

University of Alaska Museum of the North

Directed Discovery Field Trip

Alaska Native Cultures

K-1st Grade

1 hour

Introduction, Welcome & Rules (10 minutes)

★Main Idea:

People come from diverse backgrounds. There is a rich diversity of Native Cultures in Alaska.

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.

Put up the pictures of children from diverse backgrounds. Discuss how people come from different places and families. We may look different and know about different things. We might eat different foods. These are all the things that make living in our world interesting! We don't have to travel far to find uniqueness. Everyone in our class is unique, including you!

We learn to do things from our parents, aunts, uncles, friends and neighbors. A group of people may represent a unique culture. This means they might live close to each other, learn the same kinds of dances and songs, and pass on special skills and knowledge to their kids. They don't have to look alike, though sometimes they do. There are many different cultures around the world. Today we're going to learn about some of the special cultures in Alaska. These groups of people lived in Alaska before anyone else did. Alaska Native cultures all have their own arts, traditional clothes, and even their own languages!

Ask if any of the students are Alaska Native. Respond by saying "great!" or something similar. Don't put them on the spot or ask them to somehow speak for their culture. You may want to ask them if they have a native name or what culture they belong to.

[Note: "Culture": the arts, customs, and institutions of a nation, people, or group. (Custom: a traditional way of behaving or doing something that is specific to a society, place or time)]

I. Cultural Objects I Spy! (20 minutes)

★Main Idea:

People from different cultures create unique art and material objects.

This half of the class explores the Gallery of Alaska with a docent. Explain that you are going on a scavenger hunt together and along the way you will show them some hidden things.

Remind them that in the museum we have things from the past. These old things show how traditions came to be. We do things a certain way because somebody teaches us to. Usually that is somebody older than us. These things in the museum were made by people's

grandparents and great grandparents. By looking at them, people can learn about the past and can apply the same skills to make new art.

As you enter a region, show the group a picture of what you want them to hunt for. Then, allow them to look around until they find it. Tell them that if they find it, they shouldn't yell it out but should quietly stand and look at it and imagine what it would be like to wear it (make it, carry it, etc). Once a group gathers at the object, gather the other students and talk together about the object. Don't spend an overly long time on each object. Rather, say that it is a "Tlingit robe" used for special ceremonies, etc. Discuss a couple of the interesting characteristics with students. For example, "this is made with wool and bark!" or "those little decorations are seashells sewed on!," etc. Ask how they think someone got those materials or learned to make this, etc. Compare it to other items from the region (similar materials, similar art form, etc). Use hands-on objects to engage them in the discussion.

Move on to the next object. As you do, show the students the dolls in drawers (Southeast, Western and Arctic Coast) or the beaded items in drawers (Interior). Also point out some of the traditional clothing (like they have for the paper dolls).

II. Traditional Clothing (20 minutes)

★Main Idea:

Traditional Alaska Native clothing represents the region and culture it was made in.

This half of the class will remain in the Education Center with a docent. If no docent is available, a chaperone can supervise the children making paper dolls. Explanations and hands-on materials will be limited in that case.

Discuss traditional clothing with children. Explain that in the past, clothing had to be made from what was around you. Ask students to think about what that would be. Here in Alaska, mostly animal skins and fur were used but also tree bark, shells for decoration, etc. Discuss each garment separately and be sure to use the culture names (Aleut, Athabascan, Inupiaq, Yup'ik, Tlingit). Ask kids what they think something is made from and why it would be useful.

Encourage their thinking skills and reasoning. Show the stuffed dolls and have real samples available to look at and touch. While you speak, explain where each group of people lived (ex. near the sea where it rains a lot, etc) and what the garments are for. Tell them that now Alaska Native peoples also wear clothes just like we are today. However, these types of clothes from the past are still made and used, especially for special occasions.

Have the children color in the paper dolls. If there is time, have kids cut out paper dolls. If not, tell them to do this at home. Give each child an envelope (staple paper into a rectangle) or paper clip to keep papers together.

Wrap up & Coats (10 minutes)

Gather the whole class back in the Education Center. Remind them that each of us is different in special ways. Alaska is lucky to have so many different cultures. The ones we learned about today are just some of them! Encourage them to listen for different languages and to ask their parents or friends about their traditions (ex. different holidays, etc). Pass out coats. Give the teacher the paper dolls to give back to students.