

CELEBRATIONS: RITES OF PASSAGE/FIRST CATCH GR: PRE K-2 (LESSON 2-3)

Elder Quote/Belief:



“I remember that when a young boy would get their first catch, it was a big thing, the Elders would celebrate! Like when my oldest son, Mark got his first seal and there was this little old woman, Anna Chimovisky. She pretended to be a seal. She was playing like a seal on the beach, making noise like a baby seal. She was celebrating his first catch, when he got his first seal.”

–Mary Kompkoff, Chenega
Describing her son’s first catch at the Elders
December 2016 work session

Grade Level: Pre K-2

Overview: Traditionally there were celebrations held for various Rites of Passage one of which was the first catch. The first catch has been celebrated as a way of respecting the animal and ensuring successful future hunts/catches. The way it was celebrated was to give away most of the animal or fish to elders and community.

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: Students will learn about the rites of passage and the traditional importance of sharing and celebrating a person’s first catch.

Lesson Objective(s): Students will:

- Learn about the traditional rites of passage celebrations.
- Understand the importance of sharing the person’s first catch with Elders and community members.
- Learn the Sugt’stun/ Eyak vocabulary words

Vocabulary Words:

Sugt'stun Dialects

English:	Prince William Sound:	Lower Cook Inlet:	Eyak:
Sharing		ilakuiluku	Gift- xLq'a'
First catch		Cuqlleg Pitaq	
catch a fish	pilua iqallugmek	pilua iqallugmek	
share a fish	snaqllua uqallumek	snaqllua uqallumek	
fish			te'ya'

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Elder or Recognized Expert to share their TEK on first catch celebrations.
- Fish Template (Attached)
 - Or download from <https://www.clipart.email/clipart/king-salmon-silhouette-111979.html>
- Computer projection screen
- 4 small fishing poles with paper clip hooks
- “Fishing Hole” set-up (draped off area...)
- Cut-out life-size canvas/Tyvek/ or card stock ‘salmon’ with grommet eye to OR paper clip poked through salmon body to ‘accept’ fishing pole hook) – one per student
- Finger paints (orange, red, silver)
- *Optional:* painting smocks

Book:

- Sloat, Teri, *Eye of the Needle*. Alaska Northwest Books, 2007.

Video:

- Mary Kompkoff describing First Catch <https://youtu.be/HWbOs04OiTQ> (On website)

Teacher Preparation:

- Invite Elders into the classroom to talk about traditional celebrations, especially Rites of Passage and/or First Catch.
- Review ways to be respectful to guests in classroom with students prior to Elder visit.
- Review the lesson and gather materials needed.
- Review the book *Eye of the Needle* and video of Mary Kompkoff describing her son’s first catch.
- Make copies of the fish template page for each student (Attached).

Opening:

Initiate a discussion of students’ experience with catching and sharing (or not) fish. Has anyone here caught a fish? What kind? What did you do with the fish? Did you eat it by yourself or with your family? Or did you share the fish with someone else? With anyone in particular?

With your grandparents? If not, why not? If you shared with your fish with an Elder, why? Was it hard to give the fish away?

Listen to the following quote by Eleanor McMullen from Port Graham.

“I took my grandson out in a skiff to catch pinks. We caught 15 fish and then went house to house to give to elders. At the last elder’s house, we gave away the only fish left. After leaving, my grandson asked, “Umma, what are we going to do? My mom needs fish too.” I said we can go fishing tomorrow. This was my grandson’s first experience of the ‘gift of giving’ to others.”¹

Today, we are going to learn about the traditional ‘Rites of Passage’ celebrations. Does anyone know what a Rites of Passage celebration is about? Rites of passage are something like a ‘first thing’ you have ever done. What is something that you may have done for the very first time? What about your first word? Your first step? What about the time you caught your first fish. Traditionally, rites of passages were celebrated such as your first catch of a fish. It was believed when you caught your first fish, you had to share all of it with the Elders and community members. The Elders would celebrate with singing and dancing to ensure your future catches continue to be successful.

We will first watch Mary Kompkoff, an Elder from Chenega describe her son’s first catch, a seal and how an Elder, Anna Chimovisky celebrated. We will then listen carefully as the book “*Eye of the Needle*” is read. Try to remember the kinds of things that were caught and whom did he share them with.

Activities:

Class I:

1. Explain how the sharing of resources, particularly game and seafood, and fish was done with village members. When a child catches his or her first fish or goes on a successful hunt, it is cause for celebration. The celebration was because now the child will be able to help support the community through sharing with others. Catch a fish/ *pilua iqallugmek*, share a fish/ *snaqllua uqallumek*.
2. Introduce the Elder and invite him or her to recall his or her first catch and how it was shared as well as memories of how sharing is done and why it’s important to do so.
3. Read the quotation from Eleanor McMullen above. Invite the Elder to talk about the role of Elders in Alaskan Native cultures.
4. Discuss how hard it would be to give away the very first fish you ever caught. If it’s so hard to do why is this a Sugpiaq tradition? [*Accept all answers but steer students towards showing young fishermen that it will be his or her responsibility to help feed the community and to show respect to the Elders who have worked so hard all their lives to take care of the community. It is a symbolic act, something you do to show what is important in your life, i.e., to take care of your community and to honor your Elders.*]
5. Show the YouTube video of Mary Kompkoff describing her son’s first catch.
6. Discuss the video afterwards.
7. Announce that students are now going to catch their ‘first fish’ – a salmon. Divide students into groups of four. Distribute fishing poles with paper clip hooks to one group at a time. Have them cast their lines over the draped edge of the “Fishing Hole” to catch a salmon. Invite other students to watch as they hook (or don’t hook) a fish (as the teacher attaches the hook behind the screen, perhaps with the help of some dexterous students) and offer

encouragement to one another. As each group catches their salmon invite the next group up to fish. Remind students that these fish represent the first fish they've ever caught and will be given away. Catch a fish/ *pilua iqallugmek*, share a fish/ *snaqllua uqallumek*.

8. Have students to label their fish with their name and collect them for use in the next class.

Class II:

1. Read aloud Teri Sloat's *The Eye of the Needle*. Note that this book is based on a Yupik tale from Western Alaska and show us important values from Native cultures across Alaska. Was Amik, the boy in the story, able to share with his grandmother? Why not? Why should he have shared with her? [Catch a fish/*pilua iqallugmek*, share a fish/ *snaqllua uqallumek!*]
2. Demonstrate how to make 'scales.' Press your thumb into the finger paint and then onto the 'fish,' rocking it gently back and forth to ensure even coverage. Make rows of thumbprints succeeded by thumbprint rows offset from the previous row. (Share 'Salmon with Thumbprint Scales' below.) Show how fins may be kept free of scales by covering the fins with scrap paper while pressing their thumbs to the fish bodies.
3. Return the collected fish to their student fishermen and distribute the finger paints.
4. Cover the work area with protective newspaper or scrap paper. Have students practice their thumb print painting techniques before they begin working on their salmon.
5. Ask students to 'scale' their salmon.
6. Remind students that these salmon represent their first catch. Ask them to whom the class should present their completed fish. [*Elders, Community members*]
7. Have students celebrate their first catch by offering them to others. Students should present them to an invited Elder, another class of students, the school principal, or community leader. It is important that students individually recognize their responsibility to share. Remind students of Eleanor McMullen's description of the 'gift of giving.' When students present their fish each one should say something along the lines of 'I want to share my first catch with you.'

Catch a fish/*pilua iqallugmek*, share a fish/ *snaqllua uqallumek!*
Happy First Catch - Hooray!

8. *Optional:* Discuss how students felt about the importance of sharing.
9. *Optional:* Have fish displayed in a public area as a class gift to the community.

Assessment:

- Students are able to repeat and correctly pronounce Sugt'stun /Eyak words.
- Students can retell the Eye of the Needle and the traditional value of sharing and respect for Elders.
- Students can describe a traditional rite of passage.

ⁱDeCourtney, Christine A., et al. *Traditional Food Guide for the Alaska Native People*. Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, 2015. p.76

