

#9257

INUIT CULTURE

BENCHMARK MEDIA

1999

Grade Levels: 5-9

14 minutes



DESCRIPTION

Uses archival footage to contrast Inuit culture in the 1940s (games, drumming, crooning, sculptures) with today's arts and activities of races, hockey, igloo-building competition, and carving. Includes an Inuit folktale.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Subject Area: United States History

- Standard: Understands cultural and ecological interactions among previously unconnected people resulting from early European exploration and colonization
 - Benchmark: Understands the immediate and long-term impact of Columbus' voyages on native populations and on colonization in the Americas (e.g., Columbus; interactions with indigenous peoples, the Columbian Exchange, religious influences)

Subject Area: Geography: Places and Regions

- Standard: Understands that culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions
 - Benchmark: Knows how technology affects the ways in which culture groups perceive and use places and regions (e.g., impact of technology such as air conditioning and irrigation on the human use of arid lands; changes in perception of environment by culture groups, such as the snowmobile's impact on the lives of Inuit people or the swamp buggy's impact on tourist travel in the Everglades)

Subject Area: Technology

- Standard: Understands the relationships among science, technology, society, and the individual
 - Benchmark: Knows ways in which technology and society influence one another (e.g., new products and processes for society are developed through technology; technological changes are often accompanied by social, political, and economic changes; technology is influenced by social needs, attitudes, values, and limitations, and cultural backgrounds and beliefs)

Subject Area: Visual Arts

- Standard: Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures
 - Benchmark: Understands how factors of time and place (e.g., climate, resources, ideas, technology) influence visual, spatial, or temporal characteristics that give meaning or function to a work of art

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To compare the cultural traditions that have survived the transformation from what had been a largely unchanged indigenous Inuit Native American people of the far north for 2,000 years, in just the past 50 years to today's more modernized society.
2. To examine the scope of the impact modern civilization is having on formerly isolated peoples and cultures, in this case, the Inuit.
3. To observe how geography and climate affect the way people live and work.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Some 45,000 Inuit live in Alaska, 25,000 in Canada, and 46,000 in Greenland. This video documents, in rare archival footage, how the Inuit lived 50 years ago—much as they had for centuries—and today in a small settlement in Eastern Canada. These native people call themselves Inuit, which means “the people,” as they prefer to be known, rather than as Eskimos.

The Inuit are descended from Thule whale hunters who moved inland about one thousand years ago. Contact with Europeans probably first occurred when Norse colonies were established in Greenland about 985 A.D. European whalers in the mid-19th century brought manufactured goods to trade, and infectious diseases, which had a devastating effect. The Inuit were highly specialized hunters and fishers. Religious practices were largely rituals regulating the close relationship of humans with animals.

Today, hunters and fishers use modern equipment and weapons. Other sources of income are governmental assistance, mining jobs, and Inuit arts and crafts. Living standards and political autonomy have dramatically improved.



BEFORE SHOWING

1. Using a wall map, ask students to locate the Northwest Territories in Canada. Recently a semi-autonomous territory, carved from the Northwest Territories had been set aside for the Inuit, and is now called Nunavut. Our story takes place in Iqualutt, a small Inuit settlement which is at the head of Frobisher Bay, just north of Hudson Strait off the Labrador Sea. Iqualutt, itself, may not be on the map.
2. Discuss what cultural life for these formerly nomadic hunters and fishers might be like in such a far northern climate. What might Inuit leisure and recreational activities, music, carvings, or story telling be about?
3. The Inuit's attitude towards their unforgiving environment may surprise some. It is said that the Inuit, of all Canadians, has maintained that they are only one of the land's many elements, and certainly not the most important. The Inuit has learned over the ages how to adapt to, and survive in, this harshest of all climates. Discuss.

AFTER SHOWING

Discussion Items and Questions

1. Stimulate class discussion by making three columns, one describing aspects noted below of Inuit culture in the grandfather's time, the second of Inuit life today, and the third of student's lives. How are they similar and different? Aspects, students might discuss are: the music, dance, competitions, games, stories whether oral or reenacted live or recorded and replayed.
2. Discuss how geography and climate broadly affect people's lives. Ask students to list the ways that geography and climate have affected the Inuit people, 50 years ago, and today. What has changed (Internet, airplanes, television), and what has remained the same in how geography and climate have affected their lives.

Applications and Activities

1. Using the information from the columns in #1 of Discussion Items and Questions, have students research the Web sites provided below for further information on these topics, and others of possible interest. Have the students report on their findings.
2. Divide the class into groups. Ask each student to pick a cultural activity seen in the video, and to prepare class presentations on how geography and climate shaped that activity.
3. Divide the class into groups. Ask students to plan a trip to Iqualutt, using Internet information, maps, Canadian tourist information, tourist guides, books or articles, and the video. What would they see or do? How would they travel? What time of the year would they plan to travel and why? What would the weather and the vegetation be like at that time of year? What clothes would they bring? What recreational activities would they plan to enjoy? What kind of handicrafts and arts might they see?

SUMMARY

Half of the footage in this series is archival footage taken some 50 years ago. The central family about which the series revolves consists of a grandfather, James Mike, who lived in the days of the archival footage, hunted seals with a harpoon for food, traveled only by dogsled, and lived in an igloo. His daughter, Mica, who is an outdoor guide for tourists, and her daughter, Jesse, who attends school, completes the three generations. The contrast between the grandfather's life, when Inuit lived much as they had for thousands of years, and that of his granddaughter with her computer, is startling.

Inuit carvings and sculpture keep the Inuit in touch with their past, carvings of hunters, animals, musicians and dancers. To help pass the long nights, there was music, dancing, a special kind of chanting, and above all, the stories—the oral history of legends and myths.

The story of how fog came to the world is reenacted by fur-clad Inuit, intercut with Inuit carvings, which capture the highlights of the legend.



RELATED RESOURCES



Captioned Media Program

- The Arts of the Eskimo: An Arctic Adventure #8620
- Eskimos: A Changing Culture (The Cup'ik of Alaska) #3120
- Inuit Climate and Food #9256
- Inuit Shelter and Heat #9258
- Inuit Survival Skills #9259



World Wide Web

The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and "kid safe" sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

- **ESKIMO—ARTCTIC STUDIES CENTER**

<http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/features/croads/eskimo.html>

From the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, explains how the unity of Eskimo culture is enhanced by many commonalities, including similar languages, physical and genetic characteristics, and a common cultural base.

- **INUIT OF CANADA**

http://itk.ca/sitemap/I_heritage/header_iheritage.html

Describes the Inuit's 5,000-year heritage, enduring traditions, a new political vision, and a sustainable future. Provides links.

- **THE INUVIALUIT OF THE WESTERN ARCTIC**

<http://www.civilization.ca/aborig/inuvial/lande.html>

Displays photographs of the early Thule culture village site, self-portrait, as well as traditional Inuvialuit culture essentials. Contains other topics such as Survival, From Ancient Times to 1902, Isolation of the Inuvialuit, and others.

- **INUIT**

<http://www.mce.k12tn.net/indians/reports3/inuit.htm>

For lower grades, explains the Inuit habitat, dress, food, customs, and other needs for survival in their environment.