

EXPLORING TRADITIONAL VALUES

Overview:

In this lesson, students explore personal and cultural values through traditional stories. Students access multimedia to listen to traditional stories recorded through Project Jukebox, a digital branch of the Oral History Program at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, then describe how the values transferred through these stories relate to environmental stewardship.

Objectives:

The student will:

- name personal, family and cultural values that are important in their lives;
- identify cultural values communicated through traditional stories; and
- relate cultural values to environmental stewardship.

Targeted Alaska Performance Standards for the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam:

- R4.1 Apply knowledge of syntax, roots, and word origins, and use context clues and reference materials to determine the meaning of new words and to comprehend text.
- R4.2 Summarize information or ideas from a text and make connections between summarized information or sets of ideas and related topics or information.
- R4.4 Read and follow multi-step directions to complete complex tasks.
- R4.8 Analyze and evaluate themes across a variety of texts, using textual and experiential evidence.

Targeted Alaska Grade Level Expectations

Science

- [11] SA1.2 The student develops an understanding of the processes of science by recognizing and analyzing multiple explanations and models, using this information to revise student's own explanation or model if necessary.
- [11] SC3.2 The student demonstrates an understanding that all organisms are linked to each other and their physical environments through the transfer and transformation of matter and energy by analyzing the potential impacts of changes (e.g., climate change, habitat loss/gain, cataclysms, human activities) within an ecosystem.
- [11] SE1.1 The student demonstrates an understanding of how to integrate scientific knowledge and technology to address problems by researching how social, economic, and political forces strongly influence which technology will be developed and used.

Vocabulary:

conservation – preservation or protection of natural ecosystems and indigenous cultures

stewardship – the responsibility to take care of something or someone

values – a person or culture's principles or standards of behavior

Whole Picture:

Traditional Native Alaskan values share many characteristics of environmental stewardship. Traditional values dictate respect for all living things, responsibility to others, and a life lived in harmony and balance with the people and land around you. These values are communicated through the traditional stories told by Elders and are inherent in traditional ways of life.

EXPLORING TRADITIONAL VALUES

Materials:

- *Traditional Values of Alaska* poster (from the Association of Alaska School Boards—Initiative for Community Engagement, <https://store.aasb.org/collections/posters/products/traditional-values-of-alaska-poster>)
- *Athabascan Values* poster (from the Alaska Native Knowledge Network, <http://ankn.uaf.edu/publications/>)
- STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET: “Learning from Our Stories”
- STUDENT WORKSHEET: “Learning from Our Stories”
- STUDENT WORKSHEET: “Exploring Traditional Values”
- VIDEOS: “Exploring Traditional Values”

Activity Preparation:

1. Review the stories provided. Decide whether to have students complete STUDENT WORKSHEET: “Learning from Our Stories” at home or in class.

Activity Procedure:

1. Begin with a discussion of values. What are values? Who defines them? Ask students to provide some examples of personal, family and cultural values that are important to them. Use the posters “Traditional Values of Alaska” and “Athabascan Values” as visual aids and for discussion points.
2. Direct students to watch the VIDEO: “Exploring Traditional Values” to complete STUDENT WORKSHEET: “Exploring Traditional Values.”
3. When all students have completed the worksheet, review and discuss the answers to the questions.
4. Distribute STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET: “Learning from Our Stories” and STUDENT WORKSHEET: “Learning from Our Stories.” Allow students time to complete the worksheet in class or as homework.

Extension Ideas:

1. Involve the local community! This activity can become much more relevant for students and the community if Elders and other culture bearers in your community are invited to offer their own knowledge, stories and experiences. Please contact the Education Outreach Team for the guidelines for working with and interviewing Elders. Discuss these stories. Identify the values communicated through the stories and experiences. Explore the values inherent in traditional ways of life.
2. Visit the Project Jukebox website (<http://jukebox.uaf.edu/>). Follow the link to “Project Jukebox’s Alaska Map.” Here you will find oral history projects specific to particular regions and topics. Conduct a similar lesson with these relevant stories.

Answers:

STUDENT WORKSHEET: Learning from Our Stories

1. Answers will vary and students may mention many of the values listed in the table including: care for your family, honor, love for children, wisdom from life experiences, respect for land and nature, practice traditions and family relations.
2. Answers will vary and students may mention many of the values listed in the table including: honor, honesty, fairness, sharing, wisdom from life experiences, respect for land and nature, and family relations.
3. Answers will vary. Students may mention family members, their own experiences, television, radio, internet or other media.

EXPLORING TRADITIONAL VALUES

- Answers will vary significantly but students should recognize that addressing climate change supports many traditional Athabaskan values. Addressing immediate threats that climate change poses for their villages (such as coastal erosion, thawing permafrost, draining lakes, slumping rivers, etc.) addresses values such as taking care of yourself, respect for Elders, responsibility to village and care for family. Looking at the big picture and addressing the root causes of climate change issues, students may mention values such as cooperation, wisdom from life experiences and respect for land and nature

STUDENT WORKSHEET: Exploring Traditional Values

- Answers will vary but many include the following:
Mary Demientieff: care for your family, honor, honesty, fairness, sharing, wisdom from life experiences, family relations, respect for land and nature
Eliza Jones (bears): practice traditions, hard work, spirituality, respect for land and nature, responsibility to Elders, respect for knowledge
Eliza Jones (wolves): spirituality, respect for land and nature, practice traditions, fairness
Johnson Moses: cooperation, respect for knowledge, respect for land and nature, wisdom from life experiences, hard work
- Answers will vary, but should include the idea that environmental stewardship means taking responsibility to take care of the environment. This idea is a part of many traditional values, and is clearly stated in the value “respect for nature and land.” This value is communicated in all of the Elders’ stories.
- Answers will vary significantly but students should recognize that addressing climate change supports many traditional Athabaskan values. Addressing immediate threats that climate change poses for their villages (such as coastal erosion, thawing permafrost, draining lakes, slumping rivers, etc.) addresses values such as taking care of yourself, respect for Elders, responsibility to village and care for family. Looking at the big picture and addressing the root causes of climate change issues, students may mention values such as cooperation, wisdom from life experiences and respect for land and nature.

LEARNING FROM OUR STORIES

First Salmon Story

(Adapted from Osgood's *The Ethnography of the Tanaina*, 1966: 148-149.)

The Tanaina Athabascans used to tell a story about a salmon. It goes something like this:

One spring day when it was just about time for the salmon run to begin, a rich Tanaina man put out his fish trap as he always did at that time of year. He hoped to catch enough salmon to last his family for the whole year. The man told his daughter not to go near the fish trap.



His daughter was curious. She wondered why her father did not want her to see the trap. So, instead of obeying him, she walked down to the river toward the trap. "I'll be back in a little while," she called to her father as she walked away.

When the girl got down to the river, she went straight to the trap. A big king salmon was swimming around in the water, and she started talking to him.



They talked and talked, and before she knew what was happening, she had turned into a salmon herself! She slid into the water and disappeared with the big king salmon.

The girl's father looked everywhere for his daughter. He could not find her. Every day he called for her and searched for her, but she never returned.

The next year, when the salmon run was about to start again, the rich man set out his fish trap as usual. The first time he checked it, he saw that it was filled with many beautiful salmon. The man threw them all out on the grass, and began cleaning them. He left the smallest fish for last.

Finally, all but the last small fish had been cleaned. The man turned to pick up the little salmon --and saw that, where the fish had been, there was now a little boy!

The man walked around the boy, staring at him. He walked around him three times. And finally, the third time, he knew why the boy looked familiar. He looked just like the man's lost daughter. The man suddenly knew that this young boy was his grandson, the son of his missing daughter.

The boy finally spoke to his grandfather. He told him all the things he should do to show his respect for the salmon. He told the man how to cut the sticks to dry the salmon, and how to be careful not to drop the salmon on the ground while they were being dried. And he told the man that each year, when the first salmon of the year was caught, the people should hold a ceremony for that salmon. They must wash themselves, and dress up in their finest clothes. They must find a weed near timberline, and burn it. And they must clean and cook the first



LEARNING FROM OUR STORIES

fish without breaking its backbone. The insides must be thrown back into the water.

The boy explained that if the man and his people did all these things, they would have a good year, and would catch many salmon. But if they did not follow the rules, the salmon would never return to them.

The Tanaina used this story to explain to their children how the First Salmon Ceremony got started and why it was performed each year in the springtime. The people did everything the young salmon-boy had told his grandfather to do.



LEARNING FROM OUR STORIES

Nits' iil

(Adapted from Guedon's *People of Tetlin. Why Are You Singing?* 1974: 47-48.)

During the spring, Upper Tanana Athabascans used to gather nihts'iil, which are little roots that muskrats find and hide in their caches. One day a little girl found one of these caches on a lake and took out all the nihts'iil to take home to her family. She was very excited and very proud of herself when she got home with the tasty food.

"Mom!" she said, "I found a muskrat cache! Here's some nihts'iil."

"You've got to pay for the *nihts'iil*," her mother said when she saw the pile of roots. "Don't forget to leave something in the cache for the muskrat."

"Oh, Mom," her daughter answered, "who would ever know! The muskrat wouldn't know that I was the one that took the *nihts'iil*. What does it matter?"

"Yes," her mother answered. "The muskrat will know. You've got to pay for what you take. The muskrat worked hard to fill his cache, and you shouldn't empty it without paying for it."

The daughter still wasn't convinced. "What happens if I don't pay for it?" she asked. The mother answered, "If you don't pay, the muskrat will go into our cache, and take out all our meat."

The little girl went back to the cache and left a bit of cloth for the muskrat.

First Salmon Story and *Nits' iil* were written by Patricia H. Partnow, illustrated by Jeanette Bailey and produced by the Alaska Bilingual Education Center, Alaska Native Education Board, 4510 International Airport Road, Anchorage, Alaska. They are used with permission from the Alaska Native Knowledge Network. www.ankn.uaf.edu

NAME: _____

LEARNING FROM OUR STORIES

Directions: Read *First Salmon Story* and *Nits' iil* on STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET: "Learning from Our Stories." Use the table of Traditional Athabaskan Cultural Values found below to answer the following questions.

Traditional Athabaskan Cultural Values:

Taking Care of Yourself	Hard Work	Care for Your Family	Honor
Love for Children	Honesty	Fairness	Unity
Responsibility to Village	Caring	Cooperation	Sharing
Responsibility to Elders	Respect for Knowledge	Wisdom from Life Experiences	Respect for Land and Nature
Practice Traditions	Honor Ancestors	Family Relations	Spirituality

1. Name at least three traditional Athabaskan cultural values that are communicated through *First Salmon Story*.

2. Name at least three traditional Athabaskan cultural values that are communicated through the story *Nits' iil*.

3. Traditional stories are just one way that values can be communicated, shared and learned. Name one more way that you have learned values.

4. Think about what you have learned about climate change. Is responding to climate change in line with traditional Athabaskan cultural values? Explain your answer.

NAME: _____

EXPLORING TRADITIONAL VALUES

Directions: Watch the VIDEO FILE: "Exploring Traditional Values." Listen to the Elder's stories and then answer the following questions.

1. List the traditional values that are communicated in each Elder's story:

Mary Demientieff: _____

Eliza Jones (bears): _____

Eliza Jones (wolves): _____

Johnson Moses: _____

2. **Stewardship** is the responsibility to take care of something or someone. What do you think environmental stewardship means? Is it in line with traditional Athabascan cultural values?

3. Explain how you think taking action to address climate change supports or does not support traditional Athabascan cultural values. Use specific examples.

