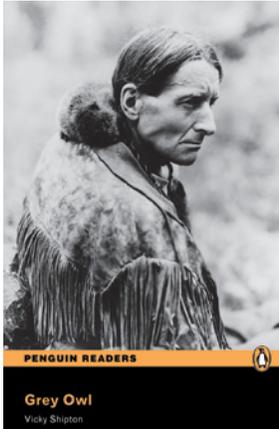




Grey Owl

Vicky Shipton



Summary

Grey Owl was the most famous North American Indian in the world in the 1930s. He wanted to protect the forests and animals of Canada. But Grey Owl also had a big secret. This book tells his true story.

Pages 1–11: It is London in 1937. A crowd is listening to a talk by Grey Owl. He describes his life in Canada, a wonderful land of animals and American Indians. He tells them that nature should be protected. His message is new and important, and he becomes famous. But Grey Owl has a secret.

Grey Owl looked and acted like an Indian, but he also spoke and wrote English well. Shortly after his death in April 1938 at his home in Canada, a story appeared in a local newspaper. It said that Grey Owl was English – that he had no Indian blood at all.

His real name was Archie Belaney. Before Archie was born, his British parents, George and Kitty, worked in America but did not make much money. They returned to England and lived with George's mother. There Archie was born. Then George returned to America and Archie went to live with his aunts. As a boy, Archie had few friends but he loved animals and read about Indians. He hated school so he left and went to work in an office, but he didn't like office work either.

Pages 12–23: When Archie was seventeen, he left his boring office job and sailed off to Canada. After working for a few months in Toronto, he travelled north and met Bill Guppy. Bill taught Archie to trap animals and helped him get a job at a hotel on Lake Temagami. He began to learn about the Ojibwa Indians who lived on an island in the lake.

The Ojibwa taught Archie their ideas about life and nature. He became angry at the “white man” for treating Indians and nature badly.

Archie went back to England in 1907, but he soon returned to Lake Temagami. He lived with the Ojibwa tribe around the Great Lakes and learned the ways of the forest. He married an Ojibwa woman, Angele, and began to spend most of his time with Indians. He wore Indian clothes and acted like an Indian.

Archie was not good a good family man, as he left his wife when their daughter was three months old. He moved around doing different jobs. In 1912, while he was living in the town of Bisco, he began telling lies about his life. He said that his mother was an Indian and that his white father was dead. In Bisco, he lived for a while with a woman named Marie, who helped him trap animals.

In 1915, Archie joined the Canadian Army. He went to Europe and fought in the First World War. He was shot and sent back to England. The war affected him deeply. For a time, he stayed in hospitals in England. His aunts visited him and introduced him to an English dancer named Ivy. They married, even though Archie was still married to Angele. In 1917, Archie's new wife agreed to return to Bisco with him. Archie went first, but found that Marie had died after having his child. When Ivy learned this, she left him.

Archie stayed in Bisco and met an Indian named Alex, and his family, who became an important part of his life. At this time, Archie was writing stories and drawing in a notebook. He began to dress and act like an Indian again. He returned to Lake Temagami and saw Angele and his daughter, but soon left again.

Pages 24–41: Archie worked in the forests, trapping animals and guiding tourists through the natural environment. In 1925, he began a new life in a cabin in the forest with a young Iroquois Indian called Anahareo. She was shocked by the cruelty of trapping and persuaded Archie to start caring for animals instead of shooting them. They kept orphan beaver kits as companions in their cabin.

At this time Archie began a new career as a writer. Adopting the name Grey Owl, he wrote articles about nature, animals and Indian life for European magazines. He travelled and gave talks, and wrote three best-selling books. Anahareo had a daughter, but she did not like Grey Owl's new life and in 1936, she left him. Grey



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Owl's private life was unhappy, but he was becoming a celebrity. In late 1936, he married a French-Canadian woman named Yvonne. The next year, he made a film and planned to make another. He returned to Canada. A newspaper reporter interviewed him and told him he knew about Archie's secret. The newspaper did not print the story because many people liked Grey Owl's message.

Grey Owl went back to Britain for another speaking tour. He took Yvonne to meet his aunts. By this time, Grey Owl and Yvonne were very tired. Yvonne went to the hospital, and Grey Owl returned for the last time to Canada. He died in 1938. The story about his real identity came out soon after.

Archie Belaney was a mystery, and his life was full of lies. But most people remember Grey Owl for his message – that if we do not look after the natural world, we will lose it.

Background and themes

At the time that Archie Belaney was born, there was growing interest in Native Americans and their disappearing lifestyle. The romantic idea of the brave American Indian, described in Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826), was a popular one, and young Archie became entranced by it. He was also a fan of Longfellow's famous poem *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), which reproduces traditional American Indian stories.

Grey Owl's writings gave the world an important vision of Canada's northern wilderness and provoked the debate between using land and conserving it that continues today. He described it as a "land of shadows and hidden trails, lost rivers and unknown lakes, a region of soft-footed creatures" (from "The Passing of the Last Frontier", *Country Life*, March 2, 1929). His main concerns were the dwindling numbers of some varieties of animals and types of tree. He was largely responsible for building up a new population of beavers in the Riding Mountain National Park, where trapping had decimated their numbers.

People are divided about Archie. Most of those who have read his books think he did more good than harm and admire him as a pioneering conservationist. Others who focus on his terrible treatment of his wives and children and his lies find it more difficult to treat him as a hero.

A movie was made of Grey Owl's story in 1999, starring Pierce Brosnan as Archie and Annie Galipeau as Anahareo. It was directed by Richard Attenborough. The movie

changes the actual story slightly, by revealing Archie's true identity before his death.

Environmental protection: Taking care of the environment is one of the main themes of *Grey Owl* and is an increasingly popular issue today. There are many organisations devoted to the protection of nature, continuing the work of Grey Owl, including the radical international group Greenpeace and the UK group Friends of the Earth. They make dramatic protests against, for example, the dumping of the Brent Spar oil platform in the North Sea by giant oil company Shell, and the cutting down of the Central American rain forests for wood and to make way for cattle grazing. They campaign against human activities that lead to global warming, such as increasing car use; and that change the delicate ecological balance of the earth, such as the introduction of genetically modified crops. Today's high-tech protesting, which uses the internet and mobile phones as well as books and posters, grew out of the low-tech protesting of Grey Owl's day – giving lectures and publishing books and articles.

Family relationships: Relationships between parents and children and between husbands and wives is another important theme in this story. Archie Belaney had four children, but apparently could not relate to any of them. His own childhood (see notes above and the story) must account for his attitude. Abandoned by his father and unloved himself, he was unable to give love to his own children. By contrast, he was able to care for and bring up orphaned beavers in a way that he never could look after his own children. Perhaps he was too afraid of the responsibility, and he preferred to deny their existence. He did send money to his children but there was no emotional contact. He had five wives or partners and left all of them except the last one.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Discuss:** There are many issues about the environment today: food and farming, cutting down trees, saving wild areas for animals and birds, wearing fur, using cars, pollution, and so on. With the class, form a question for each issue. For example: *Do you worry about GM foods? Do you eat meat? Are you worried about the rain forests? Do you wear fur? Do you or does your family drive everywhere by car?* Write the questions on the board. Take a vote on each question. Does the class think each of these issues is an important subject?



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- 2 **Guess:** Get students to look at the list of contents on page iii. Ask them which of the following words they think will be important in the story: animals, bicycles, weddings, marriage, books, soldiers, trees, family, cowboys, the American president, ghosts, movies, magazines. Note their predictions on the board. When they finish the story, you can ask them to look again at their answers to see if they were right.

Introduction

After reading

- 3 **Discuss:** When students have read the introduction (page v) ask students to close their books. Then read out these sentences and ask the students to say if they are true or false. If they are false, ask students to say the correct sentence.
- Grey Owl loved the forests in the United States.
 - The beaver was a forest animal that was in danger.
 - Every year, fewer trees were cut down in the forest.
 - People were surprised by Grey Owl's ideas.
 - Grey Owl had no secrets.

Pages 1–11

After reading

- 4 **Write, discuss:** Ask students to think of adjectives to describe the different stages of Archie's life: as a baby, as a young boy, as an older boy, as a young man, and to write the adjectives down in four lists. After they have written down some adjectives, put students into small groups. Students in each group compare their lists of adjectives. Then the whole class can list the most popular adjectives on the board.
- 5 **Pair work:** Work with another student. Have this conversation.
- You live in London in the 1930s. You work in boring office jobs. You went to hear Grey Owl and now you are talking about him on your way home. What do you think of Grey Owl? Would you like to be him? Would you like to do what he did? Would you like to learn more about American Indians? How can you learn more about them?*
- 6 **Role play:** Students work in small groups. Ask each group to choose one of these scenes and prepare to act it out in front of the class. Encourage students to add dialogue and include action in their role play.
- Students take the parts of George and his mother. George tells his mother that he wants to go back to North America because he knows he can succeed there. His mother tells him that his wife and his son must stay in England.*
 - Students take the part of Kittie and George's mother. George's mother learns that Kittie is sending money to her husband in North America. She wants Kittie to leave but she wants Archie to stay. Kittie does not want to go and she does not want to leave her son. She tries to tell George's mother why she is sending money to George.*

- Students take the parts of Archie and his two aunts. Archie tells them that he wants to leave school. One aunt thinks he should stay in school. The other aunt tells him that he can work in an office because her friend has a job for him.*
- Students take the parts of Archie and his two aunts. Archie has just blown up the pile of wood outside his office. He wants to go to Canada and live in the woods. His aunts want him to stay in England. They don't want him to do what his father did.*

Pages 12–23

After reading

- 7 **Discuss:** Divide the class in half. One half looks for things in this section that Archie can be proud of. The other half looks for things Archie would not be proud of. Note their findings on the board and talk about them.
- 8 **Discuss:** Ask students, in small groups, to discuss the Ojibwa way of life. *Imagine you were a member of the Ojibwa tribe. What would you like about it? What would you not like?*
- 9 **Role play:** Work with another group. One student is Angele, the other is Ivy. Imagine that Ivy comes to Canada and meets Angele in Bisco. What do they say? Work out a conversation.

Pages 24–41

After reading

- 10 **Write, guess:** Get students to invent new identities for themselves. They secretly write a few sentences about the "new" them. Collect in their papers, shuffle them and give them out again at random. Each student reads out an identity. Then the class can try to guess whose identity it is.
- 11 **Write, discuss:** What was Grey Owl's message about the natural world? What would be a good way to remember his message? Ask students to write down some suggestions after they read page 41 of the book. Then have a class discussion about the suggestions.
- 12 **Write, discuss:** Divide the class into pairs or threes. Give each group a page number: 2, 4, 14–15, 18, 21, 23, 25, 27, 30–1, 33, 35, 37, 39. Ask them to look at the photograph or picture on their page and prepare two or three sentences about it. It can be a description or something about Grey Owl's life at this time. Then groups can show their picture to the class and describe it.
- 13 **Discuss:** Grey Owl protested about the destruction of the natural world by giving lectures and writing books and articles. *How do protest groups get their message across today? Which do you think is better: Grey Owl's protests or today's protests?*

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.