

18.9 Dances with wolves

Dances with Wolves is a book by Michael Blake (1988) that was also made into a film in 1990. It tells a story about a young cavalry lieutenant, John Dunbar, who heads West in 1860. The outpost to which he was sent has now been abandoned, leaving him alone near Indian territory. His horse Cisco and a lone wolf he calls Two Socks are the only company.

He has more and more contact with a Sioux tribe and becomes more and more integrated. In addition, he is confronted with the crazy behavior of white people: dumping waste, killing bison only for the skin and tongue, clear-cutting of forests, ... (It seems as if little has changed after more than 150 years, except that there is no Indian culture and -territory is more.) Due to the way in which he himself is treated as a 'turncoat' by the whites, he can have little respect for his own short-sighted and selfish peers. It teaches him who the real 'savages' are.

'Dance with wolves' is the name the Indians give him when they see him fearlessly working on the plain with Two Socks. Blake also describes the riding style of the Indians on horseback, without a saddle, as a dance, in which the two partners move smoothly as one.

The Indian dances to evoke the return of the bison, or the festive and women's dances are only briefly described. And of course there is also a good portion of romance in the story.

The film's screenplay differs from the book in several ways (in the version I read/saw), but both are certainly worth your time.