

ANCHORAGE MUSEUM

ALASKA IS: HOW WE LEARN



Untitled (Story Knifing)

Ink on paper
Christine Heller Collection, Anchorage Museum, 1972.082.001

Anna Martins Story knife

Walrus ivory, Ink
Anchorage Museum collection; 1972.082.001

UNIT AT A GLANCE

Learn more about the ways in which we teach and learn.

Social Studies: Students will examine four photographs from the Anchorage Museum collection and create objects representing how individuals and cultures take different approaches to performing various actions and activities.

Language Arts: Students will examine four photographs from the Anchorage Museum collection and write or tell a short story using symbols drawn from a hat.

STANDARDS

Geography:

- E.1 understand how resources have been developed and used
- E.4 determine the influence of human perceptions on resource utilization and the environment
- E.5 analyze the consequences of human modification of the environment and evaluate the changing landscape
- F.5 examine the impacts of global changes on human activity

Cultural Standards:

- A.7 determine the place of their cultural community in the regional, state, national and international political and economic systems
- B.1 acquire insights from other cultures without diminishing the integrity of their own;
- B.2 make effective use of the knowledge, skills and ways of knowing from their own cultural traditions to learn about the larger world in which they live
- E.3 demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between world view and the way knowledge is formed and used

Language Arts:

Writing Standards - Text Type and Purposes:

- 2. Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or one or more concluding sentences that emphasize their most important point or focus.
 - 2b. Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples that support the topic.
 - 2c. Link ideas within and across categories of information using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., in contrast, especially).
- 5. With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed (e.g., adding concrete and sensory details; elaborating on how the details chosen support the focus) by revising and editing.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
- 4. Tell a story or retell an experience with relevant facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.

MATERIALS

Social Studies:

- Posterboard
- Drawing and coloring utensils

Language Arts:

- Hat
- Scissors
- Paper
- Drawing and coloring utensils

KEY TERMS

<i>yaaruin</i>	Central Alaskan Yup'ik term for a story knife
<i>qulirat</i>	Central Alaskan Yup'ik term for legendary and mythical stories
<i>qanemcit</i>	Central Alaskan Yup'ik term for historical narratives
<i>ts'utsaede</i>	Ahtna term for historical stories
<i>sukdu</i>	general Dena'ina term for stories
<i>experiential learning</i>	a form of learning through doing
<i>k'ich'ighi</i>	Dena'ina term for riddles
<i>k'ooltaah ts'in</i>	Koyukon term for riddles

CLOSE-LOOKING

TIME FRAME Approximately 40 minutes

MATERIALS Photograph 1: *Untitled (Story Knifing)*, Christine Heller Collection, Anchorage Museum collection, B1991.011.532
Photograph 2: *Untitled (Quihagak)*, Anchorage Museum collection, 2018.007.012
Story knife, Anna Martins, Anchorage Museum collection, 1972.082.001

DIRECTIONS 1. Begin by looking closely at the provided photographs. Use the questions below to guide discussion.
[30 min.]

CLOSE-LOOKING: Look closely, quietly at the objects for a few minutes.

OBSERVE: Share your observations about each photograph.



***Untitled (Story knifing)*, Christine Heller Collection, Anchorage Museum collection, B1991.011.532**

ASK: *What do you notice about this image?
Describe the objects and people that you see in this image.
What might the people in the image be doing?
What time of year do you think this image was taken?
What does this remind you of?
What more can you find?*



***Untitled (Quihagak)*, Brian Adams, Anchorage Museum collection, 2018.007.012**

ASK: *What do you notice about this image?
Describe the objects and people that you see in this image.
What might the people in the image be doing?
What time of year do you think this image was taken?
What does this remind you of?
What more can you find?*



Story knife, Anna Martins, Anchorage Museum collection, 1978.082.001

ASK: *What do you notice about this object?
How would you describe this object to someone?
What materials do you think this object is made of?
Why do you think the object is designed this way?
What does this remind you of?
What more can you find?*



DISCUSS: Use the [20 Questions Deck](#) for more group discussion questions about the photographs.

2. As a class, discuss what knowledge is and how we pass it among each other. Encourage students to give concrete examples if they feel comfortable doing so.

[20 min.]

SOCIAL STUDIES: MANY WAYS

TIME FRAME

Minimum 40 minutes

MATERIALS

Posterboard or paper
Drawing and coloring utensils

DIRECTIONS

1. Discuss with students simple actions or activities that they do on a daily basis. Make a list of their examples on a board for all students to see.

[10 min.]

2. In groups, assign students an action or activity. Invite each group to research multiple ways to carry out that action or activity. For example, one group can list different ways to eating foods (utensils, bread, hands). Invite students to create cutouts or posters of the different ways people can do these actions and activities.

[10 min.]

3. Once finished, invite groups to present their cutouts or posters. Discuss: *why might we do things differently? Why might we perform actions and activities differently from our neighbors? What can influence our decisions on how to do actions and activities?*

[20 min.]

4. If time allows, repeat steps 2 and 3, with each group receiving a new action or activity. Invite students to present their new cutouts or posters. Discuss: *how can the way we perform actions and activities change over time? Why might we prefer certain activities over others?*

[30 min.]

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed based on participation in class discussion and completion of activity.

LEARN MORE

PEDAGOGY: APPROACHES

Human beings have passed on knowledge in every generation through various means. Formalized approaches such as schools and universities are common and usually have expected outcomes for both educators and learners. In contrast, other approaches are not so explicit. In all Alaskan Native cultures, cultural practices of

harvesting, creating, and story-telling provide opportunities for people to learn skills and cultural values. In many cases, people learn by watching, listening, and doing.

Experiential learning

Experiential learning is a process in which one learns through doing. This may be coupled with explicit instruction, but is not necessarily required. This approach relies on keen observation along with trial and error. Progress in a skill is not a measured metric, but rather proof of ability as time passes. In continually practicing and observing more experienced people, the expectation is that one learning a skill self-corrects over time.

Storytelling

Storytelling serves different functions across cultures. In historically non-literate societies, oral traditions comprise a broader scope than western norms. As such, oral transmission is comparatively richer regarding the process of sharing and learning information and emphasize a higher level of involvement than passive listening.

WATCH:

Sprouts - [Experiential Learning: How We All Learn Naturally](#)

TEDx Talks - [Inupiaq stories - past, present, and future | Sean Topkok | TEDxClairemontColleges](#)

READ:

Phillips Indian Educators - [Best Practices of Indigenous Pedagogy](#)

Simon Fraser University - [Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy](#)

Kent State University - [WHAT IS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?](#)

[Iseke, J. \(2013\). Indigenous storytelling as research. International Review of Qualitative Research, 6\(4\), 559-577.](#)

A NOTE ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

The Anchorage Museum refrains from using the terms Eskimo, Indian, and Aleut and instead uses language identified by the Alaska Native language groups. Due to these words' complicated history, the Anchorage Museum does not use these terms. However, it is important to note that Indigenous communities and individuals are at different places of healing and self-identity and may use these terms.

The largest Indigenous language family in North America is the Dene language family, which is commonly identified as 'Athabaskan' – a word that is not native to any of the Indigenous languages to which it refers. Dene is a word for Indigenous peoples belonging to several cultures whose languages belong to the Dene language family with traditional homelands in Interior Alaska and into Western Canada; the word Dene means 'people' in several Dene languages.

LANGUAGE ARTS: STORIES FROM A HAT

TIME FRAME

Approximately 60 minutes

MATERIALS

Hat
Scissors
Paper
Drawing and coloring utensils

DIRECTIONS

1. People use symbols and signs in daily life. As gestures, physical objects, or abstractions, symbols are another layer in which people communicate. Announce to students that they will be telling stories through randomly chosen symbols.
[1 min.]

2. Pass out scissors, paper and utensils for drawing and coloring. Discuss with students what they think a symbol is. Encourage students to give examples of how a symbol may be similar or different from an image, writing, or a sign.

[10 min.]

3. Invite students to cut out 10 squares with a length of one to two inches and to draw one simple symbol per square. Once finished, invite students to put their squares into the hat.

[5 min.]

4. Mix the squares in the hat and invite students to pull 3-5 squares each from it. In groups of three, invite students to talk about their symbols and what they might mean. Encourage students to create stories in their groups using the symbols in different ways.

[20 min.]

5. Invite students to share their stories using the symbols if they are comfortable.

[15 min.]

6. If time allows, invite students to put all the symbols back into the hat. Mix the symbols, take three of them from the hat, and place them on a board. Draw large versions of the symbols. Invite students to collaboratively tell a story either using one of the three symbols on the board, or by drawing another one from the hat and narrating their story as they draw their symbol. Continue until the story is finished or after a set number of symbols

[variable.]

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed based on participation in class discussion and completion of Stories from a Hat.

LEARN MORE

STORYTELLING IN ALASKA NATIVE CULTURES

Stories in Alaska Native cultures employ many tools to convey lessons and emphasize elements within a story. Many of these rhetorical devices are lost in written translations as performative and contextual qualities such as crowd participation, gestures, and tone become difficult to articulate directly in writing and vary from storyteller to storyteller.

QANEMCIT, QULIRAT, YAARUIN: YUP'IK STORYTELLING TRADITIONS

Broadly speaking, Central Alaska Yup'ik storytelling falls into two categories: *qanemcit* and *qulirat*. The former is a type of historical narrative, while *qulirat* may be more legendary in character. The criteria for these two categories are not discrete, with many *qulirat* being based off real events, gaining additional elements through many retellings.

Yaaruin are story knives meant to illustrate parts of a story and are generally more for children to use when they are with each other. Storytelling with *yaaruin* often takes place on a sandy or muddy area where a *yaaruin* can easily make marks.

DENE RIDDLES, STORIES, AND PLACENAMES

Dene cultures are diverse, with 11 distinct linguistic groups in Alaska. Alongside Dene languages in Canada and the west and southwest regions of the United States, the Dene language family constitutes one of the largest Indigenous language families in North America in both size and number of speakers.

Dene stories in Alaska incorporate placenames as a means of passing on travel routes and important locations. Travel narratives guide people who will use place name knowledge to navigate the land. Stories themselves often exemplify the consequences of good or bad behavior, and provide the basis for cosmology. In the past, stories followed a cycle of telling, often only being told when they are relevant to the season. Currently, many Dene stories exist in writing or recordings and are accessible year-round.

In many Dene cultures, riddles function as a way to develop one's observational skills. One Gwich'in riddle involves the teller of the riddle acting or speak indirectly to hint that a bear is nearby to hunt. Similarly, Koyukon *k'ooltsah ts'in* and Dena'ina *k'ich'ighi* rely on indirect descriptive metaphors for the listener to discern what the subject of a riddle is.

LISTEN:

KYUK - [KYUK Yugtun Qanemcit](#)

READ:

Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center - [yaaruin "storyknife"](#)

[Balluta, A., & Kari, J. M. \(2008\). *Shtutda'ina Da'a Shef Qudel. Lake Clark National Park and Preserve.*](#)

Evan, A. (1984). *Dena'ina sukdu'a: traditional stories of the Tanaina Athabaskans*. Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska.

John, P. (2003). *Qulirat Qanemcit-Ilu Kinguvarcimalriit*. University of Washington Press.

Johnson, W. (2005). *Sukdu Neł Nuhtghelnek/I'll tell you a story: Stories I recall from growing up on Iliamna Lake*. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center.

Kari, J. (1986). *Tat'ahwt'aenn Nenn'= The Headwaters People's Country. Narratives of the Upper Ahtna Athabaskans*. Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks, PO Box 900111, Fairbanks, AK 99775-0120.

Kari, J. (Ed.). (2010). *Ahtna travel narratives: A demonstration of shared geographic knowledge among Alaska Athabascans*. Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Kari, J., & Fall, J. A. (Eds.). (2016). *Shem Pete's Alaska: The Territory of the Upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina*. University of Alaska Press.

Rearden, A., & Fienup-Riordan, A. (Eds.). (2017). *Qanemcit Amlertut/Many Stories to Tell: Tales of Humans and Animals from Southwest Alaska*. University of Alaska Press;