

# University of Alaska Museum of the North

## Directed Discovery Field Trip

### Alaska Native Cultures

2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

1½ hours

#### Introduction, Welcome & Rules (15 minutes)

**★Main Idea:**

There is a rich diversity of Native Cultures in Alaska. Traditionally, Alaska Natives lived a subsistence lifestyle dependent upon regional resources. Alaska Native cultures are not a thing of the past, rather are continuously evolving.

Gather the class in the Education Center to welcome them to the museum, remove coats, review museum rules, & divide into groups. Introduce yourself and other docents. Tell the class what will happen during the tour.

The program is introduced through a PowerPoint presentation. The goal is to introduce major cultural groups of Alaska. Students should be reminded that Fairbanks is within Alaska's Interior, traditional home of the Athabascans.

Be sure to emphasize that although many of the things we will see in the museum and photographs are historic, these are modern cultures. You could ask the class if anyone is Alaska Native.

#### I. Fish Camp (25 minutes)

**★Main Idea:**

Athabascans are the native peoples of Interior Alaska. Time at fish camp has been an important part of the Athabascan year. As food is collected and prepared at fish camp, values such as cooperation, intergenerational knowledge sharing, and respect for animals are passed on.

This half of the class will learn about fish camp with a docent.

Start in the South East portion of the Gallery of Alaska by the salmon exhibit. Briefly discuss the life cycle of salmon. Talk about the predictability of these fish and how they return to their home streams. Discuss the importance of understanding natural cycles if living a subsistence lifestyle. Discuss what subsistence means. Use props as desired to highlight salmon life cycle (posters, preserved eggs, etc).

Have the students sit. Explain the Athabascan tradition of storytelling to teach respect for animals. Tell them that another way to preserve stories, besides writing them down, is to remember them and tell them to other people. This is an oral tradition and has been an important part of Athabascan culture. Say that you would like to tell them a story. They may have heard it before. If so, ask how much of the detail they can remember. Explain that in an

oral tradition you would hear a similar story many times in order to learn it. Read them "The Girl Who Swam with the Fish."

Prepare to go to fish camp. Share with students the significance of the annual trip to fish camp - as if you were enacting it with them. "First we repair our boats after the long winter, then we load up our boats with everything we'll need for several weeks. What do we need to bring? We leave for fish camp just as the last of the ice is going out of the river in late spring. We go up river to the fish camp our grandparents built many years ago. The fish camp is on a big river – we'll say our fish camp is on the Yukon River. Who's going to fish camp? Children, moms, dads, grandparents, and maybe your auntie and uncle. Lots of people share the work and share in the fun too. "

Decide as a group if your boat will have a motor or be paddled. Have students climb into the boat and give the paddle to one student to use or carry for emergencies. Tour the gallery on the way. "Boat" to the center of the gallery (near the mammoth) and show them the wooden and birch bark canoes hanging from the ceiling. Also point out the fish traps. Arrive at fish camp.

In the Creativity Lab (aka Education Center), discuss other technologies for catching fish. Show the fishnet and tell how wooden floats would be tied to the top and rocks, pieces of antler, or something heavy to the bottom edge. Demonstrate how a fish wheel works with the model.

Tell students that the most common way to learn at fish camp is to watch and listen to elders. Sometimes you learn about fish camp skills and sometimes about other things too. There is time at camp, while working and while waiting, for stories. Say that you will now hear from some people who know a lot about catching and preparing salmon.

Show the video: "Yukon Kings." The video is about 5 minutes. While the video is showing, narrate some of the highlights. Discuss how traditionally, men have had certain jobs at fish camp and women have had others. Point out that the process doesn't end with catching the fish! After the video, practice preparing and hanging "fish." A lot of fish is needed to feed both people and dogs throughout the winter. Discuss the amount of work required to collect subsistence foods and the importance of working together.

## **II. Gallery Exploration—Cultural Objects (25 minutes)**

### **★Main Idea:**

Natural resources are used by Alaska Natives to meet subsistence needs and create art. Cultural objects represent a historic reliance on natural resources and skill at utilizing available materials. Location influences cultural traits across the various regions of Alaska.

This half of the class will complete a 'scavenger hunt' in the Gallery of Alaska focused on cultural objects and materials. Students will find and sketch objects made from certain resources or to meet specific needs.

Give each child a scavenger hunt sheet, pencil and writing board. Remind them to not touch objects unless they see a "Please Touch" sign.

Have some kids start on the latter questions of the worksheet and some at the beginning. This will make sure they are not all going to the same object at the same time.

Tips:

- If a student is struggling, read the question aloud for them. Alternatively, you could pair students up so they can help each other.
- It is OK if students do not finish.
- Allow students to look around a little. While we want to focus on cultural objects, we also want students to enjoy their time in the museum.

Scavenger Hunt Hints:

- Baskets and boats can be found in many regions.
- There are many examples of Athabascan beadwork on display (Interior). Open the drawers to see more.
- There is a pair of snowshoes in the case with the beaded dress and jacket (Interior).

### **Craft activity (20 minutes)**

**★Main Idea:**

Many subsistence activities are tied to seasonal cycles. Understanding of the natural environment is an important skill and value in many Alaska Native cultures.

Gather the whole class back together again in the auditorium. Ask what time of year people go to fish camp (spring-fall). Ask about their scavenger hunt in the gallery. Ask students for examples of things they found. Discuss what time of year the some of the resources for each object would be obtained and when/how it would be made. Get the students thinking about the seasonality of subsistence activities. The majority of food gathering traditionally happens spring-fall (give examples). What happens in the winter? Sewing, making things, gatherings, story telling, dancing, etc.

Can they think of any reason to hunt animals in the winter? Easier to track, fur is thicker for warm clothing, etc. In the winter time, traplines are set to get small animals for food and fur. Both boys and girls needed these skills. They needed to know how to identify animals, where they live and how to track them.

Show furs, tracks, scat, etc of animals of the Interior. Have students use track stencils to create their own "study poster" for their local home environment.

### **Wrap-up & Review (5 minutes)**

Review some of the main points from the day and ask students about things they saw. Emphasize that the many native cultures of Alaska are modern and evolving. Alaska Natives live in our town and are likely in your class, neighborhood, etc. Encourage them to talk with them about their culture and to watch dancing, fiddling, etc when there are public events. Invite the students to come back to the museum with their parents to share what they have learned and to discover more.