

# **Lame Deer**

## *Talking to the Owls & the Butterflies*

*A Sequence of Writing:*  
Native American Attitudes Toward the Environment

### **An Informal Writing Sequence:**

**Free Writes:** In your journals, respond to the following writing prompts:

1. “A good way to start thinking about nature, talk about it. Rather talk to it, talk to the rivers, to the lakes, to the winds as to our relatives.”

What does Lame Deer’s statement reveal regarding his people’s attitude toward nature?

If you could underline only one word as the most important in the sentence, which would it be? Why?

2. Which of these two attitudes toward nature (preservation vs use) should the U.S. government adopt as its attitude toward nature? Why? Is there room for compromise? What form might it take?

3. “You live in prisons which you have built for yourselves, calling them ‘homes,’ offices, factories.” Agree/disagree? What are the implications of Lame Deer’s assertion? What other aspects of contemporary American lifestyles might extend the “prison” metaphor?

4. “What is cultural deprivation? Being an upper middle class white kid living in a split-level suburban home with a color tv?” What does he mean by this? Why might such an existence seem “deprived” to Lame Deer? What stereotype of Native Americans is he rebuking?

5. At the conclusion of his description of the mass production of chickens, Lame Deer asserts that these practices make for an “unnatural, crazy, no-good bird. It also makes unnatural, no-good human beings?” Agree? Disagree? Can you develop Lame Deer’s logic here? How might one outcome be related to the other? What are the implications for humans of his statement?

**Reader-Response/Questions for Discussion:** In your journal, respond to the following questions.

### **Reading for Analysis:**

- 1.. How does this Native American outlook toward nature contrast with Euro-American attitudes
2. What fact does Lame Deer use to support his opinion regarding Euro-american attitudes toward nature?
3. Lame Deer claims that we “have even changed the animals,” and cites several examples. Can you think of a few others?
- 4.. How is he critical of the ways chickens are raised for the market?
5. What do you think might be the purpose of his angry attitude about our treatment of animals, domestic and wild?
6. How is he critical of what “civilization” has done to humans?
7. What evidence does Lame Deer cite to support the claim that modern American existence seems organized to minimize or eliminate our contact with nature? What are the implications of this “insular” lifestyle? Are we less human for it? If so, how?
8. In his comparative analysis between Euro-American and Native American lifestyles, how do attitudes toward food come into play?
9. Lame Deer cites many examples of how Euro-American culture tries to “sanitize” everything? List several.
10. What do the two cultures’ conflicting attitudes toward buffalo hunting have to do with the massacres Lame Deer cites (Washita, Sand Creek, Song My, and Mi Lai)?
11. How are the two cultures’ conflicting attitudes toward nature reflected in their attitudes toward the coyote? What practices of “pest control” is Lame Deer critical of? What underlying attitude toward nature do these pest-control practice reflect?
12. What changes does Lame Deer sense occurring? Amongst what segments of the population does he sense these changes occurring? What are the implications of this change--for the environment, for race relations?
13. How is Lame Deer critical of modern attitudes toward the machine?
14. Why was the turtle held in such high regard by Lame Deer’s people?
15. How have his people’s ancient medicinal practices suffered as a result of contact with Euro-American culture?
16. What example does Lame Deer cite to explain his people’s reverence for the bear?

17. How might this example be emblematic of the conflict between the two cultures?
18. What evidence does he cite to explain the Indian's relationship to the buffalo? How did it influence every aspect of their existence?
19. How does his depiction of attitudes toward the badger coincide with attitudes toward the turtle, bear, and buffalo?
20. What other small species, aside from ants, figure in his account of his people's attitudes toward animals?

### **Rhetorical Analysis of Lame Deer's Narrative Style/Techniques/Strategies:**

1. *Language*: What strong words does Lame Deer use to express his attitude? List several.
2. *Satire/Humor*: Lame Deer also uses humor and satire to develop his argument? Cite an example.
3. Can you find another example of Lame Deer's effective use of satiric humor in the passage describing pest control practices associated with the coyote?
4. *Metaphor/Humor*: Can you find an example of Lame Deer's use of a humorous metaphor in the passage describing his people's reverence of the bear?
5. What metaphor does Lame Deer use to describe the change he senses in attitudes toward nature? 7. How does his book figure into his thinking in this regard?
6. *Multi-Vocal Narrative*: Lame Deer shares the narration with Pete Catches: what does this reveal about his people's attitudes toward the making of knowledge? How does it reinforce other aspects of their life-style? How does this differ from standard Euro-American narrative style?
7. *The Personal*: How/where does Lame Deer use his personal experience as a strategy of persuasion? Assess the effectiveness of this strategy. Why/How is it effective?

### **Reading for Critical Reflection:**

1. What might be some of the implications of heeding Lame Deer's advice, of thinking of "the rivers . . . the lakes . . . the winds" as "relatives"?
2. What are the broader implications of this Euro-American attitude toward nature?
3. Can you make an ethical argument for conserving/preserving nature, an appeal to ethos?
4. Which of Aristotle's three appeals is he using in his reference to the treatment of cats? (logos, ethos, pathos)

5. What do Native American buffalo hunting customs reveal about their attitudes toward nature? List several of these customs?
6. What do the two Vietnam War massacres (Song My & Mi Lai) have to do with his argument?
- 7.. Lame Deer is critical of our over-dependency on machines: Can you think of examples from your own life? List several, and describe the effects of your techno-dependency.
- 8.. What does his people's reverence for ants reveal about their attitude toward nature? What were some of the customs, beliefs associated with their attitude toward ants?
9. How many different species of trees grow on his people's lands? What does his knowledge of this number imply?
10. What event in his life reinforced Lame Deer's deep sense of kinship with the animals of his homeland?
11. How is the "love" he describes at the end different from the love "of a mother for her son, or of a son for his mother"?
12. Is Lame Deer's angry critique of Euro-American attitudes & practices toward nature rooted in hatred or love, prejudice or kinship? Explain.
13. What is the defining characteristic of Lame Deer's lifestyle, as described in this chapter?

### **Possible Writing Theme**

### **Midterm Paper**

Instructions: Analyze Lame Deer's comparative analysis/critique of Euro-American and Native American attitudes & practices toward nature. End by assessing the *implications for the environment* of these diverse attitudes and practices. Pose some solutions.