

HONORING EYAK: TOTEM TALE GR: 6-8 (LESSON 1)

Elder Quote: “At the south end of the graveyard towards the river was the large totem pole which seemed to belong to the whole graveyard. It was made of a cedar log, about 18 inches in diameter, and 10 or 15 feet high. The front was carved with animal figures from top to bottom though the back was plain. The top of the pole was cut to represent a raven with outspread wings. The figure was not very large, since it was no bigger than the diameter of the log, and the wings were not made of separate pieces. The raven was black; the other figures below it were stained black and red.”

- Lt. Abercrombieⁱ

Grade Level: 6-8

Overview: Totem poles had their origin in decorated house posts, a feature of many Native dwellings in the Pacific Northwest prior to contact with Europeans in the late 18th century. By the early 19th century the introduction of iron tools gained from trading vessels and shipwrecks enabled Native artists to produce more poles and carve them ever more elaborately. The totem pole custom quickly spread outward from the Haida adopted and adapted by neighboring tribes. Eyak totem poles represent the westernmost reach of these Native Alaskan icons.

Standards:

<i>AK Cultural:</i>	<i>AK Content:</i>	<i>CRCC:</i>
B1: Acquire insights from other cultures without diminishing the integrity of their own.	Geography B1: Know that places have distinctive characteristics	L1: Students should understand the value and importance of the Eyak language and be actively involved in its preservation.

Lesson Goal: Students learn how the Eyak people adopted and adapted the totem pole custom, about moieties, and carve animal stamps to create custom totem designs.

Lesson Objectives: Students will:

- Review the historic expansion of the totem pole custom and Eyak moieties.
- Design individual totem poles.
- Carve and print totem pole images.
- Describe components of personal totem pole.
- Learn the Eyak vocabulary listed below.

Vocabulary Words:

English:	Eyak
eagle	GuuigAlAG
raven	ch'iileh
wolf	Guujih

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Access to Computer Projection Screen
- Native Village of Eyak Subsistence Totem Information Sheet (See below)
- Blank rubber printing blocks (Speedball's "Speedy-Cut" blocks are ideal for beginners to carve (at least two per student)
- Carving tools, inks, red and black Sharpies
- Paper for totem pole prints (11" by 17")

Books:

- Birket-Smith, Kaj, and Frederica de Laguna. *The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska*. AMS Pr, 1976.
- Emmons, George Thorton. *The Tlingit Indians*. Univ. of Washington Press, 2005. (Edited by Frederica De Laguna) – totem descriptions pp.193-195.
- Chase, Will H. *Pioneers of Alaska the Trail Blazers of Bygone Days*. Burton Pub. Co., 1951.

Web Resources:

Eyak Culture, Repatriation, Doc Chase, Totems

- <https://uafanlc.alaska.edu/Online/EY-DVD/ARCHIVE-2.mp4> April 1993 Channel Two News article on Eyak Language and Culture: See 7:17-11:23 section on Repatriation and Loss of Totem poles (Web video also listed under chugachheritageak.org 'Resources')

Totem Poles

- http://www.scapegoatjournal.org/docs/05/SG_Excess_206-211_P_JACQUET.pdf 207 206 Project Shame Totem 2.0/2.1 by Jennifer Jacquet – totem history background
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VV0rPn2F6lk> (3:56) Intercultural totem pole history
- <https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/canada/articles/where-do-totem-poles-originate-from/> Variations in totem pole design

Teacher Preparation:

- Review Activity Plan and practice Eyak vocabulary.
- Use the multiple choice quiz below or consider using Kahoot! (<https://kahoot.com/>) to create an online version for pre-and post-lesson assessment of student learning. Note several questions have multiple correct answers.

1. Among which Native American group did originate?
a) Navajo b) Haida c) Cherokee d) Sugpiat e) Athapaskan
2. Which Native Alaskan peoples have produced totem poles?
a) Haida b) Tlingit c) Eyak d) Yupik e) Inupiat
3. Which factors contributed to expanded production of totem poles in the 19th century?
a) discovery of rain proof paint b) increased wealth from marine trade
c) access to iron tools d) museum commissions e) Christian missionaries
4. Placement of new totem poles is often associated with what events?
a) battle victories b) pandemics c) births d) potlatches

5. What cultural aspects do Tlingits and Eyak have in common?
a) language origin b) geographic origin c) moiety divisions d) potlatches
6. Where did Tlingit and Eyak cultures geographically 'overlap'?
a) Lake Eyak b) Old Town, Cordova c) Alaganek d) Yakutat
7. What's a moiety?
a) a half b) one of two primary societal divisions c) clan d) family group
8. What determines an Eyak's moiety?
a) mother's moiety b) father's moiety c) personal choice d) birth order
9. Which of these Eyak groups did not have separate potlatch houses?
a) Ravens b) Wolves c) Barkhouse People d) Eagles
10. What's the message of a shame totem?
a) declaration of revenge b) commemoration of a public wrong
c) call to action d) public ridicule to force someone to meet an obligation

Answers: 1b; 2a,b,c; 3b,c; 4d; 5c,d; 6d; 7a,b; 8a; 9b,c; 10d

Opening:

Have students take pre-test knowledge assessment quiz.

Read the following section aloud and display the accompanying photographs. Invite students to comment on any details they note about totem imagery or style.

The peoples of the Pacific Northwest carved decorative house poles with stone adzes and beaver teeth tools prior to the arrival of Europeans in the late 1700s. But these posts were relatively few in number and small. By the early 1800s, however, the introduction of iron tools gained from trading vessels and shipwrecksⁱⁱ enabled Native artists to produce many more poles and to carve them ever more complexly.

There are essentially eight different types of carved poles: interior house posts, exterior house poles, often by the house entrance; memorial to honor the deceased; mortuary poles to house the ashes, or body, of the dead; grave markers; welcome poles, often on the beach to greet visiting canoes; and shame poles to hold someone up to public shame.ⁱⁱⁱ Totem poles often use traditional imagery and stylized icons. However, the ultimate significance of every pole is best known and understood by its maker.

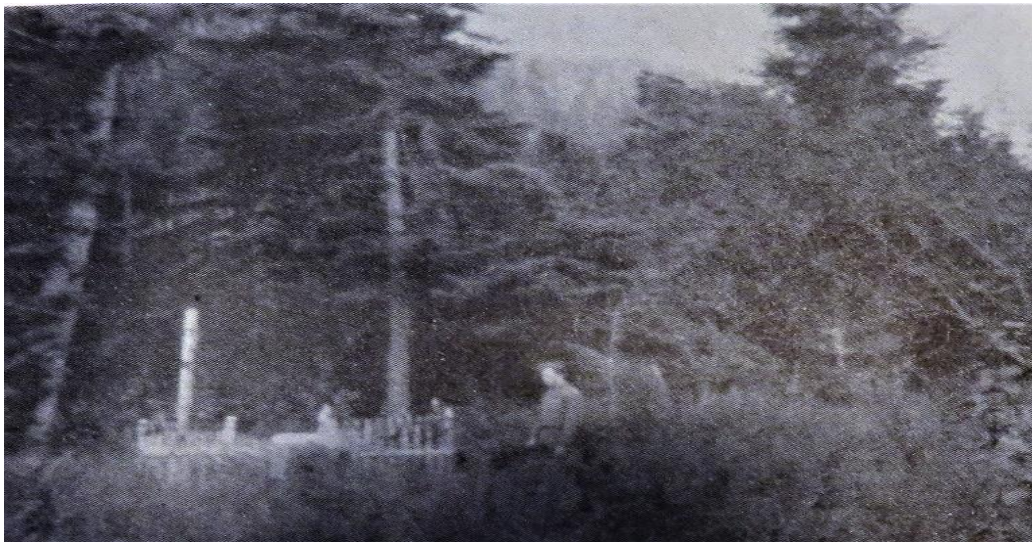
The Haida (inhabiting the southern portion of the Prince of Wales Archipelago west of Ketchikan) were the first to make their house poles into elaborate memorials to the dead and the glorification of their clans. The figures were often associated with a particular member of the family. The Southern Tlingit (extending from Klawak north to Frederick Sound^{iv} by Kake) eagerly adopted many of these customs. The new wealth created between 1830 and 1880 from the sea mammal fur trade, mining, and fisheries gave rise to ever more lavish potlatches, occasions used to demonstrate a tribe's wealth to their neighbors. These potlatches frequently involved the construction and erection of new totem poles to celebrate a family or clan's social

standing. The Northern Tlingit (extending from Frederick Sound north to Yakutat) adopted the totem pole custom to a lesser extent without a lot of the design 'rules' that the Southern Tlingit had developed. In the entire territory of the nine northern Tlingit tribes only eleven poles were observed in 1882.^v But this totem pole custom was still strong enough to appeal to the Eyak and was adopted by them.

The Eyak were a small population hemmed in by much larger tribes: the Sugpiat to the west and the Tlingits to the east. However, 18th and 19th century Eyak culture was more similar to that of the Tlingit than the Sugpiat. Intermarriage was common at the eastern edge of Eyak territory (Yakutat) and both the Tlingit and the Eyak societies divided themselves into moieties, or clans. The Sugpiat do not. Moiety, meaning half, refers to either one of two primary social divisions encompassing all group members. Anthropologists surmise that the Eyak adopted the Tlingit custom of moiety divisions relatively recently. This stems from their observation that no Eyak myths refer to moieties or the tradition of potlatches (often hosted by a particular moiety or clan).

The Tlingits divide themselves into the Raven and Wolf moieties (though among the northern Tlingit Eagle is sometimes substituted for Wolf) with many sub-clans. The Eyak also divide themselves into Raven and Eagle moieties but with only two sub-clans originating, according to Eyak oral histories, from two small Tlingit groups adopted by the Eyak. The Wolves are a subgroup of the Ravens and the Bark House People are subgroup of the Eagles.^{vi}

An individual Eyak's moiety is matrilineal: determined by the moiety of his or her mother. Everyone in a given moiety considers fellow members as sisters and brothers. Moieties are exogamic, meaning that each moiety member must marry outside his or her own moiety. If an Eyak is a Raven, he or she must marry an Eagle and vice versa. Every Eyak village had two potlatch houses, one for the Eagles and one for the Ravens, each one marked by a totem pole with the moiety bird carved on top. Graves also were marked by totem poles. (See Lt. Abercrombie quotation above.)



Grave near Old Eyak, Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska^{vii}
(Note grave totem pole at left)

Traditional villages did not have separate potlatch houses for the Wolves or Bark House People though their images sometimes appeared below that of their moiety bird, Raven or Eagle. “At potlatches the Wolves used to masquerade like their animal namesakes. They howled like Wolves while the Eagles screamed and the Ravens croaked.”^{viii}

The carving and erection of totem poles generally fell out of practice throughout Southeastern Alaska by the beginning of the 20th century. Of those that remained some were destroyed by missionaries and some succumbed to the rainy climate. However, with their elaborate carving styles and images, totem poles continued to fascinate scholars and tourists alike. In 1938 the United States Forest Service salvaged about 200 of the roughly 600 poles still standing as it began a program to reconstruct and preserve the old poles. Renewed interest in Native arts and traditions in the 1960s and 1970s inspired a revival of totem pole carving throughout Southeastern Alaska.

In Cordova the carving knife was picked up Mike Webber. Of Tlingit and Sugpiat heritage and raised in Cordova Webber’s first totems were replicas of those collected by ‘Doc’ Chase from a potlatch house in Katalla. (See below) Currently displayed in the Wells Fargo Bank lobby they are reminders of what was lost in the fire that consumed the Lathrop Building and the prolific collection of Native artifacts in Chase’s office in 1951. The explanatory caption provided by Chase indicates that the totems were found in a communal house, most probably the Eagles’ potlatch house in Katalla.^{ix} It is often referred to as an Eyak totem. (Note: *There are several dubious ‘facts’ in the caption, notably the reference to the non-existent ‘Moon Tribe’ and the upside down Great Bear of the Sitka tribe.*)

[Watch <https://uafanlc.alaska.edu/Online/EY-DVD/ARCHIVE-2.mp4> April 1993 Channel Two News article on Eyak Language and Culture: See 7:17-11:23]

The Eyak Subsistence Pole at the Ilanka Cultural Center was carved by Mike Webber in 2001 represents the Eagle moiety at the top of the totem and the Raven moiety at the base. In between are a Shaman, a hunter spearing a mountain goat, and the resources vital to the subsistence lifestyle. (See totem pole below.) Faced with a limited archive of traditional Eyak design references Webber turned to Frederica de Laguna’s 1938 book, *The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska* which summarized and expanded upon notes from a five-day anthropological field trip she undertook in 1935. The book included photos of traditional Eyak paddles covered in designs which inspired Webber in his work. (See paddle photos below.)

In 2007 Webber unveiled the first shame totem carved in over a hundred years to shame the Exxon Corporation to honor its responsibilities in the aftermath of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. (See totem pole below) 18 years after the 1989 spill the court cases, and the oil, still lingered. The totem toured communities affected by the spill before returning to Cordova and is now housed in the Ilanka Cultural Center. The information sheet provided by the center illustrates how Webber created the totem symbolism to tell a very personal story of the effect of the spill on his life and his community (See below).

The totem pole custom spread from the Haida to the Eyak because of its ability to highlight connections of clans and moieties and continues because of its versatility as a cultural medium to express an artist’s view of his or her world. What’s your totem? And what does it mean to you?



“Dr. Will H Chase. Standing by the two beautiful Totems at the entrance of his office at Cordova, Alaska. The only totems ever found west of the Gulf of Alaska. They were found in the debris of an old communal house. The top represents the Eagle and Moon Tribe, below the inverted Great Bear of the Sitka Tribe, the sides the Whale Clan and the bottom Slaves which used to be held by the Aleuts. Colored, black, white, green and red. Original Native paints.”^x

Note: Each pole is topped by an Eagle, recognizable by its curved, downturned beak and would have marked the Eagles’ potlatch house. (Photo Courtesy of Cordova Historical Society)



Communal House Totem replicas carved by Mike Webber, Wells Fargo Bank Lobby, Cordova



Subsistence Totem Pole
Carved by Mike Webber, Ilanka Cultural Center, Cordova



Close-up of Eagle, Shaman, Mountain Goat



Close-up of Fish and Seal



Close-up of Razor Clam and Sea Otter



Close-up of Beak Down Raven Base

Eyak Subsistence Totem

This was the first totem pole raised in the Eyak (Cordova) lands in well over 100 years. The Eyak Subsistence Totem was raised November 11, 2004. The event was celebrated with dancing by the Cordova Ikumat Dancers and the Mt St Elias Dancers from Yakutat.

The totem was made to honor the Eyak People, the Elders, and Ancestors and to recognize the importance of our subsistence lifestyle. Carved in the pole are some of the primary subsistence foods of the Eyak.

The Eagle at the top represents the Eagle Clan that was located in Old Town. Below is the face of a Shaman, meant to evoke the long line of powerful Eyak shaman (Kai). The Shaman's lips are blowing out a spirit. The body below the Shaman is a hunter spearing a mountain goat, one of the main sources of red meat. Below the hunter are the salmon and seal, both very important food sources. Under the those are the razor clam and sea otter. The razor clam was another food source that was dried. The sea otter had a valuable fur that was traded between the different tribes. At the base of the totem is a beak-down raven. The Raven Clan was located 17 miles out of town on the Alaganik River. On the sides of the totem are bear paws, and two paddles, one eagle, one raven.

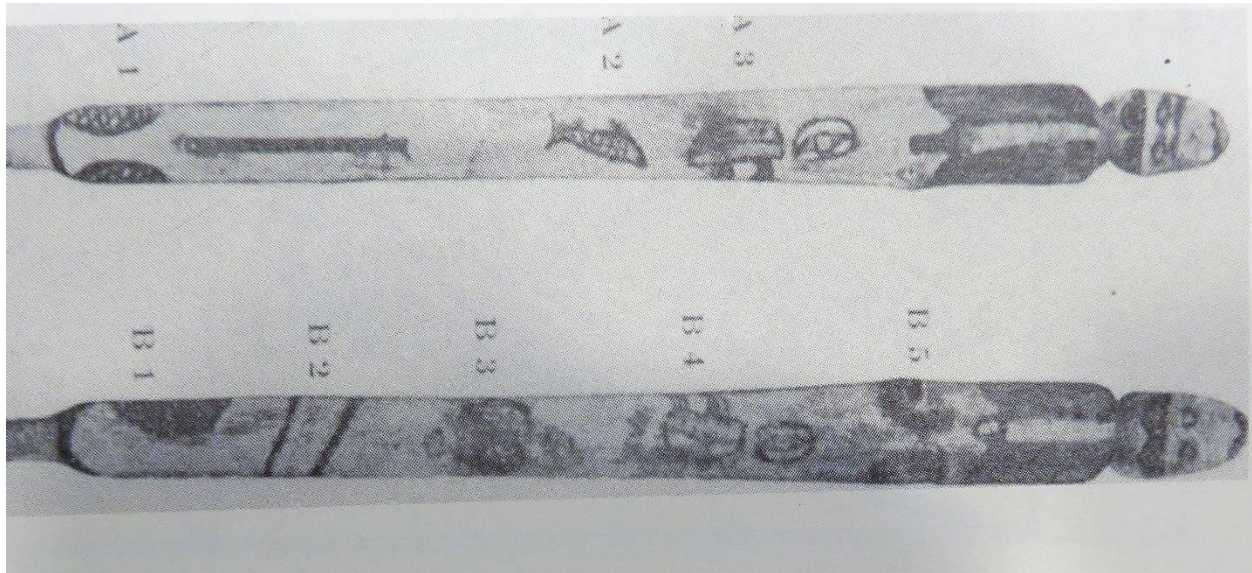


The characters on this totem are primarily inspired by De laguna's 1938 book, based on her five-day visit in 1935.

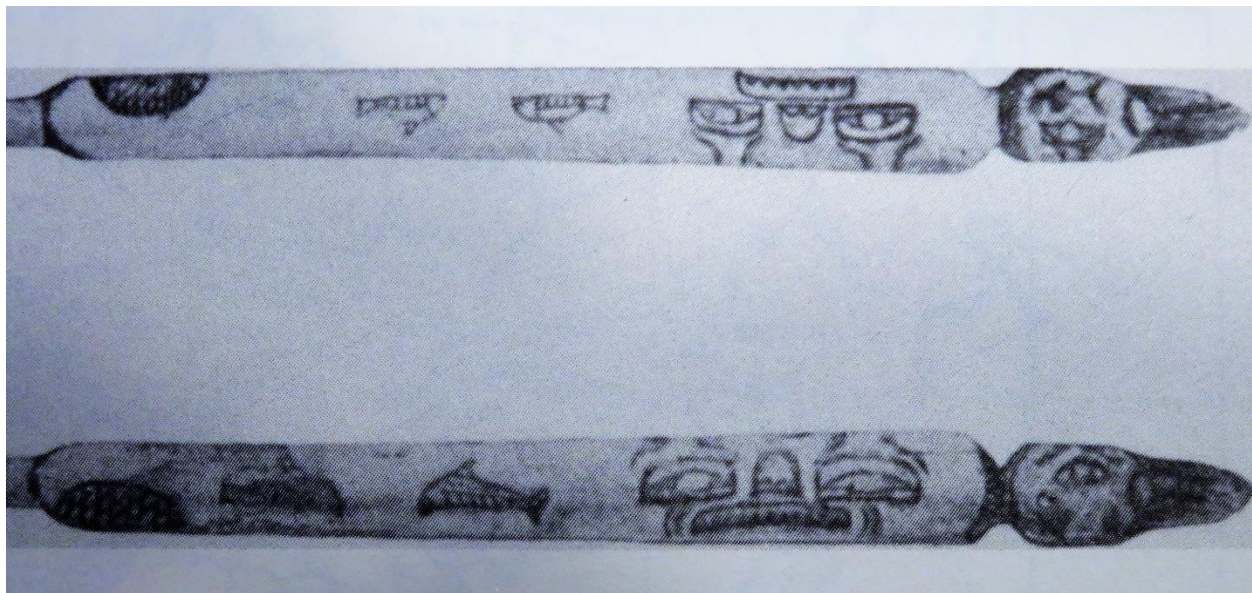
This totem pole was begun the winter of 2001, and finished spring 2002. This was Mike Webber's third carving.

Mike Webber is a tribal member of the Native Village of Eyak, where he grew up living a subsistence lifestyle.

Eyak Subsistence Pole information
Ilanka Cultural Center, Native Village of Eyak



Traditional paddle design close-up, Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska
(‘Bear’? head paddle – Note Eyak eye to right of A3)^{xi}



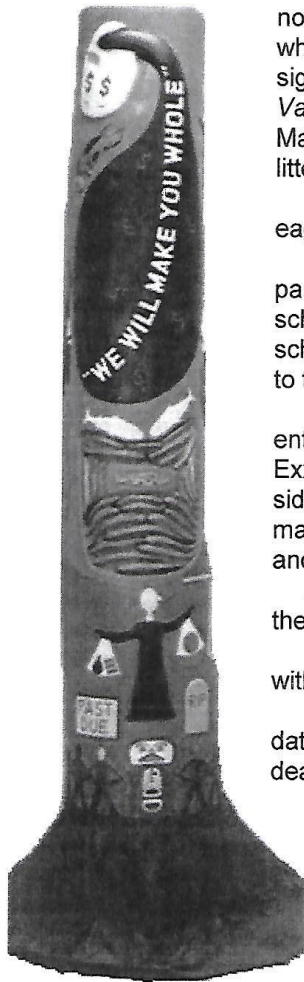
Traditional paddle design close-up, Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska,
(Raven paddle – Note ‘Eyak Eyes’ in the faces and Raven’s head)^{xii}



Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Shame Totem by Mike Webber, Ilanka Cultural Center, Cordova

Exxon Shame Pole

"The shame or ridicule pole is most often erected for the purpose of forcing some person of high standing to meet or recognize an obligation. Sometimes a person was carved on a pole upside down for the same purpose"



- ◆ On the top of this seven foot pole is the upside-down face of Exxon's now retired C.E.O., Lee Raymond. Exxon's words "We will make you whole," are floating on the surface of the oil. Raymond's eyes are dollar signs; he is without ears, deaf, his mouth is spilling oil, like the *Exxon Valdez* tanker that ran aground on Bligh Reef in Prince William Sound, March 24, 1989. The oil out of Raymond's mouth, turns into an oil slick littered with "\$" signs.

- ◆ Floating around the spill are dead animals; sea otter, sea duck, an eagle and an Orca whale spouting water and oil out of its blow hole.

- ◆ Two skeletal herring and a school of herring are below. The bottom part of the school is tight and dense, as healthy herring look, but as the school is closer to the spill, the herring get smaller and less dense. Mid school is a herring with lesions, representing the sick herring that returned to the Sound after the spill.

- ◆ Lady of Justice is blindfolded signifying the 18 years of legal entanglements that have failed to bring an end to oil spill litigation. On the Exxon side of the scale is a bag of money and a law book. On the plaintiff's side, the scale holds the Earth, representing the environment, animals, marine ecosystems, and the people who depend on them, Native people and other the fishermen.

- ◆ The "Past Due" stamp, highlights the length of this courts case and the people's demand for Exxon to pay its overdue bill.

- ◆ A tombstone is in memory of at least 6,000 plaintiffs who have died without compensation since the court case began.

- ◆ A Tlingit-style person cries eighteen tears of sadness for each year to date. This human-like figure, carved in x-ray, and shows he is very sick or dead. A hole is in the heart of the Native.

- ◆ On both sides of the crying Native are people standing together in unity and in strength. This includes the cleanup workers who became sick from working to clean up Exxon's oil.

- ◆ On the lower right-hand side of the pole a seine boat with a family and "For Sale" sign stands for the many seine operations that have gone bankrupt since the spill and those who still cannot afford to fish their permits.

- ◆ Finally, there is an alcohol bottle on the Exxon side of the pole. Sadly, the entire tragedy can be traced back to the misuse of alcohol by the infamous Captain Hazelwood, a man known by his Exxon superiors to have had a drinking problem.

Artist: Mike Webber

Material: Yellow cedar,

Completed March 2007

Mike Webber is Alutiiq on his mother's side from Prince William Sound and Tlingit on his father's side from Katalla and Cape Yakataga on the North Gulf Coast.

From the collection of Robert Henrichs

Eyak Subsistence Pole information
Ilanka Cultural Center, Native Village of Eyak

Activities:

Class I:

1. Have students review totem components and paddle images.
2. Have students select and design two totem prints. One print should be the student's moiety bird and the second a subsistence resource which holds special meaning for them. Students should select a moiety based on family heritage or whichever bird (Raven or Eagle) they find most personally significant.
3. Distribute materials: tracing paper, pencils, 2 rubber blanks per student, 11"by 17" paper.
4. Direct students to sketch totems on tracing paper; one for moiety, one for subsistence symbol. If time allows students may carve more totem stamps.
5. Have students sketch, transfer and carve totem images.
6. Have students practice stamping the images on scratch paper before applying them to their totem poles [Note: *Caution students to practice stamping images evenly before applying them to their prints. Often exhaling deeply on the inked block will transfer moisture to make the print transfer more evenly.*]
7. Students may share stamps with others to complete their totem poles.
8. Invite students to display describe their totem pole's personal significance to the class.
9. Take post-assessment Kahoot quiz.

Assessment:

- Students successfully completed pre- and post knowledge assessment quiz showing comprehension of Eyak totem poles.
- Students can explain the different totem examples of carved and printed totem pole prints.
- Students can describe the meaning behind their individualized totem pole designs.
- Students correctly pronounced the Eyak vocabulary words.

ⁱ As quoted in Birket-Smith, Kaj, and Frederica de Laguna. *The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska*. AMS Pr, 1976. p.167

ⁱⁱ Emmons, George Thorton. *The Tlingit Indians*. Univ. of Washington Press, 2005. pp.193-194

"The first evidence of this sculptural art was found upon the Queen Charlotte Islands would give precedence to the Haida as its originator, and this is further borne out by the seaward position of their coast, so directly influenced by the drift of the Japanese Gulf Stream which brought the first iron to these shores in the wreckage of Asiatic ships driven overseas."

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.scapegoatjournal.org/docs/05/SG_Excess_206-211_P_JACQUET.pdf

207 206 Project Shame Totem 2.0/2.1; article by Jennifer Jacquet

^{iv} Emmons, p.6

^v Emmons, p.194

^{vi} Birket-Smith, pp.123-124

^{vii} Birket-Smith, Plate 6

^{viii} Birket-Smith, p. 126

^{ix} Galushia Nelson, an Eyak interviewed by de Laguna, said that as a child he had seen "an Eagle post at Katalla. It was probably in front of the potlatch house which his maternal (?) Tlingit uncle built to accommodate the Eyak Eagles when they came to potlatches." Birket-Smith. p.37

^x Chase, Will H. *Pioneers of Alaska the Trail Blazers of Bygone Days*. Burton Pub. Co., 1951. Caption p.197; Photo courtesy of Cordova Historical Society.

^{xi} Birket-Smith. Plate 15 (Photo by Frederica de Laguna)

^{xii} Birket-Smith, Plate 15 (Photo by Frederica de Laguna)