

## Table of Contents

Introduction

Alaska Native Marine Lifeways

How to use the guide

Part I: Waters of Alaska

- Map of Alaska
- Terms
- Activity 1
- Terms
- Activity 2
- Terms

Part II: Water Environments and Design

- Terms
- Kayaks: *Unangax'*
- Paddles: *Anguarun* and *Duwaay*
- Activity 3
- Activity 4
- Activity 5

Final Notes and Discussion

Student Reading List

Bibliography

Web Resources

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## INTRODUCTION

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This resource examines Alaska Native marine-related objects in the collection of the Anchorage Museum and the collection of the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center.

Alaska is the largest state in the United States with a landmass of over 663,300 square miles. Surrounded by both the Arctic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, the total shoreline length of Alaska is almost 34,000 miles—making up about 64% of the entire United States coastline. There are over 3,000 rivers and over 3,000,000 lakes in Alaska. Nearly 100 glaciers in Alaska cover almost 5% of the state. Iliamna is the largest fresh water lake in Alaska and third largest lake in the United States.

As a dominant feature of the North’s landscape, water is critical in understanding Alaska and its roles to peoples, lifeways and the changing environment.

The first peoples to arrive in Alaska, Alaska Natives, first travelled on foot and by boats through the Bering Sea from Siberia more than 10,000 years ago. “Alaska,” originating from the Alaska Native Unangax̄ word, Alaxsxaq, means “place the sea moves toward.” For thousands of years, Alaska Native peoples have relied on water to support surviving and thriving in Alaska. The various bodies of water of Alaska have been and continue to be essential for transportation as well as hunting and fishing. Alaska Native peoples build and innovate technologies to navigate the vast oceans, icy seas, rushing rivers, and glacial lakes and harvest fish and other marine life from the waterways of Alaska.

Today, access to the northern waters remains critical for Alaska Native peoples. Through their objects and traditions, we can learn both invaluable innovations and knowledges as well as resilient ways of being in Alaska.



## USING THE GUIDE

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Inside of this teacher’s guide, you will find an expanded explanation on each topic present in the booklet alongside additional information and activities.

This guide highlights indigenous objects of the North found in the Anchorage Museum collection as well as objects from the Smithsonian Arctic Study Center. The prompts are intended to engage Kindergarten students and up with the context of the objects, creating deeper understanding of ways our unique place in Alaska shape lifestyles and traditions through objects, artworks and photographs.

- **Explore:** Challenge students to be curious when observing the objects, artworks and information presented throughout the guide. Support students to do their own research and delve deeply. The information is intended not only to educate but to spark interest in students and encourage further exploration on these topics. Slow down and look closely, each object has a story to tell.
- **Discover:** Encourage students to look beyond the artworks that they see and examine the details they notice either in the guide or in the exhibitions. As you move through this resource, share the additional knowledge and information presented in this packet to allow students to develop a deeper understanding of landscapes and resources of Alaska, Alaska Native lifestyles and cultures. Make this journal yours. Use the pages to draw, write, and note in your own way.
- **Ask questions:** Build an inquiry-driven experience for the students. Ask students to share what they observe and/or what they may already know. As you introduce background knowledge and object information, encourage students to ask questions about what more they want to know and what they don’t understand. Be curious about the details.
- **Connect:** Encourage students to reflect on their own life and experiences. Invite students to consider their own personal connections to what they have learned. The activities of this guide foster opportunities for such personal reflection. Ask students to share with each other what connections they have found. Tell a friend, a family member, or mentor about your experience.



## PART I: WATERS OF ALASKA

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Map of Alaska

PROMPT Invite students to look closely at the map.  
*What do you see? Name the bodies of water you see.*  
*How does Alaska's diverse geography - particularly waters - affect lifeways?*



## TERMS

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Frederick Blount Drane, Berney H. Esser Collection, Anchorage Museum, B1991.050 (detail)

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <i>Alaska Natives</i> | Indigenous peoples of Alaska often defined by language group  |
| <i>Qayak</i>          | Also known as kayak; a long narrow boat often propelled by a double-bladed paddle   |
| <i>Baidarka</i>       | Russian term for kayak; commonly used term in the Aleutian Islands  |
| <i>Harvest</i>        | Use of wild, renewable resources from the land by individuals, families and communities for food, shelter, fuel and other essential needs that are fundamental to a way of life |

## ACTIVITY 1

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Native Whaling Boat at Edge of Ice Pack-Bering Strats-Dobbs.  
Dobbs, E.G. Lehfeltd Collection; Anchorage Museum, B1998.016.15 (detail)

Ask students to define “resource” and to identify resources found in Alaska. Prompt students to consider Alaska-specific marine resources.

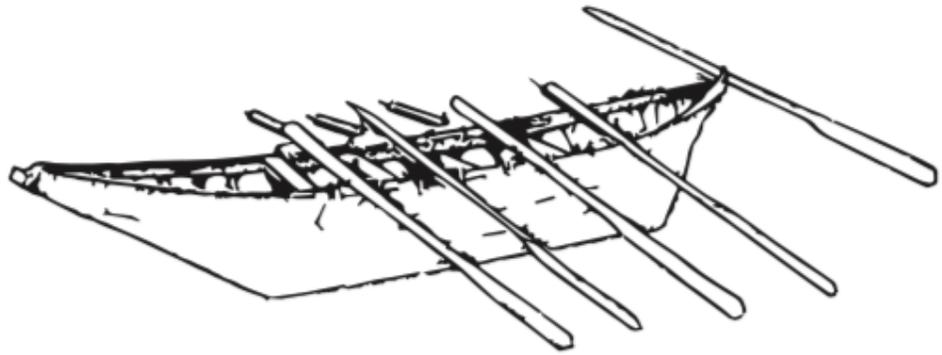
PROMPT Name resources found in Alaska.

Invite students to consider what resources might be used in making Alaska Native watercraft vessels.

PROMPT *What resources are utilized by Alaska Native peoples for creating vessels?*

## TERMS

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Nigaalax'

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <i>Angyak</i>    | Sugpiaq term for a large open boat used for hunting   |
| <i>Baidar</i>    | Russian term for open skin boat or canvas boat  |
| <i>Niġaalax'</i> | UnangaX' term for an open skin boat or canvas boat; traditionally made by covering a driftwood frame with sea lion skins; also known as baidar in Russian |
| <i>Umiaq</i>     | Iñupiaq term for an open skin boat; traditionally made by covering a driftwood frame with sea lion skins  |
| <i>Sinew</i>     | A tendon or ligament; often treated and used as a binding or sewing thread  |

## ACTIVITY 2

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Students are invited to sketch an open canvas boat.

PROMPT Look closely and sketch an open-canvas boat.

Learn more about open skin boats:

*Angyaq* (Sugpiaq open skin boat):

[alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=201](http://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=201)

*Niġaalax* (Unangax' open skin boat):

[alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=165](http://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=165)

*Umiaq* (Iñupiaq open skin boat):

[alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=445](http://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=445)

EXTENSION Look closely at Athabascan birchbark canoes. Discuss its materials, design and function. Compare and contrast with open skin boats.

ACTIVITY Learn more about Athabascan birchbark canoes:

*K'ii tr'ih* (Gwich'in, Athabascan, birchbark canoe):

[alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=303](http://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=303)

*Tr'eyh* (Deg Xinag, Athabascan, birchbark canoe):

[alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=247](http://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=247)



## TERMS

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Situgautit

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| <i>Xutl Tl'otr'edr</i> | Deg Xinag Athabascan term for a dragging sled or toboggan      |
| <i>Khwtl</i>           | Lower Tanana Athabascan term for a sled                        |
| <i>Uniat</i>           | Qawiaraq Iñupiaq term for a sled                               |
| <i>Situgautit</i>      | Bering Strait Iñupiaq term for a sled                          |
| <i>Toboggan</i>        | A long narrow sled used for coasting downhill over snow or ice |

## PART II: ENVIRONMENT AND DESIGN

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Joan Townsend Photographs, Anchorage Museum, B2013.066.258 (detail)

Crary-Henderson Collection, Anchorage Museum, B1962.001.422 (detail)

Eric A. Hegg, Crary-Henderson Collection, Anchorage Museum, B1962.001.423 (detail)

Look closely at the photographs and discuss:

1. *Describe what you see.*
2. *What makes you say that?*
3. *What more can we find?*

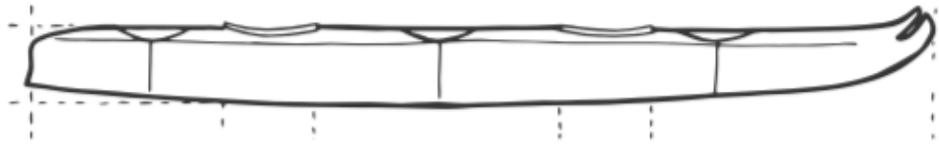
Learn more about Miles Glacier (pictured on bottom right):

[alaska.guide/Glacier/Miles-Glacier](http://alaska.guide/Glacier/Miles-Glacier)



## TERMS

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Uluxtax

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <i>Split Bow</i>            | A split design on the bow of a kayak that commonly appears in Unanga <sup>x</sup> and Sugpiaq kayaks; also known as a bifurcated bow |
| <i>Igyax<sup>x</sup></i>    | Unanga <sup>x</sup> term for a single-hatch kayak  |
| <i>Uluxtax<sup>x</sup></i>  | Unanga <sup>x</sup> term for a double-hatch kayak  |
| <i>Uluxtada<sup>x</sup></i> | Unanga <sup>x</sup> term for a three-hatch kayak   |
| <i>Paitaalek</i>            | Sugpiaq term for a three-hatch kayak   |

## KAYAKS: UNANGAX

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Two-hatch kayaks are an important part of Unangax' life—initially used for carrying cargo or children and later adapted by Russian fur traders. Two-hatch kayaks became a popular hunting vessel during Russia's colonization of the Aleutian Islands. The two-hatch kayak design allowed for the stern paddler to maintain stability while the forward paddler could carry a rifle to hunt for seals.



[top] "Native Sea Otter Fleet Unga" Crary-Henderson Collection; Anchorage Museum, Gift of Ken Hinchey, B1962.001.776 (detail)



[bottom] "Native Baidarkas Valdez, Alaska P.S. Hunt" P.S. Hunt; Crary-Henderson Collection; Anchorage Museum, Gift of Ken Hinchey, B1962.001A.375 (detail)

Look closely at the photographs and discuss:

1. *Describe what you see.*
2. *What makes you say that?*
3. *What more can we find?*

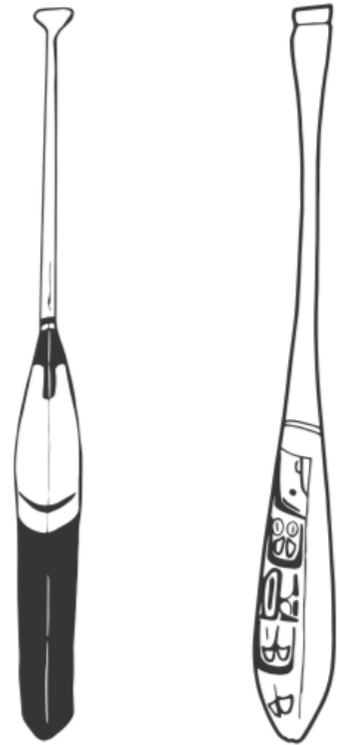
Learn more about uluxtax:

[alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=115](http://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=115)



## PADDLES: ANGUARUN AND DUWAAY

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A paddle is used to propel and steer through the waters. It is held with two hands and completely supported by the paddler, unlike an oar that is supported by the boat.

The *anguarun* (Yup'ik term for "single-bladed paddle") on the left is of Yup'ik design, with a crescent moon.

The *duwaay* (Tsimshian term for "paddle") on the right is of Tsimshian design, with a painted clan crests.

Learn more about *anguarun*:  
[alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=444](http://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=444)

Learn more about *duwaay*:  
[alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=499](http://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=499)



### ACTIVITY 3

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Students are invited to design a paddle. Ask students to consider what materials and technology will be required to actualize their special design features.

PROMPT Design a paddle. What special features might you add to your design?

### ACTIVITY 4

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Students are prompted to design their own boat or watercraft for northern waters. Encourage students to consider how their designs will traverse specific areas and overcome weather conditions in Alaska.

PROMPT Design your ideal vessel for navigating Northern waters. Get creative and draw a new style of watercraft.

### ACTIVITY 5

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Students are invited to reflect on the weather and animals they might encounter while traveling the northern waters. Encourage students to investigate further how these encounters are related to Alaska's ecosystem.

PROMPT *What weather and animals might you expect to see traveling on Northern waters?* Sketch or write what you imagine seeing.

### FINAL NOTES AND DISCUSSION

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Allow students time to reflect on what they have learned.

- *What objects did they find interesting?*
- *What drew them to those objects?*
- *What surprised them or challenged them?*
- *What more would they like to learn?*



## STUDENT READING LIST

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Books below are available at the Anchorage Public Library.

### Preschool to Kindergarten

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <i>Arrow to Alaska : a Pacific Northwest Adventure by Hannah Viano</i> | E-N VIANO |
| <i>Oceans Child by Christine Ford</i>                                  | E-N FORD  |

### Lower Elementary (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade)

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <i>Arrow to Alaska : a Pacific Northwest Adventure by Hannah Viano</i>    | E-N VIANO  |
| <i>Pete Puffin's Wild Ride Cruising Alaska's Currents by Libby Hatton</i> | E-N HATTON |

### Upper Elementary (4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade)

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <i>Edge of Nowhere by John Smelcer</i>  | J-N SMELCER |
| <i>The Journal of Brian Doyle: A Greenhorn on an Alaskan Whaling Ship by Jim Murphy</i> | J-N MURPHT  |
| <i>Neeluk: an Eskimo Boy in the Days of Whaling Ships by Frances Kittredge</i>          | J-N KITTRED |

### Middle & High School

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
| <i>Surviving on the Foods and Water from Alaska's Southern Shores by Dolly Garza</i> | N 613.69 GARZA |
| <i>Edge of Nowhere by John Smelcer</i>   | J-N SMELCER    |
| <i>Williwaw! By Tom Bodett</i>   | J-N BODETT     |

### Adult/teacher resources

|  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| <i>Surviving on the Foods and Water from Alaska's Southern Shores by Dolly Garza</i>           | N 613.69 GARZA         |
| <i>Qayaqs &amp; Canoes: Native Ways of Knowing by Jan Jackson</i>                              | N 797.122<br>STEINBR   |
| <i>Shadows on the Koyukuk : an Alaskan native's life along the river by Huntington, Sidney</i> | N-B HUNTI-S<br>HUNTING |



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## WEB RESOURCES

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Anchorage Museum Resource Center

[anchoragemuseum.org/collections/archives](http://anchoragemuseum.org/collections/archives)

Anchorage Museum Collections

[onlinecollections.anchoragemuseum.org](http://onlinecollections.anchoragemuseum.org)

Smithsonian Arctic Study Center

[alaska.si.edu](http://alaska.si.edu) Alaska's Visual Archives

[vilda.alaska.edu](http://vilda.alaska.edu)

National Park Service

[nps.gov/articles/denali.htm](http://nps.gov/articles/denali.htm)

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

[adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=species.main](http://adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=species.main)

For more teaching resources, visit [anchoragemuseum.org/teachingresources](http://anchoragemuseum.org/teachingresources)

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