

Chenega Diaries: Stories and Voices of Our Past

Classroom Resources

Intermediate Lesson

Hunting, Fishing, Trapping, and Teaching

Program Segments

1. Opening
3. Hunting and Fishing

Book Segments	Pages
Letters from John Poling to the General Superintendent, US Department of the Interior	62, 149, 160
Letters from John Poling to his family	8-9, 68
Letter from John Poling to Lankershim Elementary School	160
Letter from John Poling to the Seattle Fur Exchange	83
Letter from John Poling to Lankershim Elementary School	160
Letters from John Poling to his family	179, 195-197
“Bidarkas” by Wally Brizgalloff	224
“Geography” by Mikey Eleshansky	225
Elder Recollections: Daily Life: Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping, Daily Living, Daily Chores: Preparing for Winter, Advice to Future Generations	240-249, 260, 298-299, 263-264

Themes: survival, wildlife, adaptation, history, preservation, tradition, hunting, fishing

Content area: English, Science, History, Geography

Learning Standards

A.4, B.2, D.3, E.2, E.3

Objectives

Students will:

- Identify native Alaskan wildlife.
- Describe adaptations that enable animals to survive in the Arctic.
- Analyze the impact of game and wildlife regulations on a subsistence community.
- Simulate the passage of knowledge from generation to generation.

Anticipatory set/Background

The arctic region is too cold for farming and so the Chenega people earned a living by hunting and fishing. They fished salmon and halibut. They hunted sea lions, seals,

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mink, land otter, wolverines, and bear. On the island, boys hunted grouse, gulls, ravens, magpies, blue jays, robins, and eagles. They also hunted ducks and geese, which the Chenega people ate. Skins and furs were sold to earn money for the community. Sons learned to hunt from their fathers; the passing down of this knowledge was an important part of the Chenega oral tradition and the tribe's survival. When the Village of Chenega was destroyed by a tsunami as a result of the 1964 Alaska earthquake, 2/3 of the population was killed and the rest were relocated. When the Chenega people attempted to re-establish itself in the 1980s, the lack of elder knowledge was challenging to the people who wanted to live off the land, the way their ancestors had.

Teaching Ideas

1. Arctic birds, fish, and mammals have special adaptations that allow them to live in the cold Alaskan environment. Other survival instincts help them sense, hide from, or escape predators. Have students choose an Arctic animal and research how it survives its cold habitat and protects itself from prey.
2. Using the animal they chose for survival research, have students find out if there are any regulations from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game on hunting, fishing, or trapping the animal.
3. Investigate the status of arctic mammals and fish today. List mammals that are endangered, over fished, or otherwise declining in population. What are the reasons for these changes in their population?
4. Lead an activity in following oral directions to simulate how Chenega elders taught younger tribe members to hunt, fish, preserve, and prepare food. Describe a picture for students to draw, using vague language, then compare their drawings. Repeat the activity using very clear language. Show students the actual picture being described. Discuss situations in which clear communication is important. Ask "How would the Chenega community have been affected without clear, precise communication from their elders?"

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Hardship and Health

Program Segments

1. Opening
2. Life in Chenega
7. Winter
9. Looking Back at Life in Chenega

Book Segments	Pages
Letters from John Poling to the General Superintendent, US Department of the Interior	136, 162, 167, 181
Letter from John Poling to Pauline Brizgaloff	81
Letters from John Poling to his family	107, 170-171, 196-200
Minutes of the Parent Teachers' Association, November 23, 1945	153
Rural Education Report, February 28, 1946	165-166
Letter to John Poling from George Dale	193
Elder Recollections: Daily Life: Home keeping - Grocery Supplies, Preserving Food	249-252
Letters from John Poling to the General Superintendent, US Department of the Interior	34, 125, 148, 149, 172, 174, 177, 180, 182, 183, 187, 189, 190, 191, 202, 224
Letters from John Poling to his family	8-9, 154, 164, 179, 215-216
Letter from John Poling to Harriet Coleclough	172
Letter from John Poling to the Junior Red Cross	203
Elder Recollections: Modern Conveniences	253-255

Themes: nutrition, health, hardship, work

Content area: Social Studies, Language Arts, Science

Learning Standards:

B.1, C.3, D.1, D.6, E.7

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Objectives

Students will:

- Describe the impact of Chenega's remoteness on the villagers' health.
- Describe the impact of breakfast on physical health and mental alertness.
- Analyze the emotional, mental, and physical effects of hardship.
- Analyze how removing modern conveniences would affect daily life.
- Describe the effects of maintaining social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual well-being.

Anticipatory set/Background

Life in Chenega was one of hardship; for the Polings, who lived in Chenega for 4 years, and the tribe, who endured for over 10,000 years. Difficulties getting supplies, making repairs, and accessing a variety of foods took mental, emotional, and physical tolls. For example, good nutrition is important for physical and dental health. Daily servings of grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy, meat, fats, nuts, seeds and legumes are recommended to ensure balanced nutritional health. Fresh produce was unavailable in Chenega and if it were, there were no refrigerators available to keep it fresh. The food we eat also affects our teeth and gums. Bacteria in our teeth prefer simple carbohydrates (table sugar, corn syrup, and fructose) and over time, they produce lactic acid which affects tooth enamel leading to cavities. The Chenega children and the Elders speak often of eating candy, cakes, and pies. While fresh fruits and vegetables contain carbohydrates, they also contain fiber, which helps clean the teeth while we chew. Loss of teeth or mouth pain can lead to malnutrition.

Teaching Ideas

1. John Poling describes the Chenega children's physical and dental health in letters and reports. Research the US Department of Agriculture's daily recommendations for a balanced diet and compare it to the Chenega diet. How did the remoteness of the Chenega village create challenges for the people to maintain a balanced diet?
2. Why did John Poling decide to turn the school lunch program into a breakfast program? Make posters advertising the importance of breakfast, citing research about its impact on health.
3. Life in Chenega was hard, but John Poling didn't seem to mind. In an October 6, 1944 letter to his family, Poling called Chenega a "sort of little Shangri-La." In an August 7, 1946 letter to the General Superintendent of the US Department of the Interior, he said he wanted to "stay indefinitely." Have students read Poling's later correspondence and give their opinion about why Poling's feelings seemed to change. Discuss the hardships that wore on Poling such as the failure of the light plant, living in cramped quarters, and taking on additional responsibilities.
4. What does "hardship" mean to today's students? List current trends, technology, and ideas (cell phones, reality television, civil rights, women's right to vote, etc.) and

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have students rank the level of hardship and distress the removal of certain modern conveniences and ideas would cause.

5. Despite—or because of—the hardships of living in a remote, harsh environment, the people of Chenega led lives balanced among emotional, physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual realms. Have students create a weekly schedule that includes time to take care of emotional (time to experience feelings), physical (rest, exercise, nutrition), social (enjoyable activities, time with others who have similar interests), intellectual (challenges that stimulate the mind and creativity), and spiritual (reflections on purpose in life or meaning of life) well-being. After a week, discuss the results of their efforts to maintain a balanced lifestyle.

Intermediate Lesson

Exploring My Place in the World

Program Segments

4. Easter
5. School
6. Summer
8. Christmas

Book Segments	Pages
Letters from John Poling to his family	66, 157-158, 215-216, 222
Letter from John Poling to the Director of the Junior Red Cross	138, 203
Letter from John Poling to Lankershim Elementary School	161
Letter from John Poling to Leonard Williams and Thurman Pfaff	213
Christmas Program	212
New Year's Resolutions, by Nickey Kompkoff	213
Elder Recollections: Daily Life January 18-19, Russian Christmas, Preparing the Church for Holiday Celebrations,	275-279, 286-290
"Playing Games in School" by Wally Brizgaloff	218
"Outdoor Winter Sports" by Mikey Eleshansky	219
"Learning to do Algebra" by Nick Kompkoff	226
"Portrait of an Aleut Child" by Lucy Poling	234-235
Letters from John Poling to his family	96, 170, 196-200
Letter from John Poling to James E. West	92
Letter from John Poling to the principal of Lincoln School	93
Letter from John Poling to the American Red Cross	119
Letter from the American Red Cross	228
Letters from John Poling to the Boy Scouts of America	155, 210, 224

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Book Segments	Pages
Letters from the Boy Scouts of America	103, 163, 210
Letter from the General Superintendent, US Department of the Interior	211
Elder Recollections: Games We Played Together, Summer at Shipyard, School Days, Children's Chores, Daily Life: Adult's Chores, Manly Chores, Women's Work, Preparing for Winter	265-266, 291-295, 270-274, 297, 298-299

Themes: heritage, culture, nationality, religion, community life, customs

Content area: Social Studies, Language Arts

Learning Standards:

A.1, A.2, A.5, A.6, A.7, B.1, D.1, D.3

Objectives

Students will:

- Distinguish among one's culture, heritage, religion and nationality.
- Compare and contrast the roles of men and women in the village of Chenega.
- Explore the Aleut language by constructing simple sentences and listening to Aleut recordings.
- Analyze the changes in tribal and modern cultures during religious holidays.
- Investigate a cultural community different from their own.

Anticipatory set/Background

Different terms can be used to describe the ethnicity and nationality of the Chenega tribe. They are known as Alaska Natives. John Poling describes them as "not Indian, but are separately classified as are the Eskimos. He later describes having taught them to proudly claim themselves "Americans." The Chenega tribe is classified as Aleut, speaking a dialect of Alutiiq. They can also be considered Native Americans. In the 1700s, Russian trappers introduced them to the Russian Orthodox Christian faith.

In Chenega, men and women had defined roles that contributed to the survival of the community. The families balanced their time among work, play, spiritual, and communal activities. As American Christmas, Russian Christmas and Easter approached, daily life became focused on preparation for the holidays and a certain excitement filled the air.

Teaching Ideas

1. Discuss with students the difference between culture, heritage, religion, and nationality. Is it necessary to describe oneself in so many ways? Why or why not? Have students research their own cultural background and how it relates to the nation in which they live today.

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2. Have students choose to read the diary entries of one boy and one girl in Chenega. Make a chart to compare and contrast the roles and activities of men and women and girls and boys in the village. Then discuss what activities or events seemed to tie the community together.
3. Study the words and pronunciations of the Aleut language written in John Poling's letter to his family on February 22, 1945. Research the history of the Aleut language, including its alphabet and grammar. Have students construct simple sentences in Aleut. Listen to Aleut Orthodox liturgical music available online from the All Saints of North America Orthodox church.
4. Have students write about how holidays are celebrated in their homes or communities. Have them describe how the holidays affect their daily lives and compare this to the changes in Chenega at Christmas and Easter.
5. Start a pen-pal program with a school in another state or country to learn about new cultures and customs.