

HONORING EYAK: EYAK HELLOS GR: PREK-2 (LESSON 1)

Elder Quote: “The Eyak came from far upriver, in boats made of something like cottonwood. They came down the Copper River...When they felt like it they would go to the mouth of the river, to the breakers, to get seals. Over where they had come down the river there are no seals. Nor are there many salmon that swim up that far. When they came down they found out about all these things. They saw seals, ripe salmon, cockles, eggs, birds, geese, mallards.”

- Anna Nelson Harry¹

Grade Level: PreK-2

Overview: Approximately 3,000 years ago, the ancestors of the Eyak people separated from the early Athabaskan people. They traveled south to the Copper River Delta from Alaska’s interior and discovered the rich marine resources of the delta land with salmon and seals in great abundance. Isolated by numerous glaciers and the rugged Chugach Mountains, the Eyak people developed a distinctive culture and unique language.

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 about the origins of the Eyak people and the development of their unique language, reflective of their unique culture.

Lesson Objectives: Students will:

- Locate Eyak territory on the map of Alaska
- Discuss the time and isolation required to develop a new language and culture.
- Create individualized Eyak masks.
- Learn the Eyak vocabulary listed below.

Vocabulary Words:

English:	Eyak:
Hello! (Lit: Is it you? <i>Talking to one person</i>)	iishuh
Yes, it’s me.	aan, xuu q'A’Al (<i>See ‘Hello’ Video below</i>)
Hello! (Lit: Is it you all? <i>Talking to a group</i>)_	lAXiishuh
Yes, it’s us.	aan, GayaG q'A'Al (<i>See ‘Hello’ video below</i>)

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Geographic Map of Alaska
- Linguistic Map of Alaska
- Eyak Mask handouts

Kit Library:

- 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.

Web Resources:

Eyak Language

- <http://eyakpeople.com/dictionary>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGA1JD7IF7I> (46 sec) ‘Hello’ (Is that you?) in Eyak with Dr. Krauss and Marie Smith Jones
- <http://eyakpeople.com/wow/week-30-i-am-called> Pronunciation of ‘I am called’ in Eyak

Google Earth

- <https://www.google.com/earth/> Download program and zoom in on Copper River. (*Also located on the Traditional Place Names webpage.*)

Teacher Preparation:

- Review Activity Plan and practice Eyak vocabulary.
- Download *Google Earth* and practice searching for Eyak traditional territory village.

Opening: With the aid of Google Earth, or a globe and map of Alaska, explain that over 10,000 years ago people traveled from Siberia to Alaska across the Bering Strait land bridge searching for new places to settle. They spread out across Alaska and Canada and further south. These ancient people were the ancestors of all Native peoples of the Americas. What came to be known as the Athabaskan people settled in the Interior of Alaska. But some 3,000 years ago, a group decided to look for a new place to settle. They travelled south from the Interior to the Copper River Delta where they found an abundance of seals and salmon. They stayed and developed a distinct coastal way of living and their own unique language. These people are the Eyak.

Share Anna Nelson’s quote from above:

“The Eyak came from far upriver, in boats made of something like cottonwood. They came down the Copper River...When they felt like it they would go to the mouth of the river, to the breakers, to get seals. Over where they had come down the river there are no seals. Nor are there many salmon that swim up that far. When they came down they found out about all these things. They saw seals, ripe salmon, cockles, eggs, birds, geese, mallards.”

Help students locate the traditional territory of the Eyak extending along the coast approximately from present day Yakutat to near present day Cordova. The Eyak were a small but resourceful group. Hemmed in by the rugged Chugach Mountains and numerous glaciers to the north and the larger tribes of the Tlingit to the southeast and the Sugpiat to the west, the Eyak nevertheless maintained their independence for thousands of years, often serving as middlemen for trade between their larger neighbors.

Activities:

1. Show the linguistic map of Alaska. Note how the Eyak is a designated language group despite its small population. It takes thousands of years to develop separate languages. When people who study languages examined Eyak language, they found that it had similarities to the ancient language of Alaska's Interior (a thousand years before the development of 'Proto-Athabaskan') and Navajo and Apache in far off New Mexico. [Note: *Linguists theorize that it takes from two to three thousand years for a distinct language to develop to the point where it cannot be understood by outsiders. The relative isolation of the Eyak territory allowed their distinctive language to evolve.*]
2. Watch 'Hello' video. Let students know that Marie Smith Jones was the last fluent Native speaker of Eyak. Before she died in 2008 she worked with linguist, Dr. Michael Krauss, to record and document the Eyak language. Discuss how to say hello in Eyak. Have students practice the two versions of hello. Does it matter in English how many people there are when we say hello? Does it matter in Eyak?
3. What are we actually saying when we greet someone with 'iishuh!' [Is it you?]
What about greet with 'IAXiishuh!' [Is it you all?]
Practice the two greetings again.
What are we actually saying when we say "aan,xuu q'A'Al'?" [Yes (aan), it's me.]
What about when we say "aan, GayaG q'A'Al'?" [Yes (aan), it's us.]
Have students practice several times for the following:
 - the singular pair 'iishuh!' [Is it you?] & "aan,xuu q'A'Al'?" [Yes (aan), it's me.]
 - the plural pair 'IAXiishuh!' [Is it you all?] & "aan, GayaG q'A'Al'?" [Yes (aan), it's us.]

Note that every language reflects its culture. Foreign languages are not precisely like English so you cannot always translate word for word from one language to the other. The same ideas can be expressed but often with different words or different sorts of emphasis, i.e., the Eyak language is interested in recognizing how many people you are talking to.

4. Distribute the mask templates for students to select, color and cut out.
5. Once students have completed their masks have them practice greeting one another.
6. Invite student pairs to don their masks and demonstrate their Eyak greeting skills.

Optional: Make a game of challenging students to say hello to the correct number of people as one or more student respondents are indicated by the teacher.

Assessment:

- Students located the traditional territory of the Eyak on a map of Alaska.
- Students discussed how language reflects culture.
- Students modeled an Eyak greeting exchange.
- Students correctly pronounced the Eyak vocabulary words.

ⁱ 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. Pp.152,153



Mike Webber Eyak Mask sketch, *Coloring Cordova, A Science and Memory Project*