

Study Guide

Neeluk

An Eskimo Boy in the Days of the Whaling Ships

By Frances Kittredge with illustrations by Howard "Weyahok" Rock

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"[Neeluk] shows very well the values of sharing, caring for one another, being careful, and respecting one another and all nature, that people in that time — and those of us living today — live by."

—Winton Weyapuk Jr., Village of Wales

This study guide offers a look at the Inupiat world during the late 19th century through the eyes of a seven-year-old boy named Neeluk. Students will have the opportunity to explore the life, history, and culture of the Native people of Alaska's Arctic before the introduction of Western influences with the following ideas and activities:

Math

Objective:

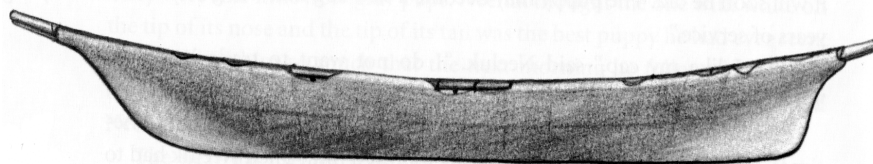
Compare the time it would take to travel the distance from the western United States to the Arctic Coast during the late 19th century compared to present day.

Facts:

Ships from Alaska sailed to and from San Francisco in the late 19th century, but soon after the Klondike and Nome gold rushes (1897-1900), Seattle became a better choice. Dutch Harbor was the meeting point, year-round, of all ship traffic. Port Clarence was the summer hub for whalers, traders, the U.S. government, and others. Ships could not get to the Cape before late June or early July, because of ice. Ships hurried to clear out of the Arctic in September and the Bering Strait in October, in order to avoid being caught in the ice and stranded until the following June, if their ship didn't break up first. The time it took to travel by ship varied depending on the route (how far out from the coasts) they traveled and the weather and winds for that particular year and season.

Math Activity:

Measure the varying distances in miles from San Francisco or Seattle to Anchorage, Nome, Teller, or Port Clarence. Divide that number by the speed with which an airplane travels (500 mph) to give the total time in hours it would take to travel by plane. Compare those answers to the 17 days it took in 1892 to travel by ship from San Francisco to Port Clarence.



Geography

Objective:

Learn the mountain ranges in the western United States and Canada and compare the tree line and river routes of the Arctic using maps.

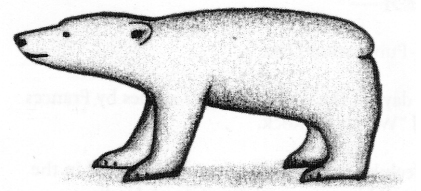
Geography Activity:

Trace the well-known mountain ranges in the western United States and Canada: Rocky Mountains, Cascade Mountains, Coast Range.

1. Which ones connect to the mountains of Alaska?
2. Which ones end near Cape Prince of Wales?

Trace the tree line and river routes in the Arctic. Some villages were near or in trees, even spindly ones.

1. If they didn't have large wood, how and when would arctic dwellers learn of it?
2. Which rivers might come from forest areas far away?



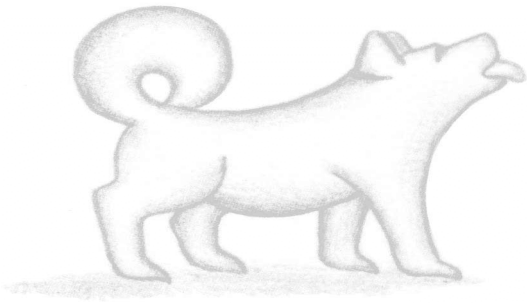
Language Arts

Objective:

Create a story about an activity that you and a few friends might do together.

Language Arts Activity:

Just as Neeluk and his friends played on the beach with a ball, come up with a story of an activity that you and your friends do together. Tell it from the view of an outsider (third person) watching.



Objective:

Communicate through words alone to describe an everyday object found in your home and ask someone to guess its name and function.

Fact:

The author, Frances Kittredge, had to think about accurate detail while writing this book about everyday life in the Arctic and about Neeluk who lived long ago.

Language Arts Activity:

Write an accurate description of an item found in your home: kitchen, garage, toolbox, etc. See if you can describe the object so that a person who lived 500 or more years ago would be able to picture in his or her mind what it looks like and how it works or what it is used for. Read your

description to someone to see if they can tell what you have written about. Draw a picture if necessary.

Social Studies

Objective:

Bring various bones and sinew from a chicken and discuss what tool they could be used for.

Facts:

Huge bones from the jaws of whales were used for monument markers at the village. Large bones were also used in place of timber for walls and roofs of their underground homes (*inne*), since they had no trees nearby, in some instances, for hundreds of miles.

Social Studies Activity:

Get some skin (sinew) from a bone of an animal in the kitchen. It can come from a beef roast, ham, turkey leg, or even a chicken leg. Discuss Inupiat “thread.” Bring small and large bones and discuss what could be made from small sea mammal bones.



Ask your parents and grandparents or elderly neighbor if they can think of an early utensil, tool, or implement that people would find strange or might not recognize today. Perhaps you could take a photo or drawing of it or even borrow it to show to the class.

Facts:

Fairway Rock near Cape Prince of Wales was a favorite place where Native people gathered many varieties of eggs. Today in the United States, it is illegal to take eggs from protected birds, except for subsistence hunters.

Social Studies Activity:

Most of us eat chicken eggs. Can you name some of the many birds' eggs that early people ate in Alaska?

Objective:

Research clothing worn by the Inupiat people in the Arctic.

Social Studies Activity:

1. How many kinds of fur might one find in a single *atigi* or parka during the old days and in the present time?
2. How was some of their clothing waterproof for whaling and hunting?
3. List the ways that the seal was used.



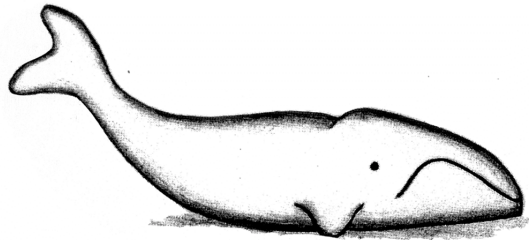
Field Trips

Zoo Trip:

If your class plans a trip to the zoo, make a list of the animals in *Neeluk* and perhaps add some of the other animals in Arctic Alaska that you find from outside reading. Include land and sea mammals as well as the most common birds in the region. Record the ones you find in a notebook along with a sketch of the animal or bird.

Aquarium Trip:

Natives of Alaska eat a lot of fish. If your class plans a trip to the aquarium, learn how many types of salmon there are and what other fish Native Alaskans eat.



About the Author and the Artist

Minnesota native Frances Kittredge arrived in Cape Prince of Wales in 1900, when she was twenty-six years old. She came north for two years, joining her sister and brother-in-law, Ellen and William Lopp, who were among the first non-Natives to settle in Wales.

While there, she took special interest in local customs, especially how the villagers' work habits, and their children's play, changed with the seasons. Frances took notes as she talked with the people about their way of life, which she wrote into a manuscript — a simple story illustrating everyday life in Wales, month by month, as seen through the eyes of a fictional Inupiat child named Neeluk.

Frances commissioned a young Inupiat man named Howard Rock, an art student at the University of Washington, to paint and sketch a series of culturally and historically accurate illustrations for her story collection. Remembered today as a gifted artist and founding editor of the Pulitzer-Prize-nominated *Tundra Times* newspaper, Rock was also a very important political activist on behalf of Alaska Native people

Frances Kittredge died in 1940, leaving her unpublished Neeluk stories and Howard Rock paintings to family members, who kept them for several decades. Finally, during the 1980s, Kathleen Lopp Smith, a granddaughter of Tom and Ellen Lopp, received the Lopp and Kittredge Alaska archives and transcribed and compiled letters, journals, and stories of her grandmother, and her great-aunt Frances. With assistance from many other members of the Lopp-Kittredge family, these Neeluk stories and Howard Rock paintings were published at last.