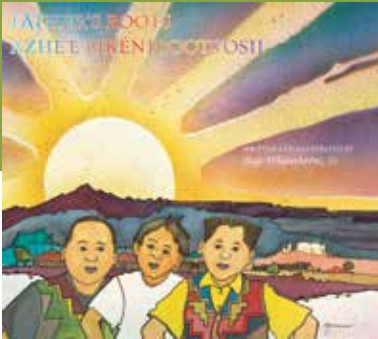


Teacher's Guide *Father's Boots*
Azhé'é Bikénidoots'osii

Written & Illustrated by Baje Whitethorne, Sr.
Translated by Peter Thomas



\$17.95

978-1-893354-29-6

About the Book

Father's Boots by Baje Whitethorne, Sr. (Navajo translation by Darlene Redhair) is a bilingual story about three brothers learning the meaning of family, respect, and prayer through the oral stories of their grandmother, Grandma Sally. Written in both English and Navajo, this picture book blends traditional storytelling with contemporary family life on the Navajo Nation. It models the value of listening to elders, honoring family, and connecting spiritual practice to daily life—central teachings in Diné culture.

The story follows the brothers as they move from impatience to understanding, realizing the depth of their grandmother's long stories and the sacred meaning behind her Prayer for Creation. Through everyday family moments—starting a fire, walking to school, listening at night—the author captures the rhythm of life in a traditional Navajo home. The father's return and the image of his boots at the doorway symbolize stability, protection, and love.

The bilingual text supports language revitalization, giving students a meaningful context for Navajo vocabulary related to family, prayer, and nature. Illustrations by Whitethorne, a noted Diné artist, vividly portray the winter landscape, the warmth of the hogan, and the family's emotional connections. The artwork reflects Navajo aesthetics—balanced composition, circular movement, and deep respect for the land.

For Navajo teachers, *Father's Boots* offers opportunities to connect literacy with oral storytelling traditions, family heritage projects, and values-based learning. It pairs well with oral retellings of *The Prayer for Creation*, *The Four Sacred Mountains*, or *The First Man and First Woman* stories. Students can explore how prayers, songs, and family routines express harmony (Hózhó).

Readability:

- Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 2.3
- Flesch Reading Ease: 86.5
- Common Core Grade Band: K–2 (Read-Aloud), 2–3 (Independent)
- Recommended Ages: 6–8 years

5 Day Grade 2 ELP Unit Plan Family, Responsibility, and Storytelling in Father's Boots

AZ ELP Standards:

- ELP Standard 1: Construct meaning from oral presentations and literary texts.
- ELP Standard 3: Speak and write about familiar topics using expanded sentences.
- ELP Standard 4: Construct grade-appropriate oral and written claims and support them with reasoning and evidence.
- ELP Standard 6: Analyze and produce language appropriate to grade-level texts.

Day 1 – Introducing Family and Storytelling

Objective (SWBAT):

Identify main characters and describe the family relationships in the story using English and Navajo vocabulary.

Activities:

- Read-aloud / shared reading: Teacher reads Father's Boots in both Navajo and English.
- Discussion: Who is in this family? What do they do for each other?
- Vocabulary: Azhé'é (father), Shimasání (grandmother), Shicheii (grandfather), Diné (the people), Hooghan (home).
- ELD Focus: Listening for meaning; simple oral sentences ("He helps Grandma." / "She cooks breakfast.").
- Exit Ticket: Draw and label your family members in English and Navajo.

Day 2 – Family Responsibilities

Objective (SWBAT):

Explain responsibilities of each family member using complete sentences.

Activities:

- Review Day 1 family words.
- Text Revisit: Reread section where the boys fetch wood and water.
- Group Discussion: What chores or responsibilities do you have at home?
- Writing: "My job at home is to ____." Students write and illustrate one chore.
- ELD Focus: Present-tense verbs ("bring," "help," "cook," "clean").
- Extension: Create bilingual sentence strips to display in class.

Day 3 – Grandmother’s Teachings and Stories

Objective (SWBAT):

Retell one of Grandma Sally’s stories in sequence and explain its message about caring for family.

Activities:

- Oral retelling: Teacher models how to tell “A Prayer for Creation.”
- Shared practice: Students retell with sentence frames (“First ... Then ... Finally ...”).
- Listening comprehension: Identify words of prayer or gratitude.
- Art activity: Illustrate Grandma Sally telling stories around the fire.
- ELD Focus: Transition words; sequencing connectors.
- Extension: Invite an elder or parent to share a short oral story (in Navajo or English).

Day 4 – Father’s Return and Symbols of Family

Objective (SWBAT):

Describe the meaning of Father’s Boots as a symbol of love and responsibility.

Activities:

- Reread the last pages showing the new boots.
- Discussion: Why are the boots important? What do they tell us about Father and his sons?
- Vocabulary: Bikénidoots’osii (his boots), T’áá hwó’ ajít’éego (self-reliance), Hózhó (harmony).
- Writing: Complete the frame “My family shows Hózhó when we ____.”
- ELD Focus: Expanded noun phrases (“Father’s strong boots,” “our warm home”).
- Extension: Compare with another Navajo story, e.g., The Three Little Sheep (Yazzie, 1998) or Frog Brings Rain (Powell, 1995), emphasizing family cooperation.

Day 5 – Sharing Family Wisdom

Objective (SWBAT):

Express appreciation for family and summarize what they learned about responsibility.

Activities:

- Revisit anchor text: Students reread favorite lines or prayers aloud.
- Writing / Oral Sharing: Compose 3 sentences about what makes their family special.
- Group Project: Create a class “Family Wall” with photos or drawings and bilingual captions.
- Assessment: Students orally share one family responsibility and one Navajo word they learned.
- Closure: Class recites “Hózhóogo naashá” (“I walk in beauty”) together.

Vocabulary

Azhé'é – Father – Central symbol of strength and family connection.

Bikénidoots'osii – His boots – Symbolic of protection, presence, and responsibility.

Shimasání – Grandmother – Represents storytelling, wisdom, and teaching through prayer.

Shicheii – Grandfather – A term showing respect and kinship; often used in prayers.

Hózhó – Harmony, balance, beauty – A key Diné concept expressing living in balance with nature and others.

Hózhóogo – In beauty; peacefully – Used in prayers and songs to express living the right way.

Tó – Water – Element of cleansing and life in prayers.

Tł'ée' – Medicine or sacred plant – Connects to healing and traditional blessing.

Ch'íjdii – Spirit or shadow – May be mentioned in prayer stories as something to respect or avoid.

Hóózhóóji' – The act of restoring balance – Key in discussions about family harmony and prayer.

Diné – The People (Navajo) – Used for self-identification and cultural belonging.

Hooghan – Hogan, traditional home – Setting of the story and symbol of family warmth and security.

Tł'oh – Plant or herb – Can be discussed when reading about nature or home surroundings.

Yá'át'ééh – It is good / hello – Common greeting; can introduce classroom bilingual practice.

T'áá hwó' ajít'éego – Self-reliance / self-determination – Reflects one of the cultural teachings in the father's lessons.

Resources for Teachers

- Begay, S. (1995). *Ma'ii and cousin Horned Toad*. Northland Publishing.
A humorous picture book about two animal relatives who outsmart each other and learn lessons about cleverness and humility. Excellent for discussing family respect, humor, and problem-solving.
- Cowan, J. (2003). *A Navajo family*. Lerner Publications.
A nonfiction early reader that introduces everyday family life on the Navajo Nation—helping, cooking, herding sheep, and going to school. Excellent for social studies and cultural awareness.
- Flood, N. B. (2002). *The hogan that great-grandfather built*. Salina Bookshelf.
Told through rhythmic repetition, this story shows how a Navajo family builds a hogan from earth, water, and trees. Perfect for exploring family roles, home building, and the connection between land and family life.
- Lukefahr, J. (2004). *Grandmother's basket*. Canyon Press.
Centers on a young girl learning to make a basket with her grandmother. Shows how family work and creativity keep Navajo traditions alive. Great for connecting art and storytelling.
- Mayo, G. A. (1999). *Star boy*. Henry Holt.
Retells a legend about family love and sacrifice between a mother and son, connecting celestial imagery with cultural teachings of responsibility. Suitable for introducing mythic family stories.
- McDermott, G. (1994). *Arrow to the sun: A Pueblo Indian tale*. Viking Press.
While not Navajo-specific, this story can provide a cross-cultural comparison for how Southwestern families use storytelling to pass moral lessons between generations.
- Oughton, J., & Desimini, L. (1996). *How the stars fell into the sky: A Navajo legend*. Houghton Mifflin.
A beautifully illustrated creation story that introduces the role of words and storytelling in Navajo culture. Can be used to discuss how elders teach moral lessons through stories.
- Powell, P. H. (2006). *Frog brings rain*. Salina Bookshelf.
A retelling of a Navajo folktale in which Frog's patience and faith help bring rain to a dry world. Useful for lessons about cooperation, caring for the land, and family prayers for balance and renewal.

- Tracy, M. (2008). *Songs from the loom: A Navajo girl learns to weave*. Lee & Low Books.
A young girl learns weaving from her grandmother, gaining patience and appreciation for family traditions. Perfect for art integration and discussions about passing skills between generations.
- Whitethorne, B. (1993). *Sunpainters: Eclipse of the Navajo sun*. Northland Publishing.
Explains a family's response to a solar eclipse through traditional teachings. Encourages discussion about how families pass down respect for natural phenomena and cultural beliefs.
- Whitethorne, B. (2001). *Father's boots / Azhé'é bikénidoots'osii*. Salina Bookshelf.
A bilingual picture book about three brothers learning responsibility and respect through their grandmother's teachings and their father's example. Ideal for units on family, storytelling, and Navajo values.
- Yazzie, S. G. (2006). *The three little sheep*. Salina Bookshelf.
A Navajo retelling of "The Three Little Pigs," featuring sheep who build homes of grass, teepee, and hogan. Students can explore the values of wisdom, hard work, and family unity through humor and traditional architecture.