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Alaska Native Cold Lifeways

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INTRODUCTION

This resource examines “cold”-related objects in the collection of the Anchorage Museum and on view in the Alaska exhibition and Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center.

Low temperatures, icy winds and freezing precipitation shape the experience of living in Alaska.

With over 663,300 square miles, Alaska is the largest state in the United States. Surrounded by both the Arctic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, the total shoreline length of Alaska is almost 34,000 miles—making up about 64% of the entire United States coastline. There are over 3,000 rivers and over three million lakes in Alaska. One-hundred glaciers in Alaska cover almost 5% of the state. Denali Mountain, the tallest mountain in North America with an eternal snow and ice-covered peak of 20,310 feet, is located in south-central Alaska. Considered to be the world’s coldest mountain, Denali has a record of -93 degrees Fahrenheit and winds over 150 miles per hour.

Throughout Alaska, snow typically falls as early as the end of September to early May—with unforgiving winds and intense temperatures dramatically changing the landscape and its inhabitant’s lifestyles. About 1,100 vertebrate species—ranging from walrus and polar bears to ravens and moose— live and thrive in Alaska.

For thousands of years, Alaska Native peoples have been thriving and adapting to the cold environment of Alaska. Through their objects and traditions, we can learn technological innovations and invaluable knowledges and resilient ways of being in Alaska.



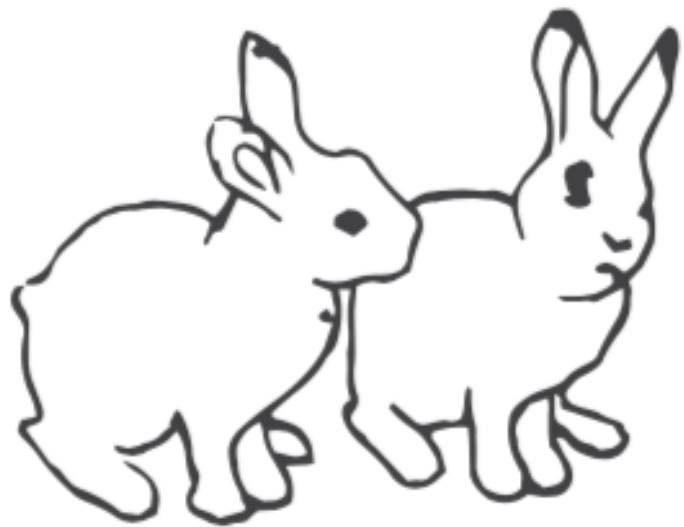
USING THE GUIDE

Inside of this teacher’s guide you will find an expanded explanation on each topic present in the booklet alongside additional information and activities.

This guide highlights Indigenous objects of the North found in the Anchorage Museum collection. The prompts are intended to engage kindergarten students and up with the context of the objects, creating deeper understanding of ways our unique place in Alaska shape lifestyles and traditions through objects and photographs.

- **Explore:** Challenge students to be curious when observing the objects, artworks and information presented throughout the guide. Support students to do their own research and delve deeply. The information is intended not only to educate but to spark interest in students and encourage further exploration on these topics. Slow down and look closely, each object has a story to tell.
- **Discover:** Encourage students to look beyond the artworks that they see and examine the details they notice either in the guide or in the exhibitions. As you move through this resource, share the additional knowledge and information presented in this packet to allow students to develop a deeper understanding of landscapes and resources of Alaska, Alaska Native lifestyles and cultures. Make this journal yours. Use the pages to draw, write, and note in your own way.
- **Ask questions:** Build an inquiry-driven experience for the students. Ask students to share what they observe and/or what they may already know. As you introduce background knowledge and object information, encourage students to ask questions about what more they want to know and what they don’t understand. Be curious about the details.
- **Connect:** Encourage students to reflect on their own life and experiences. Invite students to consider their own personal connections to what they have learned. The activities of this guide foster opportunities for such personal reflection. Ask students to share with each other what connections they have found. Share with a friend, a family member, or mentor about your experience.





Drawing of Arctic hares

Terms

Alaska Natives Indigenous peoples of Alaska often defined by language group

Harvest Use of wild, renewable resources from the land by individuals, families and communities for food, shelter, fuel and other essential needs that are fundamental to a way of life

Learn more about the Peoples of Alaska and Northeast Siberia:

alaska.si.edu/cultures.asp

Learn more about Arctic hares:

nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/a/arctic-hare

ACTIVITY 1



Drawing of a moose

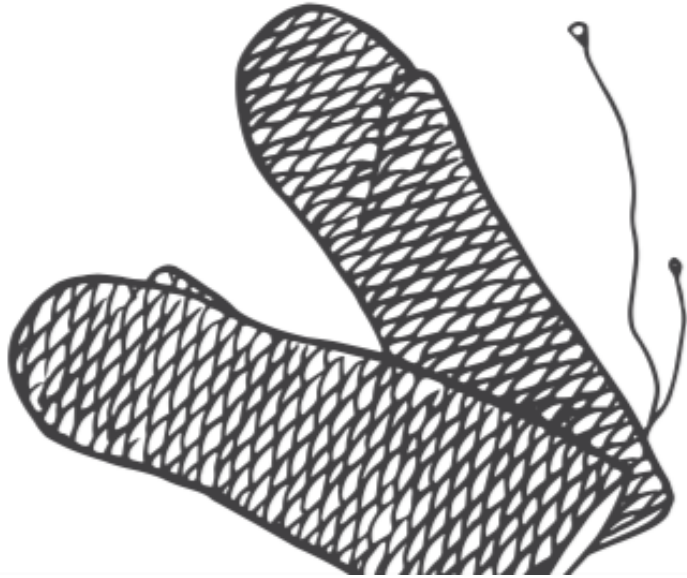
Ask students to define “resource.” Prompt students to consider resources most useful for extreme temperatures in Alaska.

PROMPT Name resources found in Alaska.

Invite students to consider what resources are useful in order to survive the cold temperatures of Alaska.

EXTENSION *What resources are utilized by Alaska Native peoples to survive the unique cold environments of Alaska?*

ARILLUUK



Drawing of an *arilluuk*

Terms

Arilluuk

Yup'ik "pair of fishskin mittens"

Sinew

A tendon or ligament; often treated and used as a binding or sewing thread

Arilluuk are waterproof salmon-skin mittens that keep hands warm and dry, even in the most extreme weather on land or sea. These mittens are versatile and used for handling fish nets or kayaking. In the process of making *arilluuk*, sinew is used as thread, and seashore grass is used as lining for durable waterproofing.

Learn more about *arilluuk*:

alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=118

TERMS



Drawing of a gut parka

Gut parkas are lightweight, waterproof garments often worn while on the water in a kayak.

<i>Chigdax'</i>	UnangaX' term for gut parka
<i>Chaġtalisax'</i>	UnangaX' term for gut parka, rain gear
<i>Imarnin</i>	Yup'ik term for gut parka
<i>Kapitaq</i>	Iñupiaq term for rain parka
<i>Kamleika</i>	Chukchi term for gut parka

Learn more about gut parkas:

[alaska.si.edu/search_results.asp?keywords=gut parka&cat=2](http://alaska.si.edu/search_results.asp?keywords=gut%20parka&cat=2)



KUMATXAX AND KULUSUK



Drawing of Kumatxax and Kulusuk

Kumatxax Unangax “sock”

Kulusuk Sugpiaq “pair of boots”

The Unangax *kumatxax*, on the left, can be worn both indoors and outdoors. They are also used as boot liners in cold weather. Made from grass woven into sock form, *kumatxax*, keep feet warm and dry.

The Sugpiaq *kulusuk*, on the right, are child-sized boots made of caribou and seal fur. Grass can be placed inside the boots for additional insulation.

Learn more about *Kumatxax*:
alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=335

Learn more about *Kulusuk*:
alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=11

ACTIVITY 2

Students are invited to design their ideal boots while considering the relationships of materials to the boot's design and functions.

PROMPT From rainboots to snow boots, many styles of boots are worn in Alaska. Design boots you would like to wear that can withstand the cold.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY Invite students to share, in pairs, about their boot's design, function and materials.



ACTIVITY 3

Students are asked to create a design for their mittens.

PROMPT Athabascan moose-skin mittens are often embellished with intricate designs made of glass beads. Before stitching beads with sinew, sewers first sketch an outline of the design on the leather. Design a pattern you would imagine embellishing on your own mittens. Challenge yourself by creating the design using only small dots.



Learn more about *dinjik dhah dzirh*, Gwich'in Athabascan mittens:
alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=258





[top] Thompson Pass, Anchorage Museum, B1962.001;
[bottom] Mountain sheep Anchorage Museum, B1962.001

Look closely at the photographs and discuss:

1. *Describe what you see.*
2. *What makes you say that?*
3. *What more can we find?*

Learn more about Dall Sheep: bit.ly/2QjtMiw



ACTIVITY 4

Alaskan landscapes change depending on the changing climate and seasons. Students are invited to explore a vessel utilized in the cold temperatures.

PROMPT Examine a sled or pair of snowshoes. Look closely and draw the object in detail.

Learn more about sleds and snowshoes:

s.si.edu/2x4MuSc



ACTIVITY 5

Students are encouraged to reflect on their favorite cold weather activities.

PROMPT Cold weather and winter precipitation make certain activities possible. Draw or write about your favorite cold weather activity below.



ACTIVITY 6

Alaska Native peoples throughout the state have many different terms for specific types of winter precipitation. Here are a few examples:

nutágaq (Iñupiaq) fresh, powdery snow

pukak (Iñupiaq) granular snow

misruligruaq (Iñupiaq) sleet

qanik (Sugpiaq) falling snow

aniuq (Sugpiaq) snow on ground

chitl' (Dena'ina Athabascan) drifting snow

k'atl' (Dena'ina Athabascan) fresh powder snow

kaklahéen (Tlingit) wet snow

dleit (Tlingit) snow

PROMPT Name and illustrate as many types of winter precipitation you can think of below.



ACTIVITY 7

PROMPT Imagine: You are on a hike in the boreal forest of interior Alaska when an unexpected snowstorm fills the sky with snow. To stay warm and dry, you decide to create a shelter with supplies you brought for the hike and natural resources from the environment around you.

Brainstorm: resources available to build a shelter	
Natural Resources (found in nature)	Man-made Resources (brought on your hike)



ACTIVITY 8

Sketch or describe your shelter.

Terms

Taiga

Also known as boreal forest. The largest terrestrial biome on Earth, the taiga is shaped by cold weather, short summers and forest fires. It is home to evergreen trees and other hardy vegetation as well as a diversity of mammals and birds. In Alaska, the boreal forest is found throughout the South Central and Interior of the state, from Anchorage to just north of Fairbanks.





Photograph of Swan Bld. Looking east on McKinley Street, Valdez, Alaska. P.S. Hunt, G1183, Anchorage Museum, B1962.001

Look closely at the photographs and discuss:

1. *Describe what you see.*
2. *What makes you say that?*
3. *What more can we find?*



FINAL NOTES AND DISCUSSION

Allow students time to reflect on what they have learned.

- What objects did they find interesting?
- What drew them to those objects?
- What surprised them or challenged them?
- What more would they like to learn?



STUDENT READING LIST

Books below are available at the Anchorage Public Library.

Preschool to Kindergarten

<i>Mukluks for Annabelle by Dianne Barske</i>	E-N BARSKE
<i>Gnome from Nome by Stephen Cosgrov</i>	E-N COSGROV

Lower Elementary (1st to 3rd grade)

<i>Gnome from Nome by Stephen Cosgrov</i>	E-N COSGROV
<i>Midnight Dance of the Snowshoe Hare: poems of Alaska by Nancy Carlstrom</i>	J-N 811.54 CARLSTR
<i>This Place is Cold by Vicki Cobb</i>	J-N 917.98 COBB

Upper Elementary (4th to 6th grade)

<i>Surviving in Cold Places by Carla Mooney</i>	J 363.34 MOONEY
<i>Alaska Animals- Where do they Go at 40 Below?</i>	J-N 599.05 RICHTER
<i>Midnight Dance of the Snowshoe Hare: poems of Alaska by Nancy Carlstrom</i>	J-N 811.54 CARLSTR

Middle & High School

<i>Two Old Women: an Alaska Legend of Betrayal, Courage, and Survival by Velma Wallis</i>	Y-N WALLIS
<i>Hear the Wolves by Victoria Scott</i>	J-N SCOTT
<i>Lily's Mountain by Hannah Moderow</i>	J MODEROW

Adult/teacher resources

<i>Travelers of the Cold : Sled Dogs of the Far North by Dominique Cellura</i>	N 636.73 CELLURA
<i>81 Days Below Zero : the incredible survival story of a World War II pilot in Alaska's frozen wilderness by Brian Murphy</i>	N-B CRANE-L MURPHY



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WEB RESOURCES

Anchorage Museum Resource Center

anchoragemuseum.org/collections/archives

Anchorage Museum Collections

onlinecollections.anchoragemuseum.org

Smithsonian Arctic Study Center

alaska.si.edu

Alaska's Visual Archives

vilda.alaska.edu

National Park Service

nps.gov/articles/denali.htm

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=species.main

For more teaching resources, visit anchoragemuseum.org/teachingresources.

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