

HONORING EYAK: POTLATCH PERFORMANCE GR: PRE-K-2 (LESSONS 3-4)

Elder Quote: “When Galushia was eight years old he attended a potlatch given by the Yakutat Tlingit on Kayak Island. It is of the same type as that given by the Eyak. The potlatch was given to all the Eagle people.

“We all started together from Alaganik, and Old Town [Cordova], and Eyak [village where Lake Eyak drains into the Eyak River]. It took us three days to get to Katalla. We stayed there a week. Then they sent a one-mast sloop to take us over to that island. We stayed on the island a couple of days before they gave the potlatch. The first day there was a big feed. The second day they gave us the blankets and the calico [cloth]. The potlatch began early in the morning and lasted until late at night. The house was so crowded that we kids were outside looking in through the windows.”

- Galushia Nelson, Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaskaⁱ

Grade Level: PreK-2

Overview: The Eyak adopted the custom of potlatches, great ceremonial feasts of food and gifts given to the guests, to celebrate important occasions. These week-long events required not only preparing enough food but acquiring enough gifts to give to the guests. Formal clothing, hats and face paints demonstrated people’s pride in participating in these traditional get-togethers.



Brooke Johnson introduces the Kindergarten, First & Second Graders at Mt. Eccles Elementary School Culture Week Assembly – 2018

Standards:

AK Cultural:	AK Content:	CRCC:
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 Eyak potlatch ceremonies and traditional weaving skills.

Lesson Objectives: Students will:

- Learn about Eyak potlatch traditions and weaving skills.
- Observe Tlingit influences on Eyak regalia.
- Create potlatch hats and Chilkat-style robes.
- Learn the Eyak vocabulary listed below.

Vocabulary Words:

English:	<u>Eyak:</u>
mountain goat	dlaaq' Aya'
chief	<u>k'ulAXiit'inhin</u>
blanket	<u>Gu'L</u>
feast	k'uwah

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Access to a video screen.
- Paper plates (white Chinet dinner plates are ideal) - one per student
- Paper bowls (white Chinet 6 ½ inch soup bowls are ideal) - one per student
- 12 oz. wide cups – 1-3 per student
- Die (with only numbered sides 1, 2, 3 visible; numbers 4,5,6 taped over & renumbered 1,2,3)
- *Optional:* Brown paint (to imitate spruce root color) and paint brushes (or colors to copy the designs examples)
- Hole Puncher, Stapler, Glue, Scissors (one pair per student), crayons or markers
- Tapestry needles
- Yarn for chin straps and cape ties
- Chilkat Robe Design (See below) Enlarge and print one robe per student
- White poster board – one per student
- Construction paper – black or yellow for robe background, black, yellow, and light blue for 'potlatch' ring bands.
- *Optional:* Bits of white roving (unspun yarn); white yarn for fringe

Web Resources:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YraJBuYfRgk> (4:57) Lily Hope Chilkat Weaver – How Chilkat robes are woven (0-1:42); Traditional urine-based dyes (1:42-2:56)
- <http://www.sheldonmuseum.org/vignettes/chilkat-blanket> Origins of Chilkat blanket weaving and uses

Teacher Preparation:

- Review Activity Plan and practice Eyak vocabulary.
- There are two regalia items to complete: potlatch hats and Chilkat robes. Review origins of the Chilkat blanket weaving on Sheldon Jackson Museum website listed above.
- Potlatch Hats: Assemble and prepare potlatch hat materials as necessary for age group (Cut 4" dia. circle from plate centers; Pre-punch holes in plates' rims, 180° apart for chin straps; Poke holes in cup centers through which potlatch 'rings' will be attached; Poke holes in cup ('potlatch ring') centers; Pre-thread tapestry needles with 2-3' of yarn)
- Prepare dice - or a single die - with renumbered sides (tape over 4,5, and 6 and renumber as 1,2, and 3).
- Chilkat Robes: Assemble and prepare Chilkat Robes materials as necessary for age group (Enlarge and print Chilkat Robe design on 11" by 17" paper; Trim poster board to approximately 24" by 22-24"; Trim bottom corners (divide cardboard into thirds and cut off lower right and left thirds diagonally; Indicate 'fringe line' approximately 6" from bottom edge. (See photo below.)

Opening:

Using a map of Alaska, point out where traditional Eyak lands are located and note the neighboring peoples' lands, the Sugpiat to the west and the Tlingit to the east. Remind students that both of these tribes were much larger than the Eyak. The Eyak people often acted as middlemen between the Sugpiat and the Tlingit tribes, meaning that the Eyak people helped their neighbors trade with each other and able to avoid meeting each other directly. This also meant that the Eyak often met with their neighbors and were influenced by their hospitality customs and how they traditionally hosted visiting guests. The Eyak, especially those living in the Yakutat area, were especially influenced by the Tlingit.

There are no potlatches described in traditional Eyak legends or stories but over time as the Eyak interacted and intermarried with their Tlingit neighbors to the east they adopted and adapted some Tlingit customs. Among these adopted customs was hosting of ceremonial potlatches – great feasts of food, dancing, and giving. These special occasions demanded special clothing from hats to cloaks to face painting. (*Read first Elder quotation from Galushia Nelson above.*)

Potlatches were given to dedicate a new potlatch house; to mourn for those killed in battle; to remember a dead relative, and to honor visitors.ⁱⁱ Potlatches demonstrated a tribe's wealth and importance. If you could provide much food to your guests and give them a lot of gifts it proved you were powerful indeed.

Let us look at some photographs that show the regalia used during these potlatches.

- Show Potlatch Dancers photos pointing out Chilkat robes and potlatch ring hats.
 - <http://vilda.alaska.edu/cdm/ref/collection/cdmg21/id/24> Potlatchers in dancing costumes, Sitka Alaska 1898; ASL-P39-0123; Note Chilkat Robe top center.
 - <http://vilda.alaska.edu/cdm/ref/collection/cdmg21/id/54> Yakutat Natives in potlatch dancing costumes, Sitka Alaska, Dec. 9, 1904; ASL-P39-0786; Note Chilkat robes and potlatch hats with single 'potlatch rings' front row, left and right.

Listen as I read an excerpt from the book *Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta* out loud about what Galushia Nelson remembers about a potlatch. “*When Galushia was a child, the Eyak at Alaganik gave a potlatch to which the Tlingit from Kayak Island were invited. The Tlingits fired shots before landing, and waited in the river, singing for some time. After they landed they sang again. They did not have to sing much that first day because they were tired. They were painted and dressed in Chilkat blankets.*”

- Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaskaⁱⁱⁱ

Let’s look at some photos of potlatch hats. Show Potlatch Hat Power Point (See below).



Potlatch Hats.pptx

Note: These are Tlingit hats which often served to inspire Eyak variations. (Very few Eyak artifacts have survived and we have to rely on photographs of similar items as we do here.) Typically, the hats’ designs indicated a person’s clan or moiety, Eagle or Raven. Each ‘ring’ on top of these spruce root hats indicates the number of potlatches the wearer has hosted – signs of great prestige and importance.

Activities:

Class 1:

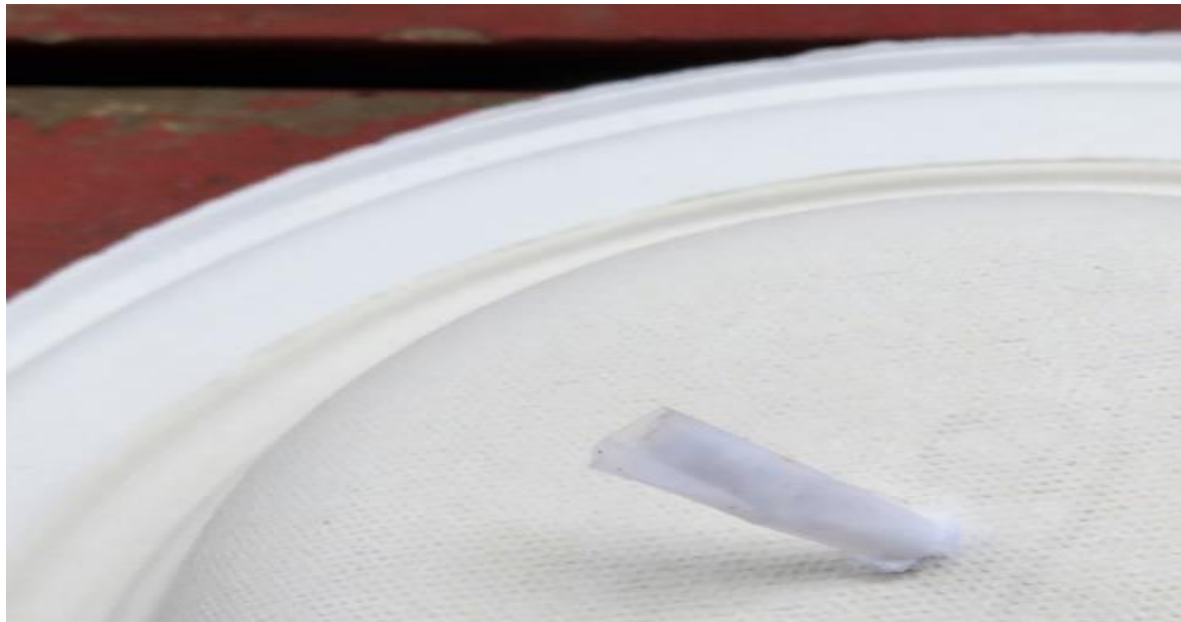
1. Announce that students will each make a potlatch hat and the number of potlatch rings each student attached will be based on a roll of the die. Remind students that potlatches required such a large amount of resources they were not common affairs. So the die has the numbers 1, 2, and 3.
2. Have each student roll the die. Distribute the corresponding number of ‘potlatch ring’ cups.
3. Hand out plate, bowl and ask the students to color the hat with traditional designs they saw in pictures shown in PowerPoint.
4. Demonstrate order of hat assembly and distribute remainder of hat making materials.



- Glue open bowl to center of plate bottom.
- If not already prepared, thread 2-3' of yarn onto needle and tie knot in yarn's end. From underside pull yarn through hole and continue through designated number of 'potlatch ring' bowls.



- Tape off end of yarn to prevent yarn from slipping back out.



- With the yarn steadying the stacked bowls glue or staple 'potlatch ring' cups on top and tie off tightly to hold them in place.



- Thread yarn through plate rims to serve as chin straps.
- *Optional:* Paint hat 'spruce root brown' color and allow to completely dry for designing later.
- *Optional:* Have students make animal based designs on hat brim and/or wrap the 'potlatch rings' with bands of black, yellow, or light blue paper using a stapler to attach them. (Note: Glue does not adhere well to waxed cups). (See photo above.)





Students listen as Bob Ladd shares a Chugach legend, Mt. Eccles Culture Week Assembly 2018

Activities – Chilkat Robes:

Class II:

1. Show Power Point for Chilkat robes (See below.) Note: Mountain Goat hair was often collected from bushes where hairs were rubbed off from passing goats.

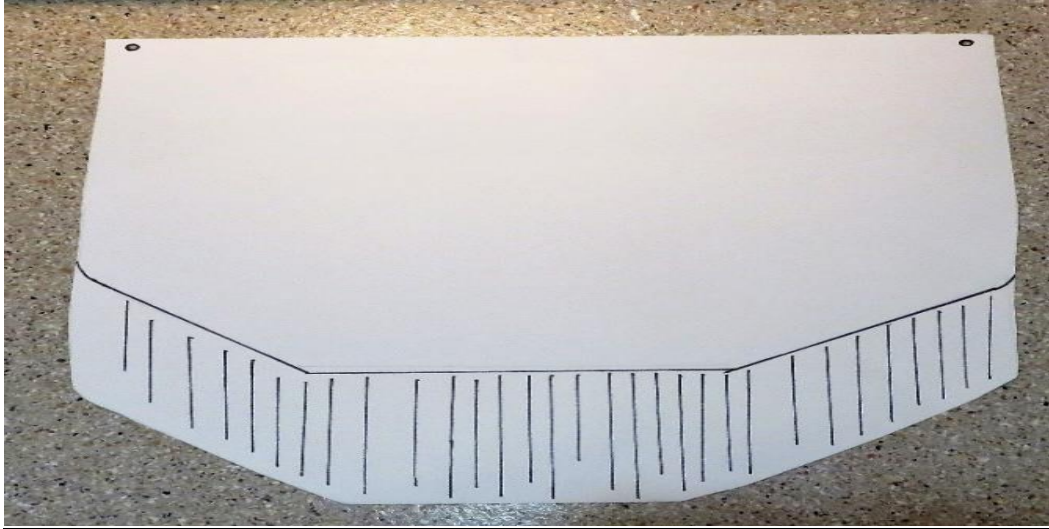


Chilkat
Weaving-Kindergart

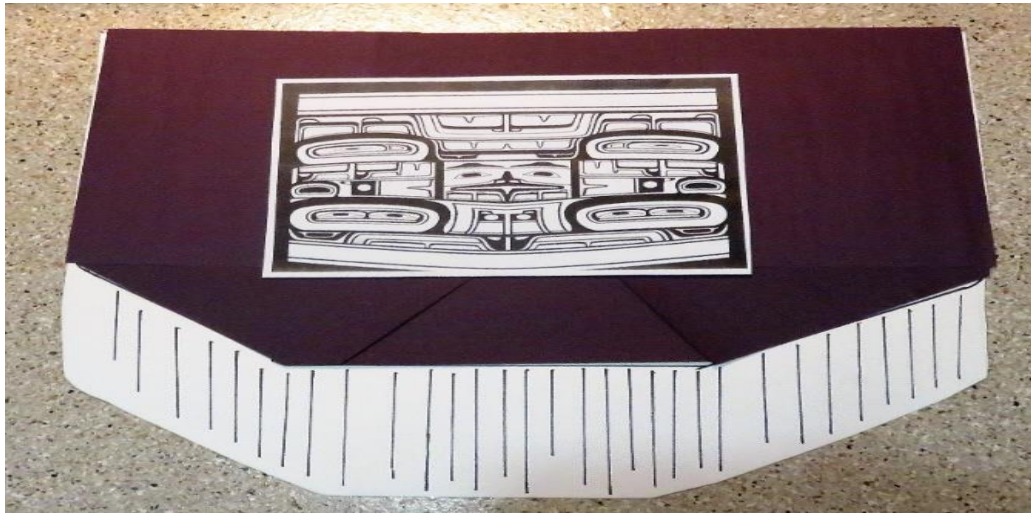
2. Show 'Lily Hope Chilkat Weaver' (0-1:42; See website above) Note: Like their Tlingit neighbors to the east the Eyak wove cloaks made with thigh spun mountain goat hair and cedar strips. The Sugpiat, to the west of the Eyak lands did not spin or weave yarns.

Optional: Distribute bits of roving for students to try thigh-spinning into yarn. Discuss talent required to spin the wool and then combine it with the thin strips of cedar.

3. Show photos of students wearing potlatch hats and Chilkat robes. (See above.)
4. Distribute robe materials (poster board, robe design, background paper, glue, scissors, markers).
5. Describe and demonstrate Chilkat robe assembly.
 - Orient poster board vertically and punch holes in upper right and left corners. Trim lower right and left corner thirds and draw fringe line approximately six inches above trimmed bottom edge as shown below.



- Glue black or yellow construction paper sheets onto poster board above fringe line. Color in Chilkat design (traditional colors: white, black, yellow, blue, green) and glue to center of robe.



- Cut fringes along bottom six inches of robe and punch holes in upper left and right corners. Thread yarn through corner holes for cape ties.
6. Have students don outfits and explain when this regalia would have been worn.
 7. *Optional:* Arrange for students to parade around the school in their outfits. With a Native drum (or recording of a drum beat) have the students form a procession and greet other classes with an Eyak hello: [lAXiishuh](#) (lit.: Is that you all?).

Assessment:

- Students can describe mountain goat hair thigh spinning.
- Students created facsimiles of potlatch hats and Chilkat robes.
- Students explain the Eyak potlatch tradition.
- Students correctly pronounced the Eyak vocabulary words.

ⁱ Birket-Smith, Kaj, and Frederica de Laguna. *The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska*. AMS Pr, 1976.
p.181

ⁱⁱ Birket-Smith, p.167

ⁱⁱⁱ Birket-Smith, p.183



Chilkat Robe Design