

Essays from "Aleut Images"

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about Aleut life through short essays written by students in Alaska.

TIME REQUIRED

20 minutes

BACKGROUND

"Aleut Images" is a collection of Aleut culture stories from class projects at Alaska Pacific University.

MATERIALS

- "Aleut Images"
 - ◆ Short essays with comprehension questions
 - ◆ Additional stories can be found at Alaskool.org
- Text for the following readings is reproduced here, but there are many other paragraphs
 - ◆ Aleut Women
 - ◆ Tools from Animals
 - ◆ Aleut History
 - ◆ Food for the Aleuts
 - ◆ or other stories

PROCEDURES

K-1

- Read the stories aloud to the students; discuss the main idea of the story

2-3

- Individually or in small groups, have students read one of the suggested paragraphs (included in this lesson) or choose their own from the list of readings on the website.

DISCUSSION

How are the topics described in the story different from your life today?

Aleut Women

Aleut women have important places in their society. Famous as weavers, they were equally skilled in other ways.

The women excelled as doctors and nurses. They knew which wild plant controlled bleeding and which healed open cuts. They knew which plant cured fish poisoning. They mixed certain herbs with goose fat for coughs and fevers. They applied a different mixture of herbs to swollen joints and muscles.

Aleut women were expert at food preparation. They preserved the meat and fish by drying it in the open air on poles or they smoked it over an open fire. They gathered berries in the fall. Blueberries and cranberries were kept a long time in finely woven baskets filled with fresh water.

The women were skilled seamstresses. They made parkas that were both warm and dry. The seams were sewn with a bone needle threaded with fine sinew. Along each seam they stitched in twisted and braided animal hairs. These decorations formed hooks and tassels.

Aleut women were very skillful people. Important roles were delegated to them.

TEST YOUR READING SKILLS

The main topic of this article is

- (1) sewing
- (2) Aleut women
- (3) smoked fish

Teacher Key

- (1) sewing
- (2) Aleut women**
- (3) smoked fish

Tools from Animals

The tools the Aleuts used were made from whales, birds, seals, sea lions and drift wood. Spoons were made from breastbones of ducks. Bone wedges were used for splitting firewood. Fishhooks were made by lashing two small bones together. Bird skins and whale intestines were made into rain gear. The gut or intestines were also made into translucent windows for their homes.

Seal and sea lion bladders or stomachs were used for storing fat and as floats. The floats prevented wounded sea mammals from sinking. They also served as markers or buoys. The markers were whitened and used to guide the hunters when they were out of sight of land. They were dropped over the side of the boat at intervals so the hunters could see one marker from the other. To make sure the hunters could get them back, they were tied to each other by cord made from sinew.

What we can learn from the tools Aleuts left behind is that they made clever use of the resources available to them.

TEST YOUR READING SKILLS

This article is about

- (1) types of tools
- (2) boat equipment
- (3) animal habits

Teacher Key

- (1) types of tools**
- (2) boat equipment
- (3) animal habits

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http://www.alaskool.org/projects/traditionalife/Aleutian_Chain/Text.html

http://www.alaskool.org/projects/traditionalife/Aleutian_Chain/Text.html#aleut

http://www.alaskool.org/projects/traditionalife/Aleutian_Chain/Text.html#tools

Aleut History

Aleuts have an oral history. Storytellers tell the things of the past to the children and to each other. Aleuts call this REMEMBERING. They tell again legends that they heard in childhood. They recall the clothing, toys, tools and boats seen or used while growing up. They remember the old ways on special days. The REMEMBERING by each person is important. It is key to the whole picture—the Aleut history.

A storyteller named Will Durant put it this way:

Grow strong, my comrade . . .
That you may stand
Unshaken when I fall;
That I may know
The shattered fragments
Of my song will come
At last to finer melody in you;
That I may tell my heart
That you begin
Where passing I leave off,
And. . . you know more.

TEST YOUR READING SKILLS

This passage suggests that history is

- (1) not always written
- (2) dull and dry
- (3) a story

Teacher Key

- (1) not always written
- (2) dull and dry
- (3) a story

Food for the Aleuts

Food was easy to get on the Aleutian Islands. Even today, the Aleuts can live off the land and the sea.

People who live near ocean reefs can get food easily. Both the young and old people can gather sea urchins, mussels and little snails from the reefs. Many species of birds and ducks live on the "Aleutian Chain." Their eggs are good food as is their flesh.

Fish is an important food for the Aleuts. Cod and halibut can be caught all year. There are salmon runs in the fall, and Dolly Varden is caught for variety.

Sea otters and seals are hunted for their meat, as well as their skins. Some islands near the peninsula have caribou, moose and bear which may be hunted.

In the summer, berries can be gathered in the hills and swamps. Aleuts have developed ways of keeping berries for a long time. At one time, there were more Aleuts than any other Native Alaskan group. The abundant food supply on the Aleutian Islands is one reason for this.

TEST YOUR READING SKILLS

The main idea of this passage is that early Aleuts ate

- (1) many kinds of food
- (2) sea urchins
- (3) bird and duck flesh

Teacher Key

- (1) many kinds of food
- (2) sea urchins
- (3) bird and duck flesh

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http://www.alaskool.org/projects/traditionalife/Aleutian_Chain/Text.html

http://www.alaskool.org/projects/traditionalife/Aleutian_Chain/Text.html#history

http://www.alaskool.org/projects/traditionalife/Aleutian_Chain/Text.html#food