

FOOD FROM THE SEA: CONSERVATION LORE GR: 9-12 (LESSONS 10-12)

Elder Quotation:

“I still hunt seal and sea lions. There’s a trick to it. I drop off someone with a rifle on the rocks where there are seals. Then I drive the boat away from the area. The seals think we have left, and they come back up to the surface where the person on the rocks shoots them. Sometimes, I’m the one to stay o(n) the rocks. You have to retrieve them before they sink. We get sea lions the same way.....If we shoot something and kill it, then we do everything we can to bring it home. There have been times when it seemed like we were out three for hours trying to get something off the bottom. We just don’t like to waste anything. That’s not our way.”

- Michael Vigilⁱ

Grade Level: 9-12

Overview: Traditional Sugpiat and Eyak lore is much more than old stories or superstitions. They help preserve and transmit important cultural values including how to treat and conserve subsistence resources with respect.

Standards:

<i>AK Cultural:</i>	<i>AK Content:</i>	<i>CRCC:</i>
<p>C1: Perform subsistence activities in ways that are appropriate to local traditions.</p> <p>D1: Acquire in-depth cultural knowledge through active participation and meaningful interaction with Elders.</p>	<p>Science C (2). A student should understand and be able to apply the concepts, models, theories, facts, evidence, systems, and processes of life science and should (2) develop an understanding of the structure, function, behavior, development, life cycles, and diversity of living organisms.</p>	<p>SS3: Students should be able to gather plants, berries, and other edible foods.</p> <p>L1: Students should understand the value and importance of the Sugt’stun language and be actively involved in its preservation.</p>

Lesson Goal: To understand how traditional Sugpiaq and Eyak lore passed down through generations instilled cultural values that helped preserve subsistence resources for generations to come.

Lesson Objectives: Students will:

- Reflect on the values represented in traditional Sugpiat and Eyak lore as they relate to food from the sea.
- Generate specific examples of how to live these traditional conservation values.
- Learn to pronounce the Sugt’stun and Eyak vocabulary

Vocabulary Words:

Sugt’stun Dialects

English:	PWS:	Lower Cook Inlet:	Eyak:
spirit	<i>suk</i>	<i>suk</i>	
We respect our sea creatures.		<i>Picakllapet imarlet.</i>	
We respect the food from the sea and the land.		<i>Picakllapet nunamek taumi imarmek.</i>	

Kit Library:

Book: Johnson, J. F., & Page, B. (1984). *Chugach Legends*

Book: Krauss, M. (Ed.) (1982) *In Honor of Eyak: The Art of Anna Nelson Harry*

Book: Poling, D.R. (2011) *Chenega Diaries*.

Book: Salomon, A. K. et al. (2011). *Imam Cimiucia = Our Changing Sea*.

Book: Smelcer, J. E., & Young, M. A. (2007). *We Are the Land, We Are the Sea: Stories of Subsistence From the People of Chenega*.

Book: Tabios, D. (2000). *Looking Back on Subsistence: Interviews with Elders of the Chugach Region*.

Materials/Resources Needed:

Class I

- Old Beliefs Handout
- Various legends –
 - ‘Pukituq Who Turned into All Kinds of Animals’ (*Chugach Legends*, pp.52-53)
 - Make no noise when hunting
 - ‘The Fire Dwarfs’ (*Chugach Legends*, p.56)
 - Pre-hunt taboos - Fast and abstain from sex before hunting
 - ‘The Man and the Sea Lions’ (*Chugach Legends*, pp.67-69)
 - Treat sea lions respectfully
 - ‘The Man Who Turned into a Squirrel’ (*Chugach Legends*, pp.69-71)
 - Humans can become animals and vice versa
 - ‘The Eagle-Man’ (*Chugach legends*, pp.78-79)
 - Designating food for sharing
 - ‘The Man Who Met “Imam- Shua”’ (*Chugach Legends*, pp.109-110)
 - Spirit of the ocean lists hunting rules
 - ‘1933: Turned into a Groundhog’ (*In Honor of Eyak*, p.122)
 - Pre-hunt taboos and preparation

Teacher Preparation:

- Review activity plan and practice Sugt’stun or Eyak vocabulary.
- Determine how many class sessions to allow students to work on project and when to share project results.

Opening: Sugpiaq Elder Diane Selanoff of Valdez has reminded us that the traditional resource usage mindset was that one should be grateful for what nature offers and not deplete subsistence resources. As a child she was taught that if you took something from the beach you were going to make it rain. Is this an example of Native folklore or superstition? Diane Selanoff was further taught that if you take something from the land you have to give something (physical) back.ⁱⁱ Is this folklore or conservation lore?

Traditional beliefs and ‘superstitions’ include a lot of lessons about the consideration for their implications on environmental impact now find there is much merit in these old stories and sayings as to the respectful treatment of resources, i.e., how to preserve their environment, attitudes that maintain a right relationship with the environment.

Activities:

Class I:

1. Introduce Elder/Recognized Expert and invite him or her to recall learning about the importance of respecting the environment and the creatures in it. Were they taught by example? By stories? By conversations?
2. Distribute ‘Old Beliefs’ handouts and discuss which contain messages of conservation. (out right preservation of populations, stories to scare kids into right actions, legends of respectful hunting.) Note: *Not every belief or story is directly on point.*
3. Divide class into small groups and distribute or assign a legend or story to each group. Students should read and reflect on what each story tells about the subsistence lifestyle and evaluate if the story or legend explains or teaches how to preserve resource populations or the environment.
4. In traditional Sugpiaq belief ‘every animate and inanimate thing, including animals, plants, tides, winds, stars, and, ice, possesses *suk* or human-like possessor that gives it personhood and awareness.’ⁱⁱⁱ “Sally Ash of Nanwalek was told by her mother that “*Cacat nangluteng sungqehut*” – “All things have a *suk*,” describing a universe that is completely alive and in which every part of nature is conscious of human thought and action.”^{iv}
There were three great *suk* spirits: *Lam Sua* – a person of the universe; *Nunam Sua* – female person who lived in the forest in charge of all land animals, and: *Imam Sua* – female person who lived at the bottom of the sea in charge of all sea animals and to whom hunters prayed when hunting by kayak.^v
5. Wastefulness disrespects nature and its life cycles. “In Prince William Sound fish intestines were customarily returned to the water because they were part of the animal’s soul. The first fish was eaten entirely except for the gall and the gills. If anything was wasted, it was believed the fish would not return.”^{vi} See also the Elder quotation from Michael Vigil of Chenega above.
6. Discuss how a tribal council, local government, or public relations firm might pass along these traditional messages of conservation and respectful treatment of food from the sea in a modern presentation. How would students as ‘future Elders’ pass along these values?
7. Write ‘*Picakllapet imarlet*/ We respect our sea creatures’ and ‘*Picakllapet nunamek taumi imarmek*/ We respect the food from the land and sea.’ What medium would students use to transmit these values to others: Brochures? Video? Rap Song? Skit? Public Service Announcement? Social Media message? Poster?
8. Invite or assign each group to choose a medium to convey conservation values based on traditional lore. Have students identify an audience for their project (elementary school students, fellow teens, general public, tourists...).
9. *Optional*: Homework: Have students interview a family member or Elder about how and where they learned traditional values about conservation and local resources.

Class II:

1. Have students work in their small groups to promote the traditional Sugpiat or Eyak values of respect and conservation by means of their chosen medium for their designated audience. They may refer to the handouts or any of the Kit Library books listed above.
2. Projects must focus on food from the sea and incorporate at least three specific references to traditional lore or beliefs and three specific ways in which that would translate into action.

For example: As Bobby Stamp's Chenega Elders told us, Don't spit in the sea – Don't throw trash into the sea.)

3. Projects will be assessed for their creativity, specific use of traditional lore references and three related actions to take, and their appropriateness for the target audience.

Class III:

Have students present their projects and assess the content and effectiveness of their messages.

Assessment:

1. Students successfully analyzed the sea-related conservation values underlying traditional lore.
2. Students created specific conservation messages based on traditional lore in a contemporary medium.
3. Students correctly pronounced the Sugt'stun or Eyak vocabulary

ⁱ Michael Vigil as quoted in Smelcer, J. E., & Young, M. A. (2007). *We are the land, we are the sea: stories of subsistence from the people of Chenega*. Anchorage, AK: Chenega Heritage, Inc. pp.128-129.

ⁱⁱ Diane Selanoff, Chugachmiut Elders Conference 9.13.17, Anchorage, AK

‘SEA-RELATED OLD BELIEFS’

Excerpted from *Chenega as I Saw It – It’s People* by Bobby Stamp (2010)

“The Aleuts did not hunt or cook sea mammal and land mammals together. You would be offending the “gods (*spirits*) of the land (and sea)” which are called **Nuu num so ko nuugah, Nu num sook no ah, New num soo ow na** or **Nunam suk nuagah**. Salt and bread were considered sacred, not to be misused or thrown away.” (p.13)

“There was a belief that the sea and all the plants and animals had god (*spirits*), wind, sun, and every different thing had a god (*spirit*).” (p.13)

“Then we were real young as kids there were things that they did not want us to do, such as catching little fish or fooling around with little bird nests. We were told that we would cause it to rain and we would not do those things. Little birds or chicks from ducks or any kind of bird were to be left alone, they were pets of the god & we were not supposed to offend the gods.” (p.14)

“Salmon was sacred. You were not supposed to even lay it on bare ground. You cut clean grass so the fish would not get dirt on it. If you mistreated the salmon, the god of the salmon would make it scarce the next year, they would not come back.” (p.14)

“You see a lot of quartz rock about the size of a nickel. All of the bidarkies carried them; it was to attract the attention of the killer whale “**Ah look**” when they came too close. They threw the rock overboard and they said they would look like little fish to the killer whales. When greeting a killer whale you would say “**Ooo hay**”. (p.15)

“If they caught a seal with a pup inside unborn, they would take the film that was over the young seal and put it on the figure head of the bow and it was supposed to bring good luck.” (p.15)

“You were not to eat any fish or animal you found dead or did not kill. They said a big evil man, in our language [was] called **Sool auk**, would get you.” (p.15)

“If we ate raw fish or salmon we were not supposed to eat berries that day.” (p.15)

“You did not eat fish tips that were dried for the animal you were trapping or the animal would get the bait from the trap or spring it without getting caught.” (p.16)

“One way of keeping us from harming any fish, the people told us that if we harm them it would rain. You did not dare do this because the other kids would beat you up because you would cause it to rain so we would watch or tattle on each other. That went for all the little birds, they were all of god’s pets and we were to leave them be, injured and all.” (p.16)

“There is a belief that the sea is sacred, you were not to spit or throw debris in there. There was a holiday for the sea. There was a sea god and he controlled the animal in it.” (p.16)

‘SEA-RELATED OLD BELIEFS’
Excerpted from *Chugach Legends* (1984)

“They used to believe in animals. Well, they believed that what animals do will happen to them. Some of them were like fortune tellers. They believed the animals because every time an animal acts, like fighting to win, that means something bad will happen to him or her. They believed that he was expecting trouble afterwards. They would say, “Oh, that’s going to be bad on me because the animal told me.” They didn’t know about God. Superstition was what they believed in.” (p.57)

“When killer whales come to a bay with a village, the villagers are sad. They think that the killer whale is after someone’s spirit. They believe that after the killer whales leave, someone is going to die. It won’t be long. Sure enough it happens, because they believe in superstition. Maybe one or two months later, someone dies in that bay.” (p.57)

ELDER KNOWLEDGE

Excerpted from *Imam Cimiucia Our Changing Sea* by Salomon, Tanape, Williams, & Huntington (2011)

“Our Elders told us not to pick in the spring and summer. We never bothered with them in the summertime: clams, bidarkis. Early October we’d go after them, leaving them alone all summer. Our Elders used to tell us, “You’ll get sick if you eat them during the springtime.” I think that was their way to scare us out of eating them during the time that they were hatching.” – John Moonin, Elder, Port Graham (p.81)

“March was the month our Elders stopped us from hunting. The animals had little ones inside. If you want to see them in the suture, leave them alone. New generation, it’s not that way, they go out and get whatever they want whenever they want.” – Simeon Kvasnikoff, Elder, Port Graham (p.81)

“When I was growing up, if you were a resource user you had to be a resource mgr, too. You pick up only what you need and leave the small ones alone. You don’t pick a beach clean. You stayed away when things were scarce. That is what we were taught.” - Walter Meganack Jr., Port Graham (p.82)

ⁱⁱⁱ Crowell, A., Steffian, A., & Pullar, G. (Eds.). (2001) *Looking both ways: heritage and identity of the Alutiiq people*. Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska Press. 142.

^{iv} Crowell, A. (2001). 192

^v Crowell, A. (2001). 192

^{vi} Crowell, A (2001). 176.