

READ THIS ALOUD TO STUDENTS:

According to the *Ecology and Society* online journal:

“Local and traditional ecological knowledge (LTK) is increasingly recognized as an important component of scientific research, conservation, and resource management. Especially where there are gaps in the scientific literature, LTK can be a critical source of basic environmental data; this situation is particularly apparent in the case of marine ecosystems, about which comparatively less is known than terrestrial ones.”

Each of the stories we read focused on some aspect of “risk hazards.” Often times, Alaskan culture had to endure many tough times due to extreme weather conditions. Have each student take a few minutes to think about one story that they have heard passed on from their parents or grandparents that deals with a risk hazard. If they can’t think of one, this could be a story of their own. Have them write down, in one page or less, their story. Be sure to emphasize several times that this is a story about a risk hazard. It may help to provide a list of the risk-hazards from the **disaster rank** activity on the whiteboard (chalkboard) for students to see.

Story #1 -- The Thinking Image

Once there was a woman who was an outcast from the village. Her husband and all her relatives were dead and she had no son to bring home meat for her. She was a slave to everybody in the village and so she was very unhappy.

One day, she was going along in an umiak. She had been rowing all day and was very tired and cold. By and by she notices that she was coming to a point of land with some big stones on it. “I shall go ashore and rest,” she said to herself. So she beached the umiak and climbed onto the shore. She sat down on a big stone and, resting her chin on her hand, she began to think.

“How tired I am!” she said to herself. “I do nothing but work for others, and no one works for me. I wish I were dead and my work all over.”

The woman sat thinking these gloomy thoughts for a long time. By and by she began to look at the stones that lay all around her.

“How wearisome my life is!” she said. “Even these stones are happier than I. They can rest always, but there is no rest for me. I wish that I were a stone so that I could rest for ever and ever and never be tired any more.”

While the woman was sitting thinking these things a crow flew over her. He made three circles and cawed three times. The woman looked up and saw him and knew that her torngak (helping spirit) had sent the crow to help her.

“I shall soon be a stone,” she thought, “My feet are stones already. They can feel nothing. Not long ago they were very cold and tired, but now they are stones. I cannot she was really changing into st them.”

By and by the woman tried to move her hands but she could not. Then she knew that she was turning into stone and she was glad.

“I shall never be tired or cold again,” she said. “I shall never work hard and be hungry.”

Gradually the woman turned into stone and there she sits to this day with her chin in her hand, thinking.

Sometimes the Eskimos who go by the point of land stop and give gifts to the “Thinking Image”, as they call the stone woman. They give her needles, spices (tobacco), and matches. Some of the women have even put a necklace of beads around her neck.

Perhaps they are sorry the poor woman had such a hard life and they are trying to make her happy now.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why was the old woman so sad?
2. Why did the woman wish would happen to herself?
3. What did the woman turn in to?
4. Do you think this story really happened?

Many traditional eskimo stories are meant to explain the hard times and lifestyle of the people. Life would have been very difficult for traditional eskimos, especially for a woman with no husband or children to help her hunt and do work. Although people cannot really turn into stone, as the story suggests, the story reflects the hard life and difficult times that a single eskimo woman would surely have endured – so there is much truth to the woman’s feelings and, furthermore, this story is meant to explain an actual rock formation that resembles a sitting woman with her chin resting on her hand.

Resource:

Morrison, Dorothy. "The Thinking Image." Tales the Eskimos Tell. School Aids and Textbook Publishing Co., Ltd. Regina and Toronto, page 43-45. <http://www.archive.org/details/taleseskimostell00morr>

Story #2 -- An Eskimo Tells How the Caribou Lost Their Large Eyes

Look, here is a little bone -- a bone taken from a caribou's ankle! I will tell you a story about it.

A long time ago, when the Eskimo first found the caribou they had very large eyes. They could see a great distance and were very savage. So it was hard to get close enough to shoot them with bows and arrows. As a result, the Eskimos often had no meat.

By and by they asked Torngarsoak to help them. "Oh, Torngarsoak," they said, "help us, for we are starving! The caribou are strong and swift and keen of sight. Oh, Torngarsoak, our hunters are as young children -- they cannot kill the caribou! Therefore, have pity on us (we are hungry), have pity on us and tame the caribou so that our hunters may kill them and so that our children may have meat.

Presently one of the caribou became very thoughtful. He said in caribou language to the others, "I wish our eyes were not so large. Then we should be better looking."

So the other caribou said, "Sew up our eyes, then."

The thoughtful caribou took this little bone from his foreleg. He said, "This will make a good needle." Then he took a piece of sinew and said, "This will make good thread."

"How handsome we shall look when our eyes are small!" said all the caribou, and they stood in line waiting to have their eyes sewed up.

The thoughtful caribou took his needle and thread and sewed up the corners of all the caribou's eyes. After that the caribou could not see so far and they became tamer.

Now that the caribou were tamer, the Eskimo hunters could take them more easily. So the people had more meat to eat and more skins to make clothing. And this was all because Torngarsoak made the caribou thoughtful.

This is indeed true -- see, this is the very bone that the thoughtful caribou used to sew up the eyes of his brothers!

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think caribou can *really* talk to each other?
2. Why would a thoughtful caribou make it easier for hunters to shoot the caribou?
3. Do think this story really happened?

It is common belief in the eskimo culture that animals surrender themselves to hunters. There are numerous instances where hunters recall animals 'giving themselves' to the hunter by coming too close and remaining still for the hunter to kill it. This story, though not real, is a way to explain how animals give themselves to hunters in order to provide for humans.

Reference citation:

Morrison, Dorothy. "An Eskimo Tells How the Caribou Lost Their Large Eyes." Tales the Eskimo Tell. School Aids and Textbook Publishing Co., Ltd. Regina and Toronto. P. 31-33. <http://www.archive.org/details/taleseskimostell00morr>

Story #3 -- The Monstrous Child

There was a family with a small child and a brand new little baby. The Winter was long and, this year, did not bring many seals to be hunted. As the father would catch small animals to eat, there was very little food for his family and the little baby did not have any food to eat. The little baby would cry and cry, "Mother, feed me!" But the mother had no food for the child. Again, the child would cry, "Mother feed me!" But the Mother still had no food to feed the little baby.

One day the little baby became so upset, he was crying and crying. His Mother and Father approached the little baby to comfort him but the baby ate his mother and father. "What have I done? I've eaten my own mother and father!" cried the little baby. "But I had no food to eat and my stomach was hurting!"

QUESTIONS:

1. What did the little baby eat?
2. Why did he eat his parents?
3. Do you think this story really happened?

Of course this story is not real, little babies are NOT able to eat their parents! This story serves as a powerful tool to show how difficult life would have been for eskimo families that did not have a good hunting season. Though the animals are plentiful, it is often very difficult to hunt with extreme weather conditions and temperatures, and it can be difficult for a whole village to get the food that is needed for all of their people. If a family missed the location or specific timing of an animal migration, it would be very difficult to hunt. It was not uncommon for young children to die during times of famine, as they were not as strong as the adults and adults were the first to eat when food was caught.