

This paper works with impressively difficult and complex ideas. There are some organization problems and a few sentence errors, but members of the faculty have been impressed with the student's thinking and with the way the readings are incorporated into a larger project in the paper. As you read, you will see comments from USM faculty inserted in green.

Student Name

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ENG 100

Date

### Black Elk

Black Elk, throughout his essay "Observation on Marxism and Lakota Tradition," struggles to achieve recognition in a world that has secluded him for so long. Black Elk is an intelligent man who sees connections between his traditions and the ideas and teachings of Marxists. Black Elk becomes angered and frustrated by the inferior standards that Marxists place on the Lakota people. Mellix is also in this same predicament being a black person in a dominantly white world. Mellix and Black Elk both have been brought up in cultures that have been devalued as being inferior by a dominant culture of the white middle class America. They also share the desire to change the past and to become equal in a world that seems to be one-sided. In hopes of being accepted by the dominant culture that surrounds both Mellix and Black Elk, they appropriate white middle class ideas into their own ideas. In return they feel as though they are a part of the larger whole, when in all reality they are no closer than they were when they began. The idea of appropriation is much similar to the dialectical process, in that to appropriate one must collect information to contradict their own beliefs, and then come to a new understanding

of their culture. Perhaps the dialectical processes being performed are due to the differences and separations between the minority and dominant cultures. The last two sentences of this paragraph present a thesis, a clearly stated central concept. The writer has brought together the idea of appropriation, from Mellix, with the idea of dialectic, from Black Elk, and argued that the idea of appropriation can be seen as a dialectical process. Using ideas from the reading to develop your own view is the key to critical thinking.

The term dialectical I believe in Black Elk's mind originated from the Marxists. I am sure the Marxists took this term from Hegel, but I think that in Black Elk's essay he takes the term and from the Marxists. In his essay he defines the Lakota spirituality as "in perhaps the only translational terms comprehensible to Marxists--the pursuit of a true understanding of the dialectical nature of the universe" (101). Black Elk takes the word from the Marxists in hopes that they will recognize the word and then recognize the Lakota spirituality as part of their lives. At first I did not think that the term could be referred to, as Mellix says, "proper" English "the language of others" (392)? However after thinking about the situation I have come to the conclusion that Marxists could be compared to as the "others" in the sense that all Black Elk's life he has heard about how the Marxists believed that his traditions were primitive. This is an example of the writer taking risks and explaining how an idea might look from two different perspectives. Saying "at first I thought \_\_\_\_, but now I think \_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_" allows the writer to explain why the ideas are difficult and what is surprising or interesting about them. You can do this without using "I," if you want, by saying something like "one way of looking at this material is. . ." or simply asking a question: "Can a word like 'dialectic' be seen as 'the language of others'? This is a surprising idea because \_\_\_\_\_, but it is worth examining because \_\_\_\_\_. This labeling of primitive is much the same as labeling that Mellix received from the

whites. Therefore the labeling connects these two people as being placed in a lower society and simply spending their lives constantly trying to get out. Mellix tries getting out and succeeds by using language. Black Elk struggles to get out by finding a connection between the religions, however, he becomes frustrated and eventually gives up.

In her essay Mellix seeks to "always be venturing into new territory, feeling one's way at first, and then getting one's balance, discovering one's self in ways that previously defined "others" (394). The last section of the quote is talking about the idea of appropriation. In order for Mellix to feel a sense of belonging, in a world where she is surrounded by a dominant class, she feels the need to define herself in ways much similar to those of the dominant class. What Mellix is going is seeking new ideas and researching information, therefore discovering new and/or different opposing ideas in order to hopefully develop a new synthesis of her original idea. This seeking out of knowledge can be closely related to a form of dialectical processes, and that is what dialectics is all about; beginning with a theory and then acquiring opposing ideas, developing this opposition into a new thesis that can be related to. Therefore Mellix and Black Elk are related in that they both have a dialectical process in their lives. Black Elks defines his dialectical process as the Lakota spirituality that he has been raised in. In Black Elk's essay spirituality is defined as "a rational means of conceiving reality. That is to say that any aspect of reality must be viewed as related, by virtue of existing at all, to all other aspects of reality" (100). Black Elk uses this definition to say that his spirituality is much similar to the definition of dialectics. He decides to appropriate the word into his definition of spirituality in hopes that he will be accepted in the Marxist community. In the world that Mellix and Black Elk live this dialectical process can be seen as opposition between minority and dominant culture. The minority culture comes up with a thesis that will bring the two together but somehow the

dominant culture always contradicts the thesis and creates a larger gap between the two. In this paragraph, the writer takes concepts from both readings and relates them all. The terms "thesis," "dialectical process," "minority culture," and "dominant culture" are described as part of a single, comprehensible process. One of the things faculty members enjoyed about reading this essay is the way it allows a reader to experience the mind of the writer at work. Paragraphs like this one contribute to that effect.

There is a point in Mellix's essay when she expresses that "I sometimes [get] tired. And I ask myself why I keep on participating in this highbrow form of violence" (394). This is an excellent quote because it informs us the reader that trying to be someone you are not and trying to fit into a community is a very difficult and tiresome process, which could result in violence due to stress and frustration. Mellix continues to deal with this frustration because she is in dire need to fit in and feel a sense of belonging. She has grown up always feeling like she doesn't belong so she struggles through the violence in hopes that in the end everything will be better. Just the same I believe that Black Elk is participating in a "highbrow form of violence." It is very clear that towards the end of the essay he is becoming tired. It is also clear that he is very frustrated with the other people that he associates with. He finds it aggravating that no one seems to agree with his ideas and that no one is willing to help him discover his ideas in greater depth. Black Elk describes his frustration to us

It seems entirely reasonable to me that, if Marxists had ever really been functioning on the basis of dialectics, they would have been interested in finding out enough about the Lakota culture to discover whatever the exact relationship between the tradition and their might be. (102)

This violence that Black Elk is experiencing is between him and his driving force to find a connection between Marxism and Lakota spirituality. He tears himself up on the inside because it hurts so much that Marxists are not able to see the Lakota the same way he sees them and for some reason he believes that it is his job to change their beliefs. Black Elk is fighting to make Marxists believe that there is no minority or dominant culture. He wants them to believe that they are all equal; not only are they equal, but also they both share the same beliefs. The hardest part of Black Elk's struggle is the fact that Marxists live in the past. They only believe what has always been said about the Lakota, and they are not open to new ideas. This frustrates Black Elk because he can see past the cultural barrier. He cannot understand why the Marxists are so determined to keep this barrier, when it is so clear that it no longer exists on a large scale.

This paragraph has several impressive features. First, notice how much analysis the writer devotes to each quotation. After quoting Mellix's two-line comment about the "highbrow form of violence," the writer uses nine lines to analyze the importance of that idea and link it to the ideas in Black Elk. Similarly, after the block quote from Black Elk, the writer devotes ten lines to analysis, bringing back the idea of violence from the Mellix quotation as well. When you quote from or paraphrase another writer's argument, you should make sure that you introduce the quotation and then analyze it afterward. There should be more of your writing than anyone else's in the paragraph.

At one point in Black Elk's essay he defines Lakota spirituality as "in perhaps the only translational terms comprehensible to Marxists--the pursuit of a true understanding of the dialectical nature of the universe" (101). Here Black Elk is appropriating the term dialectical into his own definition of Lakota spirituality. Notice that the writer uses the term "appropriating," from Mellix's essay, to say something about Black Elk. Most assignments in

College Writing ask students to make this sort of connection, taking an idea from one reading and using it to say something about another reading. This sentence provides a good example of how to do that. The writer has gone beyond comparing Black Elk and Mellix. Instead of showing how the ideas are the same or different, the writer has used Mellix's ideas to explain Black Elk's writing. I believe that he does this in hopes to catch the Marxists off balance and get them to either come to an understanding or change their minds and believe that Lakota Spirituality and Marxism are in fact similar. I believe that Black Elk appropriates the word in hopes that Marxists will see that there is a connection between Marxism and Lakota Spirituality, that connection being a word that Marxists created and use often. Perhaps Black Elk thinks that if he uses languages that Marxists are familiar with they will be more likely to pay attention to what he has to say. To use the word dialectics is also a way for Black Elk to condense the definition of Lakota spirituality into one general idea, because as Black Elk mentions in his essay Lakota spirituality is "Metakuyeayasi".....that is "all relations.....everything in the universe is related within the