Today we’ll be talking about Native Cultures of Alaska.
• What does Native mean? The first people of a certain place
• What is Culture? A group’s way of living that is passed on from one generation to the next (art, beliefs, behaviors, etc)
• What does Alaska look like? Varied environments (ex: mountains, tundra, coasts)

Before we talk about Alaska’s Native People, let’s talk about people in general. Everyone has the same needs for survival. No matter where you live, what are the four basic needs people need to survive? Food/water, clothing, shelter and transportation.

Traditionally, Alaska’s Native People lived off the land and sea using the natural resources available in the region they lived.
Different Native Alaskan groups are found throughout the state in very different environments. Using map of Alaska, show where Athabascans, Yupik/Inupiat, Aleut and Tlingit/Haida/Tsimshian lived.

We will be focusing on the Athabascans, Yupik/Inupiat and Tlingit/Haida/Tsimshian cultures, specifically how they traditionally meet their basic needs – food/water, transportation, clothing and shelter.

| 11 Alaska Native cultural groups that vary by location, language, and customs. |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Athabascan                      | Tlingit                         |
| Yup’ik                          | Haida                           |
| Cup’ik                          | Tsimshian                       |
| Unangax                         | Inupiaq                         |
| Alutiiq                         | St. Lawrence Island             |
| Eyak                            | Yup’ik                          |

At least 20 different Native languages in Alaska!

We will learn how people’s lives are the same or different in 3 regions:
- Interior
- Southeast
- Western & Arctic Coast
Interior – Rolling hills, forests of spruce and birch trees; and the big rivers Yukon, Kuskokwim, Koyukon, Copper River. Homeland of the Athabascan Indians.
SHELTER
Shelter could be temporary (such as at fish camp) or more permanent.
Look at the structures in this picture. What are they made from? Where might this be?

Women and children at what looks to be fish camp, a wash tub is on the left and there is a stove to the right. Probably on the Tanana River. (UAF-1985-72-87)

Collection of buildings in the Interior. (c1930)

TRANSPORTATION
Also note man in birch bark canoe. (UAF-1991-46-618)

Sewing the birch bark on a birch bark canoe. (c1910) (UAF-1994-70-106)
Summer clothing was traditionally made from animals. Moosehide was smoked and then sewn like leather. Here you see a chief and his family. Their clothing is well decorated with beads and dentalia to show their status. We all know that the winters here are cold. This is the region we live in! What are these women’s clothes made from?

*Traditional summer clothing - Athabascans.* (c1925) (UAF-1991-46-792)

*Traditional winter clothing – Athabascans.* (c1925) (UAF-897-8)
FOOD

Food can be caught or grown. Kids often played a big role in food gathering. The Interior has many rivers and they serve as important sources of food for people and animals.

*Cleaning out the fish wheel – Interior* (c1960) (AMRC-b85-27-2423)

Note use of motor boat (often replaces the canoe).

*Turnips grown in Rampart.* (c1910) (UAF-1994-70-264)
Remember that other parts of Alaska have different climates & environments.

Environment of **Southeast Alaska** - From the sea you get seals, fish, seabirds, and from the tidal zones, clams, and seashells like Abalone. Animals live within the rainforest and the trees provide material for homes, boats and more. Home of many related groups including the Tlingit, Haida, & Tsimshian.
SHELTER
Where are we now? What does this environment look like? Note large trees and totem poles (made from large trees!)

*Houses in southeast. (1939) (ASL-Sukkwan-1)*
*Cedar canoe in dry dock. (c1900) (UAA-hmc-0344-23-c)*
*Cedar dugout canoe outfitted with oar locks. (1938) (AMRC-b75-175-647)*

TRANSPORTATION
Cedar trees can be used to make dugout canoes. What might you use boats for? To get food!
This fancy clothing also shows the status of the wearers but it looks quite different from the Athabascan clothing we just saw.

As westerners came to Alaska, Alaska’s Natives began wearing more clothing made of woven fabrics.

*Traditional regalia – Southeast. (c1920)*  (ASL-P39-0791)

*Typical dress - Southeast. (1900)* (ASL-P117-169)
FOOD
In Southeast, food can be gathered from land or the sea. Here is a different sort of fish "catching." Fishing from a fish weir.

What could these people be enjoying? A food they have gathered... dried seaweed!

*Fish Weir. (UAF-1987-0114-10)*

*Drying seaweed in southeast. (c1910) (UAA-hmc-0344-5-b)*
Western & Arctic Coast. Colder regions, lack of trees, tundra, sea, etc.
SHELTER
In other parts of Alaska, wood from trees was not available to build homes. Here is a house made from sod.
Sometimes driftwood from beaches can be used as part of a structure. The rest might be buried underground.

*Sod house in western Alaska. (c1910) (AMRC-b64-1-777)*
*A barabaras in Barrow (pre-1950) (AMRC-wws-171-R3)*

TRANSPORTATION
Sewing bearded sealskins for a umiak in Point Barrow. (c1905) (ASL-P320-60)
Eskimos leaving in a umiak. Note kayak is front. (c1930) (AMRC-b65-18-532)
Traditional summer clothing - Eskimos. (c1920) (AMRC-b64-1-781)

Different animals available to make fur and skin clothing from. What do you think these men’s clothing is made from? Notice their “shoes.”

Traditional winter clothing - Eskimos. (1942) (UAF-1991-0045-3)
There are many ways to fish in Alaska! Here is a woman ice fishing. Along the coast, marine animals are important for food and clothing. Across the state, animals are hunted for food and clothing.

*Ice fishing.* (c1960) (AMRC-b85-27-2411)
*Butchering a whale in Gambell.* (1966) (AMRC-wws-4393-211)
*Returning from a seal hunt.*
*Caribou hunt.* (1963) (AMRC-wws-4077-133)
There is another food type that is common to gather in all parts of Alaska. Can anyone guess what that is?
-Berries (and other plants).

Woman picking with more “modern” materials (ziploc bag). What else could be used to collect or store berries?
-Baskets. These are examples of Yup’ik grass baskets that were traditionally made as storage containers and later solely for their beauty.

_Eskimo berry pickers. (c1915) (UAF-1989-0166-401-print)_:}
Traditional knowledge of how to use the surroundings for survival have been passed down for many many years. Cultural traditions based on these practices and this knowledge are still alive today. As you tour in the museum, you will see objects made for hunting, gathering and transportation. You'll see traditional clothing. Also watch for art and objects that reflect these unique cultures.