

Native Oral History and Marine Resources

Duration: 1-hour class time; one week for research.

Grade: 4th – 8th

Goals:

Alaska Natives share their culture through oral history. This lesson will give students an opportunity to take part in this tradition.

Objectives: Students will be able to...

- Demonstrate oral communication skills;
- Develop questions for interviews;
- Use library, Internet, or other resources to research information;
- Write letters using correct sentence structure, grammar, and spelling.

Standards:

English / Language Arts: A-1, A-3, A-6, B-1, B-3, E-1, E-4

Geography: B-1, B-2, B-3, B-4, B-5, D-5, E-4

Materials:

- Resource materials on native cultures that depend on marine resources and oral histories that refer to the role of the ocean in their lives.

Introduction:

Native oral histories have been shared for hundreds, even thousands of years. These stories have been told by many different groups of people, so therefore some have different written versions. Teachers may obtain copies of some of these through school or public libraries as well as by contacting the University of Alaska Fairbanks and the Alaska Native Heritage Center.

Activity:

Choose a native story and read it out loud to the class. Students should listen carefully because you will ask them to repeat the most important parts of the story once you are through. Have students re-tell the story one at a time. This will demonstrate their listening and communication skills. If possible, invite someone to your class from a local native group to speak or bring your class on a visit to native history museum.

Questions related to oral histories:

1. Who are the main characters?
2. What is the plot or theme of the story?
3. What type(s) of marine resources do they mention?
4. How are they using those resources?
5. What did they do that was surprising?
6. What does this story tell you about why marine animals are important to Alaskan natives?

Wrap-up: Students should be able discuss the following...

1. What are some of the advantages of passing information through oral tradition?
2. Do oral traditions exist in other cultures today?
3. Why do we depend on oral histories to learn more about native cultures?
4. How could oral histories be useful to (or used by) scientists studying Alaskan marine species?
5. Did you learn anything new about Alaska Natives or marine animals from the story? Why or why not?

Extension:

- Students can research how native people used natural resources. Are there still people there that depend on animals for subsistence?

Students should research this information by using the following tools:

1. Internet
 2. Library (to view old newspapers, books, etc.)
 3. Local historical society/museum.
- Students may want to research their own family history and relationship with the ocean. Parents, extended family, grandparents can be interviewed to identify family history and traditions including vacations, military service, jobs that involve marine resources or transportation.
 - Once students have completed this research they should create a chant, dance or song to “tell” the story. This can be performed for the class.
 - Invite an Alaskan Native elder to speak to your class.