



LESSON PLAN

# Resiliency Among the Salmon People



RELATED FILM

**Yukon Kings**

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## Resiliency among the Salmon People

### Key Idea

As traditional communities such as the Yup'ik in Alaska face a variety of changes, cultural traditions and wisdom passed on from elders help them to sustain their way of life.

### Background

The Yup'ik are one of 11 distinct cultures of Native Alaskans. Located in Southwest Alaska, the Yup'ik still depend upon subsistence fishing, hunting, and gathering greens around their villages. Elders tell stories of traditional ways of life as a way to teach younger generations both survival skills and about their heritage.\*

As in other parts of Alaska, the Yup'ik have witnessed dramatic lifestyle changes in the last 50 years. One of the most visible is the huge rise in the use of snowmobiles and motorized boats, which help to make their subsistence living a bit easier in this harsh locale.\*\* The Yup'ik have also noticed extreme changes in their environment. Less overall precipitation has resulted in lower lake and river levels, diminishing salmon habitat. At the same time, the melting of the permafrost—on which many villages are built—has caused serious flooding, erosion, and the rippling of the landscape, which damages village infrastructure. In fact, numerous Yup'ik villages may be forced to relocate because of severe coastal erosion.

\* Alaska Native Heritage Center, "[Yup'ik and Cup'ik Cultures of Alaska.](#)"

\*\* Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals & Northern Arizona University, Tribes and Climate Change: "[Yup'ik.](#)"



**Film:** 7 minutes

**Class:** 60 minutes

### SUBJECT AREAS

#### HIGH SCHOOL

- Anthropology
- Environmental Science
- Modern World Studies

#### COLLEGE

- Cultural Anthropology
- Environmental Studies
- Geography
- Sociology

### THEMES

- Vanishing cultures
- Power of tradition
- Wisdom of experience
- Effects of climate change

### MATERIALS

- Online access to the film
- Equipment for showing film

### PREPARATION

- None



### Connections to National Standards

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.11-12.1.c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2.Geo.9.9-12. Evaluate the influence of long-term climate variability on human migration and settlement patterns, resource use, and land uses at local-to-global scales.

Next Generation Science Standards. HS-LS2-6. Evaluate the claims, evidence, and reasoning that the complex interactions in ecosystems maintain relatively consistent numbers and types of organisms in stable conditions, but changing conditions may result in a new ecosystem.

### Lesson

#### SETTING THE STAGE

Introduce the film by telling students that they will be watching a film about a Yup'ik fisherman from Alaska who embodies both a respect for tradition and an understanding that change is inevitable. Ask students to describe a grandparent or older acquaintance who is trying to preserve a family or cultural tradition while simultaneously engaging in modern everyday life.

#### ENGAGING WITH THE STORY

Direct students to note as they watch the film how the grandfather Ray Waska views and experiences change. They should observe how he passes on tradition and wisdom to his grandchildren without keeping them from living in the modern world.



### Delving Deeper

1. Explain that the class will conduct a mini-debate on this question: As the film portrays, some cultural traditions are intimately tied to local ecosystems, and are threatened when the ecosystem itself shifts. Are cultural changes like the ones depicted in the film inevitable consequences of “progress,” or should we actively work to preserve these cultural traditions?
2. Divide the class in half, with one half taking the side that changes are inevitable as society pursues progress, and the other half arguing that change is not inevitable and that we should work to preserve some cultural traditions. Give students a few minutes to plan a brief 30- to 60-second speech supporting their position. Speeches should include a brief statement of their position and provide at least one rationale for that position.
3. Have students present their speeches, alternating between the two positions. During the speeches, have the listeners assess the effectiveness of the arguments using a rubric with such criteria as:
  - Clarity (viewpoint outlined clearly): 1=unclear, 2=somewhat clear, 3=clear.
  - Argument (rationale for viewpoint): 1=no reason given, 2=some-what relevant reason given, 3=relevant reason given.
4. After all the speeches, you may choose to have students vote for the winning position based on their assessment of the collective speeches.



### Reflecting and Projecting

Give students one of the following reflective writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding of the story. (Note for teachers: Just as quotes from a book or text are used to prove an analytical thought, students use the film to justify their reasoning.)

1. Is there a tradition in your family that is lost or dying? What are the reasons for its disappearing, and what, if anything, could you do to bring it back? (CCSS.ELA.SL.11-12.1.c)
2. Ray Waska teaches his grandchildren through his words and actions not only about fishing, but about living. What lessons about life have you learned from elders in your family or community? (C3.D2.Geo.9.9-12)
3. How have the Yup'ik changed and what will they need to do to continue to survive? (NGSS.HS-LS2-6)

### Resources

Rowan Jacobsen, "[Fast Fish, Loose Fish: Who Will Own Alaska's Disappearing Salmon?](#)" *Harpers*, May 2009.

Kwik'pak Fisheries, "[Kwik'pak Region — Kuigpagmiut Neqsurtet \(Lower Yukon Fish People\)](#)."

Kwik'pak Fisheries, "[Our Fish: What Makes It Unique?](#)"

Dan O'Neill, "[What Became of the Yukon Kings? An In-River Look.](#)" *Peninsula Clarion*, November 23, 2013.