

**CELEBRATIONS: MEMORIAL CELEBRATIONS GR: 6-8 (LESSONS 1, 2, AND 3)**

**Elder Quotation:**

“There was an old village in Port Fidalgo. A man there had five nephews, twelve sons, and two wives. He was sick and ready to die. He had a fine spear with a throwing board which he gave to his youngest nephew. Then he died. The nephews and the sons all went into one house. The sons were dividing the dead man’s things among themselves and the nephews. They gave each some bows or arrows or spears – all the dead man’s hunting implements. The nephews were talking of the throwing spear. The oldest son said that his father wanted to give it to the youngest nephew, but the oldest nephew said, "No, he gave it to me." Then they started to fight for the spear and were hitting each other with it. The oldest son seized it and threw it into the fire. Then they all quarreled and left. They went all over [the Sound]. Some of the sons went to the Cordova side; some went to Trhetla near Taukhtyuik and to all different places. Most of the nephews with their families went to Palutat. They pulled their bidarkas up and piled their hunting tools all together. Then they sat up against the wall with their knees doubled up under their chins - everybody, men and women, the women holding their babies. They died that way and dried up. You could see them there long afterwards.

The sons and some of the nephews went to all different places in the Sound, I don't remember all the names. That is how all the different villages started.”

- Stepan, Chugach Legends<sup>i</sup>

**Grade Level: 6-8**

**Overview:** Students research how the Sugpiaq and Eyak peoples traditionally remembered and honored their dead and pose as time-traveling event planners to demonstrate their mastery of traditional memorial rituals.

**Standards:**

<i>AK Cultural:</i>	<i>AK Content Science:</i>	<i>CRCC:</i>
<b>A6</b> Live a life in accordance with the cultural values and traditions of the local community and integrate them into their everyday behavior	<b>F2</b> 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.	<b>CE1</b> Students should have knowledge of traditional and contemporary Sugpiaq/Alutiiq song, dance and performance.

**Lesson Goal:** Students learn how the Sugpiaq and Eyak peoples traditionally honored their dead.

**Lesson Objectives:** Students will

- Research traditional Sugpiaq and Eyak traditional memorial practices.
- Assess the appropriate rituals for a deceased hunter.
- Organize and present a ‘Memorial Celebration.’
- Discuss traditional and contemporary memorial practices.

**Vocabulary Words:**

## Sugt'stun Dialects

English:	Prince William Sound:	Lower Cook Inlet:	<a href="#">Eyak:</a>
respect	<i>picaak</i>	<i>picaak</i>	
hunter	<i>pisurta</i>	<i>pisurta</i>	<i>k'uch'iya'</i> (good hunter)

**Materials/Resources Needed**

- Computer projection screen
- Book: Johnson, J. F. *Chugach Legends: Stories and Photographs of the Chugach Region*
- Book: Birkett-Smith, Kaj. [The Chugach Eskimo](#)  
See especially: 'Death Rituals' Bottom two paragraphs of p.88- p.91; 'Festivals' pp.108-110; 'Feasts of the Dead' pp.112-113;
- Book: Birkett-Smith, Kaj, and Frederica De Laguna. [The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska](#)  
See especially: "Death and Burial" pp.163-166; 'The (Death) Potlatch' pp.169-174
- Book: Crowell, A. *Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People.*
- Pack of playing cards to generate random numbers for deceased's property holdings
- Memorial Celebration Plan handout (Attached below) – one per student

**Video:**

Sugpiaq Mask Dance for Memorial Celebration <https://youtu.be/B4cpqtQffVQ>

**Teacher Preparation:**

- Review Activity Plan and practice Sugt'stun and/or Eyak vocabulary.
- Invite an Elder to Class III to share his or her experiences of contemporary Memorial Celebrations
- Before the Elder arrives review with students how to show respect for the Elder during his or her visit.
- Note that [The Chugach Eskimo](#) and [The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska](#) Listed above with topic specific pages listed are available on the chugachheritageak website under Resources

**Opening:** Death comes to us all and every culture develops traditions and rituals to memorialize these traumatic events to allow those left behind to move on with their lives. It was believed that if these traditions were not respected, trouble can ensue. Listen to a traditional Prince William Sound story of what happened when a family fought over the distribution of a man's belongings.

Read 'How the Different Villages Started in Prince William Sound' aloud.

"There was an old village in Port Fidalgo. A man there had five nephews, twelve sons, and two wives. He was sick and ready to die. He had a fine spear with a throwing board which he gave to his youngest nephew. Then he died. The nephews and the sons all went into one house. The sons were dividing the dead man's things among themselves and the nephews. They gave each some bows or arrows or spears – all the dead man's hunting

implements. The nephews were talking of the throwing spear. The oldest son said that his father wanted to give it to the youngest nephew, but the oldest nephew said, "No, he gave it to me." Then they started to fight for the spear and were hitting each other with it. The oldest son seized it and threw it into the fire. Then they all quarreled and left. They went all over [the Sound]. Some of the sons went to the Cordova side; some went to Trhetla near Taukhtyuk and to all different places. Most of the nephews with their families went to Palutat. They pulled their bidarkas up and piled their hunting tools all together. Then they sat up against the wall with their knees doubled up under their chins - everybody, men and women, the women holding their babies. They died that way and dried up. You could see them there long afterwards.

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Stepan, Chugach Legends

*Optional:* Display legend on computer projection screen as a reference.

Discuss what Sugpiaq traditions associated with death are revealed in this story.

- What does a man own? *Hunting implements. No mention of house, boat, clothing, or slaves.*
- Does dying man have any say in what happens to his property? *Personal property bequest made by dying man.*
- Who inherits property? *Sons and nephews inherit property.*
- Who decides who gets what? *Sons determine recipients. No mention of man's siblings.*
- Did the wives receive any belongings? *No. And there is no reference as to his house where the wives presumably live*
- Did people die sitting up? *Position in which people died was traditional pose in which a corpse was placed while it remained in the house.*

### **Activities:**

#### **Class I:**

1. Share the following description of the Feast of the Dead:

*"Yup'ik and Inupiaq communities held a Feast of the Dead celebration each winter, and a much larger Great Feast of the Dead at intervals of a decade or more. These complex and important ceremonies included rituals to provide food and clothing to ancestors for their use in the afterlife. Host villages demonstrated prosperity and gained prestige by giving away large quantities of food and furs.*

*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.*”<sup>ii</sup>

2. Have the students watch the Sugpiaq Mask Memorial Dance performed in 2010 by the Imamsuat Sugpiaq dance group in honor of the late Glenn Godfrey.  
<https://youtu.be/B4cpqtQffVQ>
3. Discuss a traditional mask burning celebration and why masks were burned after a dance honoring the dead.
4. Read the following quotation from *The Chugach Eskimo*:  
*“The festivals of the Chugach were essentially social events. A religious element was never entirely absent, and in a few cases it was very conspicuous, but even so the social aspect probably predominated...  
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.”*<sup>iii</sup>
5. Read the following quotation regarding death potlatch from *The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska*: “  
*“All the members of the deceased moiety, even those living in other villages, were invited to contribute. The guests were the members of the opposite moiety. The guests sat in one or two rows along the walls. The festivities lasted for several days, the exact number not being fixed. After the actual distribution of gifts, the guests would remain for several days and there would be dances and games. The relatives of the dead man sang first. The guest would join in and continue singing while the relatives wept.  
A fire was burning in the middle of the potlatch house and the chief of the deceased’s moiety would put food into it for the dead person. If the food was in a plate, the plate was put into the fire also, although a guest might claim the plate by asking for it. The dead man’s belongings, which had been saved by the relative, would be put into the fire by the chief, one at a time. If a member of the opposite moiety wanted one of these articles, he could ask for it, naming the object and adding “s’tlqatl” “I want it.” The chief would take the object from the fire and hand it to him. The recipient would give the relatives something useful in exchange. The recipient of the dead man’s article had to promise to take good care of it and not misuse it. If the deceased had been particularly attached to the object, it would not be traded off but would be burned.”*<sup>iv</sup>
6. Note that both Sugpiaq and Eyak memorial celebrations respect the deceased through song and dance and by recalling his life through song and dances and giving gifts in his memory – not from his belongings but items that were created or acquired to give away in his honor.
7. Divide students into small groups to research traditional Sugpiaq and Eyak memorial practices noting similarities and differences.

8. Students can choose whether they will concentrate on Sugpiaq or Eyak traditions. They are to create a mini-biography of a successful pre-contact hunter, including his village, his hunting specialty, and his family composition.

### **Class II:**

#### **Activities:**

1. Distribute 'Memorial Celebration Plan' handouts. Explain that student groups are time-traveling professional event planners. Each group is to prepare a ten to twelve slide PowerPoint presentation which outlines how to organize the traditional rites of respect and celebration appropriate to the hunter's culture.
2. Have student groups randomly select up to four cards each of which corresponds to a personal property item listed on the Memorial Celebration Plan handout.

### **Class III:**

#### **Activities:**

1. Student groups present and discuss their Memorial Celebration Plans.
2. *Optional:* A designated 'Grieving Family Panel' or the class at large may award the Memorial Celebration Contract to the most comprehensive plan presented.
3. Introduce Elder and invite him or her to share accounts of contemporary memorial celebrations. How does he or she feel that respect for the deceased is demonstrated.
4. Discuss and compare traditional and contemporary memorial celebrations. Determine what, if any, of the traditional memorial celebration traditions are still practiced.

#### **Assessment:**

- Students can explain the traditional Sugpiaq and Eyak memorial celebration rituals and can compare the differences with a modern celebration.
- Students created and presented a PowerPoint for preparing a traditional memorial celebration of their choice.
- Students correctly pronounced Sugt'stun or Eyak vocabulary words.

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<sup>i</sup> As quoted in Johnson, J. F., & Page, B. (1984). *Chugach legends: Stories and Photographs of the Chugach Region*. Anchorage, AK: Chugach Alaska Corp. p.17

<sup>ii</sup> Crowell, A., Steffian, A., & Pullar, G. (Eds.). (2001) *Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People*. Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska Press. pp.205-206

<sup>iii</sup> Birket-Smith, Kaj. *The Chugach Eskimo*. Inter Documentation Co., 1983. pp.108-109

<sup>iv</sup> Birket-Smith, Kaj and Laguna, Frederica. *The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska*. Reprint Levin & Munksgaard, Kobenhavn, 1976. Pp. 170-172

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## Memorial Celebration Plan

Consider yourselves time-traveling event planners. You are to create a 10-12 slide PowerPoint to present to the grieving family to help them organize all the rituals that a traditional memorial celebration would entail. The following topics should be considered in your Celebration Plan.

### Deceased's Mini-Bio

Name

Home Village (*Sugpiaq or Eyak?*)

Family composition (*Wives, Siblings, Children?*)

Cause of Death (*Accident, Battle, Illness – time enough for special instructions?*)

Importance within community (*Hunting Prowess, Hunting Specialty, Leadership*)

### Guests

Who is invited? (Other villages, opposite moiety, other tribes...)

How much (and what) food will be required?

Gifts needed for guests (Be sure to discuss the extent of the gifts required to reflect the importance of the deceased to his community.)

### Celebration Timeline

When should Memorial celebration begin and end?

How much time needed to round-up gifts and from whom?

Dance group(s) and schedule (include types of dances)

Will there be a second celebration during the annual Feast of the Dead?

### Personal Property Disposition

Select up to four items from the list below. Your plan should address how these items are to be distributed, when, and where. You may also note what cannot be transferred.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1) Regalia

\_\_\_\_\_ (6) Favorite slate knife

\_\_\_\_\_ (2) Toggling Harpoon

\_\_\_\_\_ (7) Greenstone adze

\_\_\_\_\_ (3) Otter amulet

\_\_\_\_\_ (8) Bone fish hook

\_\_\_\_\_ (4) Bow

\_\_\_\_\_ (9) Dentalium earrings

\_\_\_\_\_ (5) Throwing Spear

\_\_\_\_\_ (10) Qayaq/Canoe

Guidance on who gets what?

Gifting etiquette

### Respect

How is respect for the deceased shown?

Which aspects of this Memorial Celebration are particularly Sugpiaq or Eyak?