

## HONORING EYAK: THE EYAK EYE GR: PREK-2 (LESSON 2)

**Elder Quote:** “The [storage] boxes were decorated with paintings on the covers and on the sides. Abercrombie does not remember what these patterns were, except that on the front of the box was the same eye that was painted on doors and canoe paddles (Figure 7). According to Galushia, [Nelson] boxes were usually plain but some were painted, and some (?) carved. He believes there was red paint and blue paint made from blueberry juice. Abercrombie [Captain of the 1898 US Army Expedition to the Copper River] thinks the reddish-brown stain was made by boiling skunk cabbage leaves (more probably hemlock bark?). Neither the red nor the black paint was affected by water.”

- Kaj Birket-Smith and Frederica De Laguna<sup>1</sup>

### **Grade Level:** PreK-2

**Overview:** Colonel W. R. Abercrombie observed the distinctive Eyak eye design on their doors, paddles, and storage boxes on his 1884 exploratory expedition to the Copper River Delta. Applied with a combination of red and dark blue or black stains or carved into wood the eye signaled that a place or object was Eyak and belonged to no other Native group.

### **Standards:**

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

**Lesson Goal:** Students learn how to create the traditional dyes used to paint the unique Eyak eye design.

**Lesson Objectives:** Students will:

- Discuss and observe the making of traditional dyes.
- Use traditional dyes to paint the Eyak eye design.
- Learn the Eyak vocabulary listed below.

### **Vocabulary Words:**

English:	<a href="#">Eyak</a> :
Eyak people	<a href="#">DaXunhyuu</a> (lit.: The People)
blueberry	<a href="#">cha'tl'</a>
dark blue	<a href="#">cha'tl'ga'it'eh</a> (lit: it is like blueberries)
dark red	<a href="#">guunLdisLga'it'eh</a> (lit: it is like clotted blood)
(my) eyes	<a href="#">silaaX</a>

### **Materials/Resources Needed:**

- Access to a video screen.
- Dye materials (1 cup blueberries - fresh or frozen; 1 cup cranberries – fresh or frozen)  
*Optional:* 2 quarts hemlock bark
- Processing Set-up: Tabletop burner, 2 small pots for dyeing, potato masher or large spoon, small sieve or cheese cloth, access to water, small bowls for dye distribution
- Eyak Eye Paddle Pattern – one per student
- Watercolor brushes – one per student

### **Web Resources:**

#### Eyak Language

- <http://eyakpeople.com/dictionary>
- [https://books.google.com/books?id=NVZIsfj6D6EC&pg=PA226&lpg=PA226&dq=how+long+to+boil+hemlock+bark+for+dye&source=bl&ots=S7ZwOSLZCe&sig=OzL\\_GpSNmj\\_r-Sug8k2KG3OdWnw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiJje26-rdAhXZJ](https://books.google.com/books?id=NVZIsfj6D6EC&pg=PA226&lpg=PA226&dq=how+long+to+boil+hemlock+bark+for+dye&source=bl&ots=S7ZwOSLZCe&sig=OzL_GpSNmj_r-Sug8k2KG3OdWnw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiJje26-rdAhXZJ)

### **Teacher Preparation:**

- Review Activity Plan and practice Eyak vocabulary.
- Assemble dye materials (blueberries, cranberries, hemlock bark (*Optional*) and dyeing equipment
- Copy paddle design on white paper.

**Opening:** Does your house have your family name on it? How about a street number? Why? [*Accept all answers but steer students towards importance of identification and recognition of your ownership or presence.*] How do you mark something that's important to you and tells people that it's yours? Do you put your name on it? Or maybe draw a special symbol on it? The Eyak people marked many things that were important to them with a wide open eye looking straight out.

Share attached Eyak eye examples from traditional storage box and paddle designs.

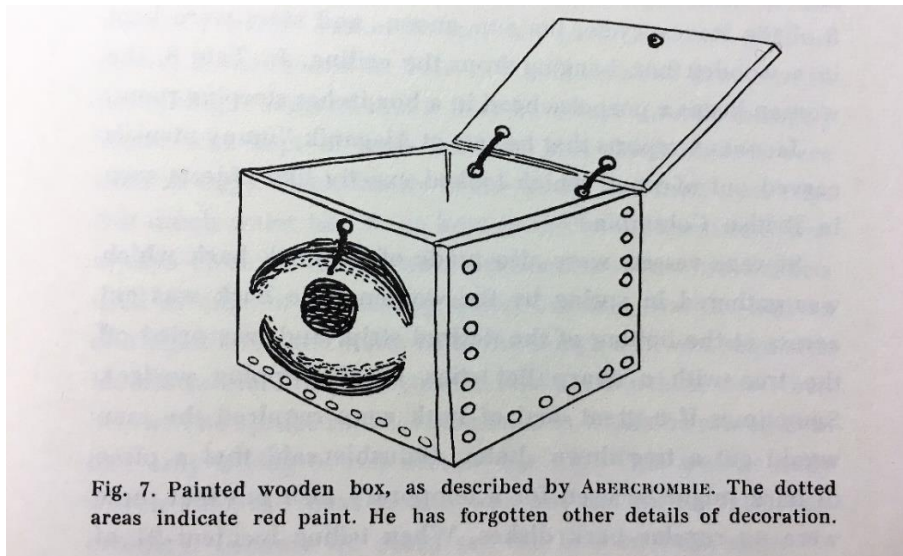
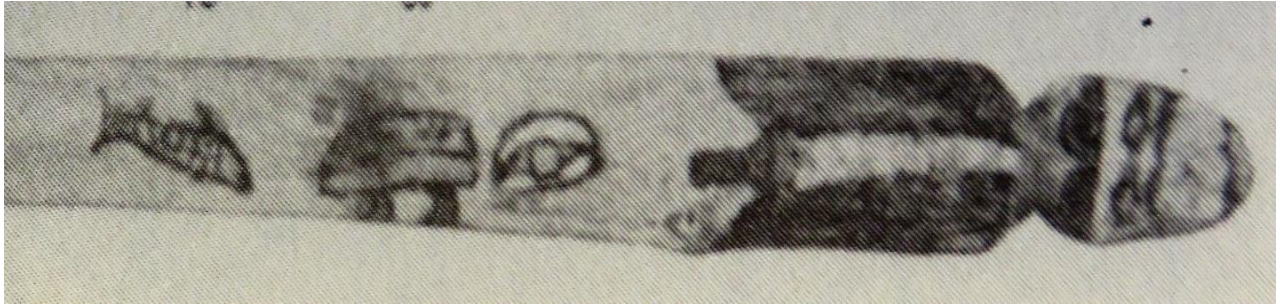


Fig. 7. Painted wooden box, as described by ABERCROMBIE. The dotted areas indicate red paint. He has forgotten other details of decoration.

Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska, p.79



Traditional paddle design close-up, Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska, Plate 15  
(Note the eye to the left of the eagle's tail feathers.)



Photo courtesy of Guillaume LeDucy of Eyak Ceremonial Paddle located at the Berlin Museum

Modern interpretations of the Eyak eye:



Eyak Paddle (based on [Eyak Indians](#) photo) by Mike Webber, Ilanka Cultural Center  
(Note the eye next to the eagle's tail feathers.)



Eyak Eye paddle by Mike Webber, Ilanka Cultural Center, Cordova

**Activities:**

1. Photos of traditional Eyak paddles and descriptions from U.S. Army Captain W.R. Abercrombie's 1898 expedition to the Copper River Delta tell us about where the Eyak eye appeared but how would this design have been painted? (*Accept all answers but steer students toward how to create colors from natural materials.*) Share quotation from above.
2. Abercrombie described the Eyak eye as having two colors: the top and bottom crescents and center circle were a black or deep blue and the inner crescents arcs were a reddish brown. Creating decorative colors is a challenge. Without store-bought paints or markers what would you use to make these colors?  
[Note: *Captain Abercrombie's described the Eyak eye reddish colors as the result of a skunk cabbage dye while Birkett-Smith and De Laguna suggested it was hemlock bark.*]

The following dyes were tested with the results seen below;

- 1 cup of blueberries – Smashed and simmered for 5 minutes
- 1 cup of cranberries – Smashed and simmered for 5 minutes
- 2 quarts of hemlock outer bark – Crumbled and simmered for 1 hour, strained and further reduced by half through 15 minutes boiling
- 8 large skunk cabbage leaves – Chopped and simmered for 2.5 hours



3. In some cases, it's easy to figure out what would make good dye sources. Blueberries are blue and should make a blue dye and cranberries should make a red dye and they do.
4. Demonstrate blueberry (and cranberry) dye making: Place one cup of blueberries (cranberries) – fresh or frozen - in pot and just barely cover with water. Smash berries with potato masher or back of spoon. Simmer for five minutes. Pour mixture into a bowl using a sieve or cheese cloth to strain out the berries.
5. *Optional:* In other cases, it's not so apparent what should be used. See what you can make with hemlock bark.

Demonstrate hemlock bark dye making.

- Gather a half gallon of hemlock bark.
- Break or smash pieces into smaller bits to increase their surface area to improve the transfer of color to the dye water. Add enough water to cover the hemlock bark. Bring to a boil and turn down to simmer for an hour or so. The color becomes darker as you boil off the water.
- Periodically test dye strength by dipping in a paper towel corner. When color becomes noticeably brown strain mixture through a sieve or cheese cloth into a bowl. Discard bark and return strained solution to pot. Further boil mixture to reduce by half – approximately 15 minutes. Note: Color may be darkened with addition of soot or bits of rotted tree trunk.]

6. Distribute small bowls of dye for students to use along with water color brushes and paddle outlines. Have students paint the Eyak eyes and sign their picture with their own symbol made with dye.
7. Invite students to share their paddle designs and personal symbols and review how this eye design was unique to the Eyak people.

**Assessment:**

- Students observed and can explain the traditional dye making process.
- Students painted a paddle pattern with the Eyak eye using traditional dyes.
- Students correctly pronounced the Eyak vocabulary words.

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<sup>i</sup> Birket-Smith, Kaj, and Frederica de Laguna. *The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska*. AMS Pr, 1976. p.79