

## LESSON PLAN – GEOGRAPHY OF ALASKA

TITLE: Geography of Alaska

Time: 60 minutes

LEARNER POPULATION: grade level 5

CURRICULAR CONTEXT: part of Social Studies, U.S. History, Alaska

### OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this activity:

- 1) Students will be able to identify different regions in Alaska.
- 2) Students will be able to become aware of misconceptions about Alaska.
- 3) Students will be able to identify places, rivers and mountains on a map of Alaska.
- 4) Students will be able to identify different Native Alaskan tribes.

### CONCEPTS/INFORMATION:

- Alaskan geography
- Working with maps
- Misconceptions about Alaska
- Native Alaskan groups

### INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE:

- 1) Start out with challenging students on what they know about Alaska. Use the sheet “Common Misconceptions about Alaska.”
- 2) Educate students about the climate in Alaska and about Native Alaskan groups by using the Background Information sheet on Alaska, and by using photos of Alaskan objects, such as the snow goggles or the miniature snow shoes, that are at the Pardee Home Museum.

- 3) Hand out the blank map of Alaska. Students research in an atlas or on the Internet and fill in place names, rivers, names of mountains, as well as territories of Native Alaskan groups.

**INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS:** Background Information Alaska; “Common Misconceptions” sheet; blank map, atlas, Internet, pencils; photos of objects from Pardee Home Museum.

**EXTENSION/CLOSURE:**

- 1) Students do more in-depth research on Native Alaskan groups.

## Background Information Alaska

The state of Alaska comprises an area of approximately 663,267 square miles which makes it the largest state in the United States. However, only 626,932 people live in Alaska which ranks it 47<sup>th</sup> among U.S. states in terms of population. Alaska's coast line is 34,000 miles, which is longer than the overall coast line of the continental United States. In overall size, Alaska is around 1/5 of the size of the continental United States. Most of Alaska is surrounded by water. To the north is the Arctic Ocean, to the south the Gulf of Alaska and the Pacific Ocean, and to the west the Bering Sea. To the east and the south, Alaska is bordered by Canada.

Alaska's capital is Juneau, but its largest city is Anchorage. Alaska can be divided into six main regions each of which has unique physical characteristics.

1) Southeastern Alaska or Alaskan Panhandle: This part has high, densely forested mountains which rise to 9,000 feet from the coast. It is also an area that is divided by many rivers and streams which results in the presence of hundreds of islands. Many small towns, glaciers and forests are located in this area. Tourism, fishing and forestry are some of the main industries. The climate is rather mild; the region sees chilly summers, temperate winters, and plenty of rainfall. It is here where some Native American groups like the Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian live.

2) South-central Alaska: The coastal parts of this region are very similar in climate to the Southeastern part; however, north of that region, there are many mountains, some of them more than 15,000 feet high. The highest mountain is Mt. McKinley which is over 20,000 feet. A few large rivers break through these mountains, opening up to the coast, creating numerous valleys that have a more moderate climate than the snowy and

stormy mountains. Most of Alaska's population lives in this part of the state. The economy is based on tourism, petroleum plants, transportation, and two military bases.

3) Southwestern Alaska and Bristol Bay: This area comprises the Alaskan Peninsula, the Aleutian Islands and Bristol Bay. The climate is rather wet, resulting in foggy summers and cold winters. Since this region is outside the forest zone, the only vegetation is grass and brush.

4) Interior Alaska: This is the central part of Alaska which is crossed by many rivers, for example, the Yukon and the Kuskokwim. Overall, elevations in this area are no higher than 600 feet, and the average is around 300 feet. This results in short but warm summers and long, cold winters. What is particular about the region is the fact that in many places, the soil is permanently frozen. Nevertheless, during the summer months, vegetables, barley, root crops, and oats grow on farms.

5) Seward Peninsula: The Northwest region of Alaska has short summers and long, hard winters as well. This region can be reached by boat from Seattle only during the summer months; while during the rest of the year, only service by plane is possible.

6) Arctic Slope: The most prominent characteristic of Northern Alaska is the Brooks Range, named after Alfred Hulse Brooks, who was a geologist with the United States Geological Survey from 1903 to 1924. The highest points of these mountains rise to about 9,000 feet and make traveling rather problematic. This is a highly remote area, and it is cut off from the rest of Alaska by hard winter conditions.

Alaska's first inhabitants came across the Bering Land Bridge, which, during the Pleistocene Ice Age – 1.81 million to 11,550 years before the present – connected Alaska

and eastern Siberia. The land became populated by the Inupiaq, the Inuit, the Yupik, and different American Indian groups. The first white people arriving in Alaska probably came from Russia. They were very much involved in the fur trade and hunted seals and sea otters for their fur.

The Inupiaq reside in the Northwest Arctic and the Bering Straits region, and their language is Inupiaq. Today, the Inupiaq still mostly live off their hunting and fishing efforts. If one member catches a whale, the entire family, even relatives living far away, are entitled to their share of the catch. In recent years, the Inupiaq have been concerned about the effects of global warming on their traditional ways of life: warmer winters make hunting on ice too dangerous and travel conditions unpredictable; it also causes flooding and erosion of coastal areas, thereby endangering small towns and villages.

The Yupik live along the coast of western Alaska, especially on the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta and along the Kuskokwim River, in southern Alaska and in western Alaska. Many years ago, when their cultures were not influenced yet by Western society, Yupik families lived in fish camps during the spring and the summer and in more permanent villages during the winter. Today, many families still provide most of their subsistence through fishing salmon and hunting seals.

The Aleuts' homeland is the Aleutian Islands and the western part of the Alaskan Peninsula. A high percentage of Aleuts are Christian today, which is a result of the arrival of missionaries during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The arrival of Russian settlers brought diseases and a disruption of Native lifestyles with it, which resulted in an enormous decimation of the Aleut population. In the past, Aleuts built houses that were partially

underground to keep occupants warm and dry and sheltered from cold winds. Aleuts were very skilled in making weapons, building boats, weaving baskets, and hunting animals.

The Haida and Tlingit are two prominent Northwest Coast cultures. They reside mostly in the Alaskan Panhandle. The Tlingit are actually spread out across the U.S.-Canada border. This culture places heavy emphasis on status and wealth, as well as generosity and proper behavior, which is best exemplified in the potlatch system. A potlatch is a gift-giving feast where hierarchical relations between individuals and clans are observed and reinforced. One person demonstrates their wealth and power by giving away their possessions. The person who is the recipient of the gifts is obliged to also offer gifts when they celebrate their own potlatch to demonstrate their status, wealth and power.

The Haida live on the Queen Charlotte Islands and in southeastern Alaska. They are very skilled in working with wood, metal and other materials, and became masters in artistically designing functional items like wooden boxes, pipes, and spoons. Living near the ocean, fishing activities have been very important to Haida people. Like the Tlingit, their society is also based on a ranked system which can be seen represented in the potlatch.

## Common Misconceptions about Alaska

*“The further north you get the colder it gets.”*

The Arctic region is warmed by heat from the ocean radiated through floating ice. Thousands of square miles of Alaska lowland are colder than Point Barrow, which is Alaska’s northernmost point.

*“Alaska is a land of ice and snow.”*

At Fairbanks, some 120 miles south of the Arctic Circle, it is sometimes 100° in the shade. The average snowfall in Arctic lowlands is less than the average in Virginia. Luxurious vegetation and mildness of climate have caused several regions of Alaska to be facetiously referred to as the “banana belt.”

*“People in Alaska live in ice houses.”*

The word *iglu* means building, and refers in Alaska to a house of earth and wood. Snow houses are occasionally built for emergency use on the trail, but are never used as permanent dwellings.

*“Alaska is remote from civilization.”*

Alaska’s neighbors are Canada, Russia, Norway, Iceland, and Greenland. Alaska is about 18 hours in direct flying time from Yokohama, Japan, or New York.

*“Alaska’s many glaciers indicate a cold climate.”*

Glaciers can form only in relatively warm climates with high mountains and heavy precipitation. Glaciers are found only in Alaska’s warmer areas (southeast, south central, southwest).

*“Nothing green grows in Alaska.”*

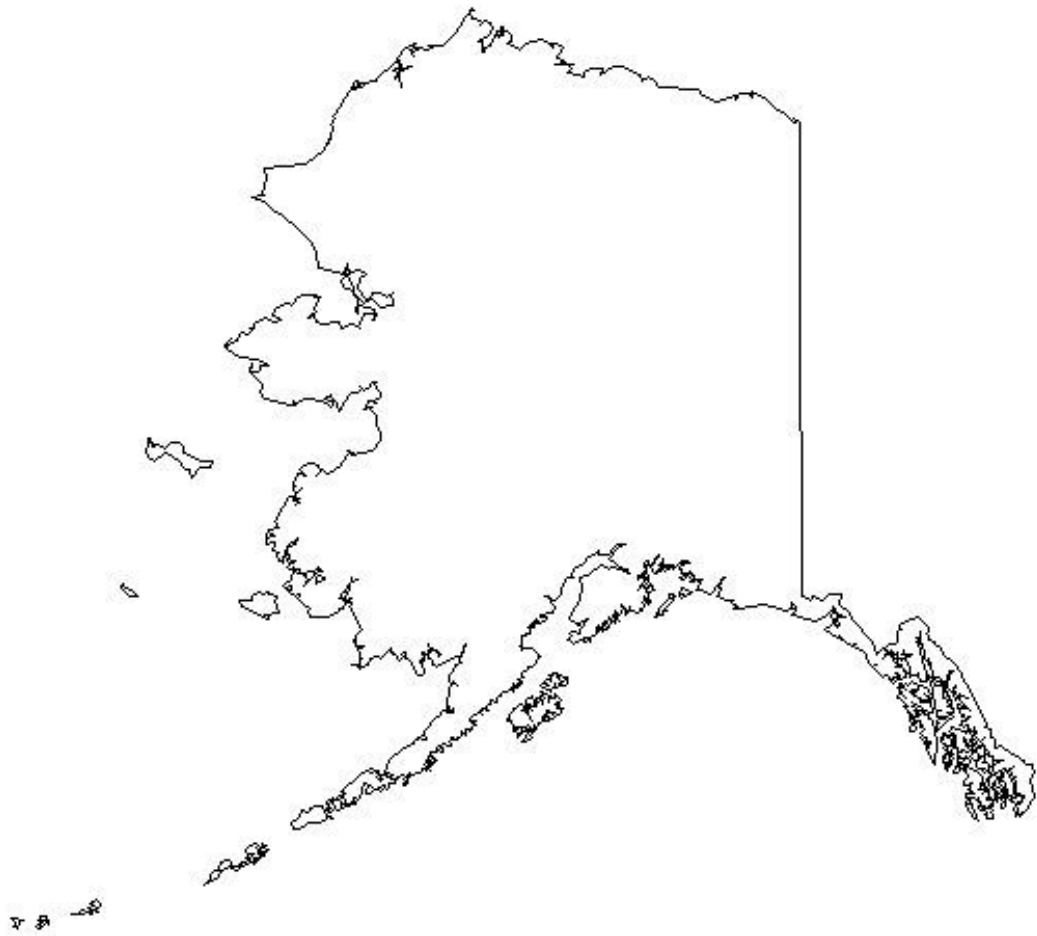
Alaska has forests, agricultural and grazing land. Cabbages, potatoes, and other hardy vegetables flourish far north of the Arctic Circle. Roses, lilacs, peonies, lilies, honeysuckles, and many varieties of bushes and berries grow profusely.

*“There is continuous darkness for three or four months in the Arctic.”*

The Arctic is never in total darkness, because of the refraction of light from below the horizon and the bright moonlight on the snow. The number of hours yearly during which print can be read outdoors is as great in the Arctic as in the tropics.

Source: Colby, M. 1940. *A Guide to Alaska. Last American Frontier*. New York: The Macmillan Company.







Snow goggles



Miniature snow shoes



Container

## Museum Catalogue Information on Objects

### Snow goggles

2 curved, oval shapes have horizontal ridge above the slit at mid-line. Inside edges of slit darkened. Twisted sinew cord attached at each side. Tag attached "Snow glasses used by Eskimos". 13.1 cm long, 4.6cm high.

### Miniature snow shoes

2 snow shoes of shaped wood held together with metal pin. 2 wood cross bars, with interwoven strings between. 2 leather moccasins tied with leather thong to string between snow shoes. Each 11.6 cm long, 4.6 cm wide.

### Container

Horn is almost completely encased in leather, with tube-like mouth covered by leather cap at one end. 5 rows of woven design and 4 rows near center. Helen Pardee's catalogue says "Horn for carrying – from Alaska". 37.5 cm long, 19.7 cm diameter.

## LESSON PLAN – MYTHS AND LEGENDS

TITLE: Myths and Legends

Time: 90 minutes

LEARNER POPULATION: grade level 5

CURRICULAR CONTEXT: part of Social Studies, U.S. History, Alaska

### OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this activity:

- 1) Students will be able to identify the Raven myth which is similar among many Native Alaskan groups.
- 2) Students will be able to compare Raven myth to different myths of their own cultures.
- 3) Students will be able to make raven masks.

### CONCEPTS/INFORMATION:

- Raven myth
- Making masks

### INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE:

- 1) Introduce the lesson to students by asking them about any myths or legends that are part of their cultural heritage.
- 2) Explain to students that they will hear the Raven myth which is part of the Alaskan and Northwest Coast cultures.
- 3) Hand out the Raven myth to students. Have one or more students read it out loud to the whole class. Afterwards, ask questions about the myth and about what it tells us about those cultures where it comes from. Also have students compare the myth to other culture's myths.
- 4) Introduce the mask making activity to students. Provide them with the model and the materials.

**INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS:** Raven myth; mask model, paper, scissors, elastic string, pencils, color crayons, stapler.

**EXTENSION/CLOSURE:**

- 1) Students make different masks which can be the totem animals of Alaskan clans, e.g. a wolf mask, a bear mask.

## Raven Myth

In that far away time when the people of the earth had no light and wanted it, they asked Raven to get it for them. Light was kept in the house of a supernatural being. Raven flew to the home of the supernatural and hid himself nearby and watched for several days. Every day he saw the daughter of the supernatural being go to the stream for a cup of water. One day Raven changed himself into an evergreen needle and floated down the stream. When the daughter of the house came to the stream for a drink Raven floated into her cup. However the daughter was suspicious and, thinking the needle might be Raven, brushed it out of the cup before drinking. The next day Raven changed himself into a grain of sand and this time when the daughter came to drink he rolled into her cup. Since he was so tiny, she did not see him and drank both the water and the grain of sand. Soon after the daughter of the supernatural gave birth to a child, which was Raven in disguise. The child grew rapidly, but one day he began to cry. He was given some bits of wood to play with, but continued to cry, all the time calling for the sun which was kept in a box in a corner of the house. Various playthings were offered the child, but he went on crying. Finally his grandfather relented and permitted the child to play with the sun. Now, the child was happy as he rolled the sun around the floor, flooding the house with light. As time went by the sun became his plaything, but it was put back in the box each night. One night, when all the supernaturals were asleep, Raven resumed his own form as a bird and, taking the sun out of the box, started to fly out through the smoke hole in the roof. Unfortunately, the sudden burst of light awakened the grandfather who called to the flames of the fire to catch Raven and hold him. The flames leaped upward trying to hold Raven and he became so discolored by the smoke that he turned black. However, Raven managed to break free of the flames and flew toward the earth with the sun. The grandfather started in pursuit; since Raven was burdened by carrying the heavy sun, the grandfather gained on him, and came closer and closer. Just as he was about to be captured Raven broke off a few bits of the sun to make it weigh less and threw the pieces into the sky, where they became stars. Again the grandfather drew closer and closer to Raven, and once more Raven broke off a piece of the sun, a large piece this time, and threw it into the sky, where it became the moon. With his last burst of strength the grandfather nearly reached Raven, but this time Raven threw the remaining piece of the

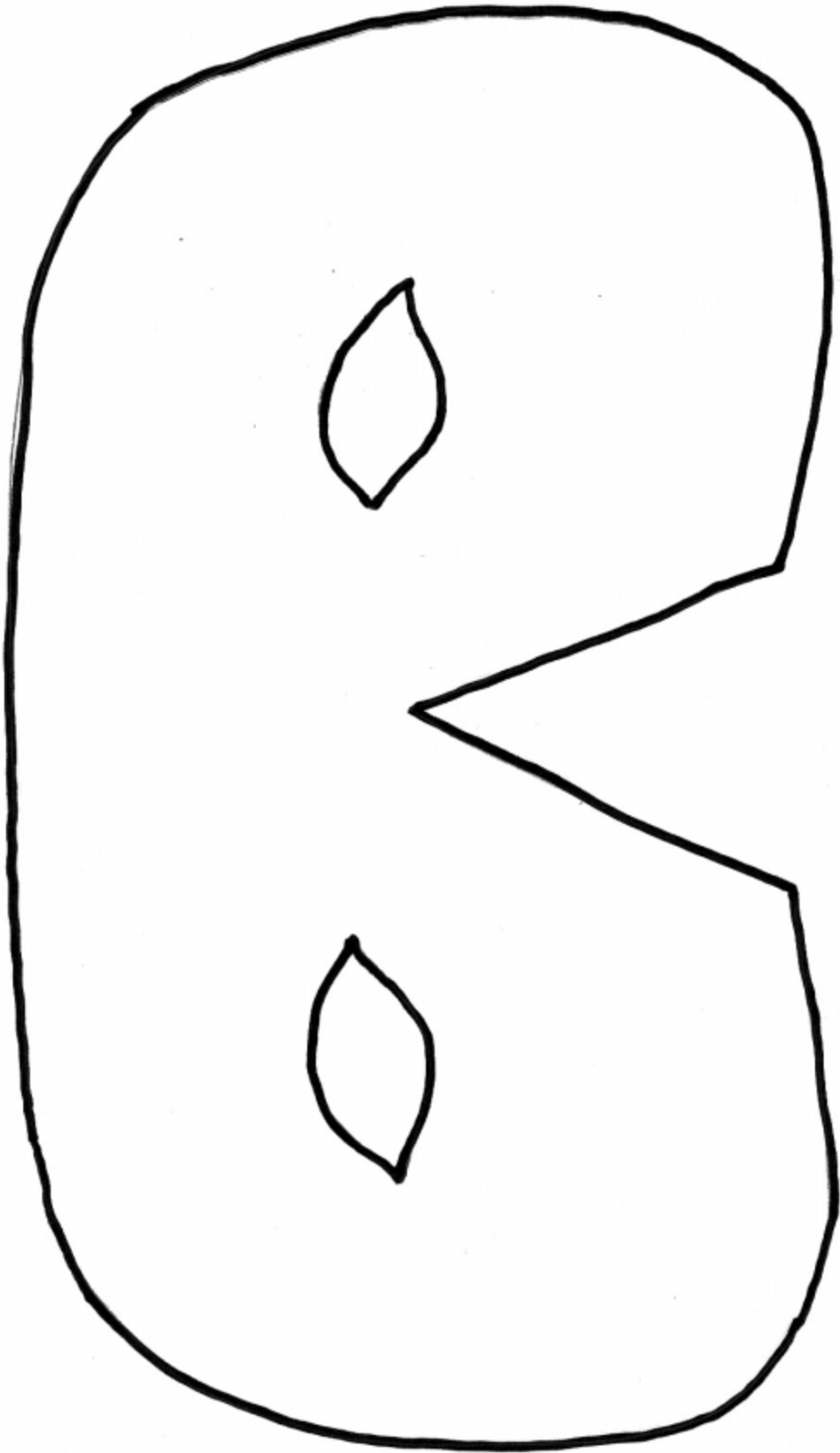


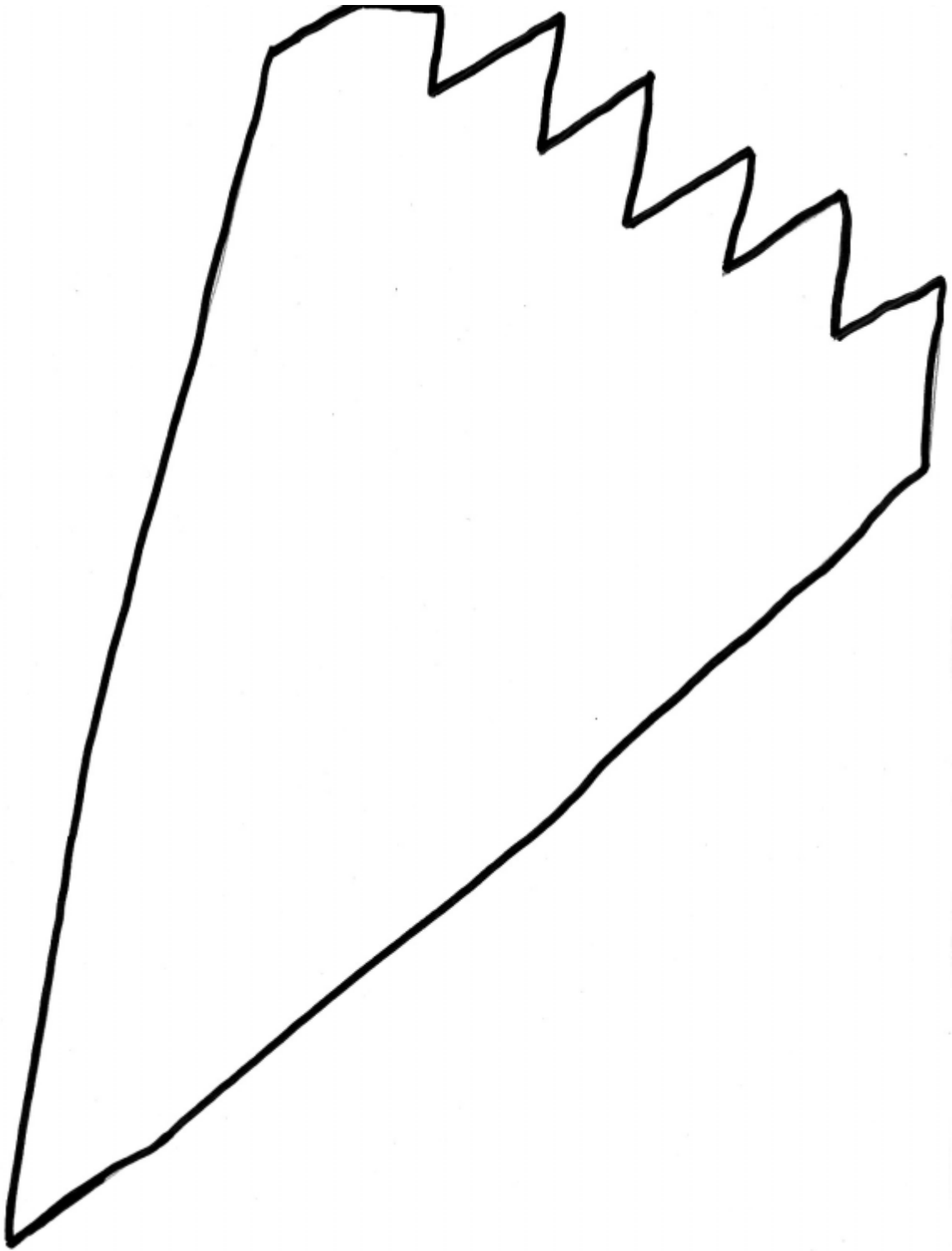
sun into the sky. All the pieces of the sun were now so scattered that they could never be put back together again, and Raven returned to the earth. It was in this way that Raven became black and all the people acquired the sun, moon, and stars.

Source: Inverarity, B. R. 1950. *Art of the Northwest Coast Indians*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. Pp. 33/34.

## Instructions for making the Raven mask

- 1) Trace the mask and the beak on construction paper.
- 2) Cut out mask and beak.
- 3) Decorate them.
- 4) Beak can be attached by folding ends over and stapling them to mask.
- 5) Put holes on both sides of mask.
- 6) Thread elastic string through holes.





Model for Raven mask

## LESSON PLAN – HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

TITLE: Historical Investigation

TIME: 45 minutes

LEARNER POPULATION: grade level 5

CURRICULAR CONTEXT: part of Social Studies; U.S. History, Alaska

### OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this activity:

- 1) Students will be able to describe the work of a historian by making creative guesses about the relationship of random documents.
- 2) Students will identify the relative nature of these interpretations by comparing their answers with those of fellow students.
- 3) Students will be able to work together as a group, and exchange, explain and show respect for each others' ideas.

### CONCEPTS/INFORMATION:

- What is history?
- How are documents and objects used in reconstructing history?
- How do historians make educated guesses about the logical relationship between documents?

### INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE:

- 1) Show photos of the Pardee Home. Explain how it became a museum, and how historians used the documents and objects inside the house to piece together ideas about who the Pardee Family was and how they lived.
- 2) Inform students that they get to be historians today.
- 3) Present the classroom with three documents and/or objects, e.g., photo of Mrs. Helen Pardee, copy of newspaper article about her collections, objects.

- 4) Ask the students to examine these documents and to think about how they are related, and what they tell us about a certain person (who/what/when/where/why).
- 5) Ask students to write down or draw their initial ideas (5 minutes).
- 6) Group work: Let students exchange and discuss their guesses within their groups, and have the groups report back their ideas to the whole class. Within groups, assign different roles (praiser, checker, recorder, task monitor, gate keeper).
- 7) Talk about how students might come up with slightly different interpretation of the documents depending on their individual backgrounds and perspectives. Historians have worked out certain historic facts about the Pardee family, but there are other areas which are still open to speculation.

**INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS:** Information from Pardee Home Museum Website; pictures of Pardee Home (see grade 4 unit on “Collecting”); three random documents and/or objects (see grade 4 unit on “Collecting”), paper, pencils/crayons

**EXTENSION/CLOSURE:**

- 1) Students bring in three objects that characterize them. Randomly and anonymously exchange them with other students. Each learner guesses about the “owner’s” life of his/her assigned objects. Afterwards, discuss ideas with that person.
- 2) Teacher brings in three random objects, and students make guesses about the owner. This could also be a unit on how archaeologists work.

## LESSON PLAN – SCULPTING AND CARVING

TITLE: Sculpting and Carving

Time: 60 minutes

LEARNER POPULATION: grade level 5

CURRICULAR CONTEXT: part of Social Studies, U.S. History, Alaska

### OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this activity:

- 1) Students will be able to identify art from Alaska.
- 2) Students will be able to identify different characteristics of Native Alaskan art.
- 3) Students will be able to identify famous Haida artist Bill Reid.

### CONCEPTS/INFORMATION:

- Characteristics of Native Alaskan art
- Haida artist Bill Reid

### INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE:

- 1) Show students the photos of Native Alaskan art at the Pardee Home Museum.
- 2) Introduce students to the characteristics of Native Alaskan art by using the Background Information sheet.
- 3) Hand out different photos that show Alaskan art and let students identify these characteristics.
- 4) Introduce Haida artist Bill Reid and his art.
- 5) Students decorate small cups with Alaskan-style art. Distribute empty yoghurt/paper/styrofoam cups; then have students fit paper around the cup. Students fit an animal or a scene on the paper which then is glued on the cup.

**INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS:** Background Information Alaskan art, Background Information Bill Reid; photos of Native Alaskan art at the Pardee Home Museum; yoghurt/paper/styrofoam cups; paper, pencils, crayons, glue, scissors.

**EXTENSION/CLOSURE:**

- 1) Students do research on other Native Alaskan artists.



## Background Information Northwest Coast Art

Artists from Alaska and the Northwest Coast use different media for their works: mostly wood, but also stone, bone, ivory, and metal were popular materials, especially for carving and sculpting. An intriguing aspect of this art is the use of various shapes which provide puzzle-pieces in developing the anatomical features of an animal or a person into complete figures.

The following are some of the shapes that can be found in Alaskan art:

- a) “Ovoid,” which can be described as rounded rectangles or angular ovals; there is variation in their thickness and length, and they are commonly used in the eyes, joints and as space fillers.
- b) “U-form,” which is a thick arch whose ends taper to sharp points; they are of varying proportions, and there is no right side up. U-forms are used as contours of the body of animals, as representations of feathers and as space fillers.
- c) “S-shape,” which is in the shape of the letter ‘s,’ with the ends tapering to cusps; there is a great variety in proportions, and usually s-shapes are used as basis for arms, legs or ribs and to connect other parts of a figure and as space fillers.
- d) “Formline”: this is a continuous grid-like pattern which creates silhouettes that are fitted with other shapes to make a complete figure. These lines can begin as fine narrow lines, swell out and return to narrow again. Most commonly, they trace the outline of a form, but can also become part of the form itself.

All these shapes can be found in the following picture:



Source: Penney, D. W. 1998. Native Arts of North America. Paris: Terrail.

Some general words about the style of the art: some experts have characterized it as repetitive, often symmetrical, and symbolic. Furthermore, it is “distributive,” which means that different parts of an animal are spread out across the design field. Another characteristic is “distortion”: for example, sometimes an artist plays with perspectives and shows more sides of one animal or person than could actually be seen. Moreover, certain features of a figure are sometimes stressed more than others, while others are condensed, so that not everything is shown. Figures are often stylized and are not natural representations. Finally, Alaskan art exhibits “frontality” which means that heads and bodies face outward and confront the observer.

Color pigments made from fungus, moss, berries, charcoal, minerals, ochre and vegetable compounds were used in art; they were mixed with chewed salmon eggs and oil for consistency, and then ground in small mortars. The main colors are black, red and blue-green.

Another feature that is noteworthy about Alaskan art is the combination of function and art. The use and function of objects were of most concern to the artists. Design was “subordinate,” meaning that it had to fit the shape and the size of the object; for example, an animal design would have to be split from head to tail to create a cloak-like shape which is wrapped around the object.

## Background Information on Haida Artist Bill Reid

William R. Reid, who is one of the most famous artists from Alaska, was born on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 1920 in Victoria, British Columbia. He died in 1998. His mother was Haida, his father a German-American. During his childhood, Reid was not very involved in Haida culture, as his mother tried to leave her heritage behind and assimilated into American mainstream culture. As a result, it took Bill Reid a few years, actually until his adult life, to discover his Haida roots.

At age 20, Bill left his home and became a radio announcer. He worked at many different stations, eventually being employed by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). It was during that time that he took classes in the processes and techniques of European jewelry-making; he often visited museums to study the art of his ancestors, and went to his mother's home village, Skidegate, located on the Queen Charlotte Islands, when he was 23 years old.

At that time, Reid met his grandfather for the first time, and they developed a strong bond, something which Bill Reid said that he missed in his relationship with his father. Even though his grandfather spoke hardly any English, they were able to establish a relationship; through art, he learned the tools and the knowledge involved in carving and sculpting. Bill recognized his affinity with his Haida ancestors, and he developed a profound respect for their art. Through this process, he was finally able to discover his identity, which he had not found in modern Western society.

Reid's life changed rapidly when, one day, while announcing the news on the radio, he read about a grant offered by the University of British Columbia. This grant was supposed to be used to re-create the totem poles and houses of a Haida village the

university campus. Reid contacted the Anthropology Department right away to offer his assistance, and this is how his apprenticeship in rediscovering Haida art started. Together with another famous Kwakiutl artist, Doug Cranmer, Reid was in charge as a designer and director of the program. Between the years 1958-1962, they completed two traditional house structures and seven totem poles as well as other big wood carvings.

Later, he opened his own jewelry business. Reid also took on young natives as apprentices. Reid became known in scholarly and journalistic circles. Several large museums wanted his input as a consultant and curator for exhibits on Northwest Coast art, and he worked on several books.

Reid created much art, including jewelry, but also worked with wood and new materials, like bronze. He also used new techniques, like large-scale casting. Reid is probably best known for his oversize sculptures, “The Raven and the First Men” and for “The Killer Whale,” now displayed in museums.



Carving from horn



Ulu: Knife



Totem pole carving





Souvenir spoon



Carved container

## Museum Catalogue Information on Objects

### Carving from horn

Oval, curved horn tapers to point at one end. Band of rough horn around opening. Rest is scraped and polished with Northwest Coast Indian Raven design with another face above. Helen Pardee's catalogue says "Buffalo horn carved by Alaska Indians" 27.3 cm long, 8.5 cm diameter.

### Ulu: Knife

Handle is curved tooth, tapers to point at one end. Other end has carved seal or walrus head with blue seed bead eye. Hafted into seal underside is flat jade blade. Polished. Used for cutting. Blade 16 cm long, handle 11.5 cm long.

### Totem Pole Carving

Square base is separate from pole. Beaver at bottom, bird (Raven) at top. Cone-shape on its head. Flat back. Made from Argillite, a black polished stone. 19.8 cm tall, base 4.8 x 4.3 cm.

### Souvenir spoon

Made from Silver. Handle is shaped, and curves slightly. Design cut into top surface of handle is bird head. "Alaska" scratched in at one corner. These kinds of souvenirs were often pre-stamped by souvenir companies and worked by Natives. 11.8 cm long, 4.3 cm wide.

### Carved container

Bowl-like container carved from wood. 2 heads on each side. Animal designs on body.

## Resources for Teachers

Colby, M.

1940 *A Guide To Alaska. Last American Frontier.* New York: The Macmillan Company.

Flayderman, E. N.

1972 *Scrimshaw and Scrimshanders. Whales and Whalemen.* New Milford, Connecticut: N. Flayderman & Co.

Lee, M.

1999 Zest or Zeal. Sheldon Jackson and the Commodification of Alaska Native Art. In *Collecting Native America 1870-1960*, edited by Krech III, S. and B. A. Hail. pp. 25-42. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.