

# The american indian wilderness

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Every author intends to achieve a particular purpose in writing a particular text for his audience.

However, the way he/she presents arguments determines the effect of the message being conveyed on the target audience. Louis Owens has mastered the art of delivering his message by making readers associate with his experience and slowly driving his point home in later sections of the text (The Encyclopedia of North American Indians 1997). In the essay 'The American Indian Wilderness' Owens tells the story of his experiences as a ranger with the American Wilderness of Washington State and shows how certain actions had slowly transformed his earlier mindset about the true definition of 'wilderness' as perceived by Europeans. While describing the incidence where he destroys shelters in the forest to revert the wilderness to its earlier form, he intends to let the audience understand how certain perceptions of the society influence one's mindset. People often follow the rules set down by the society without thinking about the reasoning behind their actions.

In this case, he acted as per the directive of the Forest Service to clear all shelters in an attempt to revert the wilderness to its earlier form. Just as people do, he greatly approves of the decision and sets it in motion without a second thought (Owens 2001). His conqueror mindset is altered by the encounter with the elderly Indian women who tell him about the origin of the shelter he had just destroyed. While describing this encounter, the author wants the audience to understand what it feels like to experiences a situation where they have performed a particular task with pride only to be

ashamed of their actions later. According to the story, women's father had built these shelters more than a century ago.

It must have had certain significance to the builder and to women. However, European mentality, which was more than 500 years old, did not perceive natives' association with their natural environment as important. The fact that the women forgave him when he showed remorse is an evidence of the offence they felt due to the destruction of the shelter. He perceives these women as old but implies that they are wise and live in unison with nature. By this, the author wants his audience to weigh reactions of others on their decisions in an attempt to properly understand their actions. As later learnt, it is from this experience that Owens makes an evaluation of his actions before arriving at the new mindset.

The wilderness preached by Europeans is nothing but sheer absurdity. The form of land ownership that existed before the Manifest Destiny was perceived negatively by Europeans but served the Natives appropriately. According to Owens, the Natives valued natural environment and sought all possible ways in which they could coexist with it. Europeans on the other hand, had a different perspective. They tried to separate themselves from the wild – the trees and wildlife – by creating shelters and clearing forested areas in order to create space for settlement. They instead allotted certain areas, where homes for different wild animals were built.

No settlements were allowed in these chosen areas as indicated by the Forest Service Directive to clear such structures (Dobrin 2009). Building of the shelter in the forested area by the Natives of the land demonstrates the

possibility of living in unison with the wild. Moreover, the author uses the reaction of women to illustrate that this coexistence is a pleasurable experience. Otherwise, there would have been no need for forgiveness upon realization of young ranger's actions. Here, the author illustrates the belief adopted by the people that the wilderness is baseless and unfounded.

Contrary to what people believe, it is possible to coexist with nature and perpetuate a mutual relationship for the sake of human survival. Owens states that it is only after the entry of Europeans in North America that 'pure' wilderness began to appear. Before that moment North American continent was known for fertility and Native Americans ensured they lived in balance with nature. The White Pass shelter, a move intended to help shelter the visitors, was to blame for the current state of the world. It attempted to enforce independent existence of the wild and humans. Having grasped the attention of the reader by narrating about experiences they can identify with, the author narrates on the question how people should determine whether their actions are justified or simply a follow-up of the trend.

He does this through an illustration of how he came to the supposed conclusion. He finalizes the story by giving a vivid explanation of the absurd perception of wilderness by Europeans and the consequences it has on the global atmosphere. By this, he wants the audience to relate present circumstances to the decisions taken by the whites. This helps them understand what could have been avoided. From author's analysis European mentality defines the wild as 'wild animals and the centuries-old trees' that make up the forest.

These are perceived as organisms which cannot coexist with humans and should, therefore, be set apart. Their bid to separate the two led to the extinction of certain animal species and excessive felling of trees for firewood and charcoal burning. Areas such as American Wilderness of Washington state are mere indicators of what was lost due to these activities. There was a distinct detachment that existed between Mother Nature and Europeans. They never saw the need in having trees and animals around them, unlike the Natives. Their actions have in the end resulted in global warming as more and more nations adopt Western culture.

The author implies that if people continued to exist as Native Americans did creating a balance with the natural world, effects of global warming would not have amounted to the present state. A great number of animal species that have become extinct would still be present and the centuries-old trees would still be looked at with pride by present inhabitants and future generation (Dobrin 2009). Despite all these notions, the author states that there is still a need to safeguard what is presently termed as wilderness. Actions such as the destruction of the shelter as narrated in the beginning of the story should be taken whenever necessary to ensure the wilderness remains at its initial state. Reduction of shelters is meant to reduce attraction of backpackers who cause compaction of the soil, disturb or poach wild animals, and cut down old trees for firewood or charcoal burning. He goes ahead to suggest that even the original constructor of the shelter would have appreciated these actions (Dobrin 2009).

In a more general sense, the author is advocating for the audience to re-evaluate actions that the society perceives as good based on their opinions <https://assignbuster.com/the-american-indian-wilderness/>

and those of others rather than rushing to act as he did at the beginning of the story. This evaluation and application should go beyond the wilderness concept to other spheres of life. Finally, it is significant to note that the sequence of thoughts through which he delivers this message could not have been better.