Create a Model Umiak

Discover some ways people use marine mammals by making a model boat!

Iñupiat and Yup'ik people traditionally use *umiaks*, large open boats with wooden frames covered in walrus or bearded seal hides.

Materials Needed:

Umiak Template printable (or draw your own)*, colored pencils or crayons, scissors, glue or tape.

**Print or draw the template on cardstock to make it sturdier.*

Instructions:

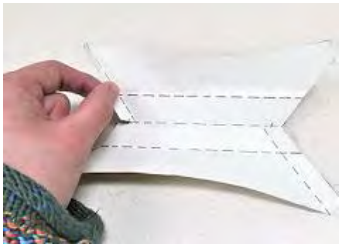
Step 1: Cut out the template on the solid line. Cut a small slit on each side where the lines form a V, as labeled on the template.

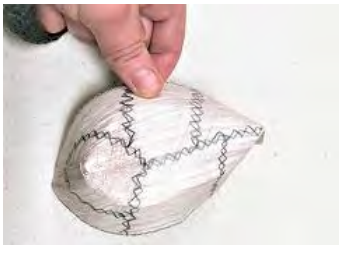
Step 2: Turn the template over and decorate it with colored pencils or crayons. Try coloring the paper to look like walrus or bearded seal hide!

Step 3: Fold and crease on each dotted line. Fold the template in half, with the dotted lines on the inside.

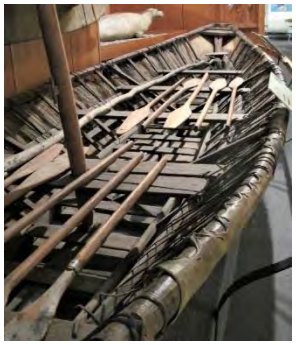
Step 4: Fold the tabs on each end, then and glue or tape them down (see picture). Flatten the bottom of the umiak along the dotted lines, so it can stand up.

Step 5: Draw people and tools for your umiak! Cut them out and glue or tape them to the umiak. Try drawing a boat engine, oars, harpoons, or life jackets!





Traditional Technology: Umiaks



Iñupiat and Yup'ik peoples traditionally use umiaks (also spelled *umiaq*), large open boats designed to carry several people. A wooden frame is covered with split walrus or bearded seal hides and sewn together with caribou sinew.

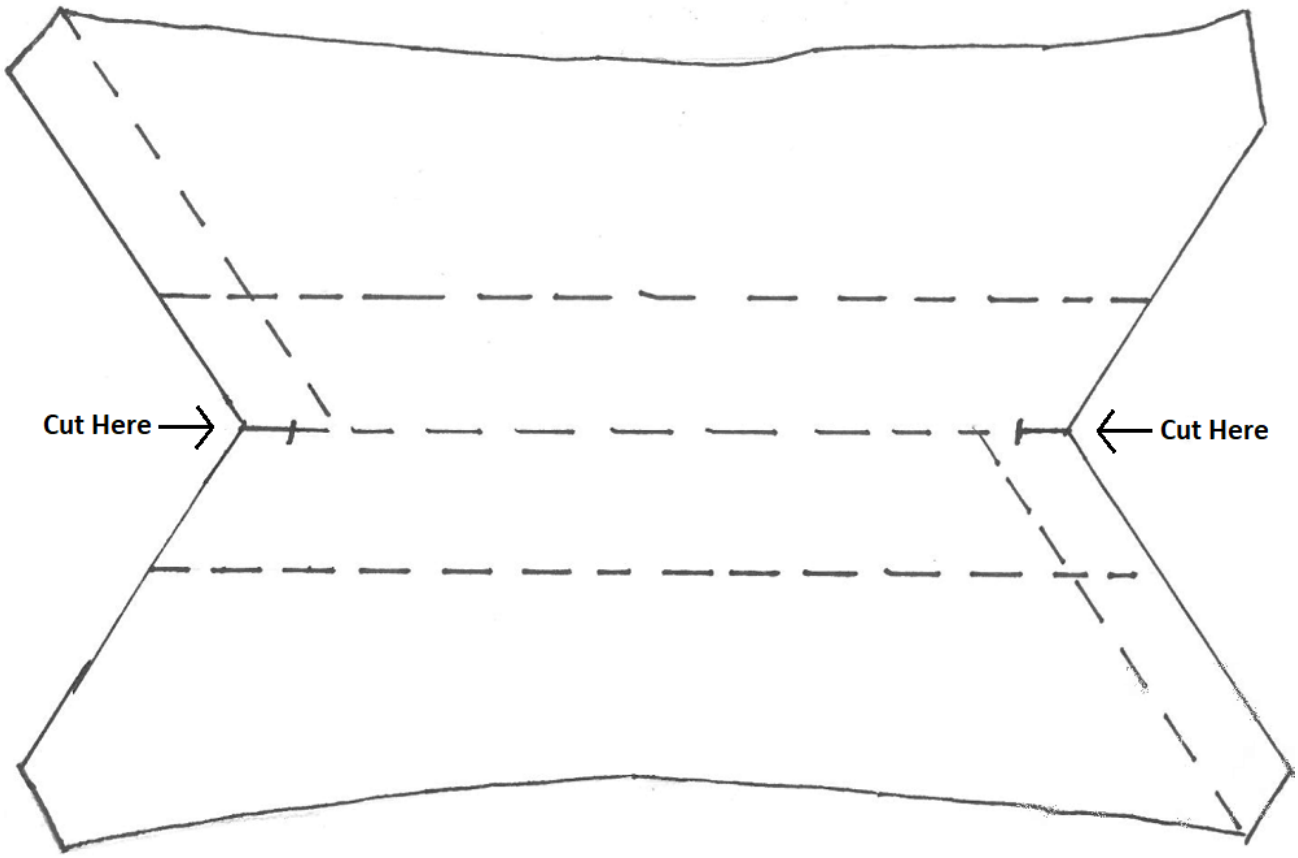
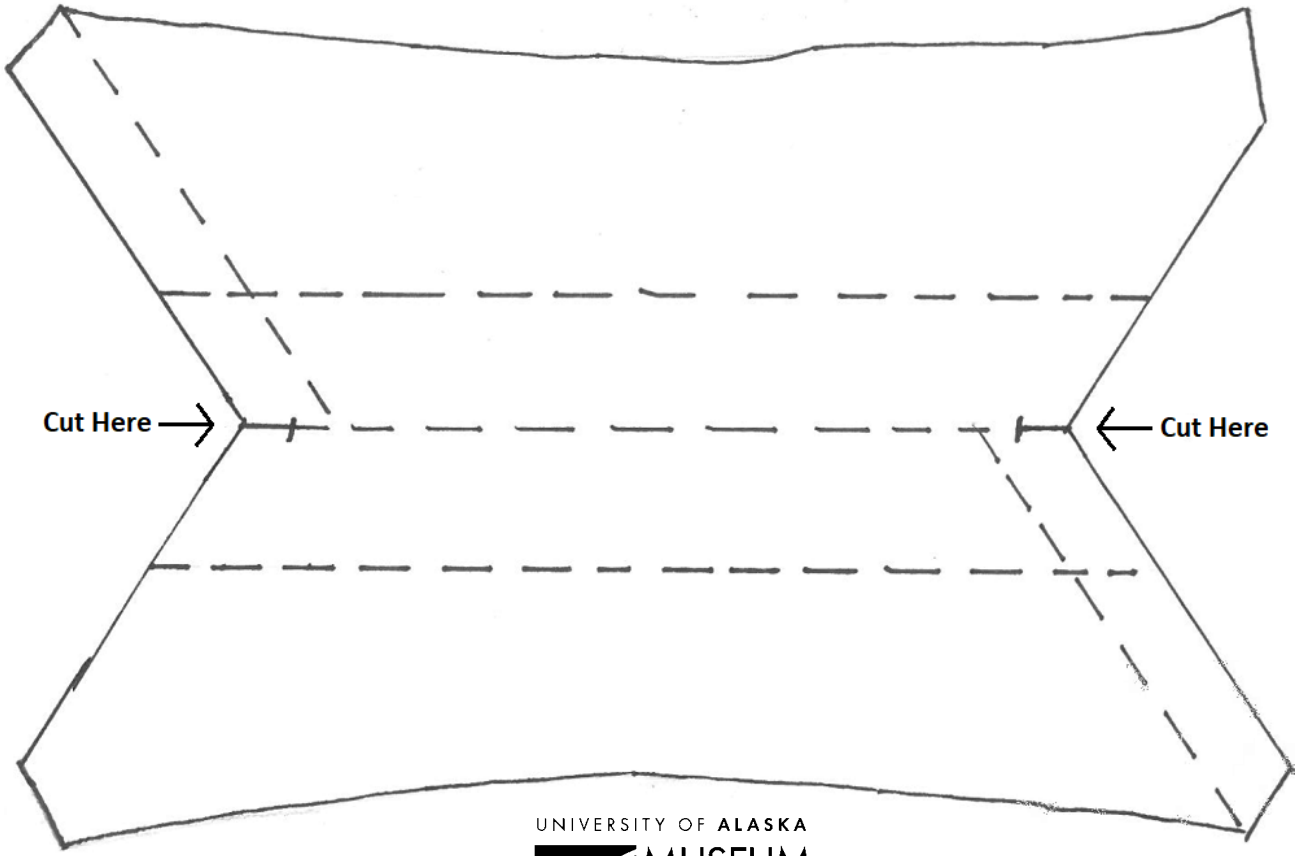
Left: Umiak from Wainwright, 1945-1949. *UAMN 0538-0001A.*

Walrus or bearded seal (*ugruk*) hides make a light, waterproof cover for an umiak. It takes five to seven bearded seal or walrus skins to cover the frame! The hides are replaced every two to four years. Sewing the hides together is a social event, with the whole community participating.

Women in Utqiagvik sew bearded seal skins for an umiak cover. *Image: Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission.*

After sewing the hides together, community members gather and use strong rope to attach the skins to the frame. Then they put the umiak on a rack to dry in the sun. When it is time to take the boats out on the ocean, the boats are placed on sleds and slid over the ice to open water.

Hunters use umiaks for bowhead whale, walrus, and seal hunting, as they are strong, lightweight, flexible, and quiet. Today, they mostly use outboard motors instead of paddles and sails. Some people have switched to using metal boats for hunting, but umiaks remain an important part of their cultural heritage.

Images: Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission.

Umiak Template Printable