

# The cutting of the hair essay examples

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



## " The Cutting of the Hair" - Use of Figurative Speech

In Zitkala-Sa's short memoir " The School Days of an Indian Girl," metaphor is a powerful literary tool used to show just how dehumanized she is at this English school where her own Indian identity is subjugated. One of the clearest symbols for white subjugation of Indian culture comes at the cutting off of her hair, which was a requirement at the school. According to Zitkala-Sa, she " heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder" (pp. 437-438). With this passage, she equates the loss of her hair to the loss of her humanity, making a metaphorical connection to being an animal as a distinct difference from humans. The braids are " gnawed" off, not cut off - this indicates an animalistic, brutal and violent action that conveys just how much this action is taken under duress. There is also an element of personification in that phrase, as 'gnawing' is a trait attributed to the shears, not to the cutter herself.

Losing " her spirit" carries the metaphor of losing her braids as losing her humanity even further; her spirit is meant to separate her from soulless beasts, and also stands for her pride and dignity. Her new status is as a " little animal," also indicating her diminishing in size and importance. She is now " driven by a herder," as in no longer able to act independently and of her own accord; she has been metaphorically 'broken in' like a horse or other beast of burden, and must do the unwilling bidding of the white men and women who seek to tame her.

In conclusion, Zitkala-Sa seeks to criticize the white American notion of conversion and reprogramming of Indian attitudes as dehumanizing; the likening of the cutting off of her braids to turning her into an animal implies that it removes her soul, her spirit and her identity. She also uses these metaphors to imply that it leaves her subservient to white "masters." With this, she harshly condemns these practices as destructive to the spirit of her people.

## **Works Cited**

Zitkala-Sa. "The School Days of an Indian Girl."