Alaska Native Transition Skills

Iñupiaq Sewing Skills

Rain Van Den Berg and Frances Gage
UAA Center for Human Development 2020 (Updated 2025)

Developed for the Northwest Arctic Borough School District surrounding region as a demonstration project to show how traditional skills can be supported and integrated into transition planning for youth with IEPs. These materials were created through the Developmental Disabilities Act partnership of the Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education and the Center for Human Development, with funding from the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

Land Acknowledgments:

Rain Van Den Berg would like to acknowledge that this curriculum was written on the unceded territories of the Sheetk'á Kwáan on Lingít Aaní, also known as Sitka, Alaska. She acknowledges that Lingít (Tlingit) peoples have been stewards of the land on which she works and resides since time immemorial, and she is grateful for that stewardship and incredible care.

Frances Gage would like to say *Taikuu* (thank you) to the Iñupiaq peoples for their continued stewardship of the lands and waters around Kotzebue where she makes her home, and to all Alaska Native people across the state that have lived in balance and respect in their Indigenous homelands since time immemorial.

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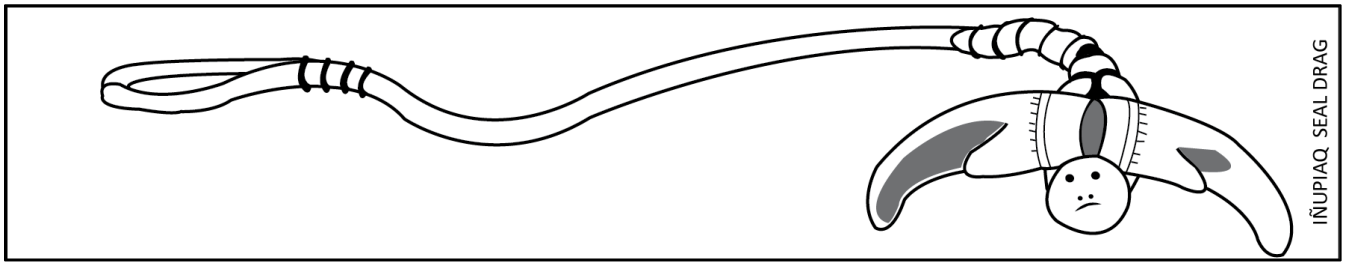
About the Authors

Rain Van Den Berg is an education and training consultant with a background in education, health education, project management, and facilitation. She has a BA in Secondary Education, and a Master's of Public Health in Community Health Education. In addition to the Alaska Native Transition Skills project, she has developed other transition guides for Alaskan students for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. She also supports non-profit organizations focused on supporting children who experience disabilities and promoting health in refugee and immigrant communities. She lives in Sitka, Alaska.

Frances Gage is the Special Education Coordinator for the Northwest Arctic Borough School District. Frances co-authored the Alaska Native Transition Skills curriculum units *Self-Employment and Financial Literacy* and *Iñupiaq Sewing* (2020); *Alaska Native Post-Secondary Transition Skills: Create Meaningful IEP Transition Plans* (2024); and *Growing Transition Skills through Connection to Indigenous Values* (2025). She holds a degree in Special Education K–12 and Elementary Education K–8, as well as a Master's Degree in Rural Development. She has taught and worked for the Northwest Arctic Borough School District for 17 years.

Frances has lived in Kotzebue, AK, for 20 years and is a mixed-race Koyukon Athabaskan and Caucasian person from the Yukon River village of Galena, AK. She is the daughter of Gordon and Ruby Cruger (Galena, AK) and the granddaughter of Charlie and Mary Carlo (Ruby, AK). She has raised her daughters, Larissa and Rhone, and two dogs, Oly and Olive, in Kotzebue with her husband, Robin. She and her family have practiced many subsistence and traditional activities that include picking berries, hunting, beading, sewing, and camping.

Note about the Header Image



The uqsiutaq, or “seal drag,” was historically used by Iñupiaq hunters to pull seals home after a hunt. The toggle fit into a slit in the seal’s chin or lip, and the leather strap was used to drag it across the snow. Traditionally carved from bone or ivory, the toggle often had protective designs to bring hunting success.

This drawing, based on a piece from the Arctic Studies Smithsonian collection, shows a seal head and two mittens. It reflects the skills needed to provide for family and community while living in harmony with the Land. The mittens symbolize home and the importance of sewing to keep people warm and safe. Additionally, seal skins are an important resource for Iñupiaq sewers.
Created by Rain Van Den Berg for use in this curriculum.

Nome Seal Hunter Image: Lou and Gilbert Adamec Collection; Anchorage Museum, B93.12.39B.
Seal Drag Image: Lt. P. H. Ray (collector), Museum: National Museum of Natural History, Museum ID Number: E056625

Table of Contents

Welcome **5**

Introduction **7**

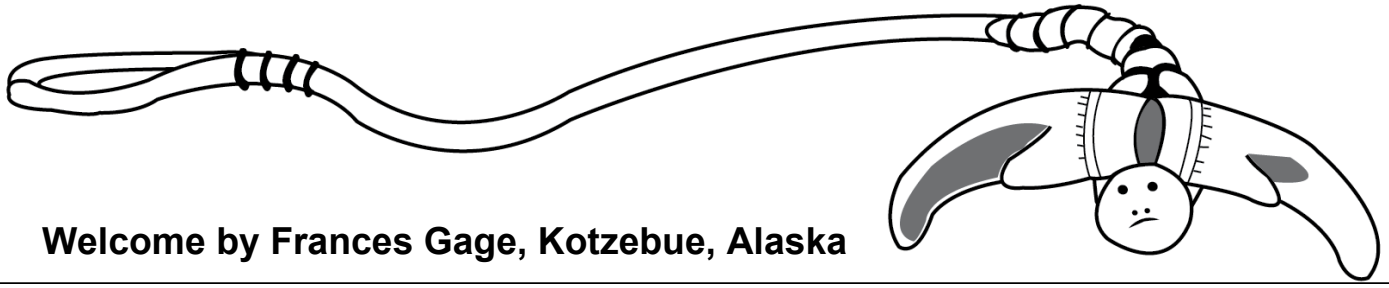
Iñupiaq Sewing Skills **9**

- Iñupiaq Sewing Part 1 10
- Iñupiaq Sewing Part 2 15
- Iñupiaq Artist Profile Maija Lukin 30
- Iñupiaq Artist Profile Mary Lou Sours 45
- Sewing Tools 59
- How to Use a Pattern 72
- Animal Sewing Project (Running Stitch) 84
- Bag Sewing Project (Whip Stitch) 93

Additional Resources for Teachers **107**

Appendix 1: Alaska Cultural Standards **108**

Appendix 2: Iñupiaq Values Definitions **110**



Welcome by Frances Gage, Kotzebue, Alaska

Uvlulluataq (good day) from the Northwest Arctic!

Hello! My name is Frances Gage. I am a mixed race Koyukon Athabaskan and Caucasian person from the Yukon River village of Galena, AK. I grew up in Galena as the youngest of 7 children surrounded by cousins and friends. As a child, I was often in the company of my grandmother and aunts who would gather together and spend their time sewing, beading, and talking, mixing the English and Koyukon Athabaskan languages. Kotzebue has been my home for 15 years and is where I am raising my daughters, Larissa and Rhone, and two dogs, Oly and Olive. We practice many subsistence and traditional activities that include picking berries, hunting, beading, sewing, and camping. I am so excited to be a part of this curriculum and unit development and hope that you and the students enjoy the lessons.

The northwest arctic region is the indigenous home of the Iñupiaq people. Kotzebue, also known as Qikiqtaġruk, which means "small island" in Iñupaitun (the language spoken by the Iñupiaq people) is the largest village in the northwest arctic region. It is considered a hub village, which means that large commercial passenger aircraft and shipping services all come through Kotzebue and then smaller commuter aircraft distributes passengers and goods to the smaller communities. Kotzebue is located on a 3-mile-long gravel spit on the Baldwin Peninsula, and is approximately 33 miles North of the Arctic Circle.

Traditionally the area of Kotzebue was used as a trading and gathering location for the local Native people for over 600 years because of its location to the three rivers of the Kobuk, Selawik, and Noatak Rivers, which all drain into Kotzebue Sound. The land and water provide many people with abundant opportunities to live a subsistence lifestyle including but not limited to harvesting of seal, fish, crab, walrus, caribou, moose, various types of berries, and vegetation. Traditional activities include hunting, trapping, fishing, carving, dancing, sewing, and beading.

In the summer, the region gets 24 hours of daylight. The day before the winter solstice in December the sun rises for about an hour and 40 minutes. The snowy period of time lasts between September and May. The summers are usually cool and cloudy with temperatures rarely rising above 60°F and the winters are generally cold, windy, and snowy.

There are 11 Iñupiaq villages in the region. The region covers approximately 36,000 square miles of land, which is roughly the size of Indiana. The population of each village ranges from ~100 people to ~3,200 people. Kotzebue is the largest populated village. There are 12 schools that provide services for PreK–12th grades. The racial makeup of the villages is mainly Iñupiaq people, with Kotzebue having a wider range of cultures/races. The District Office for the Northwest Arctic Borough School District is located in Kotzebue along with the Maniilaq Health Center which is the primary health care system for the region. Each village has a clinic that is staffed by Community Health Aides who can treat common health concerns. Some economic activities for the region include mining, government, health care, transportation, services, and

construction. Red Dog Mine, the world's largest zinc and lead mine, is a large employer in the region.

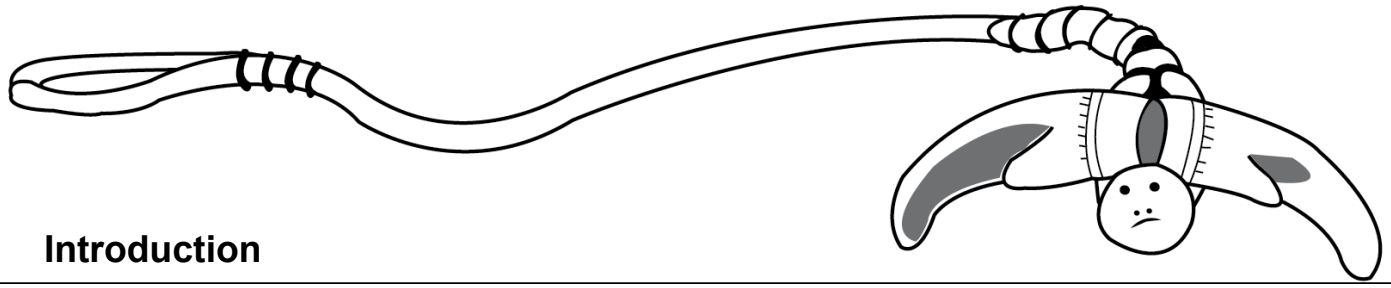
One of our goals with this curriculum is to help people unfamiliar with this region better understand indigenous traditions and cultures, and how those inform skills needed for the transition to adulthood. This curriculum engages students by using stories and examples that are familiar to teach real life skills. Culture bearers and guest Elders are invited to guide the skills and values in many lessons. Two units were created in this project. Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation advised on what should be included and worked closely with us to make sure the content was accurate in the Self-Employment and Financial Literacy Skills unit. In the Traditional Sewing Skills unit, our featured Iñupiaq sewing artists advised on content, provided pictures to use in the student materials, and reviewed the unit as a whole. We are grateful for their guidance and involvement in this project.

This curriculum can easily be adapted for other regions in Alaska. Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation departments are available in most Alaskan communities to assist students with special needs as they transition to work and life in the community. The sewing unit features Iñupiaq sewing examples and artists, but the skills are fundamental skills that can easily be adapted for other regions or traditional art forms.

Taikuu (Thank you)!

—Frances Gage

2020


IÑUPIAQ SEAL DRAG

Introduction

The purpose of this curriculum project is to improve the quality of life, connection to local community, and increase work related skills for teens and young adults with disabilities who live in rural Alaska. It is meant to provide guidance in how traditional values and knowledge can be incorporated into Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for youth who experience disabilities as part of their required transition goals. The skills are meant to create options for youth with disabilities to engage in their communities and culture as they transition to adults. Though each chapter of this project ties to the cultural values and topics of a specific region of Alaska, the skills can be used and adapted more broadly.

In the Dillingham project, we focused on basic skills to engage youth in the subsistence fishery. It was written for youth with IEPs who have a higher level of functional needs. The curriculum weaves in Yup'ik values, but the content can be used in many places around Alaska where fishing and life near cold water are part of daily life.

This chapter of the project is focused on traditional Iñupiaq sewing skills. It is written for youth with IEPs who have more independence in their day-to-day functioning. The projects provide adaptations so they can be matched to a variety of student abilities.

Goal setting and making a plan that works: Our partner at Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation identified the barrier of an understanding of planning, goal setting, and achieving goals as fundamental skills that should be included in this unit. In addition to a lesson on setting goals and one on facing challenges, all lessons in both units reinforce goal-setting skills. In each lesson, the teacher shares the learning objectives for that lesson, describes the specific activities the students will do to achieve the objectives, and reflects with the students at the end to see if the learning objectives were achieved. This need to develop goal setting and achieving skills for Alaska Native Youth is echoed in the article by Doyle et al. (2009), *The Educational Aspirations/Attainment Gap Among Rural Alaska Native Students.*

Alaska Cultural Standards: Each lesson is tied to the Alaskan Cultural Standards developed by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. A summary document of these standards is included in the appendix.

There are two units in this curriculum: *Self-Employment Skills and Financial Literacy* and *Iñupiaq Sewing Skills.*

Each lesson has these components:

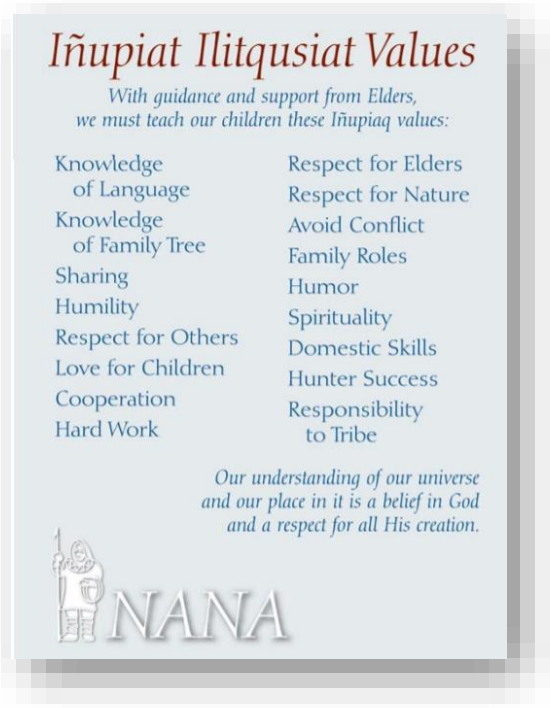
- Overview
- Link to Alaska Cultural Standards
- Link to Iñupiaq values
- Learning objectives
- Materials including commercial resources (websites, videos, books)
- Vocabulary

- Activities (with adaptation ideas for different abilities)
- Learning stories
- Evaluation
- Resources
- Student handout(s)
- Instructor handout(s)/teaching tools

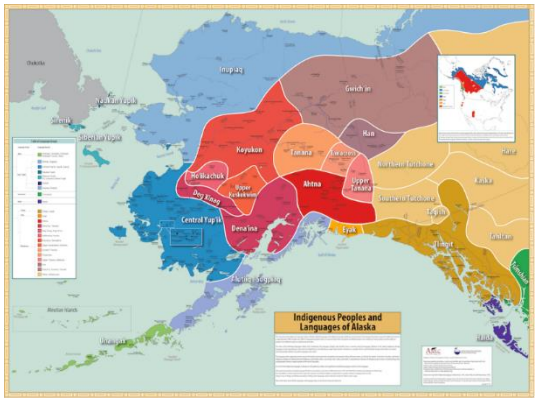
Social Skill Development: There are many opportunities through the lessons to intentionally practice social skills that will support developing skills of empathy, reciprocity, independence, and confidence. Practice how to speak respectfully to an Elder or culture bearer who comes as a guest, and practice helping each other during the activities. These are core skills to being part of a community, and will serve the student well in their adult years. These skills relate to the Alaska Content Standards: Skills for a Healthy Life.

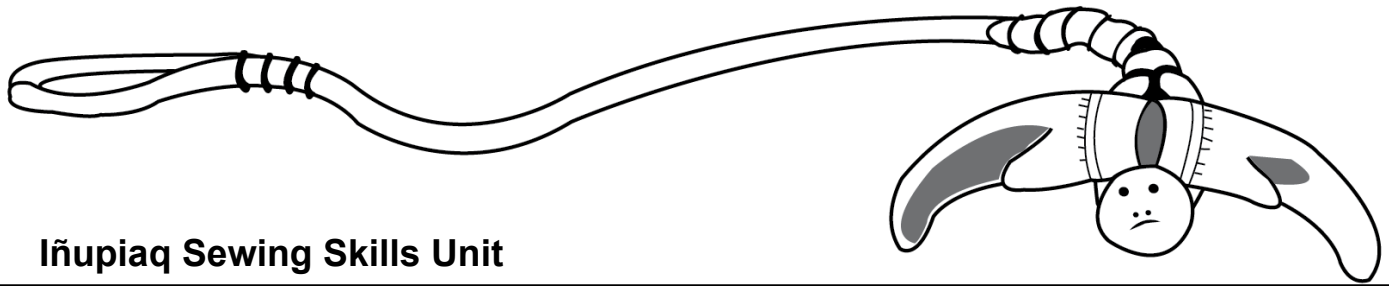
Iñupiaq Values: Each lesson is tied to Iñupiaq values, which guide and motivate learning. Instructors help students connect these values to the skills taught—for example, responsibility to the tribe and domestic skills in sewing, or hard work, sharing, and cooperation in self-employment. Values can be explored through learning stories, guest speakers, and class discussions. This approach strengthens ties to tribal traditions and supports students as they move into adulthood. The values listed are those uses by the Nana and Maniilaq Corporations. See the appendix for a values handout with definitions. To learn more about Iñupiaq values, check out these links:

- http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/ancr/Values/inupiaq.html (Iñupiaq and English)
- https://scholarworks.alaska.edu/handle/11122/6405 (Poster graphics of Iñupiaq values to use in classroom)



Traditional Lands of the Iñupiaq peoples:
You can better understand the traditional Native lands of Alaska through study of the Alaska Native Languages map. Here you can see the traditional lands of the Iñupiaq peoples in light blue tones. This map is a good way to understand the inherent diversity of people, cultures, languages, and traditions within the Indigenous peoples of Alaska. Visit this interactive version of the map online: http://www.alaskool.org/language/languagemap/index.html



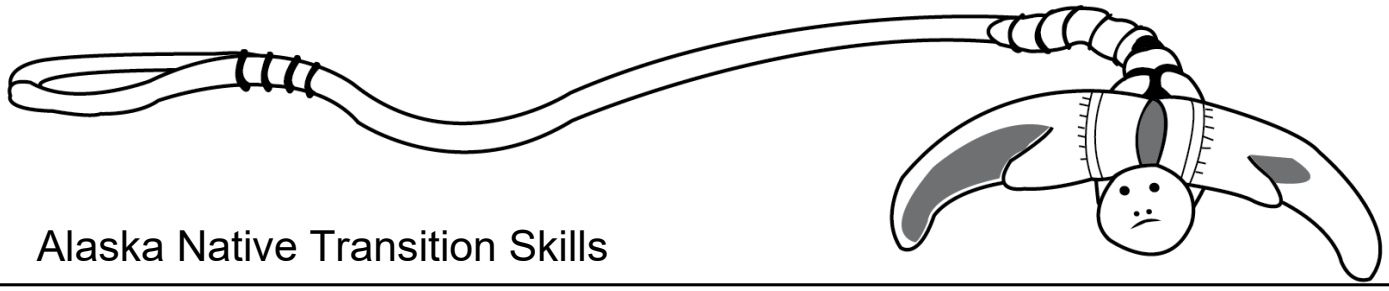


Iñupiaq Sewing Skills Unit

This unit introduces the art of sewing using Iñupiaq examples, both historic and current day. It highlights the work of two prominent Iñupiaq artists, and introduces basic sewing skills. It is meant to inspire curiosity about how things are made, how they were made traditionally, and how artists keep traditions alive through continuing the art form. This unit could be easily adapted by other regions by using regionally specific examples in place of the Iñupiaq examples for sewing, or more broadly used as a model for introducing other region-specific Indigenous art forms.

Lessons and Handouts

Lesson	Related Handouts
Iñupiaq Sewing Part 1	Many People Like to Sew (Student)
Iñupiaq Sewing Part 2	Historical Objects Teaching Cards (Instructor)
Iñupiaq Artist Profile Maija Lukin	Presentation Slides
Iñupiaq Artist Profile Mary Lou Sours	Presentation Slides
Sewing Tools	Sewing Tools Matching Game (Instructor)
How to Use a Pattern	Pattern Examples (Instructor) Make a Walrus from a Pattern (Student)
Animal Sewing Project (Running Stitch)	Felt Animal Sewing Project (Student)
Bag Sewing Project (Whip Stitch)	Sewing Project: Intro to the Whip Stitch (Student)



Sewing in the Iñupiaq Culture Part 1

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about the different kinds of sewing done in the Iñupiaq culture, through stories and video.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A2, A4, A5, A6, B2, B3, B4, C1, C3, C4, D5, D6, E1, E2, E3, E8

Iñupiaq Values

- Respect for Elders, Domestic skills, Family roles, Sharing, Hard work

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Describe at least three ways sewing is used in Iñupiaq communities.
- Describe the materials used in making three common sewn items in Iñupiaq communities.
- Distinguish between hand and machine sewing by looking at sewn examples.

Materials

- Handout: *Many People Like to Sew*
- Gather examples of Iñupiaq items that have been sewn to show to the students.

Vocabulary

Atikluk	Hooded overshirt with a large front pocket commonly worn in Alaska Native communities. This type of garment is called a Kuspuk in Yup'ik.
Material	Refers to what something is made from. Examples of different kinds of materials are metal, fabric, fibers, plastic, fur, leather, and glass.
Sew, sewing	Join, fasten, or repair (something) by making stitches with a needle and thread or a sewing machine.
Sewing Machine	A machine that is used to sew. The machine stitching is usually used for clothing and things like backpacks and bags.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we are going to start to learn about sewing, and what kinds of things that Iñupiaq people make using sewing. To learn about this, we will share ideas, and look at a handout. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to name at least three things that Iñupiaq people sew, and what kinds of materials those things are made from. You will also know how to see if it was sewn by hand, or by machine."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
    - What does it mean if something is sewn? If you look around the classroom, name the things that you see that have been sewn. (*Clothes, curtains, cushions, bags, backpacks…*)
    - What are traditional Iñupiaq things that are sewn? What are these things made out of? (*Atikluk: Fabric; Boots/Moccasin, gloves, coats: Hide/Fur*)
    - How is sewing done? What does it look like if something is sewn with a machine? What does it look like if sewn by hand? What kinds of things are sewn by machine? What kinds of things are sewn by hand? (*Machine stitching is in a line, very uniform. The stitch looks very different than using a needle and thread. When sewing by hand, the needle goes up and through, then down and through. A machine stitch looks different than this. The stitch is continuous on both sides, instead of alternating. Show examples of hand sewing vs. machine sewing.*)
- **Connect the lesson to Iñupiaq values:** You can draw connections to many of the values (see resource in the appendix) but these are some suggested values to discuss.
    - **RESPECT FOR ELDERS:** To assist and appreciate the wisdom, inner-strength, and learn from the life experience skills of our older people.
    - **DOMESTIC SKILLS**: To appreciate and perform the roles of home and family duties in both the traditional and western lifestyles.
    - **FAMILY ROLES:** To know our responsibility as a family and extended family member. To accept communication as a foundation in learning the roles and strengths.
    - **SHARING:** A foundational value based on distributing part of what is gathered or known among the people for ensuring a holistic survival.
    - **HARD WORK:** The on-going use of mental skills or physical strength to get things done.
- **Show examples of many kinds of Iñupiaq items that have been sewn, and let the students look at the stitching and materials.** For each item, ask the students to:
    - Identify if it was sewn by hand, or with a machine.
    - What is it made out of?

Learning stories

- Look at the handout *Many People Like to Sew* showing Iñupiaq sewn items and read through it together.
- Ask the students to share if they have family members that sew, and what they make.
- Invite a local Alaska Native leader, Elder, or culture bearer to share about how important sewing skills have been to the Iñupiaq peoples.

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- What are (at least) three ways sewing is used in Iñupiaq communities?
- What are those traditional sewn items made from?
- How can you tell if something was made with machine or hand stitching?

Additional Resources

- This video shows what a machine stitch looks like (0:26): www.youtube.com/watch?v=ML8CMNzW6Tg
- This video shows how to sew by hand (6:03): www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvzMMcKHVR4

All links verified 8-2025

Many People Like to Sew

Here are people learning how to make maklaks (skin boots) from leather and fur.



First, they scrape and cut out the pieces of leather.




Here they are sewing the pieces together.



Photo credit: Images provided by Maija Lukin and used with permission.

Hand Sewing and Machine Sewing

Now, most things you buy in a store that are sewn were sewn on a machine. Traditionally, things were sewn by hand. How can you tell the difference?

This traditional sewing bag was sewn by hand, and made out of reindeer, seal gut, and river otter.
(Image from https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=23)

Sewing kits are still made today, but are usually made from fabric instead of leather and fur. One of these was made on a machine, and one was sewn by hand by a young person.

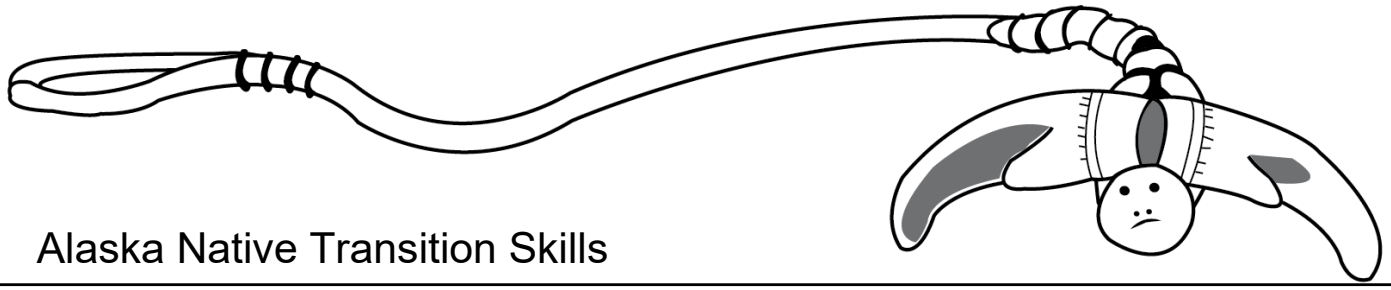
Can you see which one was done by hand? How can you tell?

Look at the stitching to see how it was made.

On the machine, the stitches are the same, in a very straight line, and look similar on the front and back of the fabric.

By hand, stitches are more irregular, and the front and back may look different.

Photo images provided by Maija Lukin and Frances Gage and used with permission.



Sewing in Iñupiaq Culture Part 2

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about the different kinds of sewing done in the Iñupiaq culture, and why sewing skills have been important to the people in the past, through stories and video.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A2, A4, A5, A6, B2, B3, B4, C1, C3, C4, D5, D6, E1, E2, E3, E8

Iñupiaq Values

- Respect for Elders, Domestic skills, Family roles, Sharing, Hard work, Knowledge of language

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Describe at least three kinds of clothing made with materials from the land that were made by the Iñupiaq people.
- Describe why these kinds of clothing were important for the Iñupiaq people.

Materials

- Teaching Cards: Historical Sewn Objects NOTE: These are made to be printed 2-sided, so that the back information matches the picture on front. If you read it in the document, it may look like the description is flipped from the object it describes.
- Gather examples of Iñupiaq items that have been sewn to show to the students.

Vocabulary

Maklak/Kamik	Skin boots.
Parka	Coat made from skins, furs or fabric or a combination of materials.
Seam	The joining of two pieces of material using stitches.
Sew/Sewing	Join, fasten, or repair (something) by making stitches with a needle and thread or a sewing machine.
Waterproof Stitch	A special way of sewing the skins or gut to make a seam that kept water from getting through. Used in rain jackets and kayaking clothing for hunters.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we are going to learn about things that Iñupiaq people traditionally made from materials provided by the land using sewing. To learn about this, we will share ideas, and look at pictures of some of these amazing things. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to name at least three things that Iñupiaq people used to make, and explain why they were important for Iñupiaq people."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
    - Before there were stores, people had to make everything for themselves from the materials the land provided. Everything we needed was here, but it took hard work to make everything needed for hunting, dancing, eating, and playing. What kinds of things did the people make for themselves for living? *[Clothing, kayaks, hunting/fishing tools, bags, baskets, items used in ceremonies like drums, dancing clothes; items used in sport (like kicking ball)…]*
    - What are traditional Iñupiaq things that are sewn? What are these things made out of? (*Atikluk: Fabric; Boots/Moccasin, gloves, coats: Hide/Fur*)
- **Connect the lesson to Iñupiaq values:** You can draw connections to many of the values (see resource in the appendix) but these are some suggested values to discuss.
    - **RESPECT FOR ELDERS:** To assist and appreciate the wisdom, inner-strength, and learn from the life experience skills of our older people.
    - **DOMESTIC SKILLS**: To appreciate and perform the roles of home and family duties in both the traditional and western lifestyles.
    - **FAMILY ROLES:** To know our responsibility as a family and extended family member. To accept communication as a foundation in learning the roles and strengths.
    - **SHARING:** A foundational value based on distributing part of what is gathered or known among the people for ensuring a holistic survival.
    - **HARD WORK:** The on-going use of mental skills or physical strength to get things done.
    - **KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE:** A heritage gift and responsibility to express and learn the cultural viewpoint.
- **Show and talk about the historical object cards with students.** For each card, ask the students questions and try to build on their ideas as you share the information about the objects. Talk about how the items are different or the same as what is used for the same purpose in present day.

Learning stories

- Watch this video of Iñupiaq from Anatukvuk Pass dancing, and have the students notice what items the performers are wearing that were sewn (Atikluks and Maklaks). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5EB59AzIlrw
- Using the historical object teaching cards, ask the students to help get a hunter ready for a hunt. Which objects would he need to go out hunting in his kayak? (parka, rain parka, waterproof boots, gloves). Once he gets home, where can he store his clothes? (in the seal bag). If he tore his parka, where would his wife get her tools to fix it? (from the sewing bag). What did the hunter carve for his daughter to play with? (a wooden doll). When the family went to a dance, which of these items did they wear? (Fancy boots and gloves). Which item was used in a competition with another tribe? (High-kick ball).

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- Describe at least three kinds of clothing or things made with materials from the land that were made by the Iñupiaq people.
- Describe why these kinds of clothing or things were important for the Iñupiaq people.

Additional Resources

- **Smithsonian Institution Arctic Studies Center Learning Lab:** There are many more examples of Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian carved objects and other traditional objects in this online collection that you can explore and share with your students: Search the Alaska Native collection by region, culture, or object type at: https://learninglab.si.edu/org/sasc-ak
  Note that since this was originally created, the collection is not accessible in the same way, so some links to the original files may not be active.

Note: Photos and some text were used for the teaching cards from this collection as allowed for educational purposes.
https://naturalhistory.si.edu/research/anthropology/collections-and-archives-access/rights-and-reproductions

Kapitaq: "Rain Parka"

Image Credit: Source: E. W. Nelson (collector); Museum: National Museum of Natural History; Museum ID Number: E043335

Kapitaq: "Rain Parka"

Image Credit: Source: Edward W. Nelson (donor); Museum: National Museum of Natural History; Museum ID Number: E043337

Kapitaq:“Rain Parka”

Ask

- What kind of clothing is this?
- What is it used for?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- Why was the material important?

About this piece

Hooded parkas made from seal intestines (gut) were ideal outer garments for wet weather and ocean travel. They were sewn with fine sinew thread and a special watertight stitch. This woman’s gut parka from Golovin Bay has side vents and rounded bottom flaps in both front and back, the same design as a woman’s fur parka.

Significance

These garments were made to keep people dry. It took a long time working the gut to soften it and make the strips which were sewn together using a waterproof stitch.

Kapitaq:“Rain Parka”

Ask

- What kind of clothing is this?
- What is it used for?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- Why was the material important?

About this piece

Hooded parkas made from seal intestines (gut) were ideal outer garments for wet weather and ocean travel. They were sewn with fine sinew thread and a special watertight stitch. This fine gut parka from Golovin Bay is decorated with red wool yarn, feathers, and strips of bird skin.

Significance

These kept hunters dry when out hunting in the weather. They could be layered over warmer parkas to make them waterproof. The bottom could be made to fit around the top of a kayak, which kept the water out of the boat.

Historical Iñupiaq Sewn Items Teaching Cards from the Alaska Native Transition Skills, Iñupiaq Sewing, Van Den Berg/Gage, UAA Center for Human Development 2020 (Rev 2025)

Qusuŋŋaq “Outer parka”

Image Credit: Source: J. H. Turner (collector); Museum: National Museum of Natural History; Museum ID Number: E153734

Qusuŋŋaq “Outer parka”

Image Credit: Source: Captain Joseph Bernard (collector); Museum: National Museum of the American Indian; Museum ID Number: 117542.000

Qusuŋŋaq “Outer parka”

Ask

- What kind of clothing is this?
- What is it used for?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- Why was the material important?

About this piece

This parka was made from bird feathers from loons. Parkas like this were lighter weight, and used in the spring, summer, and fall. In the winter, people would put these away, and get out their winter clothes usually made from caribou. The trim on this parka is made from wolverine.

Significance

Loons were one of many birds whose skins could be turned into light, warm feather parkas. Because it is made from the skin and feathers of a water bird, it naturally sheds water and was good to wear in the rainy season.

Qusuŋŋaq “Outer parka”

Ask

- What kind of clothing is this?
- What is it used for?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- Why was the material important?

About this piece

This men’s parka is made from sheep skin, and has three layers of fur around the hood, made from wolverine, wolf belly, and wolf back. The dark shapes on the front are made from caribou fur, and the bottom is trimmed with wolverine fur.

Significance

Parkas were made with the fur on the outside, or the inside, depending on when it would be used. Fur keeps people warm in very cold weather.

Historical Iñupiaq Sewn Items Teaching Cards from the Alaska Native Transition Skills, Iñupiaq Sewing, Van Den Berg/Gage, UAA Center for Human Development 2020 (Rev 2025)

Atikullak

“knee-high fancy boots”

Image Credit: Source: John Murdoch (collector); Museum: National Museum of Natural History; Museum ID Number: E153892

Piñiqqak

“pair of short summer boots”

Image Credit: Source: Victor J. Evans (donor); Museum: National Museum of Natural History; Museum ID Number: E359020

Piñiqqak: "Pair of short summer boots"

Ask

- What kind of clothing is this?
- What is it used for?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- Why was the material important?

About this piece

These waterproof boots have uppers made of sealskin dyed with alder bark; tops and straps made of winter-bleached seal; and soles made from young bearded seal hide. Children traditionally wore this type of boot for Nalukataq, the "blanket toss" festival held to celebrate successful spring whaling.

Significance

The weather is more rainy in the summer months, so it was good for boots to be waterproof. In order to make the young bearded seal hide soft for the soles, the people chewed on the soles with their teeth.

Atikullak: "knee-high fancy boots"

Ask

- What kind of clothing is this?
- What is it used for?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- Why was the material important?

About this piece

These are men's caribou skin dress boots for winter ceremonies and dancing. A man would tuck the undecorated tops inside his short dance pants. The upper parts are made with alternating vertical strips of white caribou belly and brown caribou leg skin. Geometric bands around the top include reindeer fur, caribou fur, and red yarn. The ruffs are wolverine and the straps are sealskin. The soles are made of bearded seal hide, heavily scraped to make it soft and light in color.

Significance

Some clothes are everyday clothes, and some are for special occasions. Usually, special clothes have more details and designs on them.

Historical Iñupiaq Sewn Items Teaching Cards from the Alaska Native Transition Skills, Iñupiaq Sewing, Van Den Berg/Gage, UAA Center for Human Development 2020 (Rev 2025)

Inuŋuaq: “pretend person, doll”

Image Credit: Source: E. W. Nelson (collector); Museum: National Museum of Natural History; Museum ID Number: E037634

Aqsraq: “high-kick ball”

Image Credit: Source: William M. Fitzhugh Collection; Museum: National Museum of the American Indian; Museum ID Number: 193368.000

Aqsraq: “high-kick ball”

Ask

- What is this?
- How is it used?
- What does it look like it is made out of?

About this piece

These balls would be hung from the ceiling. When different tribes would get together, they would hold competitions to see who could kick the ball at the highest level. Made from seal skin, caribou skin, and bark.

Significance

“The design on this example comes from an Iñupiaq story about a young woman who owned two balls; the larger was the sun, and the smaller the moon. The sun ball fell (or in one version was dropped by Raven) and burst open, bringing light to the world. The circular designs seen on this ball represent the sun and commemorate this ancient story.” (https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=284)

Inuŋuaq:“pretend person, doll”

Ask

- What does it look like it is made out of?
- How is this like dolls kids have now?
- How is this different than kids have now?

About this piece

This female doll from Norton Sound is dressed in a caribou skin parka and leggings, with long fur trim. The bottom of her parka is U-shaped with high-cut sides, just like the full-sized garments that women wore. Young girls played with dolls made from ivory, bone and wood, usually carved for them by their fathers.

Significance

Dolls were made from what was available. It was more common for dolls to be made from wood or antler compared to ivory, unless people lived in areas that had a lot of ivory.

Historical Iñupiaq Sewn Items Teaching Cards from the Alaska Native Transition Skills, Iñupiaq Sewing, Van Den Berg/Gage, UAA Center for Human Development 2020 (Rev 2025)

Iġałiyauraq:

“waterproof mitts”

Image Credit: Source: E. W. Nelson (collector): Museum: National Museum of Natural History; Museum ID Number: E048381

Argaak or Argaat:

“pair of gloves”

Image Credit: Source: W. H. Dall (collector); Museum: National Museum of Natural History; Museum ID Number: E007592

Argaak or Argaat:“gloves”

Ask

- What kind of clothing is this?
- What is it used for?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- Why was the material important?
- Why do these gloves have only 4 fingers?

About this piece

Decorated gloves were worn at dances. This pair is made from caribou and beaded. It has cuffs trimmed with wolverine. Iñupiaq men started wearing gloves at about the same time they began hunting with rifles, because of the difficulty of pulling a trigger with mittens on.

Significance

The design of this glove had the smaller two fingers together in one finger to likely keep the fingers warmer.

Iġałiyauraq:“waterproof mitts”

Ask

- What kind of clothing is this?
- What is it used for?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- Why was the material important?

About this piece

Long sealskin mittens like this pair from King Island were worn at sea to protect against cold water. They have drawstrings at the top and decorative tufts of polar bear fur. The reddish-brown color is from alder bark dye, and the white is seal skin that was bleached in freezing weather.

Significance

These kept hunters dry when out hunting in the weather. These were worn when kayaking as well.

Historical Iñupiaq Sewn Items Teaching Cards from the Alaska Native Transition Skills, Iñupiaq Sewing, Van Den Berg/Gage, UAA Center for Human Development 2020 (Rev 2025)

Immusrfik: “sewing bag”

Image Credit: Source: W. H. Dall (collector); Museum: National Museum of Natural History; Museum ID Number: E007602

Aġġinaq:

“hunting gear, clothing bag”

Image Credit: Source: Edward W. Nelson (donor); Museum: National Museum of Natural History; Museum ID Number: E048099

Aġġinaq:“hunting gear bag”

Ask

- What is this?
- What is it used for?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- What do we use today instead of a bag made from a seal?
- Why was the material important?

About this piece

“This bag for storing clothing was made from an entire ribbon seal, including the flippers. The seal was skinned from the inside using a small ulu knife. The opening on its chest laces up with a leather thong.” (https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=580)

Significance

Clothing bags were kept outside in the cold on a high storage rack to keep them safe from dogs.

Immusrfik:“sewing bag”

Ask

- What is this?
- What is it used for?
- What does it look like it is made out of?
- Why was this important to the people?

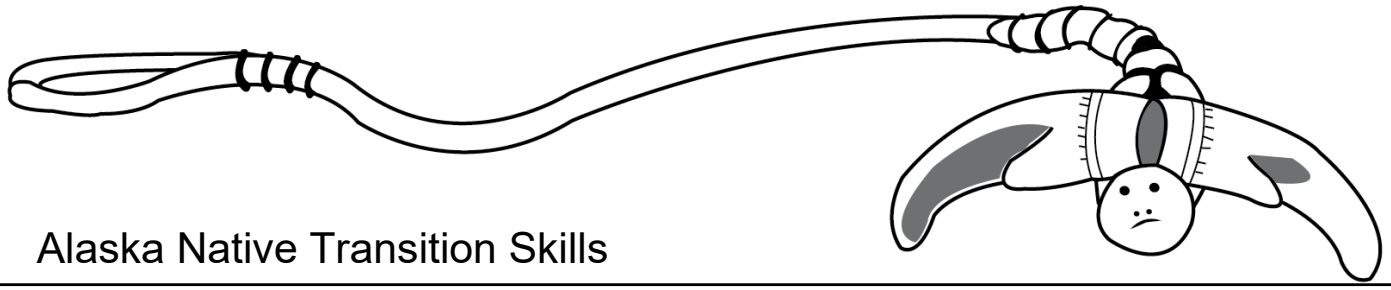
About this piece

“Iñupiaq women around Norton Sound used roll-up bags like this to store their sewing tools. Sewing bags have a pocket at the bottom and a U-shaped flap at the top, to which a cord with a fastener is attached. The pouches held needles, thimbles, boot-sole creasers, awls, small ulu knives, and other items. This bag is made of cloth with a tanned reindeer skin flap; the decorative strips are black rockfish skin and dyed seal esophagus; and the fur trim is river otter.”
(https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=23)

Significance

Girls made these to demonstrate their sewing skills and to hold their sewing tools.

Historical Iñupiaq Sewn Items Teaching Cards from the Alaska Native Transition Skills, Iñupiaq Sewing, Van Den Berg/Gage, UAA Center for Human Development 2020 (Rev 2025)



Iñupiaq Artist Profile: Maija Lukin

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about Iñupiaq artist Maija (pronounced “Maya”) Lukin. She sews fabric and furs and teaches others how to sew in traditional Iñupiaq ways.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A2, A3, A6, B2, B3, B4, C1, D1, D5, E1, E2, E8

Iñupiaq Values

- Respect for Elders, Domestic skills, Family roles, Sharing, Hard work, Knowledge of language

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Describe how Maija learned to sew, and why she likes to work in traditional ways.
- Explain the advice Maija gives people who are learning to sew.

Materials

- Presentation: An Interview with Iñupiaq Artist Maija Lukin

Vocabulary

Atikluk	Hooded overshirt with a large front pocket commonly worn in Alaska Native communities. This type of garment is called a Kuspuk or Qaspeq in Yup’ik.
Maklak/Kamik	Skin boots.
Parka	Coat made from skins, furs or fabric or a combination of materials.
Quppak	Fancy trim around the bottom of a parka or top of maklaks that shows your family design.
Regalia	Traditional clothes reflecting the tribe and family of the person wearing them.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we are going to learn about Maija Lukin, who is an Iñupiaq artist. We will read through an interview with Maija about her sewing and why she likes to work in traditional ways. Learning about artists and how they work is one way to learn more about the art they make, and can inspire you to try it yourself. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to describe how Maija learned to sew, and why she likes to work in traditional ways. You will get some advice for people who are learning to sew."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
    - How do you think artists get started and figure out what they like to make? *[By seeing Elders or family members making things, and wanting to try to make them too, or seeing a design or something that was made and wanting to learn to make it…]*
    - What are traditional Iñupiaq things that are sewn? What are these things made out of? (*Atikluk: Fabric; Boots/Moccasin, gloves, Parkas/coats: Hide/Fur*)
    - Do you have maklaks, a parka, mittens or other clothes that were made for you? Who made them?
- **Connect the lesson to Iñupiaq values:** You can draw connections to many of the values (see resource in the appendix) but these are some suggested values to discuss.
    - **RESPECT FOR ELDERS:** To assist and appreciate the wisdom, inner-strength, and learn from the life experience skills of our older people.
    - **DOMESTIC SKILLS**: To appreciate and perform the roles of home and family duties in both the traditional and western lifestyles.
    - **FAMILY ROLES:** To know our responsibility as a family and extended family member. To accept communication as a foundation in learning the roles and strengths.
    - **SHARING:** A foundational value based on distributing part of what is gathered or known among the people for ensuring a holistic survival.
    - **HARD WORK:** The on-going use of mental skills or physical strength to get things done.
    - **KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE:** A heritage gift and responsibility to express and learn the cultural viewpoint.
- **Share the artist interview presentation, and discuss questions on last slide.** Take some time to look at the pictures of the things she has made that are on the slides.

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- How did Maija learn to sew?
- Why does she like to work in traditional ways?
- What advice does Maija give people who are learning to sew?

Additional Resources

- Visit Maija Lukin's Instagram page to see more images of what she makes: https://www.instagram.com/p/BFN2tJmNcKhbqe-NmFBDEKwtOpJVfU5Q2oUIVY0/
- Making a moose hide collar, shows pattern making and sewing with a hide. *Note that this a Dene Athabascan method for moose hide, but there are similarities with the process that an Iñupiaq skin sewer would use.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzlsX-r1dw4
- Sew Yup'ik (Artist Nikki Corbett) has great videos showing step by step how to sew a kuspuk/atikluk. Visit her website at https://sewyupik.com/ or her YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeRPk08daIGJzqw8kY_Qyug/videos.

All links verified 8-2025




Artist Maija Katak Lukin

IÑUPIAQ ARTIST WHO SEWS FUR AND FABRIC

Iñupiaq Artist Maija Lukin

Maija Katak Lukin is an Iñupiaq artist that lives in Kotzebue, Alaska. She works with fabric and furs to make her own clothes, regalia, maklaks (skin boots), and parkas (both cloth and fur). She can sew by hand, or with a machine, depending on what she is making.

Artist Maija Lukin. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

How did you learn to sew?

"I learned to skin sew watching my grandmother Katak at our home in Sisualik, AK. If you watch me skin sew, you'll see I sew exactly opposite of how she sewed, because I watched her, and copied her exactly [like in a mirror].

I was 4 and 5 years old sewing my own skins. I also sew cloth, which I learned from my grandmother and mom. I made my own clothes and still do. My first machine sewn item was a doll I made for myself at age 6."

Atikluks by Maija Lukin. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

What made you interested in sewing?

"My grandmothers have always been my inspiration. My grandma was a WWII vet, and toted her six children all over the world, eventually settling in Anchorage, AK.

My aana was a member of the Alaska Territorial Guard and sewed almost 100% of the warm clothing for her 9 children and most of us older grandkids, every single year, regardless of growth, we always had new maklaks."

Parka by Maija Lukin. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

When did you start sewing and developing your skills as an artist?

"Growing up without running water or electricity, you just learn to keep busy and create. So, part of creating was making clothes, for my dolls, single barbie, etc."

Maklaks by Maija Lukin. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

What do you like about sewing?

"I think, mostly, I love that I can look at something, and say, 'I can make that.' I usually go home, sketch it, and make it. For skin sewing, I take photos that inspire me, to make quppaks, and maklaks. I know how to make patterns, from both my grandmothers, so if I don't have a particular size, I can make it. This is both for 'western' clothing and for traditional clothing."

Parka, mittens and maklaks by Maija Lukin. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

Why do you like to work in traditional ways?

"Working traditionally connects me to my Ancestors. I want to ensure that my culture is strong, therefore because I have the skills to teach, or create, I do.

I also think that there is nothing more inspiring and uplifting than to watch someone use what you've made proudly. "

Artist Maija Lukin. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

How do you decide what to make?

"I do what my grandparents did, I make new hats, maklaks, and parkys for every person in my family, every time they grow out of something or wear it out. It's kind of cold here, so warm gear is important. :).

My granddaughter needs a new parka, I'm making one."

Atikluks and maklaks by Maija Lukin. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

How do you pick your designs?

"For quppaks, I see what inspires me, or I look for family designs, or I study things that are important to that person and create something.

For cloth parkas, I just make what I think looks nice."

Black and white star wave design in calf skin made by Maija's grandmother. It is a family design. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

What advice would you give someone who is just starting to learn these sewing skills?

"Do NOT compare yourself to someone who has been doing this for 40 years. When I was 6, my stitches were uneven, and ugly. When my kids first started, they were not straight. When I teach people, their stitches aren't even.

Practice makes perfect, be proud of what you do, because you're perpetuating a culture, and you're learning to be self-sufficient at the same time."

Beginner's stitches. Photos by Frances Gage. Used with permission.

Kamiks (Maklaks)

(From Maija's Instagram post November 2019)

"Think about the amount of time it took to create these kamiks. Seal, wolf, calfskin, caribou, black bear, beaver and fox all had to be caught, processed and tanned. Then skin sewists took the time to meticulously sew each pair to fit someone. Some are fancy, with hundreds of pieces stitched together made for dancing and show. Some are functional with just a few pieces made for hunting, traveling and fishing. Each pair is unique and took so many hours to make. Four people made what they're wearing themselves, my aana made a pair, some are 50+ years old, some got done this week. Each one has a story stitched into its every piece."

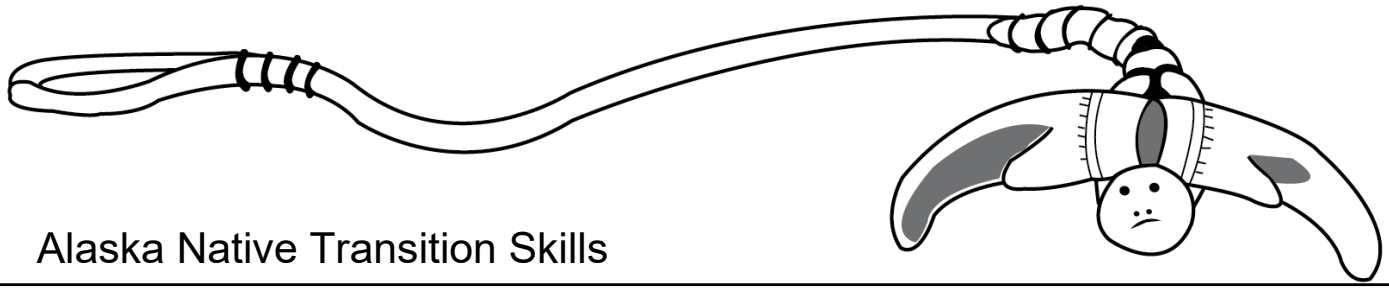
Your turn

Does anyone in your family sew? How did they learn? What do they like to make?

Why does Maija like to work in traditional ways? What do you do to connect to your Ancestors and culture?

Think about maklaks or parkas you have seen. What designs do you like?

Photo provided by artist and used with permission.



Iñupiaq Artist Profile: Mary Lou Sours

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about Iñupiaq artist Mary Lou Sours. She sews hard bottom maklaks, and also works with skins and furs. She teaches others how to sew in traditional ways.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A2, A3, A6, B2, B3, B4, C1, D1, D5, E1, E2, E8

Iñupiaq Values

- Respect for Elders, Domestic skills, Family roles, Sharing, Hard work, Knowledge of language

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Describe how Mary Lou Sours learned to sew, and why she likes to work in traditional ways.
- Explain the advice Mary Lou gives people who are learning to sew.

Materials

- Presentation: An Interview with Iñupiaq Artist Mary Lou Sours
- Video: Indie Alaska *Reviving the art of making Iñupiat Mukluks* (5:43) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDjJYE0tmFQ

Vocabulary

Crimp	To make a flat seal skin into a curved sole, the artist uses pliers to work the skin and shape it. This is called crimping.
Maklak/Kamik	Skin boots.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we are going to learn about Mary Lou Sours, who is an Iñupiaq artist. We will read through an interview with Mary Lou about her sewing and why she likes to work in traditional ways, and watch a short video about her. Learning about artists and how they work is one way to learn more about the art they make, and can inspire you to try it yourself. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to describe how Mary Lou learned to sew, and why she likes to work in traditional ways. You will get some advice for people who are learning to sew."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
    - How do you think artists get started and figure out what they like to make? *[By seeing Elders or family members making things, and wanting to try to make them too, or seeing a design or something that was made and wanting to learn to make it…]*
    - Have you seen maklaks that have a hard bottom? How do you think they are made?
- **Connect the lesson to Iñupiaq values:** You can draw connections to many of the values (see resource in the appendix) but these are some suggested values to discuss.
    - **RESPECT FOR ELDERS:** To assist and appreciate the wisdom, inner-strength, and learn from the life experience skills of our older people.
    - **DOMESTIC SKILLS**: To appreciate and perform the roles of home and family duties in both the traditional and western lifestyles.
    - **FAMILY ROLES:** To know our responsibility as a family and extended family member. To accept communication as a foundation in learning the roles and strengths.
    - **SHARING:** A foundational value based on distributing part of what is gathered or known among the people for ensuring a holistic survival.
    - **HARD WORK:** The on-going use of mental skills or physical strength to get things done.
    - **KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE:** A heritage gift and responsibility to express and learn the cultural viewpoint.
- **Share the artist video, and the interview presentation, and discuss questions on last slide.** Take some time to look at the pictures of the things she has made that are on the slides. Stop the video and ask students about what is being shown as she is working with students.

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- How did Mary Lou learn to sew? *(She started by teaching herself, and then spent time with an Elder who showed her traditional ways of working with the skins.)*
- Why does she like to work in traditional ways? *(She likes helping fill in the gap for people who weren't able to learn from their family, to continue the meaning and connection to Ancestors and cultural ways.)*
- What advice does Mary Lou give people who are learning to sew?

Additional Resources

- There is another Indie Alaska video that shows subsistence life and has Mary Lou Sours in it: *Living off the land in a rural Alaskan Community* (3:12) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xXxaRvEt94
- Visit her Facebook page to see more images of what she makes: https://www.facebook.com/pg/CusomMaryDesigns/about/
- Making a moose hide collar, shows pattern making and sewing with a hide. *Note that this a Dene Athabascan method for moose hide, but there are similarities with the process that an Iñupiaq skin sewer would use.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzlsX-r1dw4

All links verified 8-2025




Artist Mary Lou Sours

IÑUPIAQ ARTIST WHO MAKES HARD BOTTOM MAKLAKS

Iñupiaq Artist Mary Lou Sours

Mary Lou “Tautuknaitchauq” Sours is an Iñupiaq artist that lives in Noatak, Alaska. She works with skins and furs to make maklaks (skin boots), and parkas (both cloth and fur). She specializes in making artungaks (hard bottom maklaks). She teaches classes and sells maklak kits for people who want to sew their own.

Artist Mary Lou Sours. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

What made you interested in sewing?

Dad was a good hunter, and mom tanned the skins in traditional ways. Her great-grandmother Lena Suuik Sours was well-known for her beautiful sewing of fancy parkas, maklaks, and dolls. These were inspirations for learning to sew. She knew she would want to sew one day, and started saving furs and skins as a young woman.

When Mary Lou's grandson was born 7 years ago, she had a strong feeling that she wanted to sew for him, and so she started to teach herself to sew. An instinct turned on, and she knew it was time.

Artungaks (hard bottoms) by Mary Lou Sours. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

Lena Suuik Sours

Lena Sours was well known for her beautiful sewing skills in making fancy parkas, maklaks and dolls. Mary Lou continues to be inspired by her great-grandmother's work.

Image from *Not Just a Pretty Face: Dolls and Human Figurines in Alaska Native Cultures,* edited by Molly Lee, 2006

Lena Sours and Esther Jessup: http://www.kotzebueira.org/about/index.html

How did you learn to sew?

Mary Lou learned the basics of sewing from her mother, as well as how to tan and work with skins and furs. Seven years ago, she started teaching herself to sew. She worked on making makaks, then an Elder helped show her how to get the soles to the right texture and consistency. After 5 years of making maklaks, she is starting to feel she has mastered the skills.

Maklaks in progress by Mary Lou Sours.
Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

What do you like about sewing?

"My grandmother had a knack for measuring things without using a ruler. I have that same knack. I can just look at something and know how to make it without using a ruler, and it usually fits perfectly. When this happens, I get really excited."

Parka by Allanah Sours. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

Why do you like to work in traditional ways?

"It is important to me to keep the tradition alive and help pass on the traditions in the correct way. Others may use new designs or colors, which is fine for others, but for me I want to do things correctly like our Ancestors, and I want things to carry on."

Artist Mary Lou Sours. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

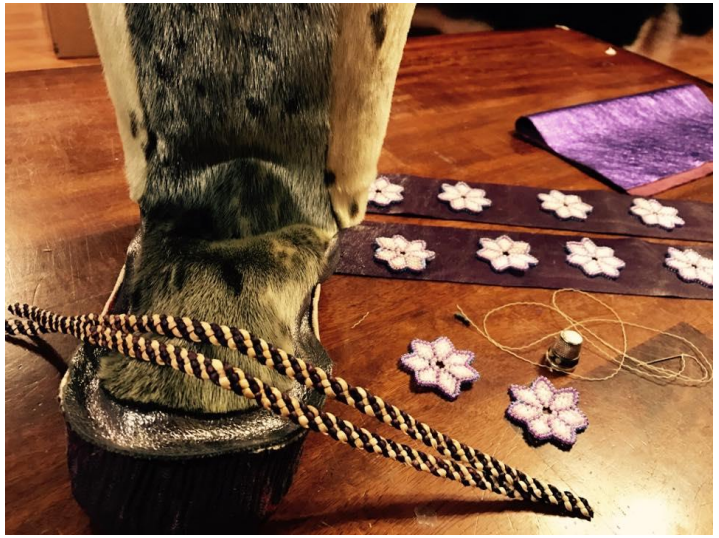
How do you decide what to make?

"For myself, it is hard to choose because I always have so many things I want to make. Family members need new parkas and maklaks, but it hard to find time for it all. Also, I have been in a maklak phase, but am ready to move into parkas.
I have to finish my current orders for maklaks, then I hope to switch to other things."

Artist Mary Lou Sours. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

How do you pick your designs?

"When sewing for a customer, I involve them in all the decisions of the patterns, picking out the materials and beadwork. I ask them to research their family patterns and designs. The border designs on parkas and maklaks traditionally showed which family you were from. I encourage them to use family designs."



Maklaks in process by Mary Lou Sours. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.

What advice would you give someone who is just starting to learn these sewing skills?

"Don't give up, keep trying. If you need help, don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask for help. It is one thing to *think* about sewing, and another to try. Once you try, don't give up. Don't compare yourself to someone else that has more experience, it will be discouraging."

Maklaks in progress by Mary Lou Sours. Photo provided by the artist and used with permission.

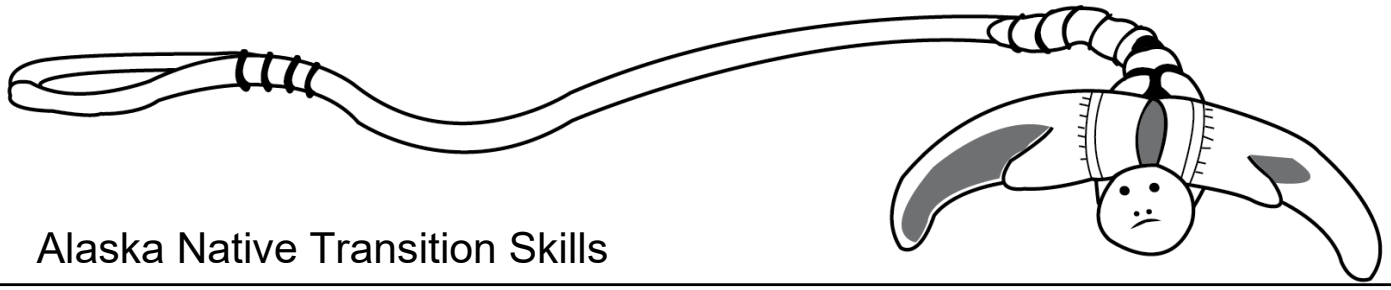
Your turn

Does anyone in your family sew? How did they learn? What do they like to make?

Why does Mary Lou like to work in traditional ways? What do you do to connect to your ancestors and culture?

Think about maklaks or parkas you have seen. What designs do you like?

Ribbon Seal Parka made by Mary Lou Sours. Photo provided by artist and used with permission.



Sewing Tools

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about the different kinds of tools used in sewing, both traditional and current.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A2, A4, A5, A6, B2, B3, B4, C1, C3, C4, D5, D6, E1, E2, E3, E8

Iñupiaq Values

- Respect for Elders, Domestic skills, Family roles, Sharing, Hard work, Knowledge of language

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Provide the names of sewing tools and describe how they are used in a matching game.

Materials

- Teaching Cards: *Tools Used for Sewing* used to play a game to match the tools name to an image and description of the tool. NOTE: These are made to be printed 2-sided, so that the back information matches the picture on front. If you read it in the document, it may look like the description is flipped from the object it describes.
- If possible, gather sewing tools (current and traditional) and Iñupiaq sewing kits for the students to touch and talk about.

Vocabulary

Ikuun	Skin scraping tool, used to remove fur and hair from the skins.
Kirraq	Pliers used for crimping hard bottom soles.
Needle	Thin, sharp metal object with a hole in one end to put thread through. Used to pierce material and bring the thread or sinew through in sewing.
Pins	Thin, sharp metal objects used to hold materials together for sewing.
Scissors	Used to cut materials used in sewing.
Sewing Machine	A machine that sews fabric together faster than can be done by hand. Most home machines are used for fabrics, but some special heavy sewing machines can also sew skins and fur.

Sinew	A type of thread made from animal gut for sewing skins, leather, and fur.
Sole Shaper	This is worked against the seal skin sole to shape the sides before crimping.
Thimble	A cover for fingers used when sewing to prevent getting stabbed by a pin or needle when sewing. It is also used to push the needle through, as sometimes even the end with the thread is sharp enough to poke a finger.
Thread	A long, thin strand of fiber which is stitched through materials to hold them together in sewing.
Ulu	A rounded knife used in cutting fabrics and other materials for sewing.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we are going to learn about the tools Iñupiaq people use to sew. To learn about this, we will look at the tools and talk about them, and play a matching game to check your knowledge. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to name 11 kinds of tools used in sewing, and describe how they are used."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
    - What kinds of tools are used in sewing? *[See vocab list for the lesson.]*
    - What traditional Iñupiaq tools are still used for sewing today? *(The ulu and the ikuun and the sole shaper.)*
- **Connect the lesson to Iñupiaq values:** You can draw connections to many of the values (see resource in the appendix) but these are some suggested values to discuss.
    - **RESPECT FOR ELDERS:** To assist and appreciate the wisdom, inner-strength, and learn from the life experience skills of our older people.
    - **DOMESTIC SKILLS**: To appreciate and perform the roles of home and family duties in both the traditional and western lifestyles.
    - **FAMILY ROLES:** To know our responsibility as a family and extended family member. To accept communication as a foundation in learning the roles and strengths.
    - **SHARING:** A foundational value based on distributing part of what is gathered or known among the people for ensuring a holistic survival.
    - **HARD WORK:** The on-going use of mental skills or physical strength to get things done.
    - **KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE:** A heritage gift and responsibility to express and learn the cultural viewpoint.
- **Show and talk about the examples of sewing tools with students.** Have them look at the tools used for sewing and talk about how they are used.
    - Ulu, the scissors, and needles and talk about how they are sharp and have to be worked with carefully.

- Crimping pliers (Iñupiaq: *Kirraq*): These are used to crimp the edge of the hard soled maklaks. In the past, ancestors used their teeth to do this job. Even with the pliers, it is slow and hard work making all of the crimps look even.
- Skin Scraper (Iñupiaq: *Ikuun*): Used to remove the hair/fur from the skins. Scrapers can be traditional or more modern. There are a couple of pictures of these that match to the word "ikuun."
- Sole shaper: This is rubbed against the edge of the seal skin sole to start to shape it in preparation for crimping.
- Thimble: Let them try the thimble on, and then touch the thread end of a needle with and without the thimble. They can practice pushing a needle through some fabric with the thimble, to see how it protects their finger.
- Thread/sinew: Look around the room for examples of sewn objects, and notice the different kinds of thread that are used. Some thread is thick, some thin. Some blends in very well, sometimes contrasting color is used to show the stitching or designs. If possible, show something made from leather or fur that was hand sewn with sinew. Notice the waxy texture and the way it sinks in to the leather.
- Sewing machine: Usually used for fabrics, though some heavy sewing machines can sew leather and furs.

- **Play the matching game:** Match the picture of the tool with its name. Then play again, matching a verbal description of how the tool is used to its picture. Note: The matching game PDF is meant to be printed 2-sided, so that when you cut out the cards, the pictures of the tools show the tool in use on the back side, and then the word cards can be matched to the picture cards.
- **Learning stories:** See if the students can fill in the names of the tools used by two artists.

Learning stories

- When artist Maija Lukin wants to make an atikluk, first she picks out her fabric and trim and thinks of the design. When she is ready to get started, she gets out all her tools. She lays the fabric out, and uses _____(pins) to attach her pattern to the fabric. Next, she takes _____ (scissors) to cut the fabric. She uses _____(pins) to hold the fabric together until she can sew it. She sits down at her _____(sewing machine) and puts the spool of this _____ (thread) on the machine and threads it through the _____(needle). Then she pushes the pedal on the sewing machine to make it sew.
- When artist Mary Lou Sours wants to make maklaks, first she picks out her skins and thinks of a design. She gets her tools out, and then she is ready to get started. Mary Lou is ready to cut out the softer leather of the upper part of the maklak and so she reaches for _____ (ulu or scissors). She draws her pattern onto the skin, and then cuts out the pieces. For the hard soles, she cuts the seal skin out with an _____ (ulu or other blade) and then she scrapes off the fur with the _____ (ikuun). To crimp the edge to make the correct shape of the hard bottom boot, she used special pliers, called _____(kirraq). To sew the pieces of the maklak together, she used a _____(needle) and _____(sinew).

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- What are the names of some tools used by people who sew?
- How do they use those tools?

Additional Resources

- **Smithsonian Institution Arctic Studies Center Learning Lab:** There are many more examples of Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian carved objects and other traditional objects in this online collection that you can explore and share with your students: Search the Alaska Native collection by region, culture, or object type at: https://learninglab.si.edu/org/sasc-ak
  Note that since this was originally created, the collection is not accessible in the same way, so some links to the original files may not be active.
- **Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center Alaska Youtube channel:** There are many videos showing Alaska Native people sewing. You can watch portions of these videos, and see if the students can spot people using the tools they learned about. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNpC1tX-kqJaSU7ZSxUWAfA/videos
- **Sewing Gut (11 of 13): Sewing Gut:** This video is about sewing gut to make traditional rain gear: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWIPDmyqAQ0

Photo provided by Maija Lukin and used with permission.

Photo: https://quotesgram.com/img/needle-and-thread-quotes/10676052/.

Photo provided by Maija Lukin and used with permission.

Photo provided by Maija Lukin and used with permission.

Photo provided by Maija Lukin and used with permission.

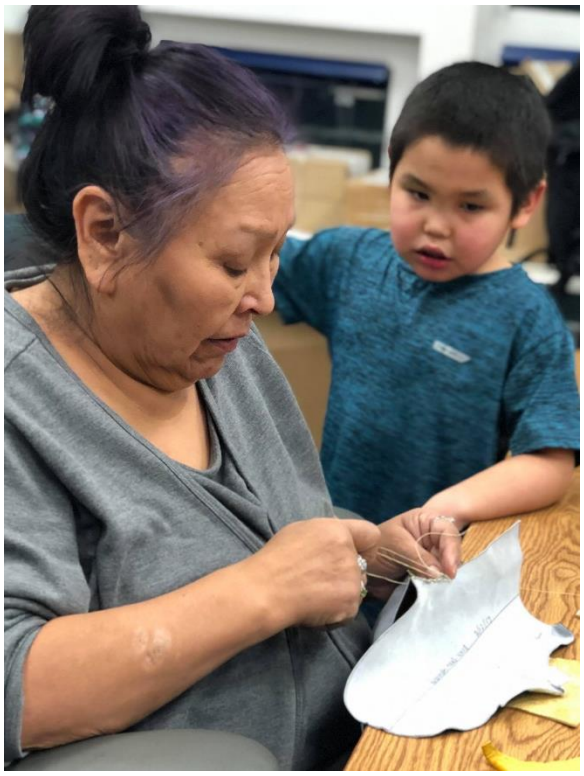


Photo provided by Maija Lukin and used with permission.

Photo provided by Mary Lou Sours and used with permission.

Photo provided by Mary Lou Sours and used with permission.

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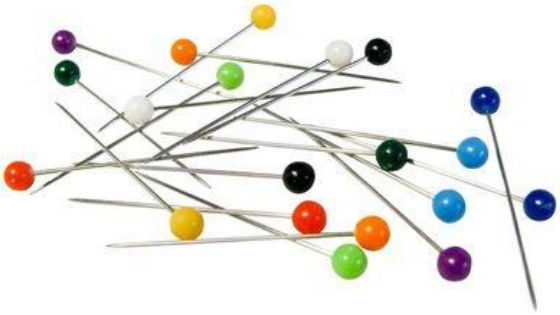


Scissors

Thimble

Photo: https://stitchers-source.com/mechanical-vs-computerized-sewing-machines-what-is-the-difference/

Photo: https://www.allpeoplequilt.com/how-to-quilt/cutting/pin-and-cut-pattern.

Needle and Thread

Ikuun (Scraper)

Kirraq (Pliers)

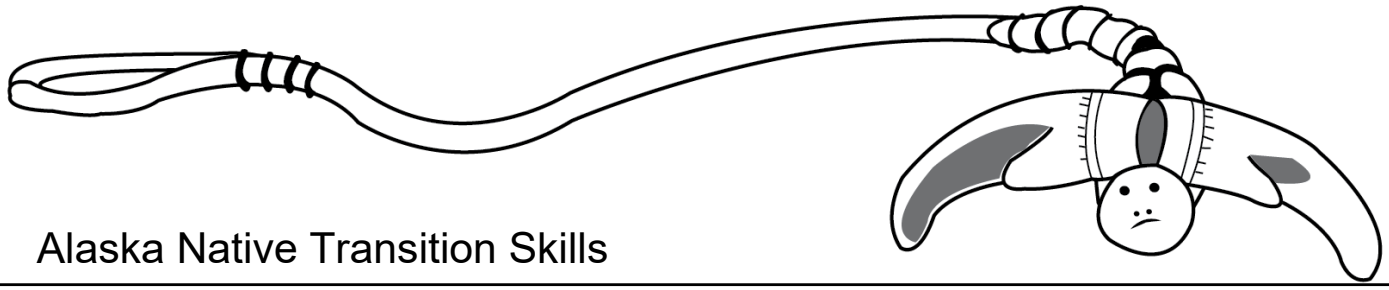
Ulu

Sewing Machine

Sinew

Pins

Sole Shaper



How to Use a Pattern

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn what a pattern is, and how it is used in sewing. The students will practice using a pattern to cut out the shapes to make a walrus.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A2, A4, A5, A6, B2, B3, B4, C1, C3, C4, D5, D6, E1, E2, E3, E8

Iñupiaq Values

- Respect for Elders, Domestic skills, Family roles, Sharing, Hard work

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Describe the purpose of using a pattern when sewing.
- Demonstrate how to cut a shape out of fabric using a pattern.

Materials

- Handouts: *Make a Walrus Using a Pattern* (Student Handout) and *Examples of Patterns* (Instructor Handout)
- Fabric in two colors of brown and white (craft felt or fleece fabric works best). Construction paper can be used if fabric is not available.

Vocabulary

Pattern Usually made of paper, it has the shapes that get cut out of fabric and sewn.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we will learn about patterns, and how they are used in sewing. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to explain what a pattern is, and how it is used. We will make a walrus from a pattern to see how a pattern works."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
    - What is a pattern? Have you seen anyone who is sewing something use a pattern to cut out the shapes that are sewn together?
    - Look at a sewn object in the room, like a jacket. Look at this. See how there are different shapes of fabric sewn together to make the arm? The hood? The pockets? How did the person who made it know what to cut from the fabric? (*A designer made a pattern, and then someone used that pattern to know what shape to cut out, and then someone sewed the shapes together.*)
- **Connect the lesson to Iñupiaq values:** You can draw connections to many of the values (see resource in the appendix) but these are some suggested values to discuss.
    - **RESPECT FOR ELDERS:** To assist and appreciate the wisdom, inner-strength, and learn from the life experience skills of our older people.
    - **DOMESTIC SKILLS**: To appreciate and perform the roles of home and family duties in both the traditional and western lifestyles.
    - **FAMILY ROLES:** To know our responsibility as a family and extended family member. To accept communication as a foundation in learning the roles and strengths.
    - **SHARING:** A foundational value based on distributing part of what is gathered or known among the people for ensuring a holistic survival.
    - **HARD WORK:** The on-going use of mental skills or physical strength to get things done.
- **Show the pattern examples, and ask what the students think the pattern makes.**
    - One is a mitten pattern, and one is an old pattern for a girl's parka, and one is a fox "woman's hat."
- **Show the examples of patterns drawn on skins, ready to be cut out for makluks.**
    - What do you think this will be? How did they know to draw this shape? *(They traced a pattern onto the fur with a marker.)*
- **Make a walrus using a pattern activity:**
    - Give the handout to students, along with felt, fabric, or heavy paper in the three colors of dark brown, lighter brown, and white.
    - Follow the steps on the handout to create a walrus. Note: You can print it on larger paper to make it easier to cut out, if a student struggles with cutting out the fins.
    - The walrus can be glued to a stiff background if desired.

Learning stories

- "Esther is a young woman who likes to make atikluks for herself and her sisters. Her grandmother helped her make a pattern so she knows how to cut the fabric to make an atikluk that will fit her. Esther takes time to pick out the fabric and trim that she thinks will look nice. Esther lays the fabric out and then pins the pattern to the fabric. Next, she cuts around the paper until she has all the pieces cut out. She uses a sewing machine to sew the pieces together, and to add the pretty trim. When she tries it on, it fits just right! She feels happy knowing she is using a pattern her grandmother helped her make."
- Ask the students to share if they have family members that sew, and if they have seen them use a pattern.

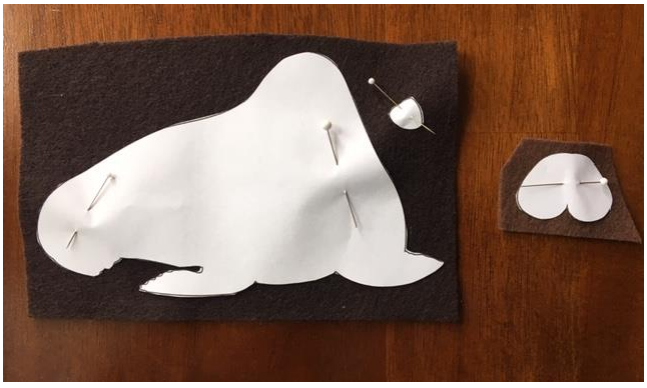
Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- Why do people use patterns in sewing?
- How do you use a pattern to make something?

Additional Resources

- This video shows a woman using a pattern to make a moose hide collar, shows pattern making and sewing with a hide. *Note that this a Dene Athabascan method for moose hide, but there are similarities with the process that an Iñupiaq skin sewer would use.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzlsX-r1dw4
- Sew Yup'ik (Artist Nikki Corbett) has great videos showing step by step sewing projects, including how to create patterns for atikluks/kuspuks. Visit her website at https://sewyupik.com/ or her YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeRPk08daIGJzqw8kY_Qyug/videos.
- **Here are some pictures of the steps in the handout, for instructor reference.**
  1. **Cut the body and chin pieces out of one color** (in the example, we used dark brown).
  2. **Cut the face piece out of another color** (in the example, we used light brown).



3. **Cut these pieces out of white.**

4. **Glue the pieces together.** This shows you how the smaller pieces overlap to make the walrus' face. The white tusks and the dark colored mouth go underneath the lighter nose piece. The first picture shows it from the back side, the second picture from the front. Glue these together first, then place them on the walrus.


5. You can use a black marker to color the details of his eyes, nose, whiskers, and flippers, as shown in the drawing.

Examples of Patterns

What does this make when it is cut out of fabric or skins and sewn together?

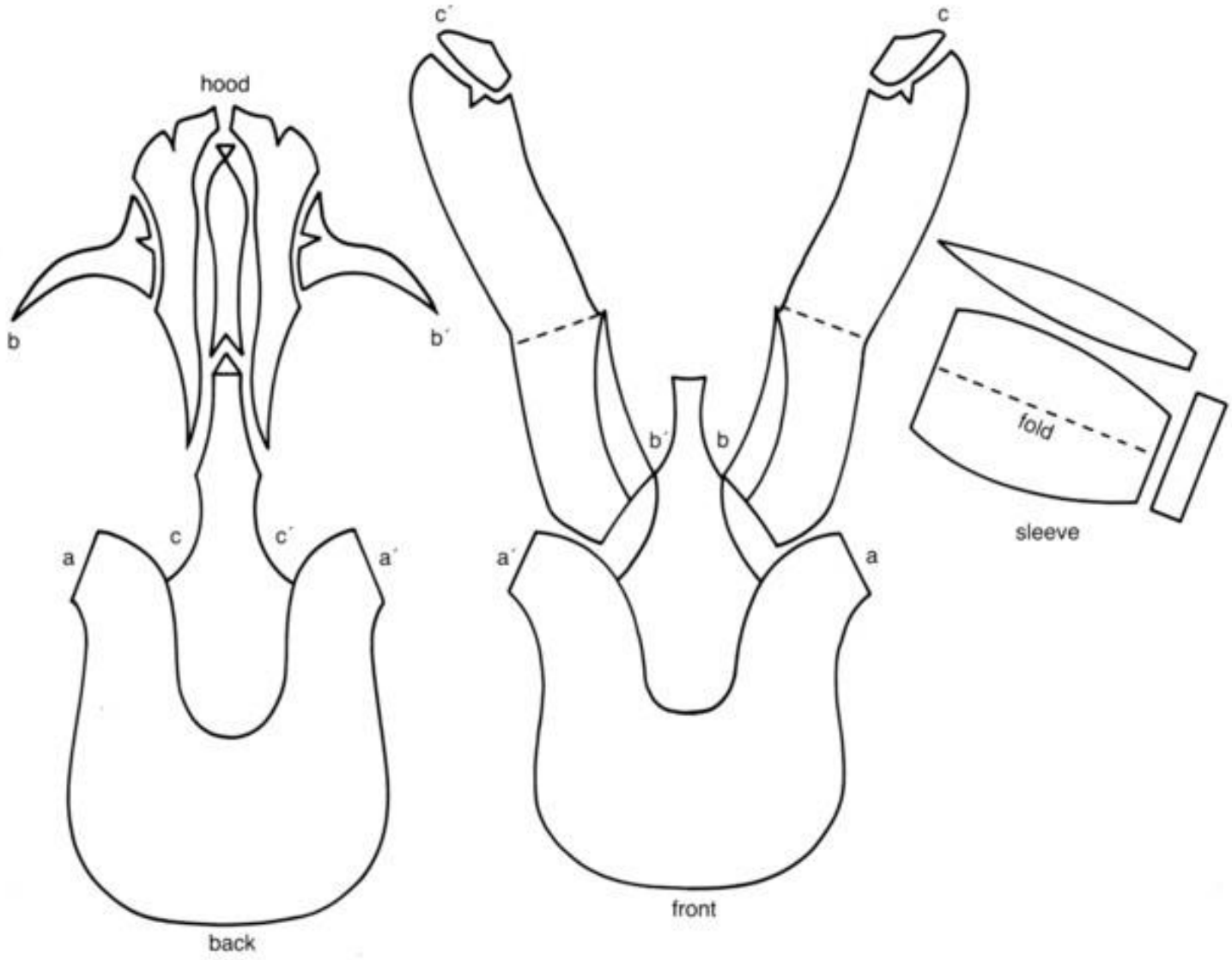
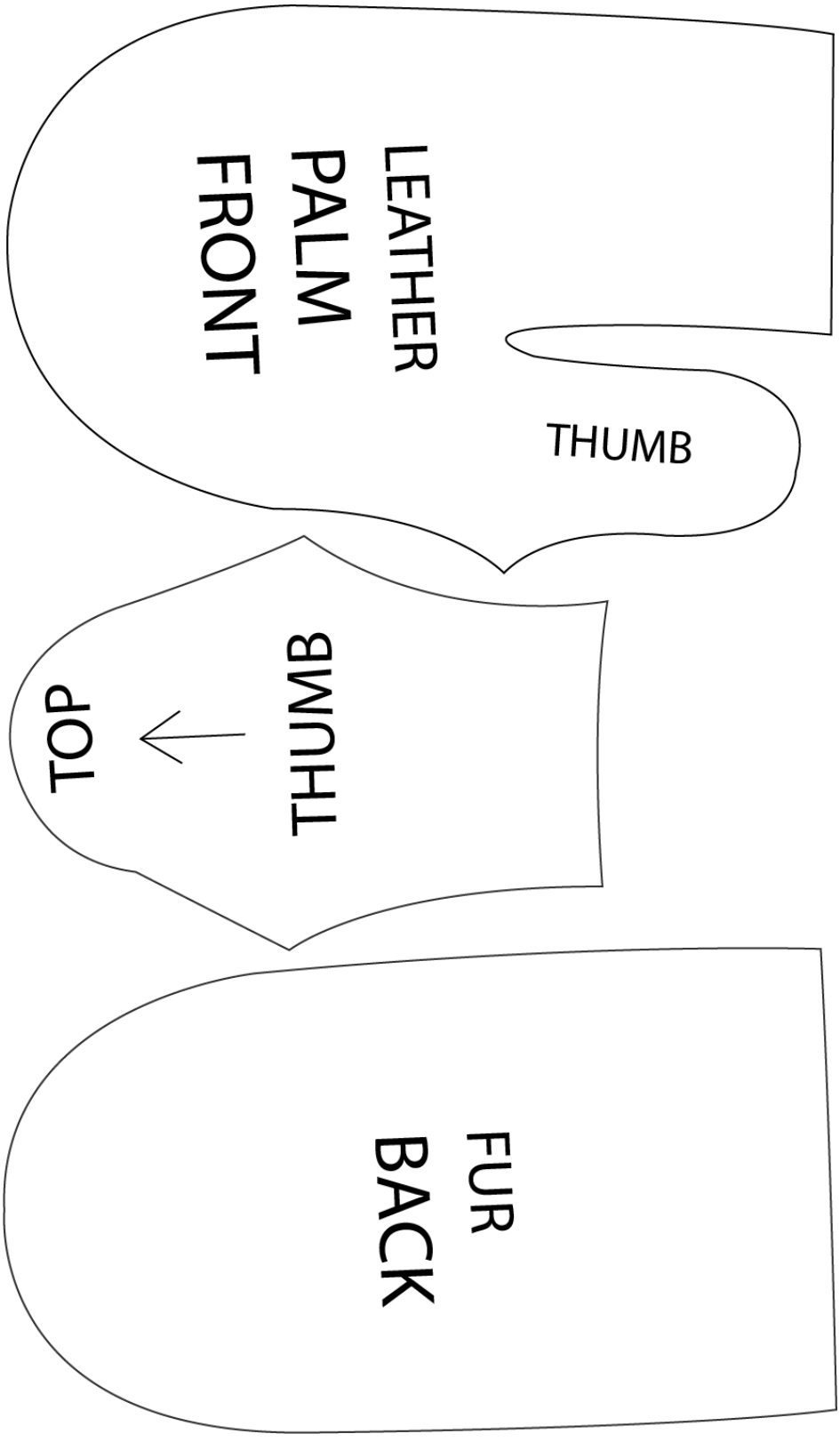


Image source: https://alaska.si.edu/media.asp?id=283&object_id=609
Pattern for an Iñupiaq woman's parka.
From Crossroads of Continents: Cultures of Siberia and Alaska (1988), fig. 279b.

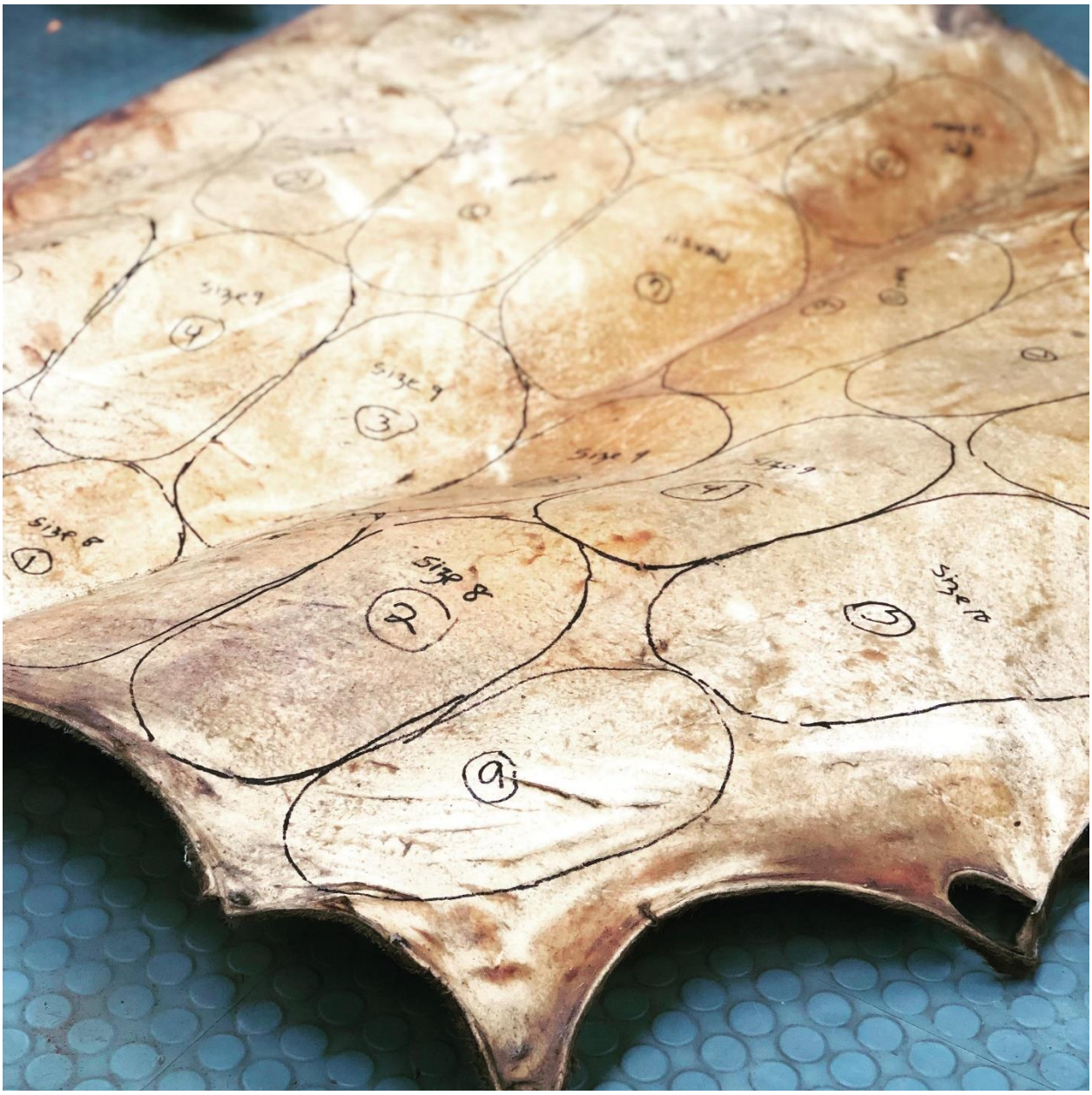
Girl's Parka https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=609
Source: Patrick H. Ray (collector), Museum: National Museum of Natural History
Museum ID Number: E074041



Pattern by Mary Lou Sours. Used with permission.

Fur mittens by Mary Lou Sours. Image used with permission.

Women's fox hat with a tail, ready to sew together. Photo by Maija Lukin and used with permission.



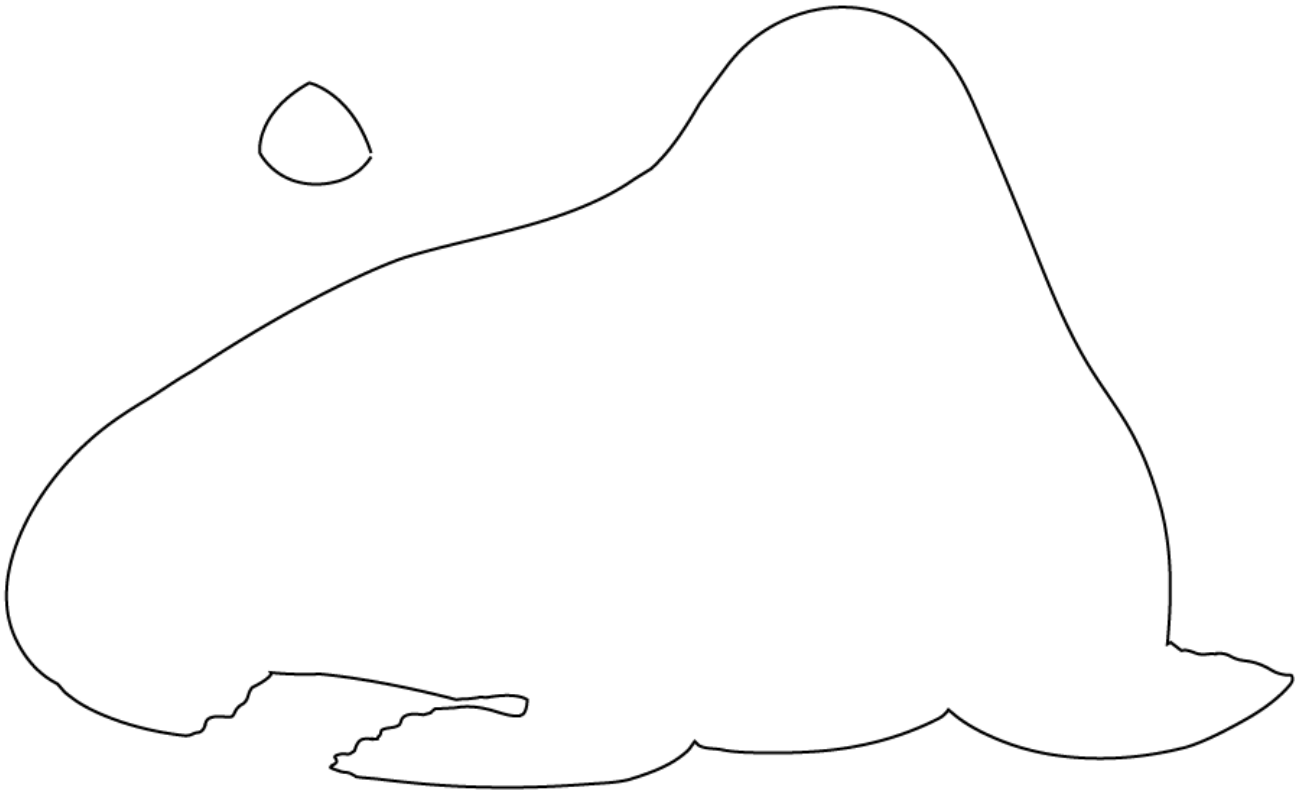
Ugruk (bearded seal) skin is for maklak soles, that still need to be scraped and crimped. Photo by Maija Lukin and used with permission.

Make a Walrus Using a Pattern

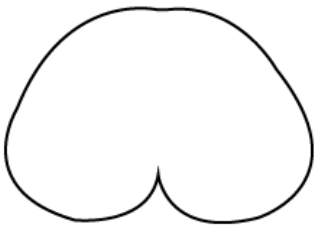
A pattern shows you what shape to cut from the fabric, so that when you sew it together it will make what you want. In this project, you will use the pattern below to cut out a walrus, and glue it together. This will help you understand what a pattern is, and how to use one for sewing.

Start by cutting the pattern pieces out. Then pin them to the fabric you will cut out. If it is easier, you can trace around the pattern to make your cutting line.

1. Cut these pieces out of one color (in the example, we used dark brown). This is the mouth and body of the walrus.

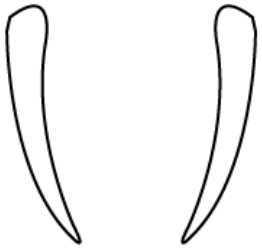


2. Cut this pieces out of another color (in the example, we used light brown). This is the face piece of the walrus.

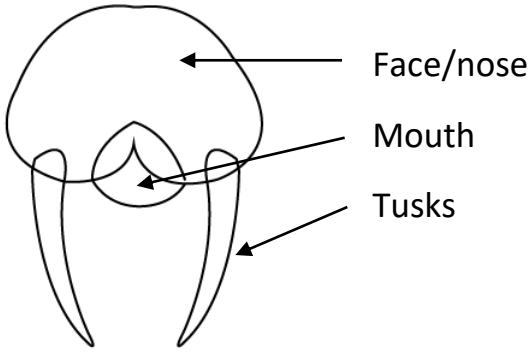


Alaska Native Transition Skills curriculum, Make a Walrus Using a Pattern Student Handout 2020, Van Den Berg / Gage, University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Human Development.

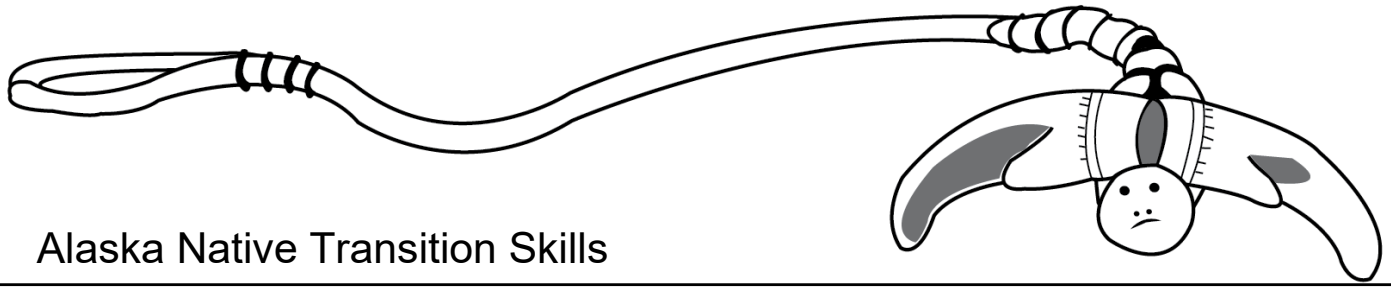
3. Cut these pieces out of white. These are the walrus tusks.



4. Glue the pieces together. This shows you how the smaller pieces overlap to make the walrus' face. The white tusks and the dark colored mouth go underneath the lighter nose piece.



5. You can use a black marker to color the details of his eyes, nose, whiskers, and flippers, as shown in the drawing.



Sewing Project: The Running Stitch

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn the basic steps of threading a needle, using a pattern, cutting fabric, and sewing using a running stitch.

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A6, B1, B2, B4, C3, D5, E4, E8

Iñupiaq Values

- Domestic skills, Family roles, Sharing, Hard work, Humor, Knowledge of language

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Demonstrate how to thread a needle and make a knot at the end of the thread.
- Demonstrate how to cut a shape out of fabric using a pattern.
- Demonstrate how to use a pin to hold the fabric together while sewing.
- Demonstrate how to use a running stitch to sew fabric together.

Materials

- *Felt Animals Sewing Project* Handout, enough printed so each student has the pattern for the animal they want to make.
- Felt, scissors, thread, needles (they can be large or medium, depending on dexterity of the students involved), sewing pins, polyester stuffing or batting (or stuffing substitute like tissue or cotton balls)

Vocabulary

Needle	Sharp tool with an eye to put the thread through used for sewing.
Pattern	Usually made of paper, it has the shapes that get cut out of fabric and sewn.
Running Stitch	A simple hand sewn stitch where the thread goes up and down in a line through the fabric.
Sew/Sewing	Join, fasten, or repair (something) by making stitches with a needle and thread or a sewing machine.
Thread	A long, thin strand of cotton, sinew, or other fiber uses in sewing.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we will learn about sewing by making an arctic animal out of felt. We will learn this by using a pattern to cut out the animal, and then using a needle and thread to sew it together. We will watch a video to see how the sewing is done, and then try it ourselves. The name of the stitch we will use is called the *running stitch*."
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
    - Have you sewn things together before?
    - What is a pattern and how is it used in sewing? *(A pattern is a shape on paper that shows where to cut fabric or other material to make something. We will use these patterns of animals so we know the shapes to cut out for our animal sewing project.)*
    - What tools are used in sewing? *(Needle, thread, scissors, fabric, pins)*
- **Connect the lesson to Iñupiaq values:** You can draw connections to many of the values (see resource in the appendix) but these are some suggested values to discuss.
    - **RESPECT FOR ELDERS:** To assist and appreciate the wisdom, inner-strength, and learn from the life experience skills of our older people.
    - **DOMESTIC SKILLS**: To appreciate and perform the roles of home and family duties in both the traditional and western lifestyles.
    - **FAMILY ROLES:** To know our responsibility as a family and extended family member. To accept communication as a foundation in learning the roles and strengths.
    - **SHARING:** A foundational value based on distributing part of what is gathered or known among the people for ensuring a holistic survival.
    - **HARD WORK:** The on-going use of mental skills or physical strength to get things done.
    - **HUMOR:** To appreciate the comical and amusing side of life. To laugh at ourselves as well as with others.
    - **KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE:** A heritage gift and responsibility to express and learn the cultural viewpoint.

- **Steps for the sewing project.**
  Print copies of the animal patterns and have students pick one to make. Note that there are two versions of the polar bear. The two-legged version is best for someone with no sewing experience, and the four-legged version for someone who already has some sewing experience. The whale and seal are a similar difficulty level as the two-legged bear.

  The Basics:
    - If the students have had no previous experience, start with the video *How to Sew by Hand* (6:03) which starts with how to thread a needle: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvzMMcKHVR4
    - Next, show the video that shows the technique of the project: *How to Hand Sew (SEWING BASICS)* (2:58) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zca_gc-Qw7w

- Tip: Students can practice sewing two squares together to practice their running stitch before starting the project. Have them start by pulling it all the way up, then all the way down, one stitch at a time. If they get that, they can weave the needle through front and back before pulling the thread through, making more than one stitch at a time.

The project:

A. **Cut out the paper pattern** from the handout.

B. **Pin it to two layers of felt,** making sure the felt is big enough to cut the shape out.

C. **Cut out the shape,** cutting as close to the lines of the pattern as possible.

D. **Unpin the paper pattern from the fabric.**

E. **Pin just the felt pieces together,** so they won't shift around while sewing them. Use safety pins for this job if it is a concern for a student to be poked by standard pins.

F. **Sew it together:** Starting where it shows a "knot" on the pattern, sew a running stitch close to the edge all the way around the animal shape and end where it says "knot" by tying a knot, leaving a gap for stuffing. Make sure both layers are getting sewn with the stitches.

   - Tip: If the fabric bunches up, it means the student is pulling too hard. You can usually tug on it to flatten it out again.
   - Tip: If the thread is knotting as they pull it through, you can run it over soap or beeswax to help keep it from knotting.

G. **Stuff the animal:** You can use polyester stuffing or quilt batting, cotton balls, tissue, toilet paper...any shredded fibers. Use a pencil to gently push the stuffing into the smaller areas (like noses and flippers and tails) before filling the body. Pin the hole closed after stuffing the animal to make it easier to finish sewing together.

H. **Sew the stuffing hole:** Sew together the place you left open to stuff, from "knot" to "knot" and tie a good knot to finish it.

I. **Finishing touches:** Use a sharpie or permanent marker to add the details indicated on the pattern with a thick black line.

Learning stories

- If any of the students have sewn before, they can share about what they know.
- As an additional activity, the students can tell a story about the animal that they created.
- Ask a local Alaska Native leader, Elder, or culture bearer to share about sewing in their family, how they learned to sew, or to share a story featuring one of the animals.

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:
Can you now do the following…

- Thread a needle and make a knot at the end of the thread?
- Cut a shape out of fabric using a pattern?
- Use a pin to hold the fabric together until you can sew it?
- Use a running stitch to sew fabric together?

Additional Resources

- There are many videos on YouTube that teach hand sewing, such as: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FknfumFPX8
- There are also many simple felt projects students can try, if they had fun with this one. An example site with many felt animal projects: https://liagriffith.com/craft/felt-and-fiber-diy-crafts/felt/felt-animals-felt-craft-do-it-yourself/

All links verified 8-2025

Felt Animals Sewing Project

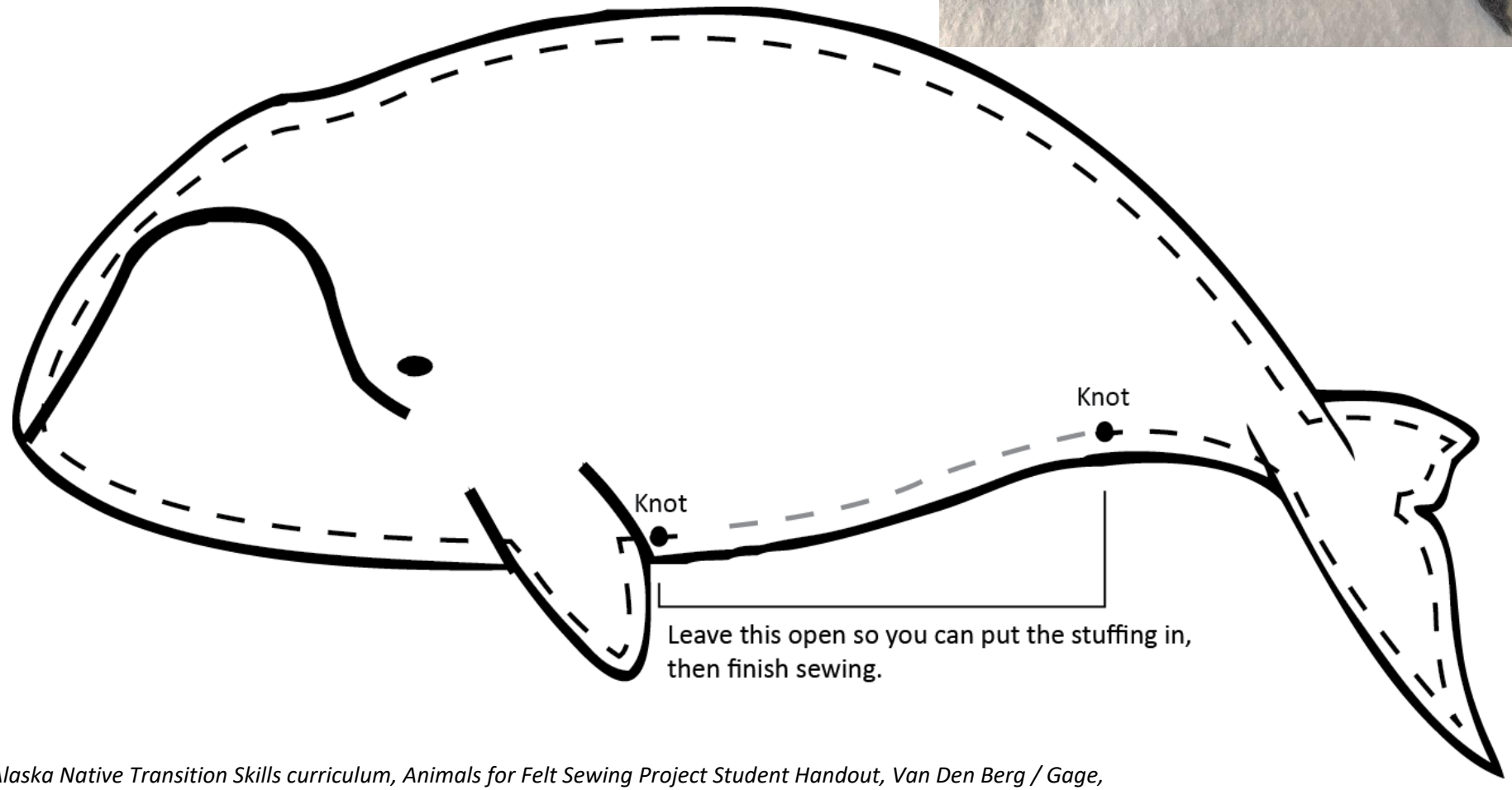
Watch the video to see how to sew a simple shape and stuff it, then use the patterns below to make animals using the same ways they showed.

How to Hand Sew (SEWING BASICS) (2:58) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zca_gc-Qw7w

Alaska Native Transition Skills curriculum, Animals for Felt Sewing Project Student Handout, Van Den Berg / Gage, University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Human Development. 2020 (Rev 2025)

Bowhead Whale

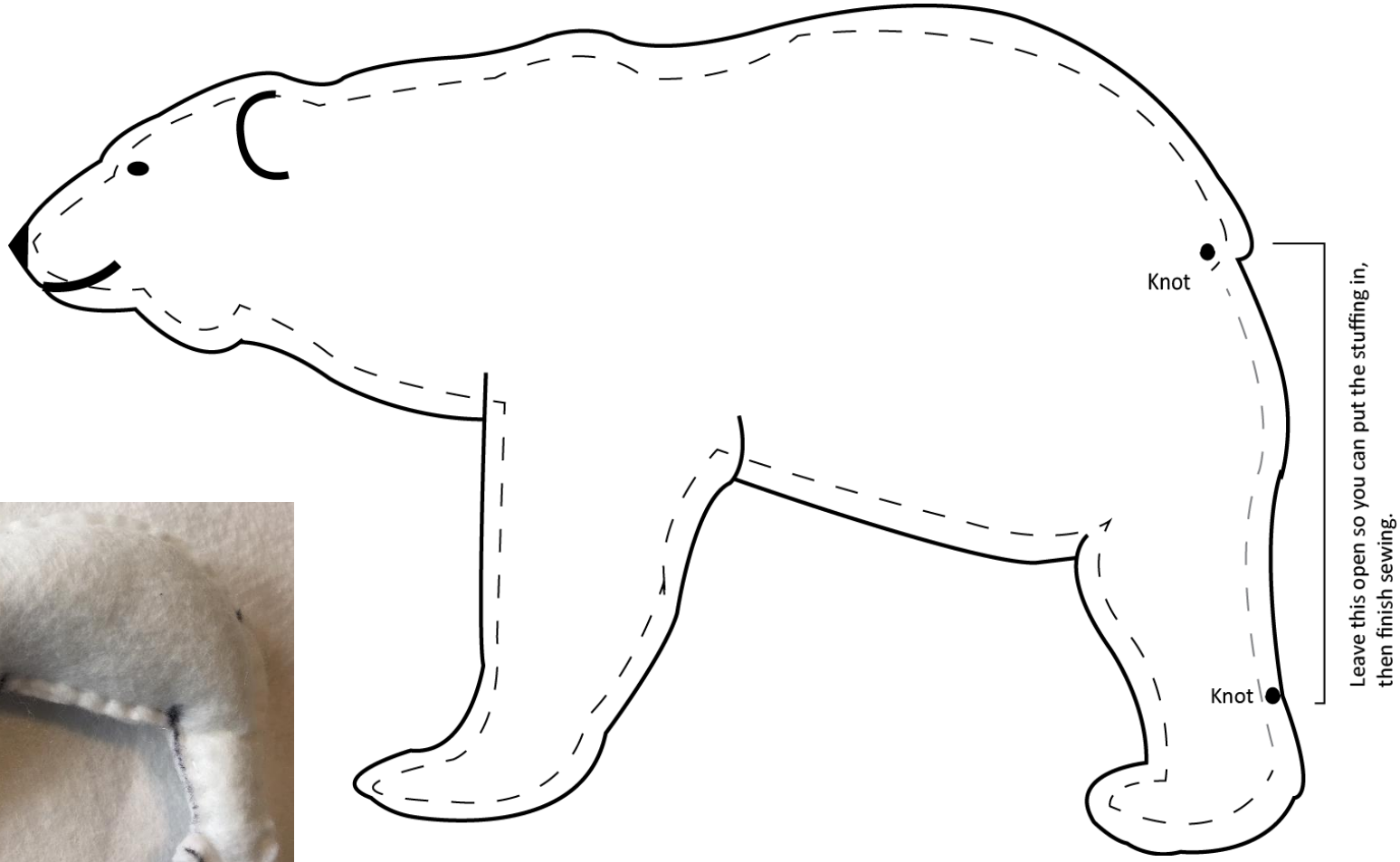
Draw the mouth, eye, and fin on with a marker. See example.



Alaska Native Transition Skills curriculum, Animals for Felt Sewing Project Student Handout, Van Den Berg / Gage, University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Human Development. 2020 (Rev 2025)

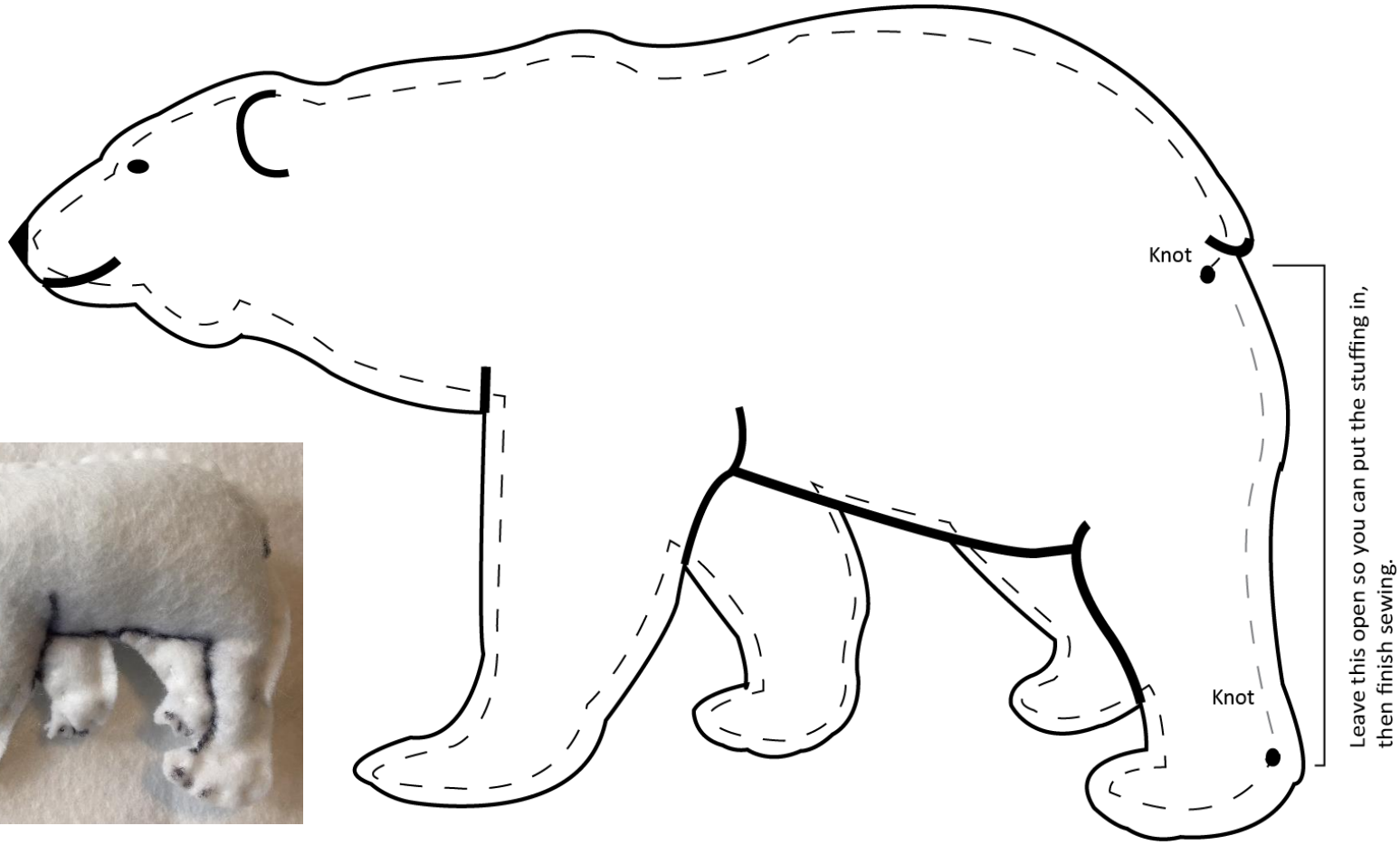
Polar Bear: Two-Leg

Draw the bear's nose, eye, mouth, and ear on with a marker. See example.



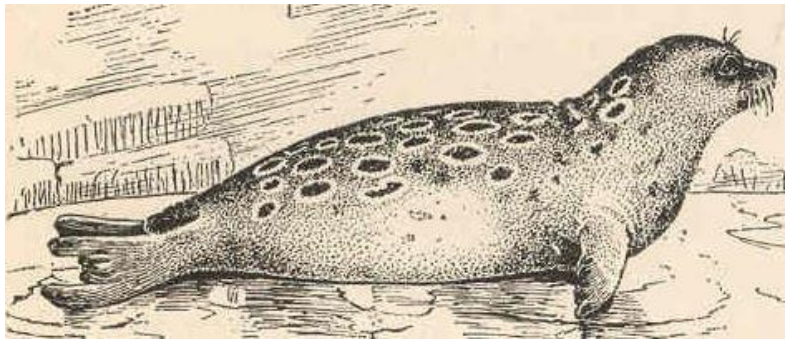
Polar Bear: Four-Leg

Draw the nose, eye, ear, mouth and leg and belly lines on with a marker. You can add dimesion by also stiching those lines after you stuff it. See example.

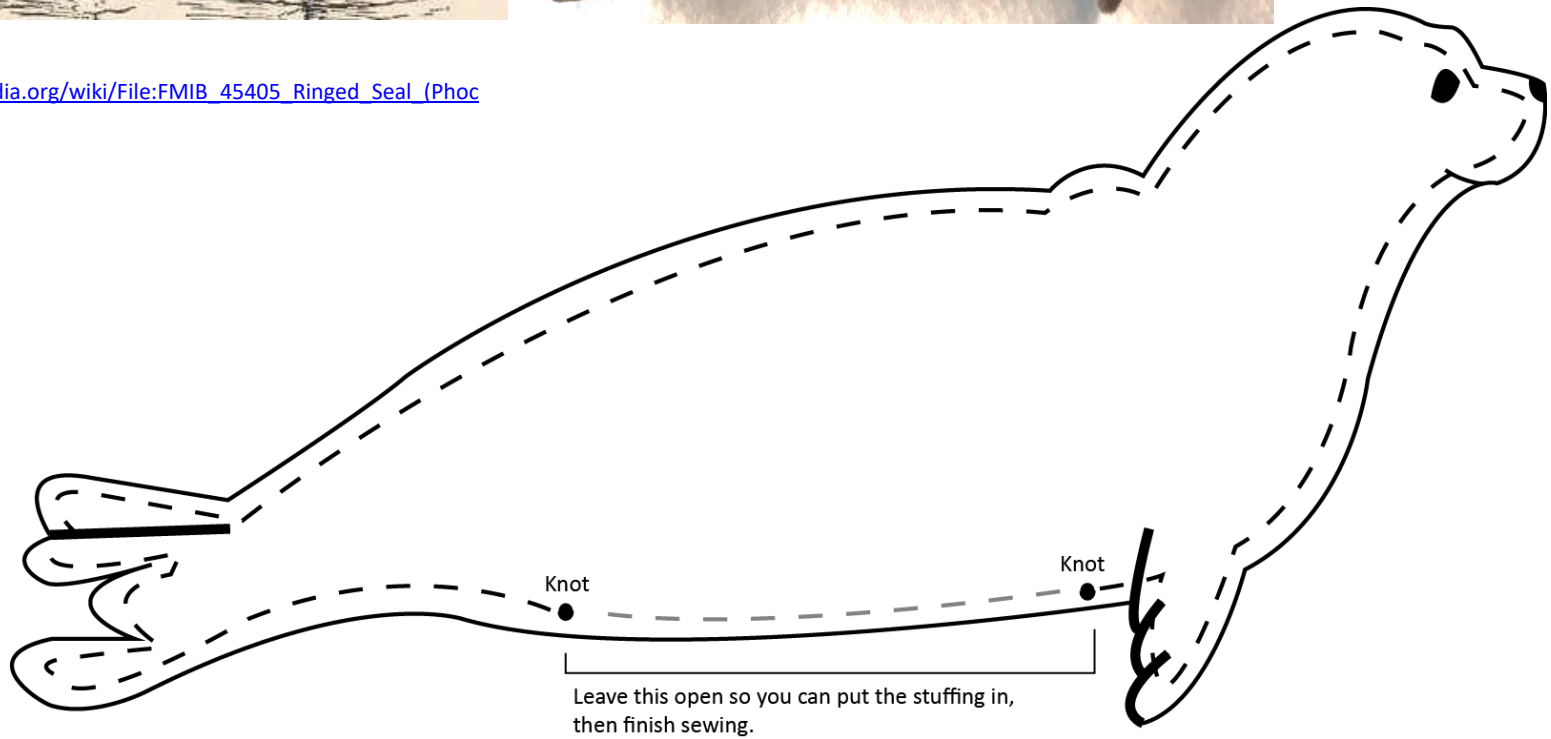


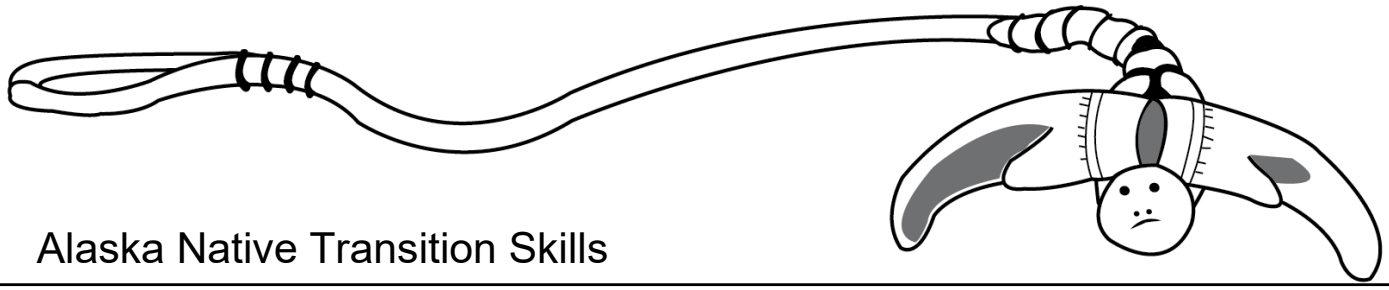
Ringed Seal

Use the outline as a pattern for your seal. If you want to add some markings with a marker, use the picture to see how the markings can look. See example.



Free Use Image:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:FMIB_45405_Ringed_Seal_(Phoca_foetida).jpeg





Sewing Project: Felt Bag Using the Whip Stitch

Overview

In this lesson, students will practice the basics of threading a needle and using a pattern, and learn the basics of design and assembly of a bag using the whip stitch. This project gives a feeling for the steps used when doing fur/skin piecework with an easier material (felt).

Alaska Cultural Standards

- A1, A6, B1, B2, B4, C3, D5, E4, E8

Iñupiaq Values

- Domestic skills, Family roles, Sharing, Hard work, Knowledge of language

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Demonstrate how to make design choices using a pattern.
- Demonstrate how to use pins to hold the fabric together while sewing.
- Demonstrate how to use a whip stitch to sew fabric together.

Materials

- *Sewing Project: Introduction to the Whip Stitch* Handout, enough printed so each student has the pattern.
- Felt, scissors, thread, needles (they can be large or medium, depending on dexterity skills of the students involved), sewing pins, buttons, glue

Vocabulary

Button Hole	The hole or slit that is made to allow a button to pass through and secure two pieces of material together, like on the front of a coat.
Needle	A sharp tool with an eye to put the thread through that is used for sewing.
Pattern	Usually made of paper, it has the shapes that get cut out of fabric and sewn.
Pin	A sharp thin piece of metal with a point on one end and a bead on the other that holds materials together while they are sewn.

Quppak	The design on the border of maklaks or parkas that historically would show which family you are from.
Running Stitch	A simple hand sewn stitch where the thread goes up and down in a line through the fabric.
Sew/Sewing	Join, fasten, or repair (something) by making stitches with a needle and thread or a sewing machine.
Thread	A long, thin strand of cotton, sinew, or other fiber used in sewing.
Whip Stitch	A simple hand sewn stitch where the thread holds two pieces together with a wrapped stitch that pulls two edges together.

Activities and Adaptations

- **Share the goal of today's lesson:** "Today we will learn about sewing by making special bags out of felt. We will use the same way of sewing that people use to sew pieces of fur together in Quppak designs on maklaks and parkas. We will practice making design choices for the bag to create the look we want. We will learn this by cutting out shapes using a pattern, trying different combinations of the design, and then sewing it together using a stitch called the "whip stitch." We will watch a video to see how the sewing is done, and then try it ourselves. In the end, we will have made a special bag.
- **Begin by finding out what students already know by asking the following questions:**
    - Have you seen the Quppak designs on maklaks and parkas? Does your family have a special pattern that is important to your family? *[Note to instructor: Some families may have lost their historical pattern due to colonization and there may be historical trauma associated with this loss. Ask about this to establish connection, but do so with understanding that some may not have it, or know it.]*
    - What does it mean to **design** something, or make choices about **design**? *(The design is the way something looks, or how it is put together. An artist has to make choices about how he or she wants something to look, which changes what they do to make it. In this project, you will explore using shapes to make different designs.)*
    - What is a pattern and how is it used in sewing? *(A pattern is a shape on paper that shows where to cut fabric or other material to make something. In this project, we will cut out shapes from felt and sew them into a special bag.)*
    - What tools are used in sewing? *(Needle, thread, scissors, fabric, pins, buttons)*
- **Connect the lesson to Iñupiaq values:** You can draw connections to many of the values (see resource in the appendix) but these are some suggested values to discuss.
    - **RESPECT FOR ELDERS:** To assist and appreciate the wisdom, inner-strength, and learn from the life experience skills of our older people.
    - **DOMESTIC SKILLS**: To appreciate and perform the roles of home and family duties in both the traditional and western lifestyles.
    - **FAMILY ROLES:** To know our responsibility as a family and extended family member.

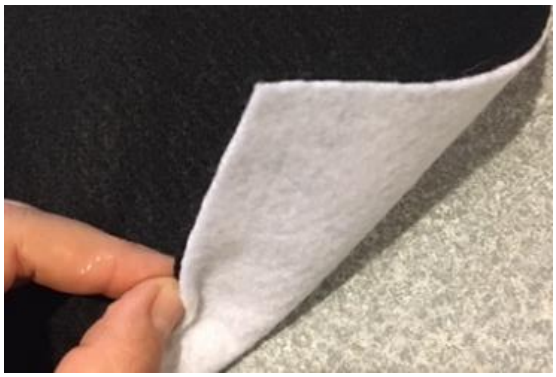
To accept communication as a foundation in learning the roles and strengths.

- **SHARING:** A foundational value based on distributing part of what is gathered or known among the people for ensuring a holistic survival.
- **HARD WORK:** The on-going use of mental skills or physical strength to get things done.

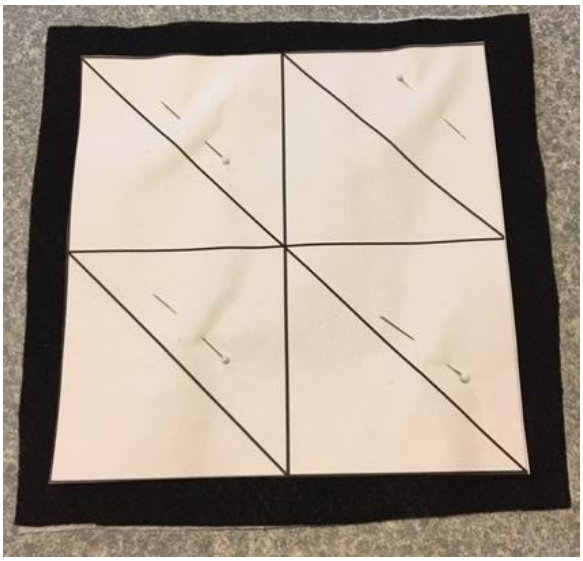
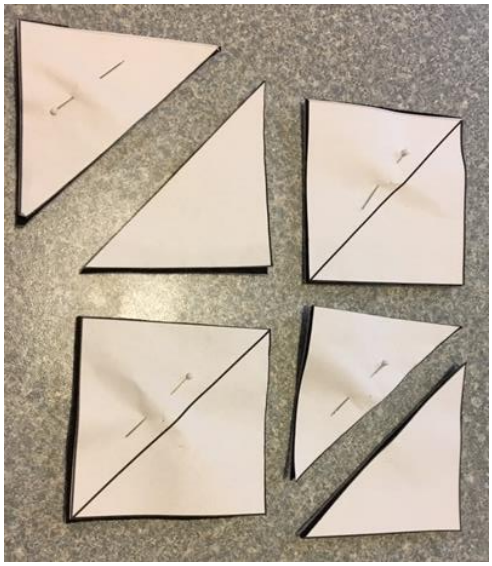
- **Steps for the sewing project.** Note: This project is more complex, so if the instructor doesn't have sewing experience, it is recommended to have one or two guests with sewing experience in the classroom to help students with the project during the sewing process. It is recommended that the instructor make a sample using the instructions before attempting to use the lesson in the classroom.
- **The concept:**
  - Fur has a hard leather layer and a soft fuzzy layer. When doing the piecework for Quppak designs, the harder leather is sewn together from the back side using a whip stitch, and it is not visible from the front. This project uses two layers of felt that have been glued together in place of fur. It allows the students to use the whip stitch on the back, and it will not show on the front. Felt is much easier to sew than fur, so they can learn the technique on a material that is easier to work with.
  - Having white on one side, and black on the other also gives the opportunity to play with the design by manipulating the felt pieces and trying designs, instead of coloring on paper. This way, you can match the ways your student works best. Some artists like to draw ideas, and some like to try things directly with their hands.
- **Prepare the materials.** Glue one white and one black felt square together for each student so it can be cut out and manipulated to play with the quilt block designs. You will also need to glue together double felt for the side edges and top rectangle so they can all be assembled using the whip stitch on the back side, without showing on front.
  - Print copies of the student handout and discuss design. Show them how the same shapes can make different designs depending on the color chosen.
  - Have one quilt block that has been cut into pieces ready to show them. You can use this to show them how the different designs on their handout can be made by flipping the pieces to the black or white side, and arranging them in different ways.
- **Getting Started:**
  - If the students need a reminder, start with the video *How to Sew by Hand* (6:03) which starts with how to thread a needle: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvzMMcKHVR4
  - Next, demonstrate the whip stitch using double layer felt, laid out flat. Show how you work on the back side, creating the whip stitch, and how it doesn't show on the front. *Tip: Have students practice sewing two double layer squares together to practice their whip stitch before moving to the project.*

Detailed steps for the project

1) **Create the double layers of felt:** Glue together one black piece of felt, and one white for each student, and place a book on them as they dry to be sure they are well adhered. Do this also with red felt squares (red to red) for the side pieces. (Note: You only do this for the pieces on the front of the bag. The back piece of the bag can be a single layer of felt.

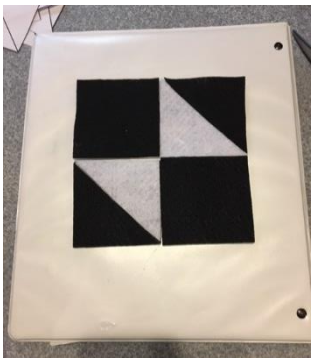
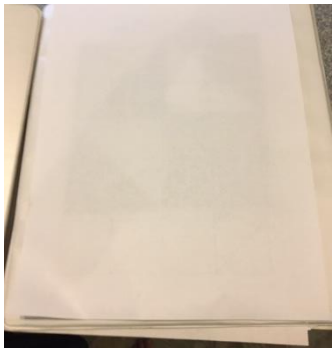
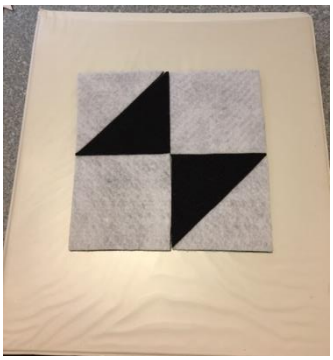


2) **Pin quilt square pattern to the black/white felt.** Cut out on the lines to make the pattern the student wants. As in this example, you can leave sections that will be the same color together, and just cut where needed.

3) **Unpin the pattern, and play with making different designs using the two-sided felt squares.** Once the student has decided how they want the design, they should lay it out on a book.

4) **Place a piece of paper on top, and then another book. Holding the books firmly together, flip them over.** Remove the top book, and your felt design is now upside down on top of a piece of paper.

5) **Pin the pieces to the paper.** This will hold the pieces in place while the student sews the back side. If the student sews through the paper, it is not a problem, and it can still be removed from the sewing work.

6) **Whip stitch the pieces together.** It is important to only sew the top layer of felt together, just as they would sew the leather and not the fur if working with fur. The sewn layer will be on the inside of the bag, so the stitches won't show.

Tension is important. You want to pull on the stitch until it brings the edges together, without bunching up. Usually it works best to do the diagonals first, then sew the squares. You may need to unpin and move pieces closer together as you work, as when you sew, it draws them closer together.


7) **Sew until all the pieces of the square are connected. Next add the red border pieces, and the top rectangle.** Trim the sides as needed to be the same as the back piece of the bag.


8) **Cut the fringe on the white felt strips.**

9) **Lay out the pieces of the bag to sew together.** Place the back of the bag, then the white fringe pieces, then the top sewn piece. Pin the edges.



10) **Use a running stitch to sew the bag together.** Start at one corner of the opening for the bag, and sew around three sides.

11) **Sew a button to the red rectangle, placed according to the pattern.** Cut a small slit (button hole) in the flap so it can slip over the button and secure the top of the bag. If desired, a rope or other cord can be added as a strap and attached to either side of the flap.

Learning stories

- Guest culture bearers with sewing experience can share why they like sewing, or tell stories of sewn objects that have been given to them and why they are important.

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, ask the students these questions:

- Can you now do the following…
- Choose a design for something you are making?
- Use pins to hold the fabric together while you sew it?
- Use a whip stitch to sew fabric together?

Additional Resources

- This video shows the whip stitch concept, but doesn't show it being used to sew two flat edges together: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lTAiUY69K8
- This video shows the whip stitch being used in crochet, which is with yarn, but shows how it connects two flat edges, and the technique is more like what is used in this project. This is more to inform the instructor, as it might be hard for students to transfer the skill to different materials.
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zMFAYuaTlU
- This video shows Athabascan Artists using patterns, sewing moosehide, and talking about working with leather. The last few minutes are tied to values and why it is important to do good work when creating things that may be shared or given to others. *Note that this a Dene Athabascan method for moose hide, but there are similarities with the process that an Iñupiaq skin sewer would use.*

  Athabascan Moosehide Tanning & Sewing (21 of 23): Making a Moosehide Yoke:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzlsX-r1dw4

All links verified 8-2025

Sewing Project: Introduction to the Whip Stitch

This design is traditionally used on the top of a maklak Quppak. It is made from piecing different colors of fur together. Usually, a family has a special design for members of their family to use. This design is from artist Maija Lukin's family.

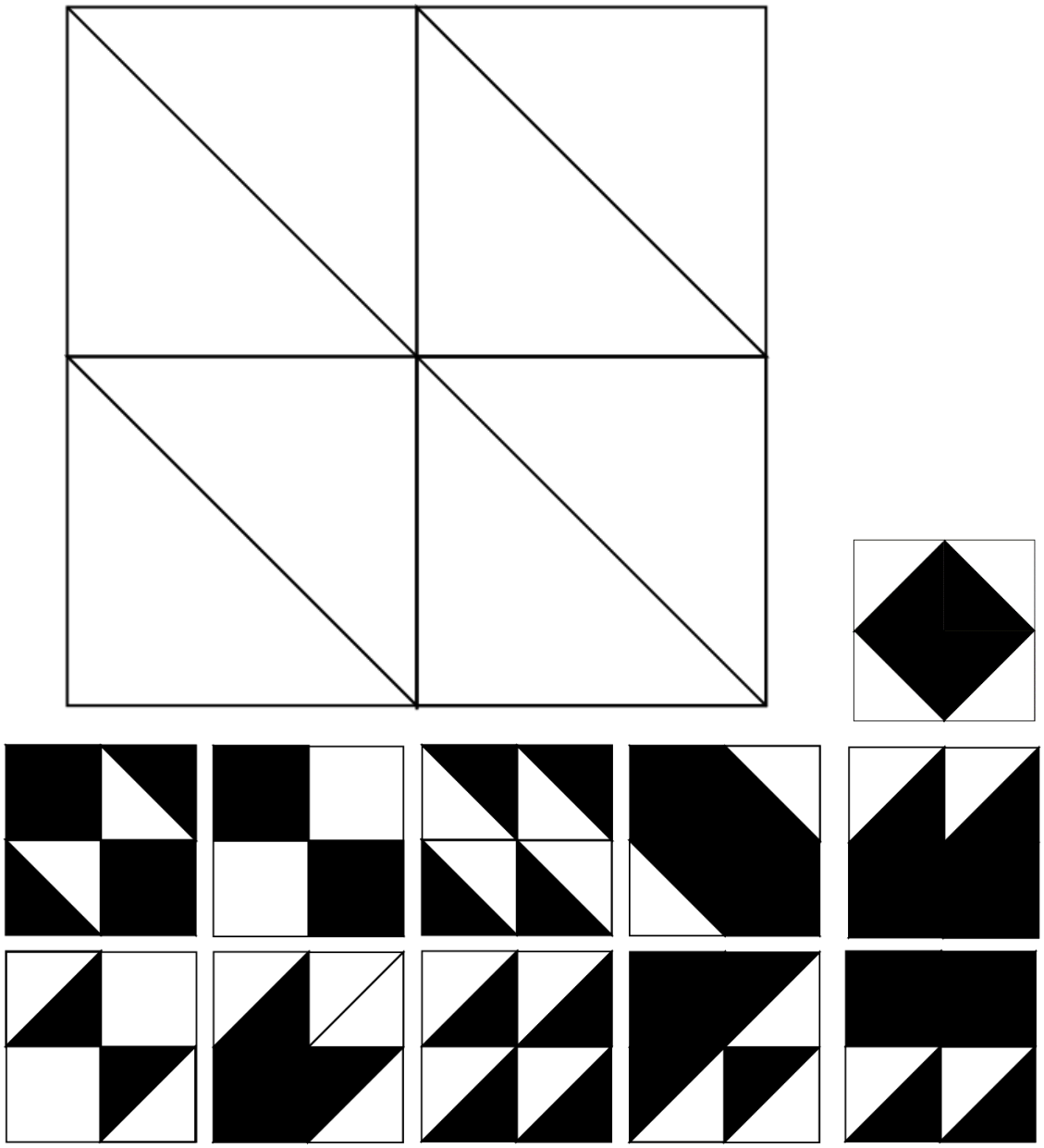
A pattern is used to cut out the pieces so they fit together snugly. The fur is sewn from the back using a whipstitch. This way of sewing doesn't show on the front. Here is what it looks like on the back side.

In this project, we will use a quilt square as a design, and use felt, which is easier to sew than fur. We will practice the way to sew the pieces together using the whip stitch. When you are done, it will make a special bag.

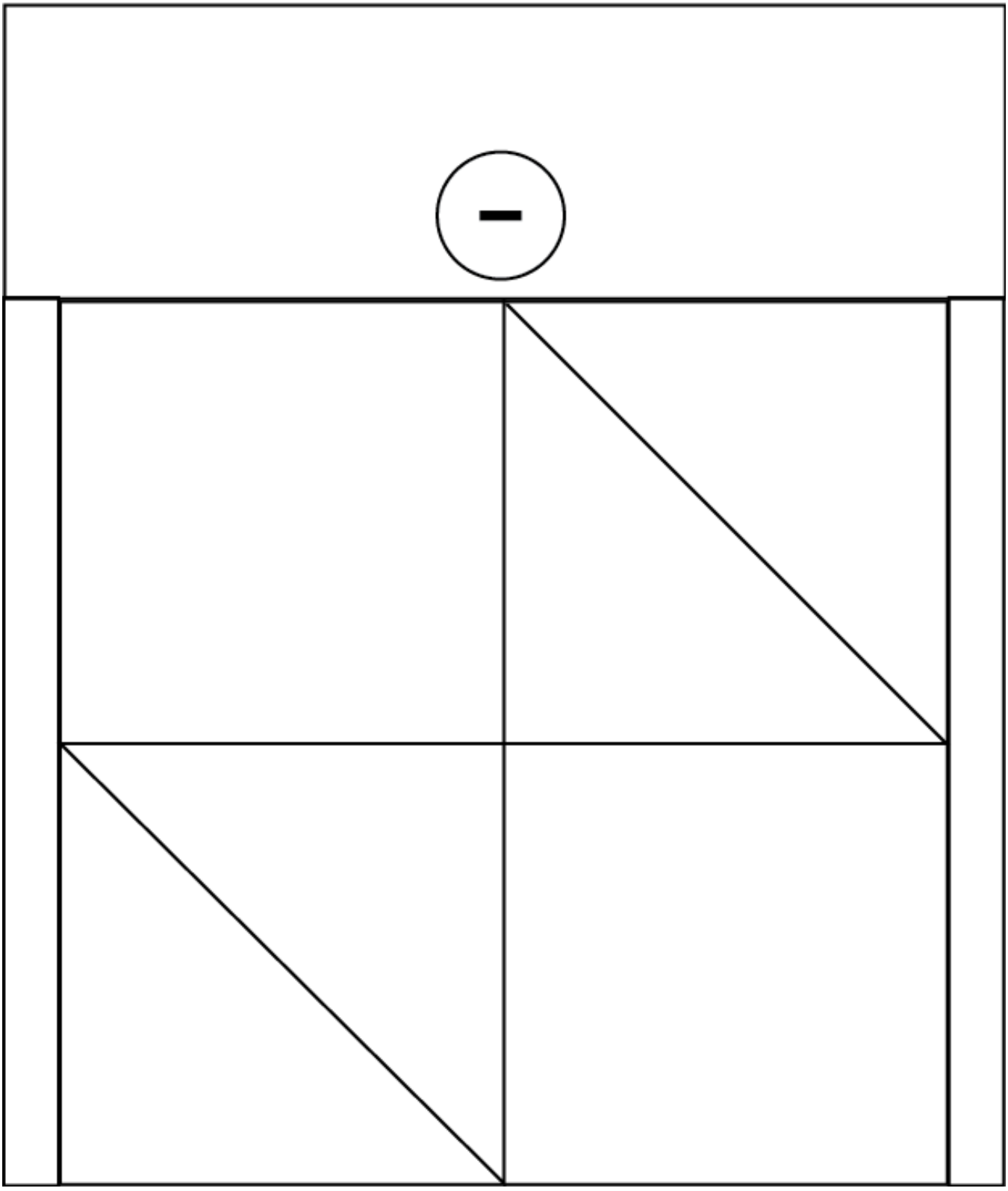
Photo credit: Quppak images provided by Maija Lukin and used with permission.

Design: Using the same shapes, you can create many different designs. You can decide which design you like by drawing it and coloring it in, or by moving around the cut out felt pieces to find the design you like.

By deciding which shapes should be black, and which ones white, you can make different patterns using the same shapes. You can also rotate them and see how they look. Some of the patterns you can make with these shapes are shown below.



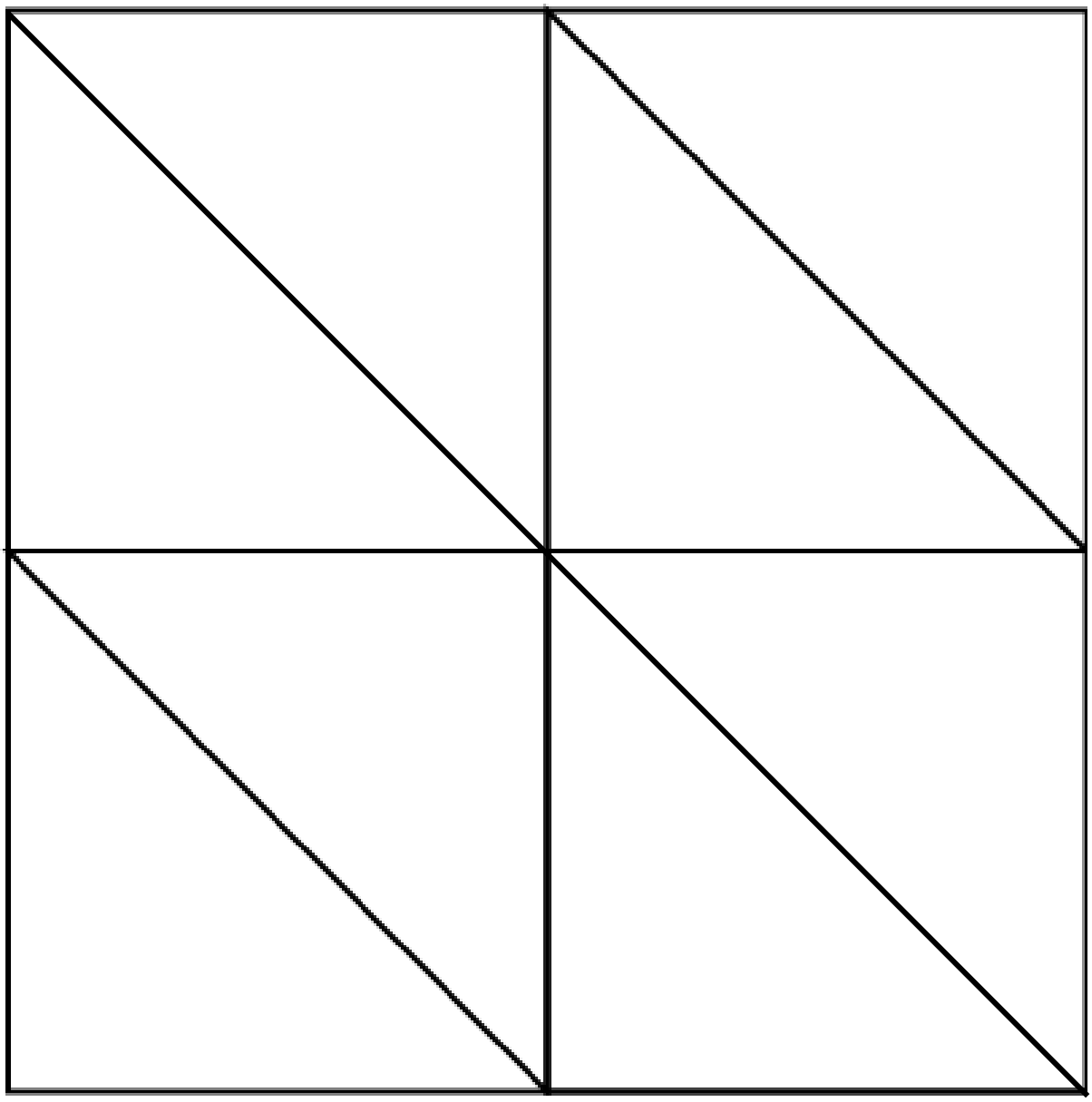
Pattern: This shows where to put the button, and the top and side shapes.



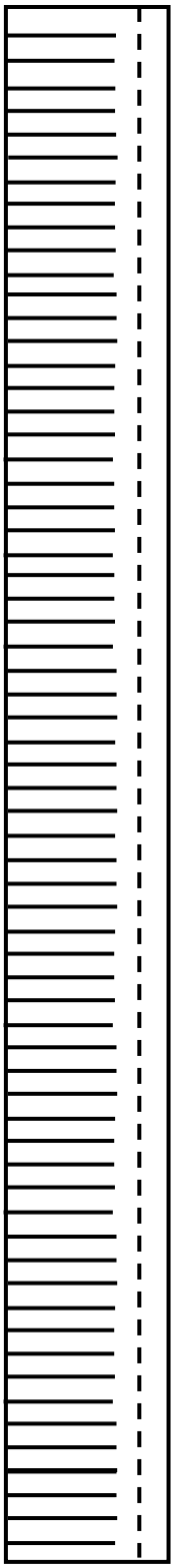
This is the pattern for the back piece of felt that wraps around the top to make the flap that buttons.

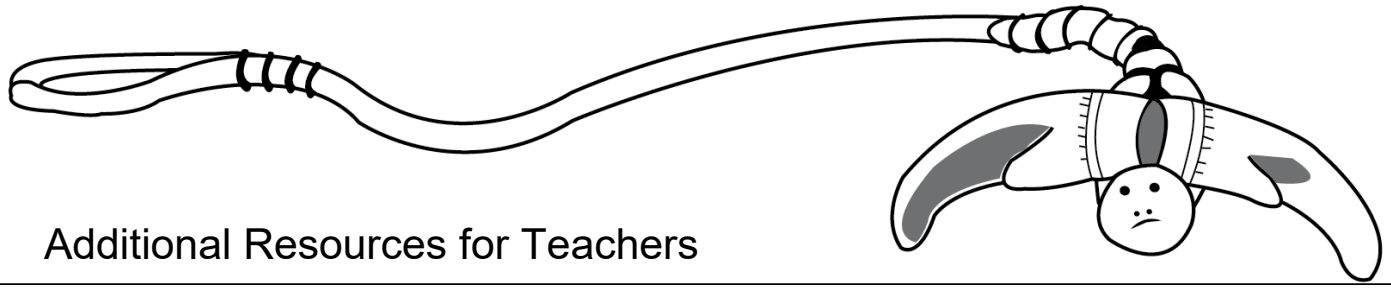
Cut **one** of these in the color you want.

If you want to do a different pattern than the one in the example, use this pattern to cut out the shapes for the main center square.



Side Fringe: Cut **two** of these in white for the side fringe. Cut as shown to make it look like a fur fringe. This is sewn between the top and back piece. The dashed line here is where this piece gets stitched into the sides of the bag using a running stitch.





Additional Resources for Teachers

These were resources we found as we developed the curriculum that may be helpful. These links were accessed 8-2025.

Tips for Non-Alaska Native Teachers who want to invite an Elder in to speak: This is part of a unit on weather. See page 6: http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/curriculum/units/PredictingWeather/PredictingWeather.pdf

Alaska Native Knowledge Network: More curriculum and other resources related to Alaska Native ways of knowing. http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/

Sew Yup'ik (Artist Nikki Corbett): Great videos showing step by step how to sew a kuspuk/atikluk as well as other sewing projects. Visit her website at https://sewyupik.com/ or her YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeRPk08daIGJzqw8kY_Qyug/videos.

Alaska Native Artist Resource Workbook by the Alaska State Council for the Arts. A very detailed guide for Alaskan Native artists to develop their art as a business. Access it online: http://thecirifoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/ALASKA-NATIVE-ARTIST-RESOURCE-WORKBOOK_2015.pdf

Alaska Native Arctic Studies Collections (Smithsonian Project): Examples of Alaska Native traditional objects and art in this online collection that you can explore and share with your students: Search the Alaska Native collection by region, culture, or object type at: https://alaska.si.edu/search.asp

Smithsonian Institution Arctic Studies Center Learning Lab: There are many more examples of Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian carved objects and other traditional objects in this online collection that you can explore and share with your students: Search the Alaska Native collection by region, culture, or object type at: https://learninglab.si.edu/org/sasc-ak

Smithsonian Arctic Studies Channel: Features videos of many Alaska Native artists and Elders teaching about traditional art forms: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNpC1tX-kqJaSU7ZSxUWAfA/videos

Visit the Sulianich Art Center (Kotzebue): Look for examples of sewn art. See many artist's work, and talk to the people that work there about how it works for artists to sell their art there. If your community is outside of Kotzebue, visit the local artist co-op or other store that sells art by local artists.

Alaska Cultural Standards

A: Culturally-knowledgeable students are well grounded in the cultural heritage and traditions of their community.	**B: Culturally-knowledgeable students are able to build on the knowledge and skills of the local cultural community as a foundation from which to achieve personal and academic success throughout life.**	**C: Culturally-knowledgeable students are able to actively participate in various cultural environments.**	**D: Culturally-knowledgeable students are able to engage effectively in learning activities that are based on traditional ways of knowing and learning.**	**E: Culturally-knowledgeable students demonstrate an awareness and appreciation of the relationships and processes of interaction of all elements in the world around them.**
A1: Assume responsibilities for their role in relation to the well-being of the cultural community and their lifelong obligations as a community member; **A2:** Recount their own genealogy and family history; **A3:** Acquire and pass on the traditions of their community through oral and written history; **A4:** Practice their traditional responsibilities to the surrounding environment;	**B1:** Acquire insights from other cultures without diminishing the integrity of their own; **B2:** Make effective use of the knowledge, skills, and ways of knowing from their own cultural traditions to learn about the larger world in which they live; **B3:** Make appropriate choices regarding the long-term consequences of their actions; and **B4:** Identify appropriate forms of technology and anticipate the consequences of their	**C1:** Perform subsistence activities in ways that are appropriate to local cultural traditions; **C2:** Make constructive contributions to the governance of their community and the well-being of their family; **C3:** Attain a healthy lifestyle through which they are able to maintain their social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual well-being; and **C4:** Enter into and function effectively in a	**D1:** Acquire in-depth cultural knowledge through active participation and meaningful interaction with Elders; **D2:** Participate in and make constructive contributions to the learning activities associated with a traditional camp environment; **D3:** Interact with Elders in a loving and respectful way that demonstrates an appreciation of their role as culture-bearers	**E1:** Recognize and build upon the interrelationships that exist among the spiritual, natural, and human realms in the world around them, as reflected in their own cultural traditions and beliefs as well as those of others; **E2:** Understand the ecology and geography of the bioregion they inhabit; **E3:** Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between world view and the way knowledge is formed and used;

A5: Reflect through their own actions the critical role that the local heritage language plays in fostering a sense of who they are and how they understand the world around them; **A6:** Live a life in accordance with the cultural values and traditions of the local community and integrate them into their everyday behavior. **A7:** Determine the place of their cultural community in the regional, state, national, and international political and economic systems.	use for improving the quality of life in the community.	variety of cultural settings.	and educators in the community; **D4:** Gather oral and written history information from the local community and provide an appropriate interpretation of its cultural meaning and significance; **D5:** Identify and utilize appropriate sources of cultural knowledge to find solutions to everyday problems; and **D6:** Engage in a realistic self-assessment to identify strengths and needs and make appropriate decisions to enhance life skills.	**E4:** Determine how ideas and concepts from one knowledge system relate to those derived from other knowledge systems; **E5:** Recognize how and why cultures change over time; **E6:** Anticipate the changes that occur when different cultural systems come in contact with one another; **E7:** Determine how cultural values and beliefs influence the interaction of people from different cultural backgrounds. **E8:** Identify and appreciate who they are and their place in the world.

This handout was created from the Alaska Cultural Standards. Source: https://kpbsd.org/departments.aspx?id=6834&transitionUi=1

The lñupiaq Values

KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE: A heritage gift and responsibility to express and learn the cultural viewpoint.

SHARING: A foundational value based on distributing part of what is gathered or known among the people for ensuring a holistic survival.

RESPECT FOR OTHERS: To be truthful with others and respectful of property. To enhance strengths and not judge weaknesses.

COOPERATION: To willingly do things together for the common good of all.

RESPECT FOR ELDERS: To assist and appreciate the wisdom, inner-strength, and learn from the life experience skills of our older people.

LOVE FOR CHILDREN: God's gift for the future survival of the lñupiat heritage.

HARD WORK: The on-going use of mental skills or physical strength to get things done.

KNOWLEDGE OF FAMILY TREE: To know all of your relatives, extended family and ancestors.

AVOID CONFLICT: To think before you act. This requires patience, reaching consensus and extending and maintaining mutual respect.

RESPECT FOR NATURE: Being aware of, and kind to the earth's plants, natural resources and animals. To understand earths seasons and to protect nature for our children's use.

SPIRITUALITY: A personal belief in a Higher Power. Our human connection with all things.

HUMOR: To appreciate the comical and amusing side of life. To laugh at ourselves as well as with others.

FAMILY ROLES: To know our responsibility as a family and extended family member. To accept communication as a foundation in learning the roles and strengths.

HUNTER SUCCESS: The ability to hunt and survive in any setting. To learn self-reliance and discipline for the purpose of providing for family and the community in a world of changing resources.

DOMESTIC SKILLS: To appreciate and perform the roles of home and family duties in both the traditional and western lifestyles.

HUMILITY: To be modest and not boastful. Actions speak louder than words.

RESPONSIBILITY TO TRIBE: To contribute, to be trustworthy, to be reliable, to know right from wrong, and to be answerable to all people of the community.

Modified by lcj/rlj 6/9

Used with permission from Linda C. Joule, Maniilaq Corporation in *Traditional Alaska Transition Skills 2020 Van Den Berg/Gage UAA Center for Human Development*