

CELEBRATIONS: BLADDER FESTIVAL GR: 3-5 (LESSONS 1 & 2)

Elder Quote:

“*Cacat nangluteng sungqeutut*” – All things have [a] *suk*.”

- Sally Ash, Nanwalek, quoting her motherⁱ

“Hunters painted designs on the bladders of all the animals they had killed during the year...”ⁱⁱ

Grade Level: 3-5

Overview: The traditional Bladder Festival celebrated the sacrifice made by animals who gave their lives to hunters so that humans might live.

Standards:

<i>AK Cultural:</i>	<i>AK Content Science:</i>	<i>CRCC:</i>
A6 Live a life in accordance with the cultural values and traditions of the local community and integrate them into their everyday behavior	F2 Develop an understanding that some individuals, cultures, and societies use other beliefs and methods in addition to scientific methods to describe and understand the world.	CE1 Students should have knowledge of traditional and contemporary Sugpiaq/Alutiiq song, dance and performance.

Lesson Goal: Students learn how the Bladder Festival celebrates the traditional Sugpiaq values of respecting natural resources.

Lesson Objectives: Students will:

- Discuss how hunters demonstrate respect for the subsistence animals they harvest traditionally and now.
- Identify the location and cultural significance of the seal bladder.
- Learn about the Bladder Festival and its meaning.

Vocabulary Words:

Sugt’stun Dialects

English:	Prince William Sound:	Lower Cook Inlet:	Eyak:
spirit	<i>suq</i>	<i>suk</i>	
respect	<i>picaak</i>	<i>picaak</i>	

Materials/Resources Needed

- Book: [Chugach Eskimo](#) p. 71
- Book: *Looking Both Ways* pgs. 192, 199
- Book: *We Are the Land, We Are the Sea*
- Computer projection screen
- Seal Anatomy Handout – one per student
- Paper lunch bags – one per student
- String, red and black markers, vegetable oil and old newspaper

- *Optional*: Small quantity of feather down to toss as ‘hunters’ tell their stories

Website:

<http://www.chugachheritageak.org/celebrations> See ‘Nanwalek Seal Dancers’ (4:11) *Chugach Eskimo* on page 71

Teacher Preparation:

- Review Activity Plan and practice Sugt’stun and/or Eyak vocabulary.
- Contact your Local Education Coordinator or local Tribal Council for a list of Elders that hunt and tell hunting stories.
- Invite an Elder to share his or her stories of a successful hunt, how they utilize the whole animal and whether or not they do any type of ritual/celebration to honor the animal.
- Before the Elder arrives, review with students the ways to show respect for the guest during his or her visit.
- Review pertinent explanations in *Looking Both Ways*
 - *Suk* (spirit) – Every part of nature – from individual animals to the sea to wind and fire - is conscious of human thought and action and therefore requires respectful treatment (p.192)
 - *Bladder Festival* – Respectful remembrance of animal who sacrificed its life by allowing the hunter to take it to feed the village (p.199)
- Make copies of the attached Seal Anatomy Handout, one per student
- Locate and gather paper bags, one per student
- Cut the string in approximately 3 feet (one yard) long enough to tie up the paper bag and hang from ceiling. One per student.
- Determine where in the classroom decorated ‘bladders’ will be hung.
- *Optional*: Decide whether to include tossing feather down onto ‘hunters’ as they tell their stories.

Opening: Introduce and invite Elder to talk about his or her hunting activities. What animals does he or she hunt? How does the hunter demonstrate respect/*picaak* for the animals? [*Proper license, well-tended gear, killing – not wounding – prey, not taking more than needed, not wasting meat, sharing the meat and/or hide, contributing to community potlucks*] How does the hunter use the animal? Is the meat shared? Is the entire animal used?

Encourage discussion of how modern hunter shows respect/*picaak* for the animals him or her harvests and how respect/*picaak* was shown in traditional Sugpiaq culture. In addition to all those actions discussed above Sugpiaq hunters wore specially decorated tools and clothing [*See painted paddles and elaborate hunting visors*] and kept the bladder for use in the Bladder Festival.



Seal Helmet, Museo de America, Madrid, Photo B. Kopchak

Optional- If no Elder is available to tell a hunting story share the following:

“I remember how when I was young we would go to a little cove at Coghill Point up around Port Wells. I had to wait at camp because I was too young to hunt with my dad and my brothers and the other hunters. When they took off, I used to walk up this hill around the point toward the glaciers. From the top of the hill, I could watch as they hunted seals amid the icebergs. I could also see the seals. I watched the hunters sneak up on the seals and shoot one or two of them. That was fun. I would sit up there until they started heading back. They’d be back in camp before I could make it back down the hill.”

- Pete Kompkoff, Jr.ⁱⁱⁱ

“Back then we ate everything we caught. Most of our food came from the land or the sea. Seal was a favorite. There was hardly any part that was discarded. The whole seal was utilized. Once you butchered a seal, the fat was anywhere from an inch thick to two or three inches. We cut off the fat to make seal oil. First, you cut the seal fat into squares. Then, over an open fire, you toss the fat into maybe a five gallon can. You keep adding the little pieces of fat, dicing them up, and pretty soon you’ve got a five gallon can full of seal oil.”

- Henry Makarka^{iv}

“After you shoot a seal, you cut it up and clean out the rib cage. You ate the liver, the heart, the kidneys, the intestines. The best part was the breast. You would take the kidney, the liver, and the breast, and everyone would take every bit, trim the skin, cook it, and put it on the boiler. They’d say, “The soup is no good if you don’t stir it.”... We made baidarkas by using the hides of female seals because the male seals had rips and cuts in their skin from fighting. We ate seal and sea lion.”

- Andy Selanoff^v

Activities:

Class I

1. If Elder available, introduce them and ask them to share their hunting stories.
2. Emphasize that all parts of the animals were used either for food, clothing, decoration, etc. as a way to show respect to the animal.
3. Ask the Elder if he or she ever retains the bladders of harvested animals.
 - a. If the answer was yes, ask why?
4. Discuss why the Sugpiat traditionally kept the bladders.
5. Read the Elder, Sally Ash’s quotation from above: *All things have a suk (spirit)*.
6. Explain to the students that the Sugpiat believed that every part of nature, from an animal, plant, place, or thing, or natural force such as wind or fire has a consciousness like a human being which deserves respect/*picaak*. They believed that a hunter was able to kill an animal not only because of his or her skill but because the animal’s suk was willing to sacrifice itself for the benefit of humans.
7. Ask the students where the Sugpiat believed the animal’s spirit lived? After a few minutes, explain that they believed that the spirit resided in its bladder.

8. The bladder is a body organ like a bag that holds urine after it passes through the kidneys and before it leaves the body.
9. Show the Seal Anatomy in Sugt'stun (attached) on computer projection screen. Ask Elder to briefly identify parts of the body and its uses (especially the bladder).
10. Just like some people say that the human spirit is in our hearts, the Sugpiat said every animal's spirit/*suk* was in its bladder. This tradition of respectful treatment of natural resources continues to this day. Respect/*picaak* for nature is an important value for the Sugpiat. This means showing respect/*picaak* for the animals' spirits and their sacrifices for us. To show respect/*picaak* it is stressed that:
 - a. Hunters are not to be wasteful and kill more than they can eat.
 - b. Every part of the animal should be utilized as possible.
 - c. The hunter should not allow a wounded animal to suffer. They should complete the kill.
 - d. It is important to always share the harvest.
11. Distribute copies of the Seal Anatomy and have students color in those parts of the seal considered useful and then use a different color to identify the bladder.
12. Read out loud the following description of a traditional Bladder Festival that took place in the late 1800s:

“Participants wore fur headbands with feathers, and painted their faces in patterns that were different for each village. Hunters painted designs on the bladders of all the animals they had killed during the year and hung them from the ceiling, then danced and sang to tell the story of each hunt. They blew eagle down in to the air so that it fell like snowflakes, gave away gifts, and played a game with inflated animal skins, After the ceremony, the bladders were stored away to taken on hunting expeditions for good luck.”^{vi}

Class II

1. Ask students if they remember the description of a traditional Bladder Festival that was read to them the day before.
2. Announce that today students will make preparations for the Bladder Festival.
3. Review with the students:
 - a. Why do we show respect/*picaak* for the animals we hunt?
 - b. What a *suk* is and where do the Sugpiat believe it lives in an animal.
 - c. Why does the belief in a *suk* mean that we should treat animals and everything in nature, with respect?
4. Remind students that the bladder is like a bag, so for the lesson we will be using a paper bag to represent an animal's bladder.
5. Distribute paper bags and red markers. Tell the students that red was chosen because it was the traditional color used to decorate the bladders.
6. Explain to students that they are to imagine themselves as traditional Sugpiaq hunters and these bags represent the bladders of animals that they have killed.
7. Direct students to decorate their bags with a drawing of animal it represented. They can add designs and to think about how they will tell the story of their hunt. Ask the students to label the bags with names or initials.
8. Have the students brush vegetable oil onto their bags to give it a translucent look. Open it up and allow to dry.

9. Talk with individual students about what animal they hunted, where and how they killed it, and how they used it respectfully. Have students write a few sentences describing the hunt and how they demonstrated this respect/*picaak* for the animal.
10. After the bags are dry, distribute newspaper and pieces of string for students to fill bags. Direct students to fill their bags with crunched up newspaper and tie off the top with a trailing piece of string that can be used to tie the bag to the ‘ceiling.’
11. When the students are finished with coloring and drawing the animal on the bladder, the bags will be saved for the last day and hung from ceiling for display to represent animal bladders.
12. Explain how the Bladder Festival included singing and dancing under the bladders showing the greatest respect to the animals. The belief is this ceremony allowed the animal’s spirit to leave and tell the other animals how you are very respectful and deserving of their lives given to ensure future successful hunts.
13. Invite individual students to tell the story of their hunt through song and dance OR imitate the animal they harvested.
14. *Optional*: Distribute small quantities of feather down (substitute for eagle feather down) for students to blow at the storytellers.

Assessment:

- Students identified the location of the bladder and discussed its cultural significance.
- Students re-enacted the Bladder Festival.
- Students correctly pronounced Sugt’stun or Eyak vocabulary words.

ⁱ As quoted in Crowell, Aron L., et al. *Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People*. University of Alaska Press, 2002. p.192

ⁱⁱ Crowell, p. 199

ⁱⁱⁱ As quoted in Smelcer, John E., and Morgen A. Young. *We Are the Land, We Are the Sea: Stories of Subsistence from the people of Chenega, Alaska*. Chenega Heritage, Inc. 2007. p.68

^{iv} As quoted in Smelcer, p.75

^v As quoted in Smelcer, p.94

^{vi} Crowell, p.199



Animal Bladders, photo courtesy of Dr. Crowell, Smithsonian Arctic Studies

Sugt'sturllinaq Nupuglluta: We Only Speak Sugt'stun

