

# ANCHORAGE MUSEUM

## GRADE 5: ART AS COMMUNICATION



**GEORGE ADEN AHGUPUK**  
***RADIO BABIES, c. 1940***

Ink and watercolor on skin  
1970.169.1



## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

---

George Aden Ahgupuk, also known as Twok, was an American artist of Iñupiat heritage born in the coastal village of Shishmaref in Alaska. He is best known for his drawings of hunting, villages, and landscapes—scenes of the traditional Iñupiat life—on the treated skins of seals, reindeer, and caribou, animals which he grew up hunting.

After completing fourth grade, Ahgupuk withdrew from elementary school to help hunt and contribute food to the family. At the age of nineteen, on his way back home after traveling to Nome with his uncle to see a dentist for an infected tooth, Ahgupuk slipped down a cliff and severely fractured his leg while hunting ptarmigan. Although his uncle had set the fractured bone, Ahgupuk's bone did not heal properly and pain continued. In 1934, at the urging of a traveling field nurse who examined his leg, Ahgupuk went to the Alaska Native Service Hospital in Kotzebue, about 169 kilometers away, where doctors diagnosed a tubercular bone infection from his earlier fracture. The doctors were able to avoid amputation with surgery but Ahgupuk would never be able to bend his knee. During his recovery period, Ahgupuk began drawing on toilet tissue with a burnt match as a pencil, the only available drawing material in the hospital. Deciding to become a full-time artist, Ahgupuk first used bleached sealskins and continued to experiment with the bleaching process of various skins as an alternative drawing surface because he did not have access to traditional paper and drawing tools.

Pictured in *Radio Babies* is Joseph Romig, a well-known early doctor in Alaska and Mayor of Anchorage from 1937 to 1938, offering advice over the radio to an expectant mother in Bethel, Alaska. The baby soars over Rainy Pass on the airwaves to an antenna in Bethel where his parents anxiously await his arrival.

## KEY TERMS

---

<i>Landscape</i>	An area of land and collection of landforms; culturally this may include the resources found in that area and the interaction of those resources with human inhabitants; the term may also reference a visual representation of an area of land. As a term in the visual arts, landscape is a type or genre of subject depicting scenes of nature, such as mountains and seascapes, and urban sceneries that may feature people, animals, or architecture. Landscape is derived from the Dutch word of <i>landschap</i>
<i>Lifestyle</i>	Habits, values, and ways of daily life



## INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE

---

Begin this art lesson by looking and discussing about the artwork together for 15 minutes.

**CLOSE-LOOKING** Invite students to look closely, quietly at the artwork.

**OBSERVE** Invite students to share observations about the artwork.

**ASK**

- *What is going on in this artwork?*
- *What colors does the artist use?*
- *What moods does the colors create?*
- *Describe the perspective in this artwork.*
- *What symbols and objects do you see?*
- *What is the relationship of the language (text) and imagery?*
- *What does it remind you of?*
- *What more do you see?*
- *What more can you find?*

**DISCUSS** **USE** [20 Questions Deck](#) for more group discussion questions about the artwork.

**LEARN MORE**

- Artist Website [ahgupuk.com](http://ahgupuk.com)
- Jones, Suzi. *Eskimo Drawings*. Anchorage Museum, 2008.
- Anderson, Eva Greenslit. *Dog-Team Doctor: The Story of Dr. Romig*. Kessinger Publishing, 2010.



## COMIC STRIP

---

**TIME FRAME** 45 minutes

**MATERIALS** Pencil  
Blank paper  
11x17" paper  
Scissors  
Markers  
Color pencils

**DIRECTIONS** In *Radio Babies*, image and text come together to tell a story. This is true in the familiar form of comics.

**1.** [6-10 mins] Invite students to think of an experience when they were communicating important information to someone. Share the experience with a partner.

*What was happening?*

*What were you trying to convey?*

*If there was a miscommunication, how did you resolve it?*

**2.** [10 mins] For the comic-strips project, prompt students to think about, and create a short story about characters communicating an important piece of information to each other. Determine the story and what critical information is being communicated.

Invite students to consider:

*What is happening?*

*Who are the characters?*

*Where are the characters?*

*When did the event happen? How?*

*What are the characters trying to communicate to each other?*

**3.** [5 mins] Invite students to create and sketch drafts of their characters. *Who are the characters? What do they look like? What are they wearing?*

**4.** [5 mins] Decide on the setting. *Where are the characters? What does the environment look like? When did the event happen? Sketch drafts of the setting.*

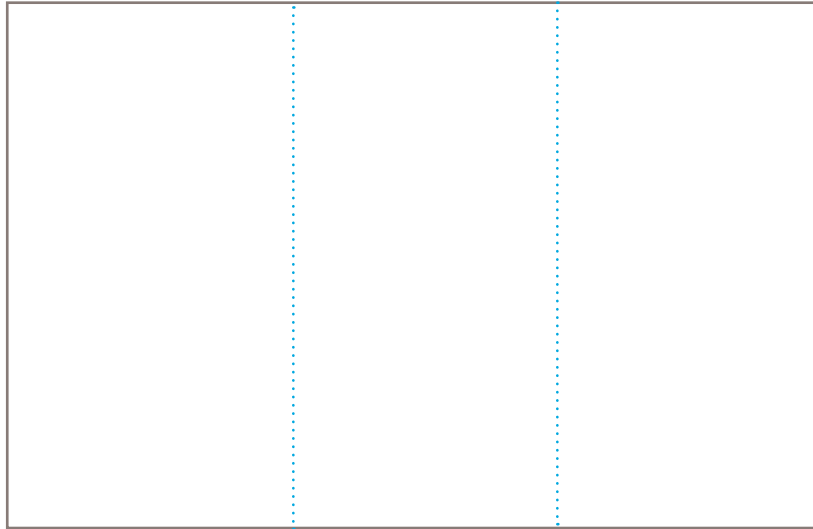
**5.** [5 mins] In their drafts, invite students to consider their design choices as well as the dialogue. *What is the relationship of the language (text) and imagery?*

Students will sketch drafts of their characters, background, and dialogue on the 3-panels of the comic strip.

The left and middle panel will depict what happens during the communication and how it is being communicated.

The right panel will depict the resolution, what happens after the communication.





*Fold the 11x17" paper in three equal parts.*

- 6.** [15 mins] For the final version of their comic strip, cut 11x17" paper in half horizontally and fold three times. Students may finalize their project by drawing with permanent markers and adding colors.
- 7.** Invite students to title their project, and present their story to the class.

## ASSESSMENT

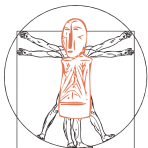
---

Students will be assessed based on their participation in the discussion, completion of the two projects, and art presentation to class.

---

For more teaching resources, visit [anchoragemuseum.org/teachingresources](http://anchoragemuseum.org/teachingresources)

Educational resources at the Anchorage Museum are made possible with the support of the Hearst Foundation, the Atwood Foundation, and the Alaska Humanities Forum.



ALASKA  
HUMANITIES  
FORUM



ATWOOD  
FOUNDATION

