DIRECTIONS: You are about to read a poem by Jimmy Santiago Baco titled, “Immigrants in Our Own Land.” As you read, make annotations to the side (take notes) on the speaker’s attitude toward dreams. Also, be sure to note any words that are unfamiliar to you.

*Use the “Think Abouts” to help guide you through the poem and reflect on important components.*

**IMMIGRANTS IN OUR OWN LAND**

by Jimmy Santiago Baca 1979

*Jimmy Santiago Baca (b. 1952) is an American writer of Apache and Chicano descent. This poem describes the experiences of people who leave their homes in search of a better life.*

*Apache*—a member of a group of [Native American peoples of the southwestern U.S.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apache_people)

*Chicano*—typically a male of [Mexican descent living in North America](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicano)

Think about the title: Why might people feel like immigrants in their own land? Continue to think about the title and its meaning as you read the poem. (Use the space below to list your thoughts)

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We are born with dreams in our hearts,
looking for better days ahead.
At the gates we are given new papers,
our old clothes are taken
and we are given overalls like mechanics wear.
We are given shots and doctors ask questions.
Then we gather in another room
where counselors orient us to the new land
we will now live in. We take tests.
Some of us were craftsmen in the old world,
good with our hands and proud of our work.
Others were good with their heads.
They used common sense like scholars
use glasses and books to reach the world.
(Think about: What do the people in the poem have in common?)
But most of us didn’t finish high school.
The old men who have lived here stare at us,
from deep disturbed eyes, sulking, retreated.
We pass them as they stand around idle,
leaning on shovels and rakes or against walls.
Our expectations are high: in the old world, they talked about rehabilitation, about being able to finish school, and learning an extra good trade.  

(Think about: What expectations does your family have for you in finishing high school?)  

But right away we are sent to work as dishwashers, to work in fields for three cents an hour.  

The administration says this is temporary so we go about our business, blacks with blacks, poor whites with poor whites, Chicanos and Indians by themselves.  

(Think about: How do the speaker’s experiences compare to their initial expectations?)  

[35] who wore blue suits and broke our doors down when they wanted, arrested us when they felt like, swinging clubs and shooting guns as they pleased.  

But it’s no different here. It’s all concentrated. The doctors don’t care, our bodies decay,  

[40] our minds **deteriorate**, we learn nothing of value. Our lives don’t get better, we go down quick.

My cell is crisscrossed with laundry lines, my T-shirts, boxer shorts, socks and pants are drying.
Just like it used to be in my neighborhood:

[45] From all the tenements, laundry hung window to window.

Across the way Joey is sticking his hands
through the bars to hand Felipé a cigarette,
men are hollering back and forth cell to cell,
saying their sinks don’t work,
[50] or somebody downstairs hollers angrily
about a toilet overflowing,
or that the heaters don’t work.
I ask Coyote next door to shoot me over
a little more soap to finish my laundry.

(Think about: Which of the following describes the speaker’s new life?)

[55] I look down and see new immigrants coming in,
mattresses rolled up and on their shoulders,
new haircuts and Śbrogan boots,
looking around, each with a dream in their heart,
thinking they’ll get a chance to change their lives.
[60] But in the end, some will just sit around
talking about how good the old world was.
Some of the younger ones will become gangsters.
Some will die and others will go on living
without a soul, a future, or a reason to live.
[65] Some will make it out of here with hate in their eyes,
but so very few make it out of here as human
as they came in, they leave wondering what good they are now
as they look at their hands so long away from their tools,
as they look at themselves, so long gone from their families,

[70] so long gone from life itself, so many things have changed.

*(Think about: What does the speaker believe will happen to most immigrants who are held in the building?)*

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**Footnote(s):**
1-The brogan shoe is believed to have originated in Scotland and Ireland in the 16th century and comes from the Old Irish word “bróc” which means shoe. A brogan is an ankle-length, lace-up shoe/boot hybrid; it is too tall to be a shoe and too short to be considered a boot.

**Think about the title again:** After reading the poem, has your answer to the question “Why might people feel like immigrants in their own land?” changed at all? Explain why or why not.

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Task 1: Vocabulary. Identify unfamiliar words in the text and use context clues to determine their meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unfamiliar word</th>
<th>What I think it means</th>
<th>The context clues (text) that helped me determine the meaning.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tenements</td>
<td>apartment in the city</td>
<td>laundry, window to window</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deteriorate</td>
<td>go bad, get weak</td>
<td>nothing of value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Task 2: Read each question and respond with the correct letter on the line provided.

1. PART A: Choose one sentence that best describes the main theme of the poem?
   A. The cruel reality that many immigrants face can gradually rob them of their humanity.
   B. Things are always changing, so people should make decisions without fear of change.
   C. As people grow older, they must evaluate — and sometimes give up — their dreams.
   D. People who wish to improve their own lives should heed the lessons of their elders.
   E. Many people mistakenly believe that life will improve if they start over in a new place.
   F. As long as they work hard, all immigrants who come to this country can enjoy success.

2. PART B: Choose one of the following quotes that best supports the answer to Part A?
   A. “The old men who have lived here stare at us” (Lines 16)
   B. “The administration says this is temporary” (Lines 26)
   C. “The doctors don’t care, our bodies decay” (Line 39)
   D. “with a dream in their heart” (Lines 58)
   E. “others will go on living” (Lines 63)
   F. “gone from life itself, so many things have changed.” (Line 70)
3. How does working in roles like dishwasher and field hand initially affect the speaker?

A. The speaker is satisfied at first with these opportunities to earn money.
B. The speaker feels disappointed but believes that things will quickly get better.
C. The speaker wishes to complain about this poor treatment to the administration.
D. The speaker feels upset but understands that everyone must start at the bottom.

4. What impact does the repetition of the word “some” in line 62, line 63, and line 65 have on the poem’s tone?

A. It creates a curious tone, as the speaker wonders which path the immigrants will take in their lives.
B. It produces an informative tone, as the speaker recites a list of possible paths without displaying emotion.
C. It creates a resigned tone, as the speaker sees little hope in the future lives of the new immigrants.
D. It produces a cautionary tone, as the speaker warns young people of the consequences of giving up their dreams.

Task 3: Written Response: Read the question and respond to each prompt in complete sentences and use evidence from the poem or personal experiences.

1. In the poem, the immigrants end up doing tasks such as washing dishes and working in the fields, even though they may have previously been teachers or carpenters. In your opinion, can someone’s identity be taken away? Why or why not?

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2. In the last stanza of the poem, the speaker seems to suggest that the immigrants never had much of a chance to begin with. (Before you answer the question, think about how much control the immigrants had over their own lives.) Thinking about your own life, in what ways do you have control over your future? Why?
3. The speaker expresses the desire to finish school making education important in this poem. Why might people leave home to get a better education? Would you ever consider going somewhere far away in order to get a better education or to attend college?