

# Badger Creek

## A Year in the Life of a Blackfeet Family

### VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



**Top:** Goonskoo dances at the Heart Butte Pow Wow. Photo by Doug Hawes-Davis.

**Above:** Michael Momberg leads his horse to the barn. Photo by Jonathan Skurnik.

**Right:** Momberg home in the winter. Photo by Sam Ward.



### Program Synopsis

*Badger Creek* is a half-hour documentary portrait of a Blackfeet (Pikuni) family, the Mombergs, who live on the lower Blackfeet Reservation in Montana near the banks of Badger Creek. In addition to running a prosperous ranch, they practice a traditional Blackfeet cultural lifestyle that sustains and nourishes them. They send their children to a Blackfeet language immersion school and participate in Blackfeet spiritual ceremonies.

### In Their Words

**"I just consider myself one part of the big picture. I'm just here to make sure our traditions get passed to my little brother...my little cousins, to the younger generation."**

— Michael Momberg (Blackfeet)

The film profiles family life through four seasons in the magnificent and traditional territory of the Pikuni Nation. We witness family interactions between the three generations of the Momberg family, who live under one roof, work hard, laugh, play, love and support each other through the good and hard times.



*Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Montana where the Mombergs live.*

### Producer's Comment



#### Jonathan Skurnik

Our intention in making this film was to share with audiences a positive portrayal of Native Americans on the reservation.

Many documentaries about reservation life portray poverty, violence and other hardships, and they depict protagonists

fighting to survive in this context. While these are important stories, our film takes an alternative approach of portraying a family that is thriving.

After speaking to Michael via Skype and communicating with his parents over email, we agreed that Michael's traditional, successful and loving Native family living on the Rez would make great subjects for a film about contemporary Native resilience.

The film focuses on key family members and typical life events so that audiences can identify with their way of life and understand why they are successful.

The family contradicts the common media narrative about dysfunction, violence and poverty on modern American Indian reservations. We felt that their story of resilience, hard work and love needs to be shared with American audiences.

While the film touches on some of the challenges of life on the reservation, such as drugs and poverty, the Mombergs' success is not portrayed in opposition to a dysfunctional reservation environment, but rather as a result of the ongoing choices they have made to stay healthy and to adhere to traditional Blackfeet values.

### Discussion Questions

1. *Badger Creek* highlights a year in the life of three generations of a healthy, happy family living in Montana on the Blackfeet Reservation. Discuss the historical backdrop that makes this seemingly ordinary family remarkable. You also may want to research the overall involvement in cattle ranching and how that came about.
2. The Momberg family is committed to practicing their Blackfeet cultural traditions and keeping their original language vibrant and alive. Why do you think this is a high priority for them? Identify the challenges of keeping their language and traditions active and alive for future generations.
3. In the film, Professor Mike Lafromboise teaches the students about the dichotomy of living with two different worldviews. What two worldviews is he speaking about? What conflicts and challenges do you imagine Blackfeet students face in blending these two worldviews?
4. What did instructor Darrell Kipp mean when he pointed to a book and said, "In our world, this is a best seller?" Why does Darrell, one of the most esteemed elders on the reservation, believe that it is important for Native people to tell their own stories in their own language?
5. Michael's high school graduation is significant on many levels for the Momberg family. He is taking his place as a role model to the younger generation; he is becoming a future leader and preserver of the Blackfeet cultural traditions; and he is a strong indicator that the Mombergs are, in fact, ending the cycle of violence and addiction. Consider each of these levels separately and explore why each is important to the health and future of the Blackfeet Nation.



*The Momberg children with their grandparents. Photo by Jonathan Skurnik.*

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The Momberg men share breakfast. Photo by Jonathan Skurnik.

### By the Numbers

1. The Blackfeet Nation, located in northwest Montana, is bordered by Glacier National Park to the west and Canada to the north.
2. The Blackfeet Reservation is one of the 10 largest reservations in the United States, with 1.5 million acres and a population of 17,321 enrolled members. Not all members currently live on the reservation.
3. The Blackfeet Indian Reservation was established by treaty in 1855.
4. During what is known as “Starvation Winter” of 1883-1884, as many as 600 Blackfeet people died, approximately one-fourth of the population.
5. The Pikuni Blackfeet people are one of several distinct bands of The Blackfeet Nation, some of which span the U.S. border into western Saskatchewan and Southern Alberta in Canada.
6. The Blackfeet people call themselves “Niitsitapi” (nee-itsee-TAH-peh) meaning “the real people.”
7. The Blackfeet band, to which the Momberg family members belong, call themselves Pikuni, which also has been spelled Piikani, Piegan, Peigan, Pikani, Pekuni, Piekann and Pikanii.
8. The name, “Blackfeet” is reported to come from the Blackfeet people wearing moccasins that had been dyed a dark color.

### Suggested Activities

1. The Momberg family has been ranching for many generations. Research the early history of the Blackfeet people to discover how the passage of time and historical events have changed the way the people live, gather food and interact with their land.
2. The “Starvation Winter” of 1883-1884 was a significant and tragic moment in the long and prosperous history of the Blackfeet people. Create a timeline of the circumstances that led up to this catastrophic event which caused the deaths of 600 Blackfeet people, approximately one-fourth of the population.
3. When Buzz and Glenda married, they decided as a couple to quit using alcohol so they could raise their family in a good way. This was a first step in ending a cycle of violence and abuse that still plagues many Native communities today as a result of historical trauma. Conduct research to gain an overview of the effects of alcoholism and drug abuse in Indian Country today and identify four strategies that Native people are using to bring health and strength back to their communities.
4. Revitalizing the Blackfeet language and cultural traditions is a central theme in this film. Review the film and identify the specific ways that indicate how the people are keeping their language and traditions alive, both in the schools and in the Momberg family.
5. Conduct a geographical search of the Blackfeet Nation as a whole. What makes them unique? How have the people handled being split between two countries? What is the structure of the current Blackfeet tribe to which the Mombergs belong?



Spencer Momberg tags a cow on the ranch. Photo by Jonathan Skurnik.



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## Resources

### About the Blackfeet Reservation

<http://blackfeetnation.com/>

### Websites for more resources

[http://www.native-languages.org/piikani\\_culture.htm](http://www.native-languages.org/piikani_culture.htm)

<http://www.everyculture.com/multi/A-Br/Blackfoot.html>

<http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/IndianEd/IEFA/BlackfeetTimeline.pdf>

### Articles

<https://ethnicamericanliterature.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/west-starvation-winter.pdf>

### Source of Map

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/16/us/montana-tribe-divided-on-tapping-oil-rich-land.html>



Michael Momberg herds cows on horseback. Photo by Jonathan Skurnik.



Goonskoo Momberg prepares for the Heart Butte Pow Wow. Photo by Doug Hawes-Davis.



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*Badger Creek* is a co-production of Skurnik Productions, High Valley Productions and Vision Maker Media, with major funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

This Viewer Discussion Guide was developed by Jamie Lee, an author and former instructor at the Oglala Lakota College, where she taught for five years. Lee has a master's in human development and has been a communications trainer and an educator for the past 30 years. Her stories and articles have appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *Winds of Change Magazine* and several other anthologies. She has published three non-fiction books, a novel and a collection of writings from Oglala Lakota College students. Her first novel, *Washaka: The Bear Dreamer*, was a PEN USA finalist in 2007. Lee has written more than 70 documentary programs, including Public Radio's landmark 52-part Native music series, *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*.

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Educational resources for this film are available at <http://www.visionmakermedia.org/educators/badger-creek>

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