

LEVEL

4

DISCOVERING AMERICAN HISTORY

NATIVE AMERICANS

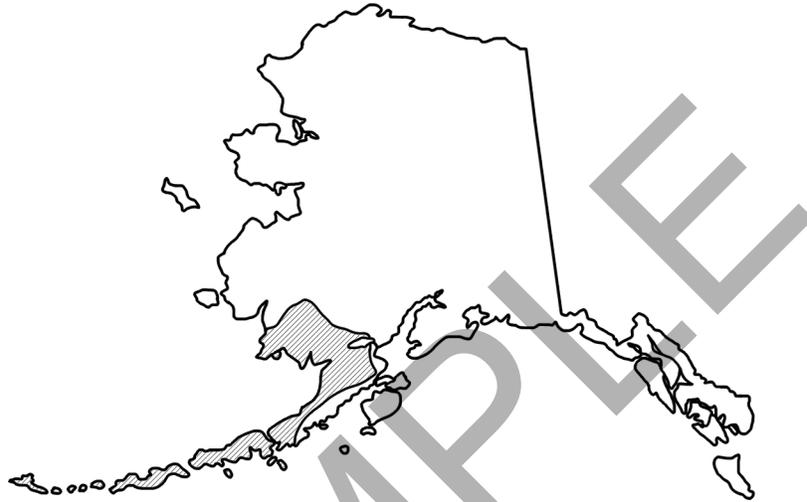


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Native Americans of the Arctic, Northwest Coast, and Plateau

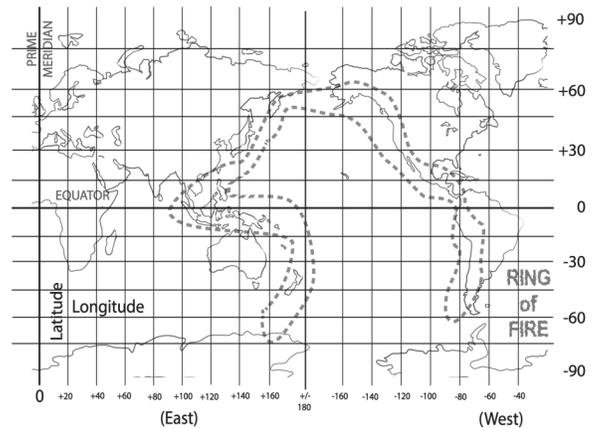
We're going to discover part of the story of three Native American tribes who lived in the northwestern part of what is today the United States. Of course, no single book could ever tell the whole story, but we're going to try to discover as much as we can. To learn about the first tribe, the Aleuts, we need to head north to Alaska. Of course, if you're reading this in Alaska or parts of Canada or Asia, the part of the Alaska we're going to visit might be south of you!



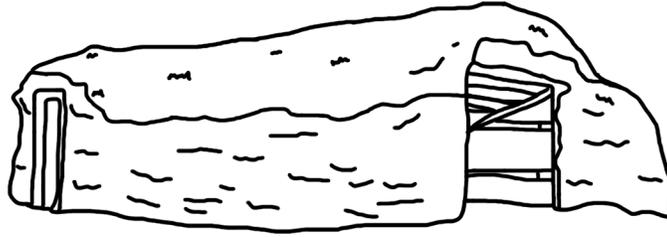
The Aleutian Islands are in the southwestern part of the state of Alaska. Alaska became a state in 1959, but we're going to start much farther back in history than that. We're going to start before the mid-1700s.

The Aleutian Islands are part of the Pacific Ring of Fire, an area that has more volcanoes than most other areas. There are about 35 volcanoes in the islands that are active today, so the Aleuts would have been familiar with the eruptions.

Often, when we think of Alaska, we think of very cold weather. The area the Aleuts lived in, however, had a milder climate. The average temperatures ranged from about 50° F to 30° F (30° C to -1° C). Most parts of Alaska get much colder.



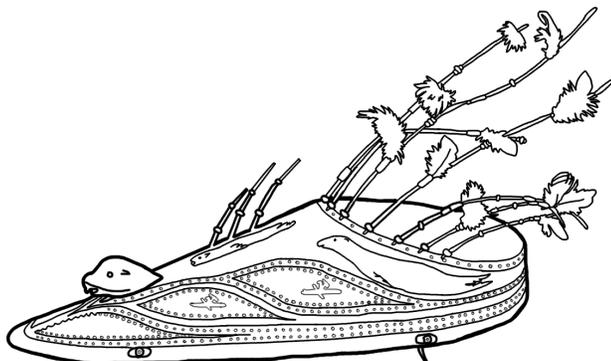
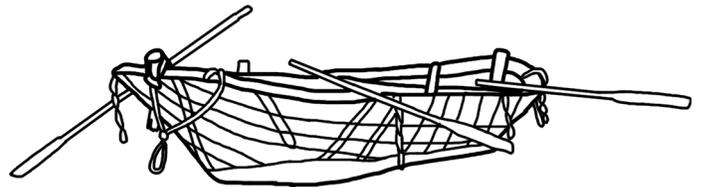
Aleuts often built houses that were semi-subterranean, which means they were partially underground. These houses were called barabaras and were part of the permanent winter villages. A village often had several of these houses, with each one being the home of several families.



First, the base of the house was dug out of the ground. Then, a frame made of driftwood and bone was built above ground. The house had sod walls, and an opening in the roof allowed smoke to escape and light to come in. The roof opening was also used as a doorway. People climbed through the hole and down a notched log to come in. There were other kinds of houses, too, but barabaras were very common.



The waters around the islands provided a tremendous amount of food and resources, so villages were built as close to the ocean as was safe. Men hunted seals, sea otters, whales, and sea lions. At times, and in some areas, they hunted walrus, caribou, wolves, wolverines, and bears as well. The skin boats they used called baidarkas, or kayaks, could hold one or two men. They also had large, open boats made of skin. The Eskimo called these boats umiaks. There were also larger boats that groups could travel in. These boats were called angyaq or baidaras in Russian and were made of driftwood or bone and covered with walrus skin.



Hunters wore visors trimmed with sea lion whiskers. The visors helped protect their eyes from the glare of the sun. You can imagine how bright the sun would seem reflecting off the snow, ice, and water. The more sea lion whiskers a hunter had on his visor, the more successful he had been. The hats were also decorated with beads and dentalium shells.

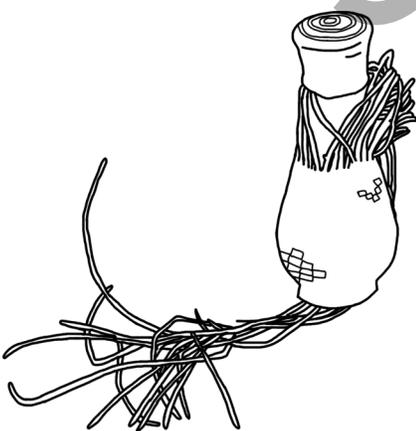
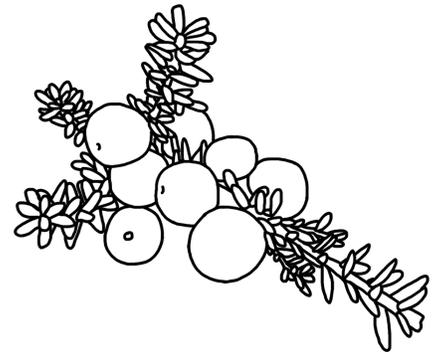
Some Aleuts hunted whales. First, they dried the root of a certain plant and ground it into a powder. They turned the root into a poison and smeared it on harpoon blades made from chipped stone. The hunters then struck the whale with the harpoon. The poison killed the whale, which then drifted to shore. Hunters were waiting for the whale to wash up and quickly butchered it, being careful to cut out and get rid of any part that had the poison in it.

The hunters also killed birds such as gulls, cormorants, and puffins for food by using bows and arrows, barbed darts, or snare nets. They fished for halibut, cod, and different types of salmon.



It was important for the hunters to work together. Some hunting, such as hunting with the large nets to catch fish, could only be done when several people worked as a team. They also shared what they caught and hunted with each other. If someone had a very good day hunting and had more than his family needed, he shared with others. Everyone knew that even the best hunters would sometimes have days when they came home empty-handed and would need someone else to share with them.

Meat wasn't the only thing the Aleuts had to eat. In addition to helping hunt or gather birds, fish, and mollusks, women gathered wild plants for food. Plants such as grasses, sedge, wild celery, crowberries, ferns, and lichens were common.

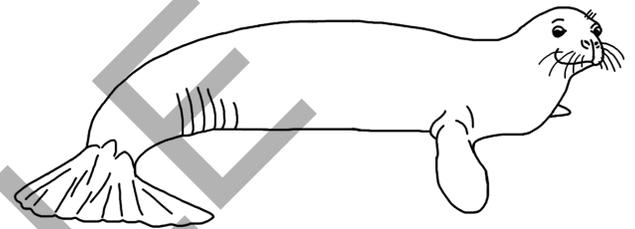


The women were expert weavers. They wove grasses into beautiful baskets, sleep mats, wall dividers, and coverings for the hands and feet. They could weave so tightly that some of the containers they made could even hold water, and the hand and foot coverings kept everyone warm and dry.

Aleuts wore long coats without hoods. They decorated their clothing with natural dyes, feathers, and puffin beaks. They often wore clothing in layers to provide the best protection against the weather. They made clothes from the skins of many animals and even used seal intestines to waterproof clothing.



Life by the shore provided almost everything the Aleuts needed. They used the animals they caught and hunted for much more than food. They used their bones, along with stones, to make tools like scrapers, knives, and fishhooks. They also used them to make harpoons and spears. The driftwood that washed ashore could be gathered by the children and used in many things. Seal fat was burned in stone lamps for heat and light. Sea lion skin was used to cover boats, and teeth were carved into pendants.



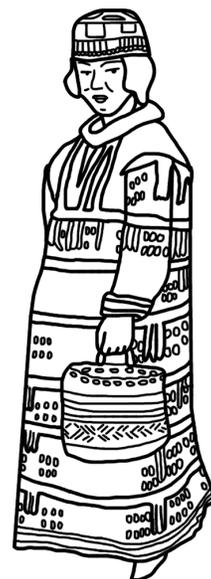
The Eastern Aleuts had a class system in their society, and their main loyalty was always to their village. The highest rank was the honorables. The rank under honorables was commoners, which included most of the rest of the people. The lowest rank was slaves, who were usually people captured during raids on other villages.

The leaders of society were elected from the honorables. These chiefs might be war chiefs who led raiding parties against other villages or peace chiefs who worked to protect everyone. The chiefs were selected by village representatives who came together for that reason.

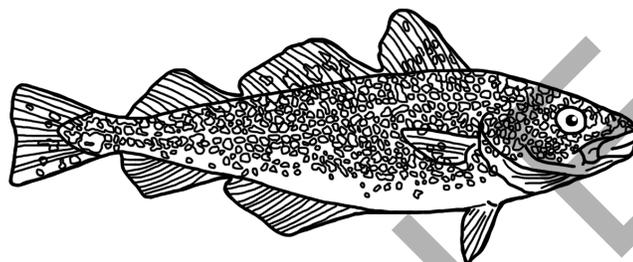
The people often tried to cooperate as much as possible, but sometimes, war broke out. The barbed arrows, spears, and even poison normally used for hunting and fishing were then used in combat with other Aleuts.



Men and women who led households were regarded as very successful. They were responsible for hunting, warfare, trade, organizing a household, caring for and providing for their families and tribe, and passing along the oral history of the people. The roles of both men and women were looked at as equally important, even though the role of the men was often more noticed.



The Aleuts were extremely resourceful and used everything they had, but there were still things they needed. They traded with other tribes for these resources, offering things they had much of that others needed.



Around 1750 to 1760, Russians started to settle in the Aleutian Islands. There were battles between the Russians and Aleuts. The Russians also forced some to work for them as slaves. Diseases that the Russians brought hurt and killed many. Within 50 years of the Russians' arrival, nearly 80 percent, or 8 out of every 10 Aleuts, had died.



Life changed very quickly, which is always hard to adjust to. Some changes, however, were not terrible. The Aleuts learned to read and write not only their own language but also Russian. Doctors who moved to the area brought medicines that helped the people. Some people learned new things about shipbuilding and navigation.

In 1867, things changed again. Russia needed money to help recover from the Crimean War and sold Alaska to the United States. After this, industries such as whaling and salmon grew, and some Aleuts worked in these jobs.

World War II brought many more difficult changes. The Japanese occupied Attu Island and took 42 Aleuts to Japan as prisoners, where they were forced to serve the Japanese until the war ended. Only 24 survived, but when they returned to the United States, they were forced to settle in the village of Atka instead of being allowed to return home.

Approximately 975 Aleuts in other areas of the Aleutian Islands were moved out by the government to protect them from Japanese attacks. However, they weren't treated very well. They were forced to leave behind most of their possessions and moved to abandoned mines and fish canneries. They didn't have good sanitation or medical care in these places. By the time they were finally allowed to return home after the war, more than 80 had died.

Many Aleuts today still live in the Aleutian Islands. They work hard to preserve and revive their history and culture. They teach their language to their children so it will not disappear. They work to combine the old ways of working together to hunt and fish with the modern ways of buying and selling whatever is needed. They also work hard to keep alive the tradition of sharing with those in need alive.



Review

Aleuts used whiskers from what animal to trim their visors?



Puffin

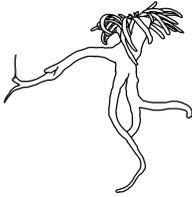


Sea lion

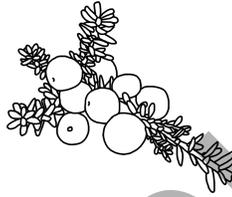


Kinkajou

Which plant was highly valuable to the Salish?



Bitterroot



Crowberries

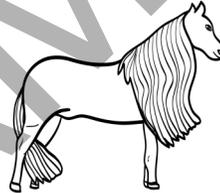


Yellow bell

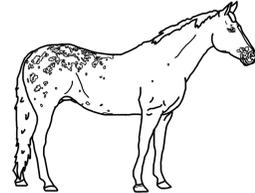
Which breed of horse did the Nez Perce help create?



Gypsy Vanner



Andalusian



Appaloosa

Which famous leader was from the Coast Salish tribes?



Seattle



Sequoyah



Sitting Bull

What is the region of the Pacific that the Aleuts lived along that made their territory more likely to have volcanic eruptions?

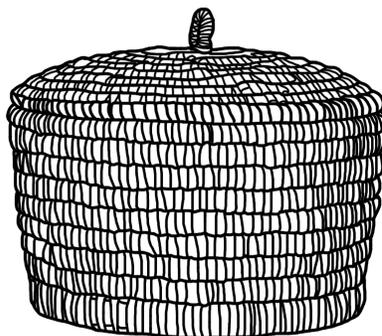
What were the three ranks in Eastern Aleut society?

Who is often credited with discovering the bitterroot plant that had been known to the Salish for a long time?

What was a characteristic that was highly prized in Salish society?

The French name for the Nez Perce came because the French saw some who had what part of their bodies pierced?

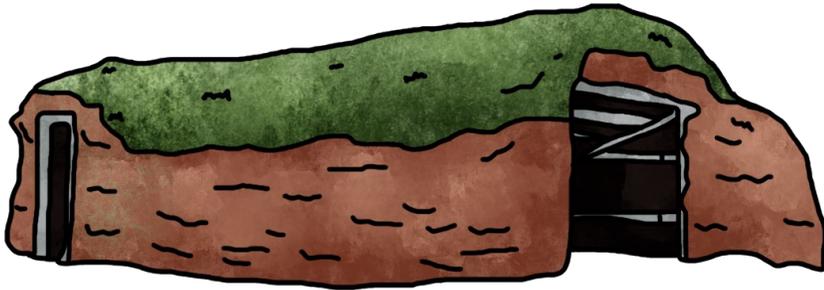
With whom did Chief Joseph hope to meet in Canada?



Native American Tribes
Full-Color Images

Aleut

Here are color versions of select images from the unit so that you can see the artistry and beauty of the Aleut work.



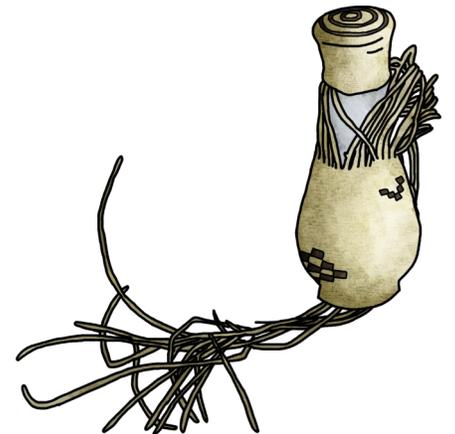
Homes



Clothing for hunting



Dress



Tightly-woven container



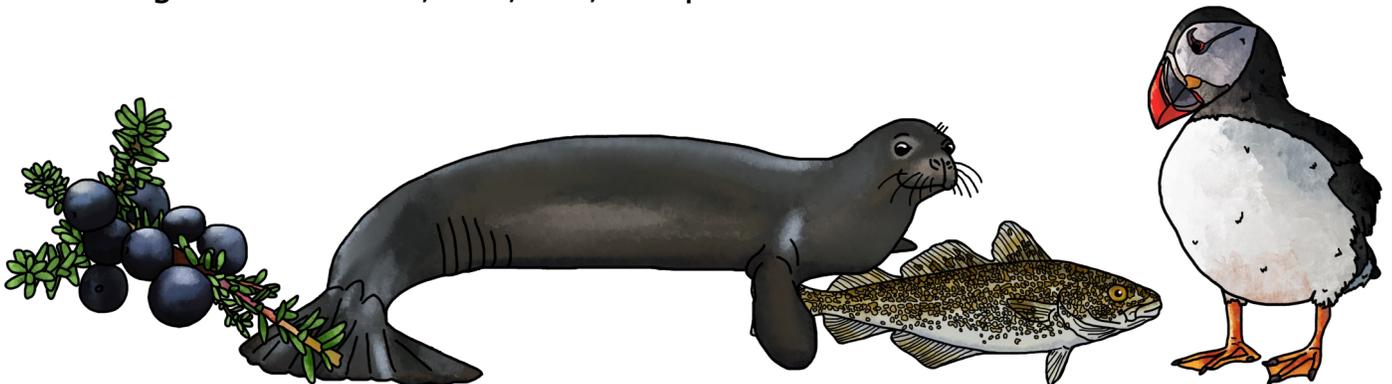
Clothing



Basket

Plants and animals of the region:

Left to right: crowberries, seal, cod, and puffin



Answer Key

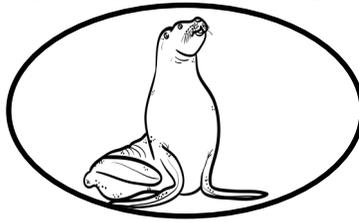
SAMPLE

Review Answer Key

Aleuts used whiskers from what animal to trim their visors?



Puffin

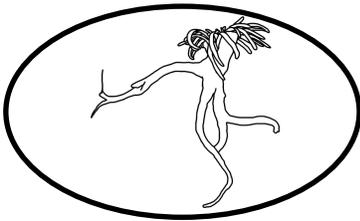


Sea lion

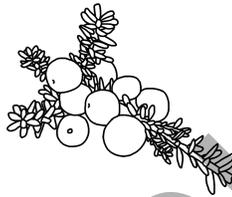


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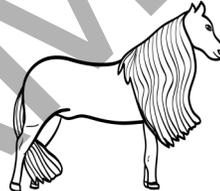


Yellow bell

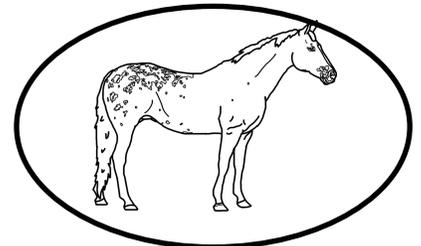
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What is the region of the Pacific that the Aleuts lived along that made their territory more likely to have volcanic eruptions?

Ring of Fire

What were the three ranks in Eastern Aleut society?

Honorables, commoners, and slaves

Who is often credited with discovering the bitterroot plant that had been known to the Salish for a long time?

Lewis and Clark

What was a characteristic that was highly prized in Salish society?

Being able to use resources wisely

The French name for the Nez Perce came because the French saw some who had what part of their bodies pierced?

Nose

With whom did Chief Joseph hope to meet in Canada?

Some Sioux who had escaped into Canada

