

HONORING EYAK: EYAK PODCAST GR: 9-12 (LESSON 1)

Elder Quote: “We have a dictionary pertaining to the Eyak language, since there are so few of us left. That’s something my mom never taught me, was the Eyak language. It is altogether different than the Aleut. There are so few of us left that they have to do a book about the Eyak Tribe.

There are so many things that my mother taught me, like smoking fish, putting up berries, and how to keep our wild meat. I have to show you; I can’t tell you how it is done, but anything you want to know I’ll tell you about the Eyak tribe.”

- Rosie Lankard, 1980ⁱ

Grade Level: 9-12

Overview: Heritage preservation requires both active participation and awareness of cultural origins. The assaults upon Eyak culture and loss of fluent Native speakers in the recent past have made the preservation of Eyak heritage even more challenging. Here students actively investigate and discuss Eyak history and culture to inspire their production of culturally insightful podcasts.



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 select themes or incidents from Eyak history and culture to create culturally meaningful podcasts.

Lesson Objectives: Students will:

- Review and discuss Eyak history.
- Discuss nature of podcasts and potential Eyak culture themes.
- Plan and script podcast as a team.
- Record, edit, and present culturally meaningful podcast.

Vocabulary Words:

English:	Eyak
Eyak (people, human beings)	The Eyak people
raven	ch'iileh
wolf	Guujih

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Access to Computer Projection Screen
- Map of Alaska Native Languages
- Access to sound recording and editing technology.

Books:

- Birket-Smith, Kaj, and Frederica de Laguna. [The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska.](#) 1938
- Crittenden, Roberta, et al. [Out of Our Time, the Storytellers: Oonechguk Edowchu](#) 1980.
- Harry, Anna Nelson, and Michael E. Krauss. [In Honor of Eyak: The Art of Anna Nelson Harry.](#) 1995.
- Johnson, John F.C. [Eyak Legends of the Copper River Delta, Alaska.](#) 1988.
- Sherman, Cathy R. *Cordova.* Arcadia Pub., 2012. (Early 20th century historic photos)

Web Resources:

[Eyak Culture, History](#)

- <https://uafanlc.alaska.edu/Online/EY-DVD/ARCHIVE-2.mp4> April 1993 Channel Two News article on Eyak Language and Culture: (Web video also listed under chugachheritageak.org 'Resources')

- <https://www.newyorker.com/books/double-take/back-issues-saving-eyak> Brief discussion of importance of saving Eyak language
- https://alaska.si.edu/culture_eyak.asp?continue=1 LaRue Barnes, Eyak history overview
- <https://heritage.chugachmiut.org/HeritageKit/Resources,%20Culture%20and%20History/40316678.pdf>
Krauss, Michael E. "[A History of Eyak Language Documentation.](#)" *Arctic Anthropology*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2006, pp. 172-217

Podcast Development

- <https://blog.spreaker.com/how-to-create-your-perfect-podcast-intro/>
- <https://www.voices.com/blog/planning-your-podcast/>
- <https://www.podcastmotor.com/actually-create-podcast-intros-attract-listeners/>

Teacher Preparation:

- Invite an Elder or Recognized Expert on Eyak history and culture.
- Review Activity Plan and practice Eyak vocabulary.
- Make copies of the Eyak timeline for each student.
- Determine how many class periods to devote to podcast project.
- *Optional:* Consider having students present their podcasts over the school public address system OR submit their projects for local broadcast OR hold a class contest with the winning projects broadcast on local radio station.



Man in Dugout Canoe on Lake Eyak, Photo courtesy of Cordova Historical Society

Opening:

Cordova is a melting pot of Native cultures with a mixed heritage of Sugpiat (also referred to as Alutiiq), Tlingit, Athabaskan, and Eyak cultures. It was the Eyak who originally settled the Copper River Delta some 3,000 years ago but what do you know of them? Were they a sea-faring culture? Did they exist in peaceable isolation or were they actively competing with their neighbors for geographic domination? How are they distinctive?

Invite students to share whatever they do know about the Eyak and note limits of their knowledge. Why do they know so little (or so much)? What does it take to preserve a culture? Share Elder quotation from Rosie Lankard (See above.). What happens when Elder knowledge passes away?

Highlight Eyak territory on map. Some 3500 years ago the Eyak migrated from the interior of Alaska to the Copper River Delta region. Their unique language is derived from a precursor to the proto-Athabaskan language in the interior. Eyak shares about a third of its vocabulary with that of the Ahtna language as well as that of the Navajo. Though still distantly related, the Tlingit and Eyak languages have more in common than Sugt'stun and Eyak do.

Traditional Eyak territory extended from Yakutat west to the Copper River Delta with over 47 sites having been identified as Eyak-occupied.ⁱⁱ The Eyak were squeezed in between larger, more powerful ocean-going tribes: the Sugpiaq to the west in Prince William Sound and the Tlingit to the southeast and the upriver Ahtna people. Unlike their coastal neighbors the Eyak were not great sea mammal hunters and traditionally harvested resources closer to shore. Both the Tlingit and Sugpiaq were relatively aggressive and the Eyak often functioned as middlemen in trade relations between these two groups. In the 18th and 19th centuries the Tlingit readied and traded their way up the coast assimilating Eyak culture through intermarriage. The Eyak from Controller Bay, Cape Suckling, Cape Yakataga, and Yakutat Bay were Tlingitized by the 1880s.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Eyak adopted the social divisions of the Tlingit, dividing themselves into the Raven and Eagle moieties, as well as some of their potlatch and totem customs. Linguist and Eyak language expert Michael Krauss points out: *“Though clearly it is the English language and Anglo-American society that are obliterating the last of Eyak, we must not lose sight of the strong probability that if the English-speaking people had not thus intruded into local history, the Eyak language might then have disappeared almost as quickly, perhaps even more quickly, being replaced instead by Tlingit.”*^{iv}

Nevertheless, the Eyak survived and persisted to the present day.

Activities:

Class I:

1. If Eyak Elder or Recognized Expert available, invite them to share their traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) on Eyak history and culture.
2. 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
3. Discuss how cultures are forgotten and how they are preserved.
4. Distribute or display ‘Eyak Timeline’ (See below.) and discuss. Note factors which promoted or inhibited the preservation of Eyak culture.
5. Divide students into small groups and task them with selecting a topic suitable for development into a three to twelve-minute podcast which promotes the knowledge and understanding of Eyak culture and history. (See podcast instructions below – excerpted from NPR project learning contest^v)
 - Projects must be between three (3) and twelve (12) minutes in length.
 - Projects must be the students’ original work.
 - Projects must not contain material that violates or infringes another’s rights (material that violates privacy, publicity, or intellectual property rights).
6. Assign students to research Eyak topics of interest and identify a podcast topic.
7. Share podcast creation websites (See above.) and have students plan their format and script.
8. Announce deadlines for podcast project development and let teams begin creating.

9. Share the following criteria for graded podcast:

Student projects will be reviewed under the following criteria:

- **40% Project Information and Structure**
 - Does the Submission tell a compelling story or teach us something new and important?
 - Is it structured in a way that makes sense and keeps listeners engaged?
 - Can we easily follow the story you are telling or the information you are explaining?
 - Have you spent time editing — cutting out unnecessary information or repetition and making sure the main ideas come through clearly?
- **40% Personality and Creativity**
 - Does the listener hear the unique voices of your team and community?
 - Does it have personality, or does it make us want to "fast forward"?
 - Does it make us laugh or cry or leave us deep in thought — FEEL something? That's what we're looking for.
- **20% Production Quality**
 - Recording and editing expertise is not necessary but efforts to make the podcast pleasurable to listen to should be evident.
 - Projects may use sound, or audio, in creative ways.
 - Others may be more of an interview format.
 - If you use sound, does it add to the story you're telling?
 - Did you layer the audio and narration?

10. Listen up! Share and discuss student projects and how they promote knowledge of Eyak culture.

Assessment:

- Students researched a topic from Eyak history or culture on which to base their podcasts.
- Students created and presented culturally relevant Eyak podcasts.
- Students correctly pronounced the Eyak vocabulary words.

EYAK TIMELINE

- 3500 years ago** - Migrated from Interior Alaska to Copper River Delta, Gulf of Alaska
- 1700-1800** - Eyak extended territory northwestward, across Copper River Delta to Eyak Lake, replacing Chugach Eskimos
- 1783** – First European knowledge of Eyak tribe from Russian expedition under Potan Zaikov
- 1793** – Russians established trading post/fort at Nuchek on Hinchinbrook Island
- 1800** – Yakutat mostly Tlingit-speaking
- 1805** – Rezanov (Russian) collected first Eyak vocabulary list – published 1857
- 1818** – Russian census recorded 117 Eyak
- 1839** – Wrangell – collected short Eyak vocabulary list – published 1839
- 1850s** - Eyak contact with Europeans through trading post Fort Constantine at Nuchek, nominally converted to Russian Orthodoxy
- 1880s** – Total Eyak population approximately 200: 160 in Alaganik and Eyak Lake villages; 40 at Bering River village (Chilkat – meaning *salmon storehouse* -, near Katalla in Controller Bay)
- 1884** – U.S. Army exploration of Copper River under Lieutenant Abercrombie
- 1885** - U.S. Army exploration of Copper River under Lieutenant Allen
- 1889** – Trading Post at Alaganik established by Charles Rosenberg
- 1889** – Establishment of 4 canneries in Eyak territory devastating Eyak resources and culture
- 1889** – Galushia Nelson born, Alaganik
- 1892** – Village of Alaganik abandoned, population wiped out by European disease epidemics (Survivors move to Old Town, southwestern shore of Eyak Lake)
- 1900** – Eyak Village (‘Eyak’ derived Yupik *Igya’aq* for ‘throat of the lake’) destroyed
- 1900** – Villages of Yakutat and Kaliakh completely Tlingit-speaking (formerly Eyak speaking)
- 1906-1911** – Founding of Cordova and Construction of Copper River and Northwestern Railway
- 1906** – Old Town officially absorbed into City of Cordova
- 1906** – Anna Nelson Harry born, Old Town, Cordova
- 1918** – Anna Nelson Harry married to Galushia Nelson (probably last Eyak wedding)
- 1918** – Marie Smith Jones born
- 1930** – Anthropologist Frederica de Laguna comes to Cordova to study Chugach Eskimo prehistory, meets Galushia Nelson in Cordova
- 1933** – Danish-American expedition with anthropologists Kaj Birket-Smith and Frederica de Laguna: spent 17 days with the Eyak people in April-May [noted 38 Eyak people remained in Cordova with 15 fluent Eyak speakers]
- 1938** - *The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska* published by Birket-Smith and de Laguna; unique source of Eyak cultural knowledge, Galushia Nelson is chief informant
- 1939** - Galushia Nelson dies
- 1952** – Chinese linguist Fang-Kuei Li first to write down Eyak oral literature [7 speakers left]
- 1963** – Michael Krauss of University of Alaska, Fairbanks, begins documentation of Eyak language [5 fluent speakers left]; Assisted mainly by Anna Nelson Harry (Yakutat), Marie Smith Jones (Cordova), and Galushia Nelson’s niece Lena Saska Nacktan (Cordova), also worked with George Johnson and Mike Sewock (formerly of Bering Village), and Marie’s sister Sophie Borodkin.
- 1980** – Native Village of Eyak officially formalized
- 1982** – *In Honor of Eyak: The Art of Anna Nelson Harry* published – Eyak lore and legends
- 1988** – *Eyak Legends of the Copper River Delta, Alaska* published

- 1992** – Eyak speaker Sophie Borodkin dies.
- 1993** – Formal repatriation from Smithsonian of remains of unidentified Eyak man to Nirvana Park Spit on Lake Eyak
- 1995** – First Eyak Potlatch in 80 years held in Cordova; Bestowal of Eyak names to young people by Marie Smith Jones, honorary Chief of the Eyak and last Native speaker of Eyak
- 2008** – Marie Smith Jones, last full-blooded Eyak, dies; first Alaskan Naïve language to be declared extinct
- 2010** – 21-year-old Frenchman Guillaume LeDuey, having taught himself Eyak via internet, travels to Alaska to help teach and revive Eyak language
- 2011** – Eyak People website goes online (<http://eyakpeople.com/>)
- 2012** – Bridge over Eyak River, Copper River Highway 5.7 Mile, named for Marie Smith Jones
- 2016** – Community Committee with representatives from Eyak Burial Caucus, Native Village of Eyak, Cordova Historical Society, and City of Cordova worked to investigate and preserve the Eyak Burial Grounds in Nirvana Park Spit.
- 2017** - Ground Penetrating Radar reveals 44 graves in Nirvana Park. Area is officially designated as Eyak Burial Ground by City of Cordova and recreational activities are restricted. Explanatory signage is installed.
- 2018** – Native Village of Eyak hosts 25th Annual Sobriety Celebration
- 2018** – World premiere of ‘*Sur la bout de la langue*’ (‘On the Tip of the Tongue’) directed by Vincent Bonnay, an Eyak language documentary, at Anchorage International Film Festival

ⁱ Rosie Lankard interviewed by Linda Lankard: Crittenden, Roberta, editor. *Out of Our Time, the Storytellers: Oonechuk Edowchu*. Cordova Baptist Press, 1980. p.23

ⁱⁱ <https://www.commerce.alaska.gov/dcra/DCRAExternal/Community/Details/cb9ed81c-83e8-46b1-bd3f-e5490e6c5941>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. – Community History

^{iv} Harry, Anna Nelson, and Michael E. Krauss. *In Honor of Eyak: The Art of Anna Nelson Harry*. Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska, 1995. p.12

^v <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/15/664671123/npr-student-podcast-challenge-turn-an-idea-into-sound-and-win>