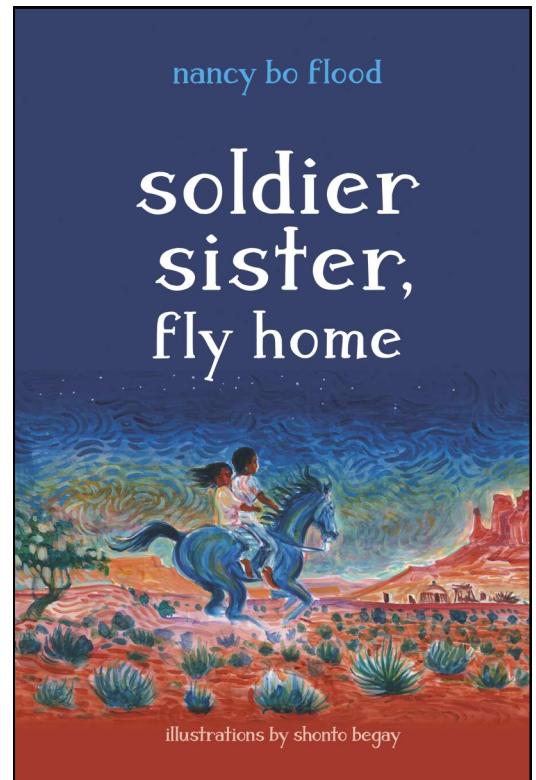


soldier sister, fly home

Nancy Bo Flood

Illustrated by Shonto Begay

Writing Prompt Guide developed by Nancy Bo Flood



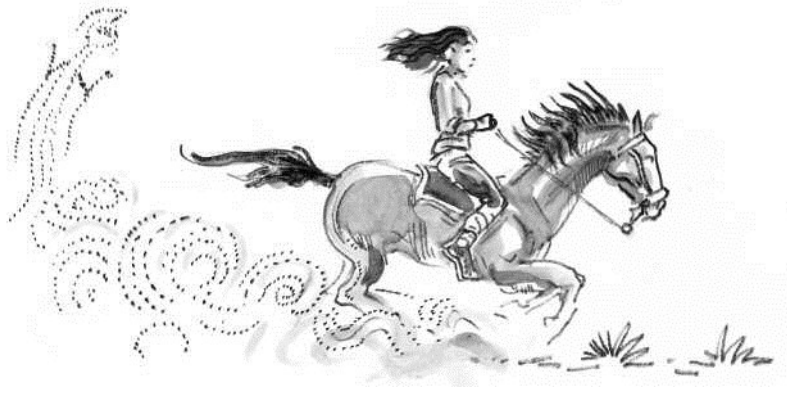
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The Navajo Nation is located in northern Arizona and extends from the Grand Canyon into New Mexico and Utah. It is an area almost as big as New England (excluding Maine), with a population of more than 300,000 people (according to 2011 estimates). Two books I recommend about Navajo life are *Navajo Long Walk*, by Joseph Bruchac and Shonto Begay, and *Little Woman Warrior Who Came Home*, by Evangeline Parsons-Yazzie and Irving Toddy. Sherman Alexie is Spokane/Coeur d'Alene, not Navajo, but when I taught on the Navajo Nation, his book *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* was my students' absolute favorite.

I hope you try out some of the prompts and writing projects below to enrich your reading of *Soldier Sister, Fly Home*. At my website www.nancyboflood.com you will find a list of many more books about Native life and people.

Prompts and Writing Projects

- ◆ If you were unfamiliar with the Navajo culture when you read *Soldier Sister, Fly Home*, make a list to share with others about what you have learned while reading. Your list could include the way Navajo people live on the Navajo Nation (*not* in tipis!), their values, work, schools, beliefs, or traditions. If you are Navajo, were there descriptions in the book with which you agree or disagree?
- ◆ In the prologue a raven is shot by a stranger at the shooting range. Tess has nothing to do with it, but feels partly responsible. Why? Have you ever felt this way? (Perhaps when you have watched kids teasing or bullying another kid? Or when hearing about people suffering from poverty or violence?) Write about a time when you wanted to do something to make a difference but were afraid or didn't know what to do.
- ◆ Tess has to put an end to Blue's suffering at the end of the book. Have you ever had a beloved pet you have had to give away or "put down"? Try writing down your pet's name, and then list thoughts, feelings, and memories you have. Your list could include funny things your pet did or frustrating habits it had. Now choose words and phrases from your list. Shape them into a poem similar to Tess's "Ten Little Indian Girls."



- ◆ Look up Emily Dickinson’s poem about death. (It begins with “Because I could not stop for death” and is sometimes called “The Chariot.” You can find it easily on the internet.) Read it out loud. What do you notice as you read the poem? What can we do to prevent death, or control fate or destiny? What do you think Tess fears most of all about death?
- ◆ *Shimá Sání* hated boarding school. Why? What do you know about children who were taken from their parents and sent to boarding school? Why were they made to go? Watch the poignant movie about boarding schools for indigenous children in Australia called *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002, rated PG). Or read a book about a Native American person who was sent to boarding school such as Jim Thorpe, the great Olympic champion and athlete (*Jim Thorpe’s Bright Path*, by Joseph Bruchac and S. D. Nelson) or the author/activist Zitkala-Sa (*Red Bird Sings*).
- ◆ What does the phrase “Walk in Beauty” mean to you? What do you think it means to Tess and her family? Are there other words you could use to express the same feeling?
- ◆ In *Soldier Sister, Fly Home*, Tess says, “They never saw me. They never saw Navajo or white—they only saw an Indian.” Whom is she talking about? What does Tess mean? Can you give examples from your own life about when others might not have seen the real you? What words would you use to describe how it feels for someone to judge you—or react to a stereotype—without knowing you?
- ◆ A traditional hogan is eight-sided and is made of logs with mud packed between them. It is made of earth, water, and trees. Architecturally a hogan is ideal as a home in the desert, similar to how an igloo is ideal shelter in the Arctic. Can you imagine why? A hogan always has one door, which faces east. Why do you think this is important?
- ◆ Ravens appear throughout the story. Find a few places in the book with a raven and see if you can make a connection between its appearance and what happens next in the story.
- ◆ In chapter one you learn that Tess’s grandma “revered the sunrise.” Why do you think sunrise is a holy time for traditional Navajo? Grandma also reveres her sheep, her hogan, the canyon, and even the rugs she makes. What does this tell you? Are there times of day, belongings, or places that are special to you? Why? Tess’s grandpa honors his rifle, his Code Talker war medals, and also the sheep he slaughters. What might this tell you about how culture plays a part in what people prize?
- ◆ When people are very sad, they feel many different emotions. They might laugh, cry, or become silent. What does Tess do when she is sad? For you, what is the saddest moment in the book? One opposite for sadness is hopefulness. What do you think is the most hopeful moment in the book? Write about a time when you felt sad or hopeful in your own life.
- ◆ Tess is half white and half Navajo, and she often feels confused about where she fits in best. Some words to describe someone who has more than one cultural background are multicultural, multiethnic or biracial. What do those words mean to you? How are you multiethnic or multicultural? Do you have relatives who belong to different religions, communities, or ethnic groups? Make a list of all the groups of which you are a member. Are the groups ever in conflict?
- ◆ People often believe stereotypes before they know better about other people and new places. What are some of the stereotypes you believed or had heard before reading *Soldier Sister, Fly Home*? (Some of those stereotypes could be about the army, enlisting, raising livestock, killing animals to eat, being Navajo, and more.) Have you changed your mind about any of them? Did you read anything in the book that surprised you?