ANCHORAGE MUSEUM

Dena'inaq' Huch'ulyeshi

The Dena'ina Way of Living

7

TOOLS FOR TEACHERS

Lesson Plan 7
Since the Arrival of the Underwater People

Prepared by Patricia H. Partnow, Ph.D.
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Secondary (Grades 6-12)

Overview

Students learn about the contact-era history of the Dena'ina people through informational reading and the production of an illustrated timeline.

Goals and Desired Outcomes

Overarching Understanding

- Change is often accelerated through contact with people from other cultures and societies.

Essential Questions

- What is the nature of the contact between the Dena'ina people and those who came to their territory?
- How might people make cultural contacts positive, rather than negative experiences?
- How has the location of the Dena'ina homeland affected the nature and/or the intensity of contact?

Assessments

- Verbal or illustrated responses to the Underwater People story
- Reading and responses to informational text
- Participation in class discussion
- Participation in group work
- Illustrated timeline

Learning Activities

Materials

- Readings and text-based questions
  - "The First Underwater People" by Fedosia Sacaloff
  - "Introduction to Dena'ina Culture and History" by James A. Fall
  - Since the Arrival of the Underwater People in Dena'ina Ełnena

- Computers and Internet connectivity
- Dena'ina Chronology found in the Educator Guide, pg. 30–31
- Art supplies for timeline (or computers and software to make an online timeline)
- 24 Photographs of objects from exhibition – see lesson plan 2 for images

Strategies

Strategy 1: Informational reading and text-based questions

1. Read "The First Underwater People" by Fedosia Sacaloff.
2. Why were they called "Underwater People" (Answer: When the Dena'ina saw the large sailing ships rising and falling below the horizon, it appeared from a distance that these ships were arising from under the water.)
3. Have younger students illustrate the story.
4. Have older students respond in class discussion or writing to the prompt, "It is human nature to be afraid of strangers." Discuss their answers.
5. There are two readings that summarize Dena'ina history from the time of contact with Europeans, one suitable for elementary students: "Excerpts from Introduction to Dena'ina Culture and History" for students in Grades 6-12 and "Since the Arrival of the Underwater People in Dena'ina Ełnena." Have students read the appropriate selection.
6. After students have had a chance to read the selection, put them into groups of two or three and have them share answers to the text-based questions. One student can serve as scribe, while all contribute to the answers.
7. Research Anchorage populations online. Relate the changes in population to the information contained in the readings.
8. Discuss: The Dena'ina people have suffered from contact with Russians and Americans. Divide the class into two groups and ask each group, either together or as individuals, to tackle one of these two related questions:
    a) What might have been done differently to avoid the negative impacts on Dena'ina life that occurred from the 1700s to today?
    b) Is it possible for two groups of people to meet without causing hardship to one or the other? Imagine such a situation and describe it.

Strategy 2: Illustrated Timeline

9. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Print enough copies of the Dena'ina Chronology so that each group has its own.

10. Each group chooses five events to illustrate. Be sure that no event has been chosen by more than one group. Students will build a class timeline by pooling their information. Your timeline could be online (using PowerPoint, for instance), or a paper banner that spreads across your classroom wall.

11. For each event, the group should:

    a) Find any of the 24 objects from the exhibition that were collected on or around that date, and place them on the timeline

    b) Illustrate the chosen date with an icon or symbol

    c) Write a label that explains the symbol and why the event was important in Dena'ina life

    d) Describe something that was happening elsewhere in the world at the same time this event was occurring.

Note: As an extension, have students produce murals for each period in history.

Elementary Reading

"Unhsah Tahna'ina: The First Underwater People"
by Fedosia Sacaloff

From *Shem Pete's Alaska: The Territory of the Upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina*. Edited by James Kari and James A. Fall (2003), p. 356.

Note: Fedosia Sacaloff of Kenai (1922-89), an expert speaker of the Kenai Dena'ina dialect, told this story in 1975. The Dena'ina gave the name *tahdna* ("underwater people") to the first people who arrived in the Inlet by ship. The name later came to be used to refer to the Russians. This story shows that the Dena'ina have maintained a historical story of Captain Cook's party's arrival in Cook Inlet. The incident in which a dog is shot is strong evidence that the story refers to Cook's party. The story seems to blend Cook's encounter on the western shore, where the canoes first approached his ships, with his landing at Point Possession, where a dog was shot.

The very first ship sailed into Kustatan. When the Underwater People's ship sailed in, everyone was afraid.

There was only one man who never was afraid, and he went out to the ship. They picked him up together with his boat. They dressed him like a soldier. They filled his boat with all kinds of things, and he brought them back ashore.

And they were called the Underwater People.

After the Underwater People first came, there were sewing needles. These the Dena'ina learned to use quickly. But they could not figure out the scissors. They strung a rope through them and hung them around their necks.

At that time we also acquired different kinds of tools. They also got guns. They killed a dog with a gun. One man, in order to see how the bullet comes out, put his head to the gun. Someone fired. And they killed the man with it.

Secondary Reading

Excerpts from "Introduction to Dena'ina Culture and History" by James A. Fall

Original essay in *Dena'inaq' Huch'ulyeshi: The Dena'ina way of Living*. Edited by Suzi Jones, James A. Fall and Aaron Leggett (2013), pp. 1-45.

History: The Russian Period

The Russians learned of the Dena'ina from the Koniag of Kodiak Island. The first recorded interaction between the Dena'ina and European explorers occurred during Captain James Cook's voyage up Tikahtnu (Cook Inlet) in 1778 in his unsuccessful search for a northwest passage. Near North Foreland, the English and Dena'ina engaged in trade. Cook's crew disembarked at Tuyqun ("Calm Water"), which they renamed Point Possession, and buried a box of coins to claim the area for Great Britain. Fedosia Sacaloff's "Unhsah Tahna'ina: The First Underwater People" preserves Dena'ina oral traditions about these interactions with Cook's crew (in Kari and Fall 2003:356).

Russian trading companies established their first posts on the Kenai Peninsula at Kasilof (Fort St. George) in 1787 and at Kenai (Fort St. Nicholas) in 1791. The Dena'ina became involved in the fur trade. Most trade was funneled through Dena'ina middlemen, usually *qeshqa*, enabling most Dena'ina communities to remain largely independent of direct Russian control until at least the 1840s (Fall 1987:48–52; Ellanna and Balluta 1992:61).

In the 1790s, the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company established posts at Tyonek and Old Iliamna. The English Navy captain George Vancouver observed the post at Tyonek in 1794, shown as "Russian Factory" on his map. In the late 1790s, the Tubughna, under the leadership of Quq'ey, destroyed this post and killed the Russians (Alexan 1981; Fall 1987:17). The Lake Iliamna post too was destroyed by Dena'ina in the late 1790s. Also in 1797, the Dena'ina attacked the Lebedev-Lastochkin post at Kenai (Boraas and Leggett 2010). Mistreatment of the Dena'ina by the Russians was one cause of these attacks. The disruption of traditional trading relationships between Dena'ina villages and regional bands was likely another cause. Oral accounts speak of retaliations later by the Russians that resulted in Dena'ina deaths around Kenai.

Because of Dena'ina resistance, Russian penetration into most Dena'ina territory, including the Upper Inlet and Inland areas and most of the Kenai Peninsula, was minimal for most of the early nineteenth century (Kari and Fall 2003:17–21; Ellanna and Balluta 1992:61). Shem Pete reported:

> They [the Russians] had their headquarters in Kenai. They killed lots of people, and they took their women. They didn't move into the [Dena'ina] villages. They [were] scared the Dena'ina would kill them. They didn't trap much [on the Kenai Peninsula]. [The Dena'ina] never let the Russians up there [up the Susitna River]. They [the Russians] were too cheap [in trading]. They [the Dena'ina] don't allow them. They kill them. Not even ten or twenty in a group go there because too many natives. (Kari and Fall 2003:17)

Of particular importance was the devastating decline, of 50 percent or more, in the Dena'ina population as a result of a smallpox epidemic in the late 1830s (Townsend 1981:636). Abandonment of villages and the aggregation of people at fewer sites were among the permanent results of this loss of population (Fall 1987:29–31).

Another consequence of population loss appears to have been more openness on the part of the Dena'ina to conversion to Christianity by Russian Orthodox priests based in Kenai (Fall 1987:18–19). The first Russian Orthodox mission was founded there in 1845 by Hegumen Nikolai (Znamenski 2003:15). Over the next several decades, Orthodox priests traveled to Dena'ina villages, and gradually most Dena'ina became adherents of Orthodox Christianity. Rather than Christianity completely replacing the traditional belief system, however, a syncretism of Christian and Athabascan traditions developed.

History: The American Period

With the sale of Alaska by the Russian government to the United States in 1867, the holdings of the Russian-America Company passed to the Alaska Commercial Company. Permanent trading posts were established in the Knik Arm area and on the Susitna River, and continued to be maintained on the Kenai Peninsula, at Tyonek, and on Iliamna Lake. In the American period, the trend toward fewer Dena'ina villages, concentrated around trading posts and churches, continued, although the seasonal round of fishing, hunting, and gathering activities and the dependence on subsistence resources persisted as well.

Rivalries between fur-trading companies brought relatively high fur prices and prosperity for Dena'ina communities into the 1890s. Fur prices dropped in 1897, however, and never recovered, creating hardships for the Dena'ina, who faced lower incomes and reduced access to trade goods (Townsend 1981:636).

Commercial salmon fishing in Cook Inlet began in the early 1880s, with the first salmon cannery built at Kasilof in 1882. Cannery ships began trading for fur with the Dena'ina, purchased salmon, and began fishing at traditional Dena'ina locations. By the late 1890s, overfishing was harming Cook Inlet Dena'ina subsistence fishing. The Russian Orthodox priest Bortnovsky observed:

> The quantity of fish grows smaller each year. And no wonder each cannery annually ships out 30,000 to 40,000 cases of fish. During the summer all the fishing groups are jammed with American fishermen and of course the poor Indian is forced to keep away in order to avoid unpleasant meetings with the representatives of the American Civilization. (Documents Relative to the History of Alaska, n.d. Vol. 2: 82)

The first commercial salmon cannery in Bristol Bay opened in 1883. As in Cook Inlet, unregulated commercial fishing, including operation of traps that blocked entire rivers, resulted in the depletion of salmon runs, including that of the Kvichak River, a major food source for the Iliamna and Inland Dena'ina. Not until 1907 did federal legislation begin to address this problem (Ellanna and Balluta 1992:238).

American prospectors searching for gold ventured up the Susitna and Yentna Rivers in the 1870s and 1880s, but the first consequential discoveries occurred along Turnagain Arm at Resurrection Creek in 1888 and at Bear and Palmer Creeks in 1894, as well as on Willow Creek in the Susitna River drainage in 1897. An influx of several thousand people, mostly men of Euro-American origin, flooded the area. Tyonek became a major disembarking point for miners and prospectors, as well as for the military and scientific expeditions that followed in the late 1890s and early 1900s. In support of mining, Knik developed as a commercial center, and the first phase of homesteading in upper Cook Inlet occurred.

With the development of commercial fishing and processing, mining, and homesteading, a permanent non-Native population became established on the Kenai Peninsula and portions of the upper Cook Inlet area by the early twentieth century. Events of particular note were the founding of Anchorage as a base for the construction of the Alaska Railroad, the construction of the railroad itself, and a devastating influenza epidemic in 1918, which killed hundreds of Dena'ina and severely disrupted the traditional culture and economy.

Overall, the Dena'ina population declined in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Disease, loss of access to important traditional foods such as salmon, and intermarriage with Euro-Americans all contributed to reducing the size of Dena'ina communities.

In the early twentieth century, Cook Inlet and Inland Dena'ina found employment in salmon canneries. Later, the Dena'ina became more directly involved in commercial salmon fishing, adding this activity to their spring and summer subsistence fishing at such traditional sites along Cook Inlet as Fire Island, Point Woronzof, Point Possession, and Kenai. In the 1930s, Iliamna and Inland Dena'ina began participating in the commercial salmon fishery in Bristol Bay (Ellanna and Balluta 1992:239; Johnson 2004:19).

An additional effect of the demographic, sociocultural, and economic changes of the early and mid-twentieth century in the Cook Inlet area was a decline in the use of the Dena'ina language. Policies of the U.S. Bureau of Education discouraged the use of Alaska Native languages, and children were physically punished for speaking their languages. In the early 2000s, only about fifty people were fluent speakers of Dena'ina (Kari and Fall 2003:10). Elders recalled the fear and shame they associated with speaking Dena'ina as children as a result of their experiences in school. These elders explained that linked to this suppression of the language by the school system was a dismissal of the Dena'ina way of life and identity. An important consequence of this loss of the Dena'ina language has been a disruption in the passing on of Dena'ina oral traditions as expressed in *sukdu*, the traditional stories. Evidently, the most knowledgeable elders of past generations were unwilling, and likely also unable, to teach these stories to their children and grandchildren in English. However, such traditions will live on as oral and written English texts as the Dena'ina originals are preserved, especially if they are incorporated into school curricula and the stories are considered relevant by present and future generations.

An important development in the twentieth century was the enforcement of game laws that restricted traditional Dena'ina subsistence hunting, most significantly in the more populous areas along the road system on the Kenai Peninsula, Anchorage, and the Matanuska-Susitna valleys. Alberta Stephan of Niteh and Eklutna recalled the difficulties her grandparents' family faced:

> The year 1913 also saw new territorial laws, hunting and fishing regulations. The natives could not hunt for traditional foods anymore. They were not allowed to fill their caches for winter. The native people were not allowed to hunt or fish for their food even though that was the only way they always survived. No one told them how they were supposed to live. . . . The Esi family at Matanuska were watched closely by the Game Warden. They came unexpectedly always trying to catch them with fresh moose meat. (2001:23–24)

World War II brought increased development and population growth to Southcentral Alaska. The Seward and Sterling Highways connected the Kenai Peninsula to Anchorage, and the Glenn Highway linked Anchorage to the Alaska Highway, Canada, and the rest of the United States. Further economic and population growth followed the discovery of oil and gas reserves under Cook Inlet and the Kenai Peninsula in the 1950s. The consequences of such growth and natural resource exploitation included the destruction of wildlife habitat and increasing competition for depleted populations of fish and wildlife.

Congress passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971. The act split Dena'ina communities into three regional corporations: Cook Inlet Region Incorporated (including the village corporations of Knik, Eklutna, Tyonek, Seldovia, Kenai, and Salamatof), Bristol Bay Native Corporation (Nondalton and Pedro Bay), and Calista

Corporation (Lime Village). It also extinguished aboriginal hunting and fishing rights but left unresolved issues regarding subsistence hunting and fishing opportunities. The Alaska legislature passed a subsistence statute in 1978 that defined subsistence as "customary and traditional uses" and established subsistence as the priority use of fish and wildlife.

Responding to Change, Conserving Traditions

For centuries, the Dena'ina way of life thrived within a rich but challenging homeland. Material items, sociocultural traditions, stories and songs, and cultural and spiritual values all attest to effective and sustained adaptations to the natural and social environments of Southcentral Alaska. Beginning in the eighteenth century and continuing at an accelerating pace up to the present, Dena'ina communities have also faced the challenges brought by waves of newcomers, including depleted resources, epidemic disease, and socioeconomic and political changes and opportunities. In the twenty-first century, the Dena'ina continue to play an important and ever more visible role within the diverse lifeways of modern Alaska while nourishing links to their history and distinctive culture. It is the goal of *Dena'inaq' Huch'ulyeshi: The Dena'ina Way of Living* to enhance an understanding and appreciation of this history and culture and thereby enrich the lives of all who live in or visit Dena'ina Ełnena, Dena'ina country.

Text-Based Questions on the Reading

1. According to oral tradition and written history, why did the Russians NOT move back into Dena'ina Ełnena after the first two trading posts they established?
2. What was the nature of the relationship between the Dena'ina people and the Russians in Alaska?
3. What were the major impacts on the Dena'ina people of the Russian presence in Alaska?
4. What were the major changes in Dena'ina life after the Americans came? Name at least three big changes.

Elementary Reading

Since the Arrival of the Underwater People in the Dena'ina Homeland

Explorers and traders from Europe came to Dena'ina Ełnena, the Dena'ina homeland, beginning in the late 1700s. The first was Captain James Cook of England. He traded with the Dena'ina and buried a box of coins at Point Possession on Turnagain Arm.

Only a few years later, Russian traders traveled to the Dena'ina homeland from the Aleutian Islands and Kodiak Island. They set up trading posts. The Dena'ina soon destroyed the posts and killed the Russians who were there. From then on, the Russians stayed out of Dena'ina Ełnena. Instead, the Dena'ina traveled south to Russian trading posts that were outside of their territory, and traded there. *Qeshqa* (traditional Dena'ina leaders) controlled this trade by taking the goods north and trading with other Native people, then carrying the northern furs back down to the Russian trading posts.

Even though the Russians did not settle in Dena'ina land, they spread diseases that killed many Dena'ina. The worst was smallpox that swept through all of southern Alaska in 1838. Half of the Dena'ina people died.

The Russians also brought their religion, Russian Orthodoxy. By the time the United States bought Alaska from Russia in 1867, the Dena'ina people had become Orthodox Christians. They did not give up all of their old beliefs. Instead, they saw how some of the old ways fit with the new ones.

After the U.S. bought Alaska, Dena'ina continued to trade, this time with American traders instead of Russians. Big companies from Seattle and San Francisco built canneries and brought up many men from the U.S. and Europe to fish for them. They caught so many fish that the Dena'ina found it hard to support themselves through fishing, as they had done in the past.

At about the same time, gold was discovered in Alaska, and many men and some women from the United States traveled to the Dena'ina Ełnena to get the gold. A railroad was built to get the gold to boats, and more and more newcomers from outside of Alaska came to the Dena'ina homeland.

Another change to the life of the Dena'ina came from the schools. They would not let Dena'ina children speak their language. In fact, they hit them or made them sit in closets if they did so. The children stopped speaking Dena'ina in school, and their parents stopped speaking it at home so their children would not be punished in school. Today fewer than 50 people speak the language that thousands once spoke.

Today, the Dena'ina people are landowners, workers, and business people. They still fish and hunt, but they have had to change their ways because there are so many people living in their homeland.

Text-Based Questions on the Reading

1. What happened to the Russian trading posts that were built in the Dena'ina homeland?
2. What two impacts did the Russians have on the Dena'ina people?
3. How did the canneries make life harder for the Dena'ina people?
4. What is one of the effects that schools had on Dena'ina culture?

625 C Street
Anchorage, AK 99501

www.AnchorageMuseum.org