Iñuit Cultural Orientation

Iñupiat Heritage Center
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Iñupiat History, Language and Culture
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Topics discussed

- Inuit in a Global Perspective
- North Slope Iñupiat
  - Location and climate
  - History
  - Major Organizations for the Region
  - Inupiat Values
  - Cultural Activities
  - Traditional Beliefs
  - Climate Change
  - Language
Iñuit People Across the Circumpolar Region

- Russia
- United States
- Canada
- Greenland
Language and Culture of the Iñuit People

All speak varying dialects of the Iñuit language.

Iñuit culture varies across the region depending on environment and country of government.
Universal themes among all Iñuit

- Respect for natural environment of the Arctic
- Understanding that we are of all the same people
Iñuit of Alaska
Iñupiat of the North Slope
Location and Climate

- Farthest North Municipal Government in the US.
- Extreme cold weather climate
  - Average winter temperature –20 below, average summer temperature 40 above
- Above the Arctic Circle
  - 24 hour day light in the summer, 24 hour darkness in the winter (no sun, but twilight during the day)
  - Months in between are transition months where we gain or lose daylight
Summer in Barrow
Winter in Barrow
History of the North Slope

Short video clip
U.S. Navy heavy presence in Northern Alaska mid 1940s through 1950s
- Sole purpose of oil exploration

Established the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory (NARL) lasting throughout the 1960s and 1970s, (which has now been converted into Iḷisaġvik College)
Major Organizations on the North Slope

- North Slope Borough – Municipal Government
- Arctic Slope Regional Corporation – Regional Native Corporation
- Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope – Regional Tribal Organization
- Arctic Slope Native Association – Regional Health and Social Services Organization
- Every community has tribal organization, village corporation and city government.
Iñupiat Values

The Iñupiaq people have identified with 12 major values that guide their way of life.
Respect for Nature

Essential for survival
We are communities of large extended families
Avoidance of Conflict

We must live in peace with one another
Cooperation

Working together we can accomplish great things
Remaining humble will bring you wisdom
The tradition of hunting has been passed down for thousands of years, keeping us alive.
Sharing brings joy
Caring for one another makes our communities stronger.
Laughter is the best medicine
Knowledge of Our Language

Language is what connects us to our heritage
Love and Respect for Elders and One Another

Greetings an Elder – Sign of respect
Remember to be humble, kind, and listen
We believe in a higher power
General Information of Interest

- Our way of life is very important to us
  - Our local organizations are supportive of values
- People are very friendly on the North Slope
  - Locals may be wary of outsiders
  - It is appropriate to practice these values in respects to the people
North Slope Culture

Way of Life
People of Whaling
Way of Life

- Our culture and livelihood depend upon our environment and how we survive
- Whaling a major source of sustenance and is the foundation of our social structure
- Inland Inupiaqs traveled to coastal whaling communities to take part in whaling and traveled back home after the season.
- Cultural Calendar based on seasonal activities
Social Structure

- **Umialik – Whaling Captain**
  Usually the leaders in the community and historically those who were successful in providing sustenance for a community.

- **Men and Women Equal**
  - Men typically the hunters
  - Women typically prepare food, materials

- An umialik has the financial responsibility of a whaling crew and is also responsible for the safety of the whaling crew.
Over 50 whaling crews in Barrow alone
Crews made up of large extended families
Captains are leaders in the communities, now and throughout history
The Tradition of Whaling

There is a cycle of events that happen throughout the year that perpetuate our livelihood:

- Adaptability through change and technology
- Preparation
- Actual Hunt
- Celebrations throughout the year
- Governing agencies – BWCA, AEWC and IWC
Preparation Activities

- Bearded Seal Hunting
- Caribou Hunting
- Sewing Parkas
- Maintaining Snow machines
- Sewing Skin Boat
- Cleaning out Ice Cellar
- Breaking trail on ice
- Whaling time!
Ugruliaq – Bearded seal hunting

Takes place in June and July
Caribou Hunting Year Round

Gathering tendons to make lvalu
Creating or mending fur clothing

Needed for warmth
Amiq Season

Usually done in February
Us Whalers have great respect and pride in our skin sewers who work hard to keep us afloat.
Cleaning out Ice Cellars

Always done before spring whaling
Whaling

- **Spring**
  - Happens in April/May
  - Traditional seal skin boat used
  - Crews camp on the ice, near open lead
  - Harvested whales pulled onto the ice by block and tackle
  - Whales are butchered on the ice, meat hauled in

- **Fall**
  - Happens in October
  - Modern ocean boat with outboard motor
  - Boats used on the open ocean, no ice
  - Boats tow in the whale, loaders bring it to location of butchering
Piuqtuq – Pursuing the Bowhead
Happiness is always after giving Thanks
Takes a community to pull up a giant
Agviuq – Buthchering

Diving and Sharing the Whale
Modern ways

Fall Whaling

Modern ways
Fall Whaling
Modern ways
After the whale is caught

- Brought back to the captain's house and a portion is cut into serving sized pieces
- Whole whaling crew works together to process whale
- Cooked, served to the community
- A portion is put into the underground ice cellar for storage until celebration
Serving plate
Celebrations

- **Feasts**
  - Apugauti
  - Nalukataq (June) – Celebrating successful spring hunt
  - Thanksgiving
  - Christmas

- **Kivgiq**
  - Major regional Eskimo dance festival (every 2 yrs)

- **Eskimo Games**
  - Christmas
  - July 4th
  - Piuraagiaqta (spring festival)
Nalukataq

Spring Whaling Festival
Blanket toss

Nalukataq

Blanket toss
Kalukaq
Box dance drum
Eskimo Dance
Games of strength and agility

Eskimo games—Qitik

Games of strength and agility
Climate Change

A very real issue
Climate Change effects

- Coastal Erosion
  - Home site threat
  - Archaeological threat

- Changing ice
  - Open water in the Arctic Ocean
  - Unstable ice conditions for subsistence hunting
Kivalina, Alaska
Coastal Erosion
Climate Change and us

- The end of the Iñupiaq Eskimo…?
- We have endured change for thousands of years, and will remain resilient.
The Inupiaq Language

General Information
Language Facts
Common Easy Phrases
30% of Inupiaq people are fluent speakers
Language is endangered due to western culture and government
Dramatic changes in lifestyle resulting from oil development may be a major factor
Iñupiaq language is more prevalent in certain communities
Efforts in language revival successful
Interesting Facts of the Language

- Over 67 words for ice
  - Piqaluyak – chunk of freshwater ice
- Over 46 words for snow
  - Auksalaq – rapidly melting snow
- Over 70 words for ‘over there’
  - Amani – located over there (not visible)
  - Aptumani – located with that one over there (not visible)
  - Avuuna – via, by way of over there (visible)
Quick and Easy Phrases

- Quyanaq – Thank you
- Uvlaaluataq – Good Morning
- Paglağivsi – Greetings
- Suviñ/Suvat? – What’s up?
- Alappaa! – I’m cold!
- Hauk – I’m tired
- Qanuģitpiñ? – How are you?
- Nakuuruņa – I am fine
- Aasi ilviñ? – And you?
- Uvlaakulu – See you tomorrow
Available Resources for Learning Iñupiaq

- Iñupiaq wordfinder available on the App Store and the Play Store (iPhone and Android)

- Online licenses for Iñupiaq language learning program available free by request, please call 907–852–0422 for more information
Quyanaqpak, or thank you for having us, now we’ll be on our way.