

CELEBRATIONS: POTLUCK/POTLATCHES (LAST LESSON FOR EVERY UNIT)

Elder Quote/Belief: “We all started together from Alaganik, and Old Town [Cordova], and Eyak [village where Lake Eyak drains into the Eyak River]. It took us three days to get to Katalla. We stayed there a week. Then they sent a one-mast sloop to take us over to that island. We stayed on the island a couple of days before they gave the potlatch. The first day there was a big feed. The second day they gave us the blankets and the calico [cloth]. The potlatch began early in the morning and lasted until late at night. The house was so crowded that we kids were outside looking in through the windows.”

—Galushia Nelson, *The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska*, p. 181

Grade Level: PreK-2

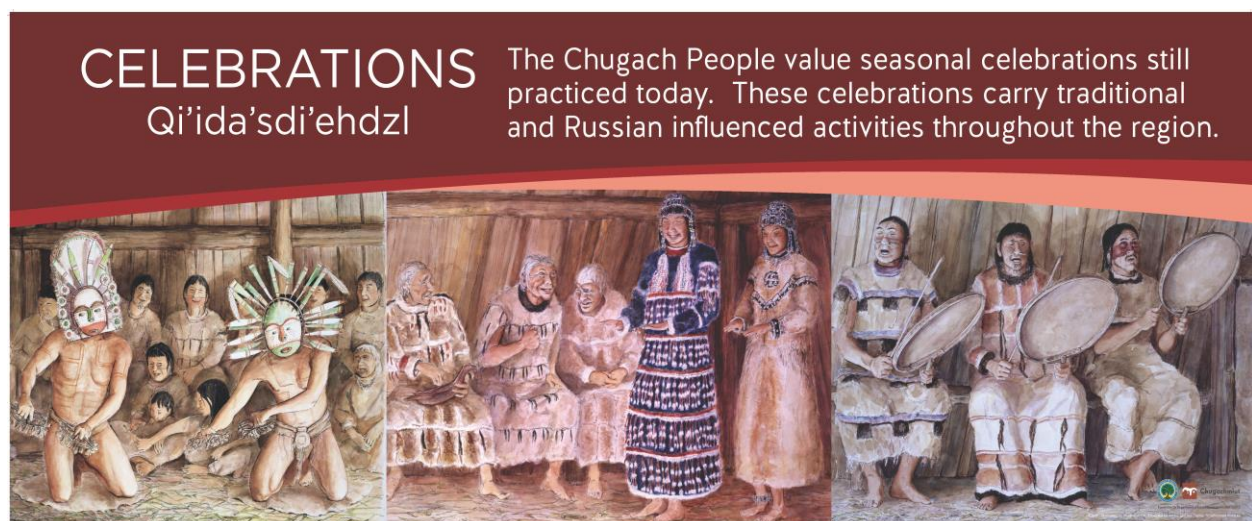
Overview: Potlucks/Potlatches were an important culminating event of celebrations. Depending upon where the community is located and what type of event is being celebrated, would determine whether a potluck or potlatch was done. The people of the Chugach Region would wear their best regalia, and the singing, dancing, storytelling, gifting and feasting brought the communities together.

“The principal ingredients of any feast consisted in singing, dancing and -not least, of course – extravagant eating. Some feasts were also combined with a distribution of gifts as the Indian potlatches, and in some cases masks were worn.”

—*The Chugach Eskimo*, p. 108-109

The term “potlatch” as used by the natives means feasting and distribution of gifts; dancing and singing were the usual accompaniments but did not in themselves constitute a potlatch. ~During the regular potlatch ceremonies the hosts would make a noise like their clan animal (Eagle, Raven, or Wolf- we do not know if the Bark House People has a special cry), and the guests would ask: “What do the Eagles want?” or What does the Eagle want?” for example.

— *The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska*, p. 169-172



Illustrated by Mark Matson, Provided by Arctic Studies Center, Smithsonian Institute

Standards:

<i>AK Cultural:</i>	<i>AK Content Science:</i>	<i>CRCC:</i>
A 1 Culturally knowledgeable student is well grounded in the cultural heritage and traditions of their community. Students who meet their cultural standard are able to: assume responsibilities for their role in relation to the well-being of the cultural community and their lifelong obligations as a community member	F 1 A student who meets the content standard should: develop an understanding of the interrelationships among individuals, cultures, societies, science and technology:	CE 9 Students should have respect and appreciation for their own culture as well as the culture of others.

Lesson Goal: To learn about a traditional Sugpiaq potluck and/or Eyak potlatch ceremonies.

Lesson Objective(s): Students will:

- Correctly describe a traditional potluck/potlatch.
- Organize a potluck/potlatch feast.

Vocabulary Words: Sugt'stun Dialects

English:	Prince William Sound:	Lower Cook Inlet:	<u>Eyak:</u>
Eating			k'uwah
Singing	atuhtut They are singing	atuhtut They are singing	Singer, I'm singing something k'uxtsinh
Dancing	agnguahtua (I'm dancing)	agnguahtua (I'm dancing)	i-gwa
Celebrations			Qi'ida'sdi'ehdzl

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Elder or Recognized Expert
- Large area to accommodate eating and dancing
- Paper plates, bowls, utensils, napkins, serving utensils
- Volunteers to bring in food for potluck/potlatch
- Attached checklist for volunteers assigned to oversee certain tasks, i.e., set-up, clean-up, bringing food, displays, emcee, etc.

Books/ Documents:

- Birket-Smith, Kaj. [The Chugach Eskimo](#)
- Birket-Smith, K. and DeLaguna, F. [The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska](#)
- Crowell, A. et.al. *Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People*

Videos/Websites:

- Tamamta Katurlluta- A Gathering of Tradition and Friendship by Pratt Museum in Homer
 - <https://youtu.be/FRyHIMe9oIM>
- Native Village of Eyak Sobriety Celebration
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCz2uWOacoE>

- <https://www.facebook.com/NativeVillageofEyak/videos/thats-a-wrap-on-another-successful-sobriety-celebration/182889345982937/>

Teacher Preparation:

- Invite Elder and review the ways to show respect to our Elders. Especially important that Elders are invited to be first in line to get food or if unable, be brought food.
- Invite guests to attend.
- Make copies of Potluck/Potlatch Feast Checklist for each student (attached)
- Depending upon the celebration, assign students to make or gather gifts for guests.
- Reserve area where potluck/potlatch will be held.
- Ask for volunteers (or students) to head certain tasks, i.e., emcee, food set-up, singing and dancing area, blessing of food, etc.)
- Display students projects created throughout the unit.
- Allow students ample time to practice dance(s) they will perform at celebration.

Opening:

How many of you attended a potluck or potlatch? If so, which one? Who attended? What happened during the potluck or potlatch? Do you know how it compared to a traditional potluck/potlatch that happened a long time ago?

Birket-Smith reported that a Chugach Alutiiq Feast of the Dead was held each August in Prince William Sound, until about the 1880s. The wealthier villages of Nuchek, Palugvik, Montague, and Chenega took turns hosting the event, which was attended by guests from all of the surrounding settlements. The Feast of the Dead was celebrated in addition to the individual memorial feasts given forty days after death...

The Feast of the Dead in Prince William Sound began with a week or more of singing and dancing in the plank smokehouse. Comical dances were performed with masks. The musicians played large drums, and the dancers wore red paint around their eyes and on their chins. At the lavish feast that followed, the hosts gave away furs, food, and other gifts to the poor, asking each recipient to remember the deceased. Other gifts were burned sending them directly to the sky-world where the ancestors lived. Masks used in the Feast of the Dead were placed in caves after the ceremony.” –*Looking Both Ways*¹

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At the end of each unit in the Celebrations kit, a potluck/potlatch is an important component that incorporated the singing, dancing, storytelling, and sharing with others. We are going to organize a potluck/potlatch that showcases the projects we created, songs and dances we learned and share what we learned with others.

Activities:

Class I:

1. If available, introduce the Elder or Recognized Expert guest to share their traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) regarding potlucks/potlatches that were held in the past and what were the preparations needed to make the celebration successful. Ask Elder if they would like to do the blessing of the food.
2. Depending on age group, can discuss (or assign students to research) traditional potlucks/potlatches that were held in their communities/areas.
 - a. Which type was celebrated in the area?
 - b. When were the potlucks/potlatches typically held?
 - c. What did they do during these potlucks/potlatches?
 - d. How long did they usually last?
 - e. Are the potluck/potlatch held today? If so, are they the same? Different? If different, how are they celebrated today?
3. Allow time to watch videos of various celebrations held around the Chugach Region.
4. Determine what is needed for celebration potluck/potlatch. It can be a simple one (similar to honoring Elders potluck, First Fish, or Culture Week) or more elaborate one that lasts for days (similar to the Sobriety Celebration in Cordova or Tamamta Katurlluta Celebration in Homer).
5. Hand out the *Potluck/Potlatch Feast Checklist* (attached) and discuss what needs to be done according to which event celebrated.
6. Allow students to sign up for specific jobs, bringing of food/supplies (or ask others to bring food/supplies).
7. Gifts made or gathered, if desired.
8. Make an agenda for order of events, i.e. group that is first to sing and dance, projects displayed and explained, stories told, etc.
9. On day of event, double check that things are going to be done:
 - a. Set up tables.
 - ✓ Tables for maindishes, desserts, drinks and plates, utensils and napkins.
 - ✓ Tables and chairs for people to eat.
 - b. Students projects that were created, displayed or worn.
 - c. Area cleared for singing and dancing to be performed.
 - d. Write the Sugt'stun/Eyak word for the certain traditional foods shared and posted.
 - e. Ask an Elder, or guest, to lead prayer/blessing of food.

Assessment:

- Students fully participated and/or organized a potluck/potlatch culminating celebration event.
- Students correctly say and used Sugt'stun/Eyak vocabulary words.



Rhoda Moonin, Tom Anderson during Chugachmiut Cultural Heritage Elder Potluck



Potluck held to honor the Elders who have helped provide priceless information and guidance for the Heritage Kit lessons development.

From left to right: Anesia Metcalf, Nancy Yeaton, Mary Babic, Barclay Kopchak, Helen Morris (hidden), Ephim Moonin, Darrel Olsen, Rhoda Moonin, Mark Hiratsuka, Nick Moonin, Patrick Selanoff, Patience Anderson-Faulkner, Pam Smith, Tom Anderson and Kari Brookover taking the photo.



First Fish Celebration Potluck held in Cordova. Photo courtesy of Darrel Olsen



Sobriety Celebration in Cordova, Alaska



From left, Todd Ladd, Bob Ladd, Matt Piche, and Jimmy Paley, prepare crab for NVE's Sobriety Celebration community traditional subsistence potlatch dinner on Saturday, Nov. 10, 2018. (Photo by Emily Mesner/The Cordova Times)

The traditional subsistence potlatch featured a variety of seafood, including Dungeness and king crab, Sitka spot shrimp and razor and steamer clams, purchased by NVE. Moose was also offered at the potlatch, catered by Chris Belgarde, thanks to a subsistence permit for the village.



Members of the Tattilek Dancers walk into the Cordova Jr./Sr. High School gym to perform during NVE's Sobriety Celebration on Saturday, Nov. 10, 2018. (Photo by Emily Mesner/The Cordova Times)



Darrel Olsen during the 2018 Cordova Culture Camp, explained how the ancestors celebrated various activities such as First Catch. The person would share all of their catch with Elders and community members and end with a feast along with singing and dancing.



Ikumat Dancers leading a traditional dance with the students at the 2018 Cordova Culture Week Celebration



Students showing their masks they made during Cordova Culture Week Celebration



Beebles donated by Port Graham Tribal Council to share at the Cordova Culture Week Celebration Potluck



Tamamta Katurlluta Celebration in Homer, Alaska. Photo courtesy of Pratt Museum



Nanwalek Seal Dancers at the Tamamta Katurlluta Celebration in Homer, Alaska.
Photo courtesy of Pratt Museum



Traditional foods shared at 2010 Gathering Potluck. Photo courtesy of Pratt Museum.

[†] Crowell, A., Steffian, A., & Pullar, G. *Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People*. Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska Press. 2001. pp.205-206

Potluck/ Potlatch Feast Checklist

(NOTE: The number of food sign up will depend upon how many people attending)

Set-up tables and chairs (at least three people, or assigned classroom)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Clean up and put away tables and chairs (at least three people, or assigned classroom)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Main Dishes (see NOTE above)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Side Dishes/ Salads (see NOTE above)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Desserts/ Snacks (see NOTE above)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Drinks (depending on amount of people attending, determines how many drinks needed)

Water

Coffee/Tea

Juice

Dinnerware and Utensils:

Plates, Bowls, Cups

Eating Utensils (forks, spoons, knives)

Napkins

Serving Utensils (big spoons, spatulas, ladles, tongs, etc.)
