



Dena'inaq' Huch'ulyeshi

The Dena'ina Way of Living



TOOLS FOR TEACHERS

Lesson Plan 6

Things That are Well Made

Elementary (Grades 3-5) and Secondary (Grades 6-12)

Overview

Students examine the objects that allowed the Dena'ina to survive for centuries in Southcentral Alaska. They note the effectiveness and beauty of the tools. Teachers can choose from among four strategies to undertake this study:

- Aesthetics
- Riddles
- Learning about objects in-depth
- Learning about museums

Goals and Desired Outcomes

Overarching Understanding

- Material objects help us survive, but many objects have a greater meaning to people than simply survival.

Essential Questions

- How did various material objects make life in Dena'ina Ełnena, the Dena'ina homeland, possible?
- Why did the Dena'ina make so many of their objects beautiful as well as useful?

Assessments

- Art project inspired by a Dena'ina object
- Solving of riddles and creation of new riddles
- Written or verbal report on one object
- Participation in class discussion
- Written report on a collector of Dena'ina objects

Learning Activities

Materials

- 24 photographs of objects from exhibition
- Information about the objects

- Mitten pattern
- War club pattern
- Riddle Treasure Hunt
- Answers for the Riddle Treasure Hunt

Strategies

Strategy 1: Aesthetics

1. Look at the photographs of 24 objects from the exhibition. Choose several that have strong visual appeal and show artistry in their manufacture. Project these images in the classroom. Discuss what makes them beautiful or well made. Look at the designs: Are they floral? Geometric? Symmetrical? Colorful? Well crafted? What materials were used to add the artistic elements to the pieces?
2. Consider: Why did the Dena'ina make their tools and clothing so beautiful, when the aesthetics did not enhance their effectiveness or usefulness?
3. After determining the characteristics of the objects' artistry, choose one or more characteristic and assign a drawing or sculpture project based on that characteristic.
4. For younger students, print copies of the two patterns (mittens and war club) and have students draw their own designs to complete the objects. For a more free-form art activity, have students draw their own quiver, clothing, basket, or bowl shapes and draw designs on their surfaces.

Strategy 2: Riddles

Teacher Background

Alaska's Athabascans had a custom of playing with language to create what we would call riddles. This word play was considered a very high art form, and good riddlers often engaged in contests against one another. Riddles took the form of a declarative sentence that was a simile or metaphor for the object the riddler had in mind. The opponent had to state what the metaphor referred to. For instance, the answer to "I come upstream in a red canoe," is "red salmon." The following activities will give your students a taste of this custom.

5. Talk about riddles. Pose riddles to the class that they may have heard of, such as, "What has one eye but cannot see?" Answer: A needle
6. Explain that Athabascan children and adults also told riddles. Ask students to pose riddles to the class based on something they see in the classroom. Then progress to a riddle that describes something from the exhibition.
7. Explain that students will be given a treasure hunt sheet that is written in riddles. Their task will be to figure out the riddle, then find the related object or objects in the set of 24 object photographs.

8. Using the Riddle Treasure Hunt students locate the items indicated in the exhibit. Have small prizes available for the first correct answers. Share answers.
9. Not all of the 24 objects on this website are the answers to riddles. Have students write riddles for those items.

Strategy 3: Learning about objects in-depth

10. Choose a photograph of an object from the exhibition and project its image to serve as a model for students' independent work. As a class, explore the object, trying to learn as much as possible about the people who used it. Have in hand the information about the object.
11. As you look at the object as a class, use the following sequence of questions as a guide:
 - a) What is the object made of? Where did those materials come from?
 - b) What do we notice about the object? (Elicit as many observations as you can.)
 - c) Are there any objects students are familiar with that look like this? What are they and how are they used?
 - d) Any hypotheses about what this object might have been used for?
 - e) Any hypotheses about who might have used the object?
12. Read the information about the object to the students. Were they surprised about anything?
13. After you have modeled the way to examine one object's photograph, assign to each student another object. Since there are only 23 objects not yet discussed, some students may be given the same object. Students are to record answers as best they can tell from the photographs for the above five questions. Only after they have recorded this information may they read the information about the object and compare it with their observations and hypotheses.
14. Explain to students they have become experts on their objects. They will now tell the rest of the class about their objects. If you want students to offer more detailed information, refer them to the exhibition catalog to research the assigned object in greater depth.

Strategy 4: Learning about museums

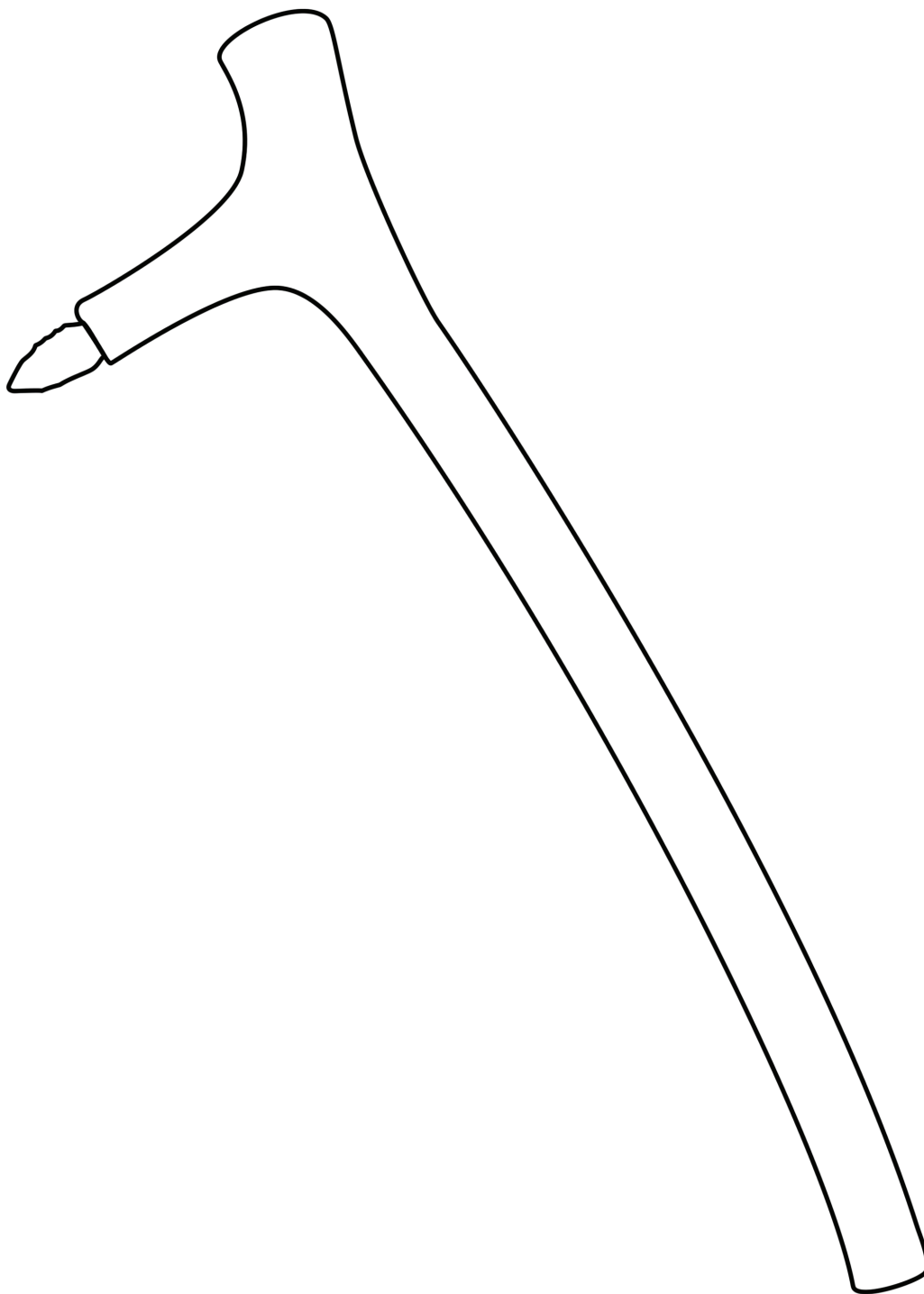
15. Refer to or make copies of the information about the 24 objects shown in photographs.
16. Have students look at the information about the objects. Have them rewrite labels for objects, as if they were describing them to younger students.

17. Note that the object information sheet identifies the museum that loaned the object and, in some cases, the people who collected the objects. Have students contribute to a class map that traces the journeys of one or more objects from Dena'ina Ełnena to the lending museum and back again to Anchorage for the temporary exhibition.
18. Ask what personal skills and characteristics would be beneficial to collectors. Have students investigate the lives of one of the collectors. The information about most of the collectors is contained in the exhibition catalog.
19. Use this statement as a writing prompt or discussion topic: "The Dena'ina might not have wanted to sell or trade some objects to collectors. Why not?"
20. Then discuss: "What parts of culture might not be easily reflected in material objects?"
21. Draw a timeline, then place the 24 photographs along that timeline. Talk about why certain dates are more commonly represented on the timeline than others. Why are some dates entirely unrepresented in the exhibition? Do students see a difference in the objects that were collected at different times?

Make Your Own Design

Instructions

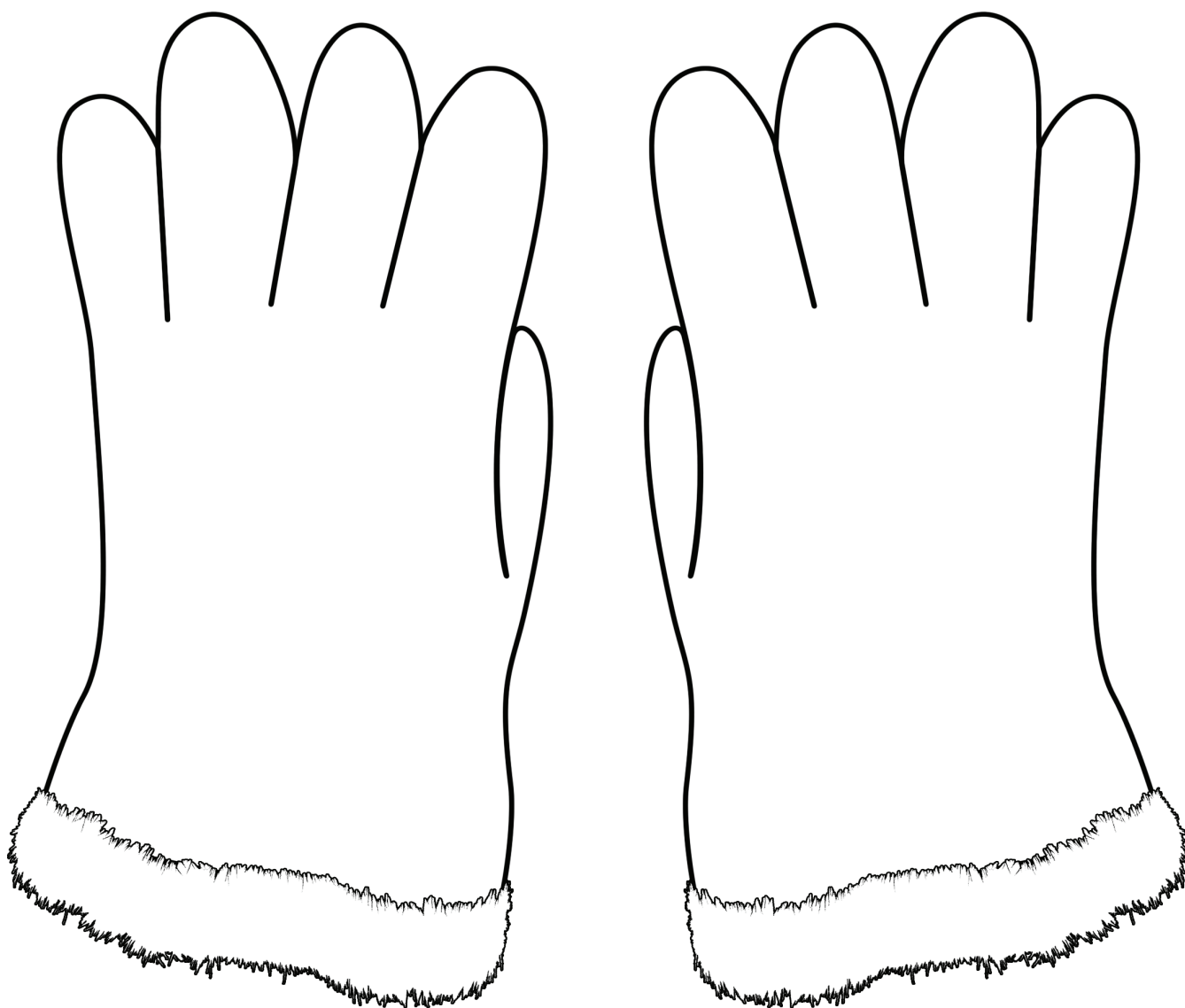
Look at the antler club in the exhibition, and then draw your own design on this club. A band of caribou hide was wrapped around the bottom of the club to serve as a handle. Be as creative and detailed as possible in your artwork.



Make Your Own Design

Instructions

Dena'ina women were experts at sewing, often decorating their caribou hide clothing with bands of dyed porcupine quills or beads. Look at some of the designs on the clothing in the exhibition. Then draw your own designs on these gloves. You can add anything you want to make them special.



Riddle Treasure Hunt Questions

Instructions

Each clue will lead you to an object or fact about the Dena'ina people, their culture, and history. You will need to read the clue, decide what it refers to, and search the website or the catalog that accompanied the Dena'ina exhibition for the answer.

Questions

1. Put me down, leave, and there's a treasure when you return.
2. I come from the sea but I'm popular in the Interior.
3. My insides go outside.
4. Bend me, stretch me.
5. Beauty covering a deadly object.
6. I'm not a clock but I keep track of time.
7. I was beautiful while alive, and I'm still beautiful.
8. My outside tells my goal.
9. I can hurt and I can please.
10. I'm like a cloud – soft and white with rainbow colors.
11. I come from far away.
12. My hollowness can fill you up.
13. Ride me to catch me.
14. From the top of my head to the top of yours.
15. From my feet to yours.

Riddle Treasure Hunt Answers

Instructions

Each clue will lead you to an object or fact about the Dena'ina people, their culture, and history. You will need to read the clue, decide what it refers to, and search the website or the catalog that accompanied the Dena'ina exhibition for the answer.

Answer Guide

1. Put me down, leave, and there's a treasure when you return. (fish trap)
2. I come from the sea but I'm popular in the Interior. (dentalium necklace)
3. My insides go outside. (bear gut parka)
4. Bend me, stretch me. (horn bowl)
5. Beauty covering a deadly object. (quillwork knife sheath)
6. I'm not a clock but I keep track of time. (counting cord)
7. I was beautiful while alive, and I'm still beautiful. (feathered headdress)
8. My outside tells my goal. (quiver with figures of animals)
9. I can hurt and I can please. (porcupine quillwork)
10. I'm like a cloud – soft and white with rainbow colors.
(summer caribou hide clothing with beadwork)
11. I come from far away. (woman's belt with trade sewn on)
12. My hollowness can fill you up. (drinking tube)
13. Ride me to catch me. (skin-covered kayak used to hunt sea mammals)
14. From the top of my head to the top of yours. (war club)
15. From my feet to yours. (caribou fur socks)

Object Photograph



Vak'izhegi, bear gut parka, made by Helen Dick. Lime Village, 2009. L 91.4 cm. Bear gut, thread. Anchorage Museum, 2010.010.001. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Helen Dick told Aaron Leggett that she had wanted to make a bear gut raincoat since she was a young girl and that she had promised her grandmother she would make one. Aaron encouraged Helen to make one and, during one of his trips to Lime Village, even tried to harvest a bear for her. Helen made this parka in 2009, noting that it was made from the intestines of four different bears. She explained that the darker strips of intestine are from bears taken during berry season. Completing this parka gave Helen a great sense of accomplishment for having kept her promise to her grandmother and having this rare item preserved by the Anchorage Museum.

Object Photograph



K'anyagi, dress. Chekok/Iliamna. L 86.4 cm, W 67.3 cm. Cotton, wool, dentalium shells, glass beads, beaver fur, thread. Private collection, on loan to the Anchorage Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

The beads and dentalium shells adorning this dress are attached to a strip of red wool, which is sewn onto the black cotton dress. When beaded garments wear out, the beadwork often is saved and reattached to new garments.

Object Photograph



Viqizdluyi, fire bags. Tyonek and Knik River area, circa 1883. L 21 cm, W 12.5 cm. Moose hide (?), dentalium shells, beads. Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, IVA 6103, 6104, 6149. Photograph by Chris Arend.

These bags were carried by travelers and contained powder and lead for reloading their rifles. The one on the right was collected on the Knik River, while the other two were collected in Tyonek.

Object Photograph



Ts'en zitl'i, drinking tube with beaded strap. Iliamna, 1931-1932. L 47.5 cm. Bone, dentalium shells, glass beads, caribou bone (?). Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University, ANT.015852. Photograph © Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Girls went into seclusion during their first menses. They used bone tubes like this, worn as necklaces, for drinking water, since they was not supposed to touch liquids with their lips.

Object Photograph



Biqidin gga, kayak model with two figures. Susitna Station, 20th century. L 32.2 cm. Moose hide (?), glass beads, wool and cotton cloth, wood, pigment. Anchorage Museum, 1997.048.003. Photograph by Chris Arend.

The Dena'ina constructed one-, two-, or three-hole kayaks (*baidarka* [Russian], *baydalgi*, or *biqidin*) using a birch frame covered in sealskins, patterned after the watercraft of the Sugpiaq (Alutiiq) people of lower Cook Inlet. These were used for travel and for hunting sea mammals on Cook Inlet and the lower portions of major rivers.

Object Photograph



Ghelch'ehi, birch bark container. Stony River, circa 1940. L 34 cm. Birch bark, root, grass. Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, catalog no, 1.2E1179. Courtesy of the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Birch bark was used to make baby carriers, canoes, and baskets such as this one.

Object Photograph



Chijel, feather headdress. Willow, late 19th century. Diam. 31 cm. Eagle and goose (?) feathers, red wool, sinew. Anchorage Museum, 1978.035.005. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Headdresses such as this were worn only by a *qeshqa* (traditional Dena'ina leader) and were a sign of wealth and status. This was owned by several Susitna *qeshqa*, including Shem Pete, who transferred it to the Anchorage Museum.

Object Photograph



K'duheḥ, war club and arrowhead. Kenai, 1853. L 60 cm. Caribou antler, stone, caribou hide. The National Museum of Denmark, Ethnographic Collection, Hb106a and H840. Photograph © The National Museum of Denmark. Photograph by Arnold Mikkelsen.

Dena'ina war parties were led by particularly skillful and powerful warriors known as *ezhge'en* (*edzege'en* in the Upper Inlet dialect), which Billy Pete translated as "heroes" or "champions." They wielded clubs of caribou antler called *k'duheḥ*, which were soaked in oil to add strength and weight.

Object Photograph



Dalch'ehi, horn bowl. Cook Inlet, 1778. L 24.3 cm, W 11.4 cm. Dall sheep horn. British Museum, NWC33. Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum.

This bowl was collected during the 1778 voyage of Captain James Cook. Dena'ina artifacts from the Cook expedition are the oldest known artifacts collected from the Dena'ina. To make a sheep horn bowl, the Dena'ina placed the horns in hot water for several minutes to soften them before carving them into spoons and bowls.

Object Photograph



K'izhagi yes, knife sheath. Kenai Peninsula, circa 1790. L 31.7 cm. Caribou hide, porcupine quills, sinew, ochre. British Museum, VAN99. Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum.

This knife sheath, collected by Captain George Vancouver in 1794, is among the oldest known examples of Dena'ina quillwork.

Object Photograph



Lugech', gloves. Nondalton, early 20th century. L 26 cm. Caribou hide, dentalium shells, beads, wool, beaver fur, sinew, thread. Private collection. Photograph by Chris Arend.

These gloves, decorated with dentalium shells to signify rank, were once owned by Gabriel Trefon, a *qeshqa* (traditional Dena'ina leader) in Nondalton.

Object Photograph



Deghk'isen sez, beaded woman's belt. Kenai Peninsula, 1883. L 54 cm, W 14.5 cm. Chinese coins, moose hide, dentalium shells, glass beads, sinew, coins. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6110. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

This item represents the trade that was occurring with Dena'ina during the nineteenth century. It is highly decorated with signs of status and wealth through its use of beads, Chinese and French (?) coins, and dentalium shells. Although it is listed as a "belt," it may in fact be a band of ornamentation for a tunic or dress.

Object Photograph



Nithuqeyishi, counting cord. Kenai, pre-1907. Gut, glass beads, feathers, hair.
Alaska State Museum, II-C-316g. Photograph by Chris Arend.

This counting cord is part of a set that was collected by Father Ioann Bortnosky, the Russian Orthodox priest at Kenai from 1896 to 1907. Father Bortnovsky collected it from the Kenaitze Dena'ina at the request of Judge James Wickersham, who was a district court judge for the Territory of Alaska at the time. A letter written by Bortnovsky provides rare insights into the meaning of the knots and beads on the counting cords in this collection.

Object Photograph



Q'us, quiver. Alaska, 1850s. Caribou hide, eagle feathers, porcupine quills, sinew, ochre. Furuhjelm Collection, Hämeenlinna High School (Hämeen Lyseon Lukio). Photograph by Marcus Lepola.

This stunning example of a painted Dena'ina quiver was collected in Russian America and donated by Finnish mining engineer Hjalmar Furuhjelm to the Hämeenlinna High School in Finland. Hjalmar was the younger brother of Johan H. Furuhjelm who was the governor of Russian America between 1859–1863. This collection has recently come to light thanks to the work of Finnish researcher Marcus Lepola. Lepola shares an interest in Dena'ina archery with Leggett, and during a 2012 summer visit to Alaska, Leggett assisted Lepola in a project to make a bow in the traditional Dena'ina style from Alaska birch.

Object Photograph



Hulehga taz'in, whitefish trap with fences. Anchorage Museum, 2009.010.001af, DH-W2K2874. Photograph by Chris Arend.

In 2009, the Dick family of Lime Village made this fish trap for the *Dena'inaq' Huch'ulyeshi* exhibition. A complete photographic essay of the construction can be seen on pp. 182-193 of the exhibition catalog.

Object Photograph



Detail (breast band VK167A) of *Kil dghak'a*, man's summer tunic. Photograph © by Finland's National Board of Antiquities/Picture Collections. Photograph by István Bolgár.

This photograph shows the very detailed and exacting work put into the decorations for a man's caribou skin summer tunic. The design is made with flattened porcupine quills.

Object Photograph



Kił dghak'a, tunic, and *tl'usel*, moccasin-trousers. Tyonek, 1883.

Tunic: L 124 cm, W 54 cm. Caribou hide, beads, sinew, ochre, down (eagle?), fur trim (beaver?). IVA 6147.

Moccasin-trousers: L 128 cm, W 53 cm. Caribou hide, beads, sinew, ochre. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6146.

Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

The extensive use of dentalium shells on this outfit suggests that it was owned by a man of high status, a *qeshqa* (traditional Dena'ina leader). Its beaded designs are similar to the earlier patterns found on quilled garments.

Object Photograph



Chik'ich'a, hood. Kenai, 1894. L 61 cm, W 55 cm. Caribou hide, glass beads, sinew, thread. American Museum of Natural History, E/2383 C. Photograph © Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History.

This would have been worn in the summer as part of a complete outfit that consisted of pants with moccasins attached, a tunic, and gloves.

Object Photograph



K'anyagi, dress. Stony River/Old Iliamna. L 116, W 79.5 cm. Wool, beads, dentalium shells, caribou hide (?), fur, thread. Private collection, on loan to the Anchorage Museum, L1971.003.001. Photograph by Chris Arend.

This dress was made and worn by the Roehl family.

Object Photograph



T'uyedi, dentalium necklace. Susitna Station, circa 1902. L 86.5 cm. Dentalium shells, sinew, beads, wool cloth. Anchorage Museum, 1978.035.002. Photograph by Chris Arend.

This necklace was owned and worn by several Susitna *qeshqa* (traditional Dena'ina leader) before Shem Pete was given it in 1957. He later transferred the necklace and other ceremonial items to the Anchorage Museum.

Object Photograph



Vaqilani, caribou hide bag. Cook Inlet. Caribou hide, glass beads, sinew. Alaska State Museum, II-C-71. Photograph © Alaska State Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Object Photograph



K'izhagi yes, chughi, knife sheath with beaver tooth. Tyonek, 1883. L 57 cm with strap, W 9 cm. Moose hide, beads, beaver tooth. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6101. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Object Photograph



Tel, caribou skin socks. Kenai, 20th century. Caribou hide. Kenai Visitor and Cultural Center, City of Kenai Collection, 1968.001.001ab. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Object Photograph



Q'us, quiver. Kenai, 1853. L 71 cm. Caribou hide, eagle feathers, porcupine quills, sinew. National Museum of Denmark, Hb117. Photograph © The National Museum of Denmark, Ethnographic Collection. Photograph by Arnold Mikkelsen.



© Anchorage Museum 2013
625 C Street
Anchorage, AK 99501

www.AnchorageMuseum.org