

#9259

INUIT SURVIVAL SKILLS

BENCHMARK MEDIA
1999
Grade Levels: 5-9
14 minutes



DESCRIPTION

Focuses primarily on skills and tools the Inuit used for survival in the 1940s. Uses a carving to show what a hunter needed. Archival footage shows how to build a sledge with no wood. Survival skills for today's Inuit include using the Internet.

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: Environment and Society

- Standard: Understands how physical systems affect human systems
 - Benchmark: Knows how the physical environment affects life in different regions (e.g., how people in Siberia, Alaska, and other high-latitude places deal with the characteristics of tundra environments; limitations to coastline settlements as a result of tidal, storm, and erosional processes)

Subject Area: Geography: Places and Regions

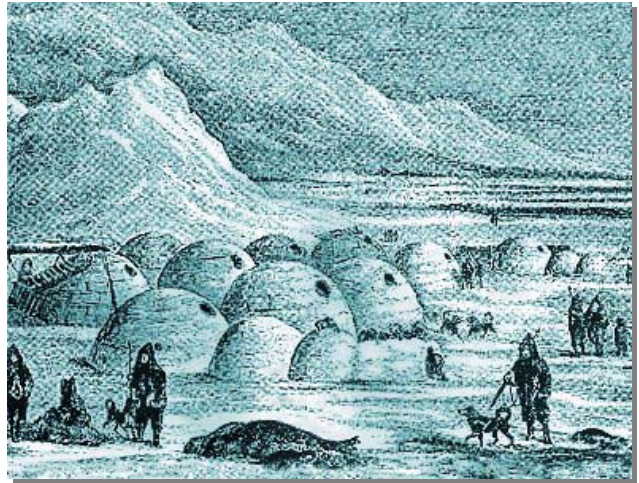
- Standard: Understands the physical and human characteristics of place
 - Benchmark: Knows the physical characteristics of places (e.g., soils, land forms, vegetation, wildlife, climate, natural hazards)

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 portray the vast change in the skills needed for survival by what had been a largely unchanged indigenous Native American people of the far north for 2,000 years, the Inuit, in just the past half-century.
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. Ask students to contribute to a discussion about what life would be like in such a far northern climate. What skills might they have needed there both before and after the arrival of outside modern world, to obtain the basic human needs of shelter, food, and transportation?
3. The Inuit’s attitude towards their unforgiving environment may surprise some. It is said that the Inuit, of all Canadians, has maintained the closest relationship with the land. They

have a saying “Our land is our life.” They understand 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.

4. Discuss how climate and geography affect the way people live and work in your local area. Expand the concept to different climatic regions of the country. When they view the video, ask students to note how climate and geography have affected the survival skills, which are needed by the Inuit.

AFTER SHOWING

Discussion Items and Questions

1. Stimulate class discussion by making three columns, one describing different aspects noted below of Inuit life in grandfather’s time, the second of Inuit life today, and the third of students’ lives. How are they similar and different? Aspects students might discuss are: the materials and tools with which homes are built, a hunter’s weapons, the things needed to prepare food, have light and heat, the means of transportation, and the reuse or recycling of objects.
2. Discuss how geography and climate affects 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, 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 product seen in the videos, such as wood for a dog sled, or computers, and to prepare class presentations on how that product might be imported over what routes and carriers, and from where. How does geography affect what products are imported and how they get there?
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 the Inuit lived much as they had for thousands of years, and that of his granddaughter with her computer, is startling.

The skills of the Inuit in the old days of grandfather James included making fire using 2 sticks of wood, a leather thong, and moss kindling. How to paddle a kayak made of sealskin, and the way to throw a hunting spear were essential to learn.

Fifty years later, Jesse, in primary schools, is learning to use the Internet for research and communication. The children have their own Web site <http://apa.nunavet.com>, and communicate around the world with other children. The keyboard is in the symbols of their own language, Inuktitut. Mica, the mother, uses the Internet for her tourist business. Some old skills and objects are still in use.

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 Culture #9257
- Inuit Shelter and Heat #9258



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 adaptation to arctic and subarctic maritime environments.

- **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 Inuvialuit land, wildlife, villages, and other essentials. Contains many other topics such as Survival, From Ancient Times to 1902, Isolation of the Inuvialuit, and many 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.