

Migration Poetry Writing Project Model

Think of an event or memory from your life or family history related to migration—the journey (for example, a time you moved to a new home or school, your grandparents' stories about moving to this country, or a new state, meeting someone who moved from a different state).

(trip to Black Hills, saw tiny reservation houses)
(forced migration of Native Americans when colonists/settlers arrived)

What biographical information about you is important or related to this issue?

(lived in SD, then MN—both had reservations)
(best friend, Candace, Sioux, and French)
(comfortable middle class upbringing, teacher parents)

What historical context is important to this event or memory—perhaps push or pull factors?

(no Casinos when I was growing up)
Native Americans pushed from their land
Colonists/settlers pulled to America by the opportunities)

How does your event relate to migration

(New world migrants eventually pushed the Native Americans from their homes to the reservations)
(Candace's French influence—migrant fur trappers)
(Natives reacted to white migrants)
(Reservations—forced assimilation—unwanted assistance)

List at least 3 emotions that are attached to this event. Think about the issues of reception, reaction, adjustment, assistance, assimilation. (curiosity, sadness, shock)

Write a brief sentence that describes what caused each of these emotions.

(I was curious about all of the tiny houses I saw—asked dad about the “outhouses.”)
(When Dad said they were Indian houses, I was very sad, because they were so small and looked like they were not taken care of)
(I was shocked that families could actually live on those barren, trashy lots)

What do you want to tell people about this memory or incident?

I am concerned that people forget the Native Americans had a thriving culture in America before all the migrants arrived. The Natives' migration was forced on them (all push factor), and the effects on their culture have been horrendous (reaction, lack of acceptance, forced assimilation).

Now, write this memory or incident in a poem form. Be sure to include biographical and historical details

that help the reader understand the moment. Use emotionally packed words to help the reader understand the emotions of this memory. Give your poem a meaningful title.

I see the glitz and glamour of the Casinos, the fireworks on Saturday nights,
I remember that long ago road trip to the Black Hills
“Dad, what are all of those little houses on the hills?”
“Those are the Indian houses; this is the reservation.”
People in those unpainted, falling-down shacks? They look like Grandma’s lake cabin outhouse!
I studied the trashy yards, the barren land, and dead or dying cars.
How could they fit a family in there? No cozy bedroom for a good book and a peaceful night’s sleep.
No nice car for family vacations.
No grass to mow, or swings to fly high.
Is this where Candace would have lived if she hadn’t been adopted?
I drive past the Casino, and see the falling-down shacks, barren land, and trash, and dead and dying cars.

Pam Baack 1959-?

Pam Baack grew up in South Dakota and Minnesota in a comfortable middle class family. Both states had many Indian reservations, but the Casino industry had not yet begun. The reservations were barren lands where poverty abounded. Her elementary school friend, Candace, was a French/Sioux Indian girl who, along with 2 sisters and 2 brothers, had been adopted by a white family. One of her earliest brushes with racism was when some mean boys called Candace “squaw,” and made both she and her friend cry.

Her father grew up in Flandreau, the home of Flandreau Indian School, one of the largest boarding schools for Native Americans. In the 1800’s children were taken from their homes on the reservation and sent to schools like Flandreau to be “assimilated” into white culture. By the 1960’s the school had become a place where young Native Americans could go to reconnect with their ancient culture. When Baack saw the movie Billy Jack, the story of a school much like Flandreau, it ignited a passion for the lost culture of the Native Americans who had been displaced by the migration of the white colonists, and later, white settlers.

Baack became a high school English teacher, and taught American Literature, combining her love of reading with her love of history. Although the curriculum was very packed, she always began the survey class with Native American Poetry and culture, wanting her students to understand that even though they saw Casinos and heard about coming-of-age endowments, many Native Americans still live in poverty. In addition, the rich *culture* of the Native Americans was forever changed, and sometimes lost, as a result of white migration in America.