

Footprints in the Snow

Poet

Written by Nichola Batzel

Nichola Batzel was born in Churchill, Manitoba, to an Inuit mother and an English-Norwegian father, and was adopted into the Batzel family. She identifies with her given name, her spirit name of *Wabishki Mahkwa Equay*, given to her by an Anishinaabe elder, and her Inuit name of *Tookoome*. All play a role in how she views her role as an educator, a mother, and a member of her family and community.

Tips

ajaaja: a traditional Inuit song, often involving stories about people and their travels

Wabishki Mahkwa Equay: white bear woman [in the Ojibway language]

N'dizhinigaaz: my name is [in the Ojibway language]

Uvunga: my name is [in the Inuktitut language]

Tookoome: the poet's Inuit name

stanza: a grouping of lines in a poem, set off by a space

Before

Brainstorm what you know about Inuit life and culture.

During

As you read, visualize what the poet is describing. What words and phrases helped you visualize?

Have you heard the crunch in the snow as you travel on your journey?

Have you taken time to look at the footprints you leave behind?

As I walk and leave footprints in the snow,
My son follows and jumps in the impressions
I leave behind.

What does he see? What does he learn
From my footprints in the snow?

I am the white bear from the Great White North,
Who walks among the trees and the West wind
of the South.

I walk with relatives but often not side by side with fellow bears;
My fellow bears who live in the land of caribou, ice and snow.

My stride is longer and paws bigger than those found here.
My fur made to withstand the icy cold and the Northern winds.

Has the rhythm of my stride harmonized to a new and extraneous land?
As the rhythm of my ancestors' *ajaajas* and drum dancing is not heard here.

How do I blend to those whose songs run deep within this land?
And yet remember my original song of the bears from the land of caribou,
ice and snow?

"*Wabishki Mahkwa Equay N'dizhinigaaz*" is what the Inuit woman says ...
Followed by "*Uvunga Tookoome.*"

I walk and leave footprints in the snow.
As I grow older I realize I must be aware of what I leave behind.

Proud to acknowledge who I am,
Yet flexible enough to adjust to the songs of others.

I attempt to walk with peace and balance within my stride
As my son picks up what I leave behind.

I hope he learns to harmonize with the rhythm of his song
As he dances in the snow.

Stop and embrace the rhythm of your steps
As we all dance together and leave footprints in the snow.