



# Alaska Native Design: Parkas

Created by: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska

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## Description:

Expertly designed clothing has enabled Alaska Native peoples to survive and thrive for millennia in extreme climates and varying environments. Over many generations, sewers refined materials, construction and techniques to make clothing for specialized uses, everyday wear and ceremonial events, while at the same time representing their unique cultural heritage. This Learning Lab unit provides materials for students to learn about Alaska Native parkas and to take an in-depth look at Iñupiaq fur parkas in the past and today. Short essays, photographs with detailed descriptions and museum objects featuring Elders' discussions allow students to learn directly from community members. Questions and writing projects in the lesson help students understand and apply what they have learned, and find shared cultural values in their own lives. Below is a visual overview of the pages which make up the unit.

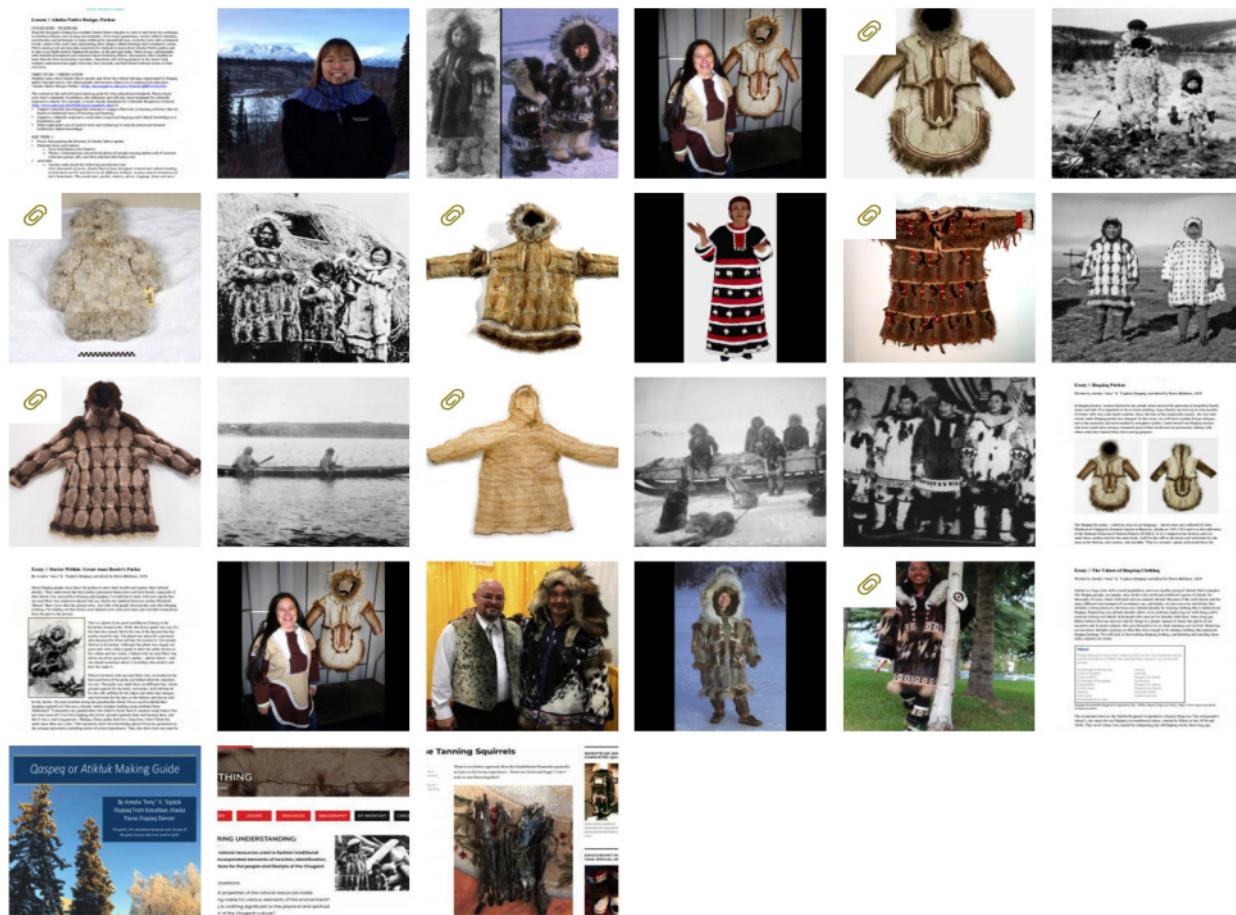
**Subjects:** Social Studies, Cultures, Visual Arts, Nonfiction Informational Reading, Anthropology, Museum Studies

**Age Levels:** Middle School, High School, Post-Secondary, Adults-Lifelong Learner

**Educational Features:** Lesson Plan, Instructions, Content, Images, Museum Objects, Activities, Additional Resources

**Related Collections:** The Yup'ik People and Their Culture, The Iñupiaq People and Their Culture

**Education Standards:** Alaska State Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools



## Lesson // Alaska Native Design: Parkas

### OVERVIEW / PURPOSE

Expertly designed clothing has enabled Alaska Native peoples to survive and thrive for millennia in extreme climates and varying environments. Over many generations, sewers refined materials, construction and techniques to make clothing for specialized uses, everyday wear and ceremonial events, while at the same time representing their unique cultural heritage and community values. This Learning Lab unit provides materials for students to learn about Alaska Native parkas and to take an in-depth look at Iñupiaq fur parkas, in the past and today. Short essays, photographs with detailed descriptions and museum objects featuring Elders' discussions allow students to learn directly from community members. Questions and writing projects in the lesson help students understand and apply what they have learned, and find shared cultural values in their own lives.

### OBJECTIVES / VERIFICATION

Students learn about Alaska Native parkas and about the cultural heritage represented by Iñupiaq parkas through essays, text, photographs and museum objects in a Learning Lab collection, "Alaska Native Design: Parkas" (<https://learninglab.si.edu/q/ll-c/W4o8K4pBDVcFswN2>).

The content in this unit will meet learning goals for state educational standards. Please check your state's standards. In addition, this education unit will also meet standards for culturally responsive schools. For example, it meets Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools (<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/Publications/standards.html>) to:

- Support culturally-knowledgeable students to engage effectively in learning activities that are based on traditional ways of knowing and learning;
- Support a culturally-responsive curriculum using local language and cultural knowledge as a foundation; and
- Make appropriate use of modern tools and technology to help document and transmit traditional cultural knowledge.

### SECTION 1

- Focus: Recognizing the diversity of Alaska Native parkas
- Materials from unit website:
  - Text: Introduction text (below)
  - Photos: Contemporary and archival photos of people wearing parkas and of museum collection parkas (all), and their attached information text
- Activities:
  - Teacher reads aloud the following introduction text:

*Over thousands of years, Alaska Natives have designed, created and refined clothing to help them survive and thrive in the different climates, seasons and environments of their homelands. They made hats, parkas, mittens, gloves, leggings, boots and more from a variety of locally sourced, sustainable materials and from materials acquired*



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*through trade. Let's look at parkas as an example. Alaska Natives made and wore parkas in the past, and they still make and wear them today.*

- Teacher-led questions with answers
  - Student preparation: Ask students to look at the photos noted above and read the attached information text for each.
  - Question 1: What animals did Alaska Natives use to make materials for the different parkas shown in the photos?  
Answers: Arctic hare, auklet (bird), calf, caribou, crested auklet (bird), fur seal, ground squirrel, guillemot (bird), mink, murre (bird), muskrat, reindeer, seal, sea lion, sea otter, walrus, wolf, wolverine
  - Question 2: During what activities would people wear parkas?  
Answers: Competition/contest, convention, ceremonies, cold weather, festivals, hunting, posing for a photo, special occasions, trading fair, traveling, wet weather
- Teacher-led questions with answers
  - Student preparation: Ask students to pick one pair of photos: one museum object and one archival image. Ask them to re-read the information and the attached texts for the museum objects, and to prepare answers for the following two questions. Ask students to take turns sharing their answers with the class.
  - Question 1: Which two images did you select? What do you think about them? What do the images make you wonder?  
Answers: Answers will vary for each student.
  - Question 2: Name an activity in your life – past, present or future – when you would wear that type of parka and why.  
Answers: Answers will vary for each student, but will generally describe activities involving wearing a large windproof jacket with a hood, designed to be worn in cold weather.

## SECTION 2

- Focus: Understanding the traditions, changes and values in Iñupiaq parkas
- Materials from unit website:
  - Essays: “Iñupiaq Parkas” & “Stories Within: Great Aunt Bessie’s Parka”
  - Photos of Iñupiaq people wearing parkas (by title): Wearing an *atikluk*, Skin-sewing today, Fancy parka traditions, Competing in a fancy parka
- Activities:
  - Teacher-led questions with answers:
    - Student preparation: Ask students to study the photos noted above and read the attached information text for them.
    - Question 1: Based on what you read, what are three techniques or traditions that have stayed the same about making Iñupiaq fur parkas, and what are three things that have changed?



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Answers:

Same: Parkas are made with fur (seal, wolf, wolverine); the walrus tusk design is used (pointing down from the hood); men still wear parkas at conventions; women still wear parkas for competitions

Changed: An *atiklik* (summer shirt) is based on the fur parka but is now made from fabric; today men make parkas; parkas have zippers now; calfskin is now used for parkas; some people wear sealskin vests instead of a heavy parka

o Teacher-led questions with answers

- Student preparation: Ask students to read the essay, “Iñupiaq Parkas.”
- Teacher reads aloud the following introduction:  
*Now that you've read an essay giving even more information about Iñupiaq parkas, let's take a closer look at traditions and values that this type of clothing represents.*
- Question 1: Historically for the Iñupiaq people, why was it important to be able to sew a well-made parka?

Answer: To keep your family warm in the cold, harsh weather of Alaska.

- Question 2: One design element that you read about in the essay and saw in the photos of people wearing parkas is the walrus tusks at the sides of the hood. Why did a skin-sewer use this design?

Answer: A skin-sewer used the tusk design to show respect to the spirits of walruses.

Question 3: As you read, walruses are an important source of food and materials for the Iñupiaq people. Why then do you think it is important to show respect to walruses?

Hint: They read about this in the caption for the photo, “Parkas for sled travel” in the previous section.

Answer: By honoring the spirits of walruses, a family increases their chance of hunting success for bringing home a walrus.

Question 4: What are different ways Iñupiaq people learn to make fancy parkas?

Answers: By looking at other parkas made by their family; by learning designs and techniques passed down in their family; by working from photos of parkas; by learning from other skin-sewers; by getting encouragement; by visiting with Elders and learning from them; by studying parkas at museums and culture centers to see how they were made (7)

Question 5: When someone is able to make a fancy parka, what two values about their character does this shows to other people?

Answer: They are a hard worker (diligent, conscientious, careful) and can listen well to complicated instructions (observant, attentive, meticulous).

o Student project (writing or drawing): Family heirlooms

- Student preparation: Ask students to read the essay, “Stories Within: Great Aunt Bessie’s Parka.”
- Writing project: Ask students to think about how Amy learned about a family heirloom – a parka that her aunt inherited – by studying the parka together,

listening to her aunt's memories, and thinking about what this information means beyond the specific details. Ask students to think of an article of clothing they were given, or would like to have given to them, by an older family member or friend. Based on the kind of information that Amy gathered, ask students to think of five questions to ask themselves that will help tell the story about the clothing, including details and meanings. For example: How is the clothing different from clothes they could buy new today? Why was the clothing important enough to keep it? Ask students to write answers to their questions. Finally, ask students to share their questions and answers, or write a short essay about the heirloom.

- Drawing project: As an alternative to the writing project, or in addition to it, ask students to think about the values and attributes that made the parka Amy's aunt inherited a special heirloom. For example, the parka was made with materials that are traditionally used in her culture, and it was made with beautiful details. Ask students to draw an article of clothing they would like to make and hand down in their family or to a friend. Ask them to include design elements – like figures or words – that reflect meanings important to the student. Ask students to present the drawing to the class, describing the materials and design element meanings.

Note: If a student is Yup'ik or Iñupiaq, they can adapt the design activity for their culture. For example, they could make their own pattern for *akurun/qupak* (fancy trim for a fur parka). For an advanced sewing project, they can use the additional resource, “How to make a *qaspeq/atikluk*” (<https://learninglab.si.edu/q/ll-c/W4o8K4pBDVcFswN2#r/966688>) to make their own summer shirt.

### SECTION 3

- Focus: Understanding values held by others and oneself reflected in clothing
- Materials from unit website:
  - Essay: “The Values of Iñupiaq Clothing”
- Activities:
  - Teacher-led questions with answers:
    - Student preparation: Ask students to read the essay, “The Values of Iñupiaq Clothing.”
    - Teacher reads aloud the following introduction:  
*We've just read an essay about how making and wearing Iñupiaq-style clothing – and learning and teaching how to make clothing – all express Iñupiaq identity and community values.*
    - Question 1: Think about something you wear that shows something special about you or that means something special to you. What is it and how is it special?
  - Answer: Answers will vary for each student.

**Question 2:** Look at the list of 17 Iñupiaq values in the essay. Who sees a connection between the item you wear and one of those values? Which value and how?

<b>Values</b>	
Iñupiat Ijitusiat is that which makes us who we are. Our traditional values are the foundation of NANA. We embody these values in our words and actions.	
Knowledge of family tree	Humor
Love for children	Humility
Avoid conflict	Respect for Elders
Knowledge of language	Spirituality
Cooperation	Respect for others
Family roles	Respect for nature
Sharing	Domestic skills
Hard work	Hunter success
Responsibility to tribe	

Adapted from NANA Regional Corporation, Inc. (2020), *Iñupiat Ijitusiat Values*, <https://www.nana.com/about-us/mission-values>

**Notes to teacher:** It may be helpful to list the 17 values for students to see as a group. If a student does not see a connection and you do, guide the student to recognize the value. If there are Indigenous students, research and present the values of that community as a class group. For example, community values shared by Alaska Natives can be found on the website “Alaska Native Knowledge Network” at <http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/ANCR/Values/index.html>.

**Answer:** Answers will vary for each student.

- Student project: Interview and writing assignment
  - Teacher reads aloud the following introduction:  
*In the essay, we learned from people Amy talked with, and these women talked about how they learned, and how they like to share what they learned.*
  - Ask students to think of a family member or friend who does an activity or knows how to make an object of interest to the student. Some examples are making a craft or food, playing an instrument or building. Ask students to write questions about the activity based on who, what, where, how and why. Ask students to interview the person – taking notes or recording the interview – and to write a newspaper-style article from the interview. Ask students to include in their article what values they think are related to the activity.

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (descriptions and links on unit website)

- Guide: “How to Make a *Qaspeq* or *Atikluk*” (a summer shirt or dress designed inspired by parka designs)
- Educational materials: “Chugachmiut Heritage cultural curriculums”
- Shared techniques: “How to tan dried squirrel hides”

## About this unit: Amy

This education unit was designed, researched, written and edited collaboratively by Amelia "Amy" *Ahnaughuq* Topkok and Dawn Biddison (Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center, Alaska office). In addition, Amy wrote the essays presented in this unit.

Amelia (Amy) *Ahnaughuq* Katherine Topkok is an enrolled member of the Iñupiaq group Kikiktagrumiut of Kotzebue and has lived in Fairbanks for over 30 years. Her parents are from Shishmaref and Noatak, Alaska. Amy earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts (1997) and Master of Arts in Cross-Cultural Studies (2018) from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). Her Master's project was "Alaska Iñupiaq Skin-sewing Designs: A Portal into Cultural Identity." Amy has worked at UAF since 1994 and is currently the Biomedical Learning and Student Training program (BLaST) Reporting and Outreach Coordinator. In addition, she teaches two courses at UAF: Alaska Native Studies: Alaska Native Dance and Aesthetic Appreciation of Alaska Native Performance. Amy has performed Iñupiaq dance since the early 1990s and has been an integral member of the non-profit group Pavva Iñupiaq Dancers of Fairbanks with her husband, Dr. Sean Topkok, and their three sons since its creation in 1999. Her volunteer work includes the Native Education program and Board Diversity Committee at the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, and teaching Alaska Native dance at the Residential Treatment Center of Fairbanks. Amy was awarded the 2014 Parent of the Year by the National Indian Education Association.

Photo courtesy of Amy Topkok

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



## Children wearing parkas

An Iñupiaq girl at Nome in 1905 (left) poses for a photo wearing a fur atigi (parka) and kammak (boots) made to keep her warm in cold weather. Nora and Delbert Rexford's children Charles Burton, Qinugan Nayusian, and Barbara Elizabeth (right) wear fancy fur parkas at Barrow, which were made for them to wear on special occasions like Kivgiq (The Messenger Feast), an Iñupiaq celebration with dance performances, the sharing of traditional foods and trading. And as any well-dressed Inupiaq, the Rexford children also wear fancy kammak and aitqak (mittens) with their atigi. Families who could afford the materials and the time made fancy fur parkas, even for a child. A fancy fur atigi showed that a family had "wealth" and had the skills to sew such complicated work. In the past and today, wearing a fancy atigi also shows that the person is loved and honored, especially for a child who will outgrow it in one season, since it takes months to sew work such as these.

Left: Photo by Hozo Arctic Studio, courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-ppmsc-02369.

Right: Photo by Larry McNeil, courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian, P26511.

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



## Wearing an *atikluk*

Jana Harcharek wears an *atikluk* (summer shirt) she made using fabric and a pattern based on this historic fur *atigi* (parka) from the National Museum of Natural History. The fur *atigi* was collected by John Murdoch in 1883 at her home village Utqiagvik (Barrow), and she found an illustration of it in the Smithsonian publication *Ethnological Results of the Point Barrow Expedition* (1892), now a public domain book available for free download online. Today many Iñupiaq women wear an *atikluk* to work, during travel from home, at important meetings, for special occasions, and on any day. Jana wore this *atikluk* at an Iñupiaq language and culture seminar held by the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center at the Anchorage Museum in 2011.

According to the Iñupiaq dictionary written by linguist Edna Ahgeak MacLean, an *atikluk* is a "cloth cover for a fur parka" and "commonly called a 'snowshirt.'" This definition refers to its historic use. According to Iñupiaq Elder Ron Aniqsuaq Brower, Sr., men wore a white *atikluk* when hunting game as "camouflaged covering in white snow," and women wore them "to go over their fur parkas."

Photo by Dawn Biddison, courtesy of the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska

To learn about parkas and more from Iñupiaq Elders and culture-bearers, visit:

<https://learninglab.si.edu/q/ll-c/6DMoTfdLBJBWmfDT#r/30286>

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



# Parka

**Object name:** Parka

**Alaska Native object name:** *atigi* "parka," *qusunŋaq* "outer parka fur outside"

**Language of object name:** North Slope Iñupiaq

**Culture:** Iñupiaq

**Region:** Northwest Alaska

**Village:** Point Barrow

**Short description:** " *Tainna quparjruanik uvani Utqiaġviŋmi atigit quparŋasurut* (ones like these are seen here at Barrow and the parkas have similar trimmings). – Ronald Brower Sr., 2002

This is a young woman's fancy parka for festivals and ceremonies. The U-shaped bottom edge is a traditional feminine style. The white fur is from the belly of the reindeer, and the brown fur is from its other parts, including leg skins used to make the vertical panels. The seams and bottom are trimmed with wolverine fur. Along the lower edge are a strip of alder-dyed skin, lines of brown fur and red yarn, and a triangular patch of bleached sealskin. Elders said that the fine work shows the young woman's skill as a seamstress.

**Dimensions:** Length 132cm

**Category:** Clothing

**Museum:** NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

**Catalog number:** E74041-0

**Accession date:** 1883

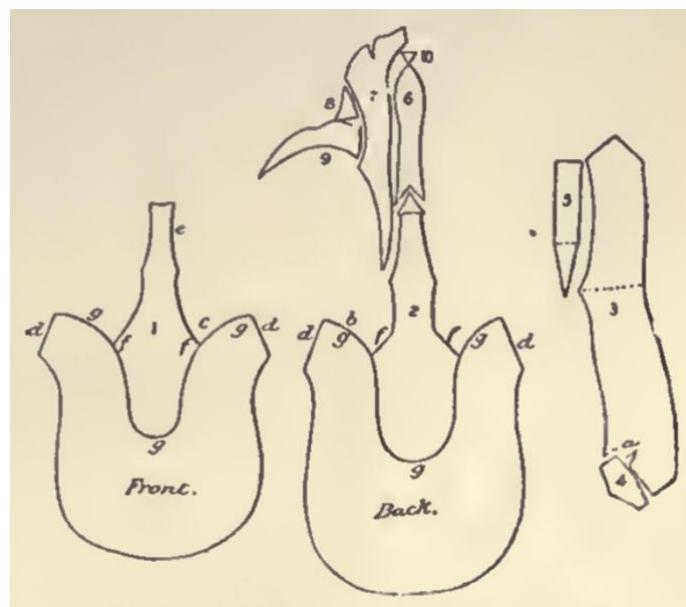
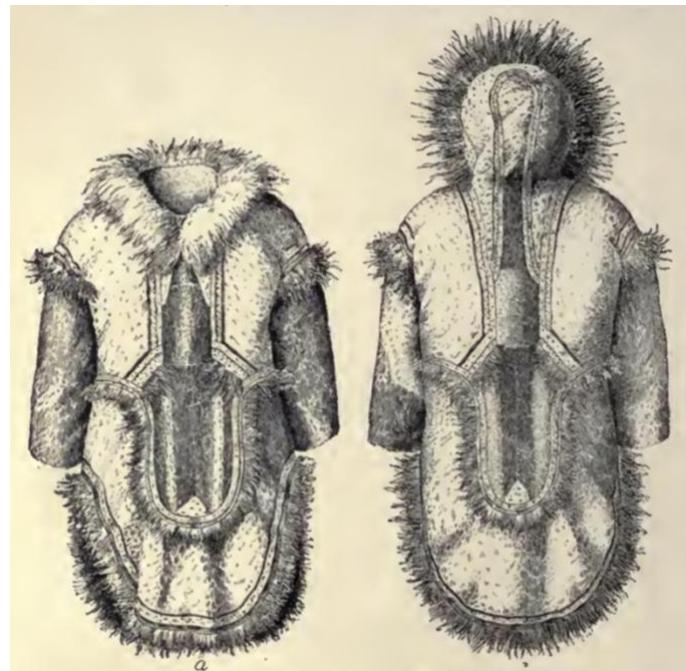
**Source:** Patrick H. Ray (collector)



**Short description:**

These illustrations are of the Iñupiaq parka E74041-0 collected by John Murdoch at Point Barrow in 1881-1883, where he was a naturalist employed by the Chief Signal Officer of the Army with the International Polar Expedition to conduct meteorological observations. In addition to this work, Murdoch wrote extensive notes about his research and collecting of items with the local Iñupiaq people that eventually came into the National Museum of Natural History collection. His work was published in the book Ethnological Results of the Point Barrow Expedition (1892) and includes drawings of the front and back of the parka and a basic pattern for it, both drawn after the collections arrived in Washington, DC.

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



## Elders Discussion

### Materials

**Ron Brower:** This looks like it is a parka made out of reindeer skin. These (indicates vertical trim below waist) look like that's the legs (leg skin). And some of this is the belly part (indicates white skin of body of parka), unless this is – *qatiqtaaguruq* (it is white). The light skin was sought after from Siberia, because the reindeer is a much lighter color than caribou. And so it would be sought after it in trade. *Agnaiyaam atigisujnaja* (maybe it's a girl's parka).(1)

**Jane Brower:** *Narraayanik* (from the belly).

**Ron Brower:** *Tainna qupayaruanik uvani Utqiagvijmi atigit qupayasurut* (ones like these are seen here at Barrow and the parkas have similar trimmings).

**Jane Brower:** Mm.

**Kenneth Toovak:** Yeah.

**Ron Brower:** They have red string or yarn. This is wolf (indicates ruff), deer (indicates light colored skin of parka) and wolverine (indicates decorative band at waist). (Examines dark colored skin down center of parka body.) *Marra manna natchiq, naluaq* (is this ring seal, bleached seal skin?)?

**Jane Brower:** *Qavvik* (wolverine).

**Ron Brower:** This is wolverine trimming with caribou belly (indicates light colored skin of parka body) and leggings (indicates dark colored skin down center of parka body). And this is cut from the body of the caribou (indicates dark colored skin of sleeves), the arms.

**Aron Crowell:** And how about the embroidery around the bottom? How's that made?

**Doreen Simmonds:** That's wolverine.

**Jane Brower:** *Tuttu* (caribou).

**Doreen Simmonds:** *Aa* (yes).

**Ron Brower:** This (indicates decorative band at hem of parka) is dyed caribou skin. This (indicates trim at bottom hem of parka) is the back of the wolverine that's been dyed.

## Design

**Karen Brewster:** Where would this style have come from?

**Ron Brower:** There's a number of different designs. These were probably either traded or made up in the area, in the North Slope.

**Karen Brewster:** Is this something you would have seen in Barrow?

**Jane Brower:** I've never seen any of that kind of parka. (2)

**Ron Brower:** These are too old. These are before our generation of time, that they would have made these.

**Doreen Simmonds:** What I understand is that our people wore this kind a long time ago. It was traditional to wear this kind (indicates rounded bottom hem of parka). Isn't that right? And then we slowly changed to that way (indicates straight bottom hem of parka), flat. Flat.

**Ron Brower:** This is definitely the North Slope style.

## Wearing

**Ron Brower:** Looking at ruff this would be everyday wear.

**Jane Brower:** Fancy parka. Wedding parka? *Agnam atigiya. Nasaya agnam allausuuruq ajutim nasajaniñ.* (A woman's parka. A woman's parka hood is always different from a man's hood.) (3)

**Aron Crowell:** And this is a young woman's parka?

**Jane Brower:** Yes.

**Kenneth Toovak:** Yes.

**Aron Crowell:** You said maybe a wedding parka.

**Jane Brower:** Depends.

**Kenneth Toovak:** It's just like a young lady has to wear a fancy garment.

**Ron Brower:** When they become eligible for marriage.

**Kenneth Toovak:** Yeah.

**Ron Brower:** Your eligibility for marriage also included your skill in sewing. Sewing was an important skill for young women, if they were going to be seeking a husband. Sewing was one of the traits that people looked at.

**Kenneth Toovak:** Yeah. Just like when you're going to the ceremony, you have to put suits on today. So back in those days, this type of garment is the ceremony-type parka. Before they got those cloth and material in the old days. So, you see there's a special parka that they wear, when there's a gathering or for special whatever.

**Ron Brower:** They had a lot of festivals where when people were gathering. And they put their best dress on when they had their ceremonies and gathering of different groups or clans. Cause when they gather, you're looking for a spouse, in those days. And one of – for women, one of the attributes was their skill in sewing. So the fancier clothing that you make, you're considered a highly prized woman.

## Change

**Aron Crowell:** Why do you think people changed the style?

**Ron Brower:** They slowly changed from fancy style clothing to the type of clothing we're using today because of the ease of access of cloth. And it was easier to switch to cloth. And from animal clothing to this kind of clothing there's been a change. And also the change in the population. *Tainna savaguuruat nayirrutm nujunjagait* (people that had this talent of styles were wiped out by sickness).(4)

**Kenneth Toovak:** Mm.

**Ron Brower:** There were diseases that wiped out many of the people who had the skills of making clothing like this in the early days. Remember our communities were ravaged with disease. First there was starvation followed by introduced diseases until right up to the 1930s. And people began changing their style of clothing, probably as a result from that. . . . Not to mention we've lost entire communities to famine and to disease in the North Slope that greatly reduced the population.(5)

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[From discussion with Jane Brower, Ron Brower, Sr. (Iñupiat Heritage Center), Doreen Simmonds (Commission on Iñupiaq History, Language & Culture) and Kenneth Toovak at the National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of the American Indian, 2/04/2002-2/06/2002. Also participating: Karen Brewster, Wanda Chin and Terry Dickey (University of Alaska Museum) and Aron Crowell (NMNH).]

1. According to Martha Aiken, this type of parka is called *qusuyyaq*, an “outer parka fur outside.” It was made from any kind of skin with the fur side facing out and made fancy or plain.
2. According to Martha Aiken, this parka does not have the right cut – not ankle-length, not straight bottom – and is not fancy enough to be an *atqagun* (woman’s dress parka) from Barrow. An *atqagun* – sometimes called a *siksrigaat* – is ankle length with a straight bottom hem. It is usually made mostly from squirrel with *qupak* (fancy trim) around the bottom, wolverine *nigra* (tassels), a *manusiniq* (parka gore) at the sides of the neck on the front and sometimes the back, a squirrel head *nasaq* (hood) with white trim, and a sunshine (wolverine) *isigvik* (fur ruff).
3. According to Martha Aiken, a woman’s parka hood – *nasaq* means “hood” – is a little bigger than a man’s. Also, a woman’s hood has a small crest-like protrusion on the top and a bubble-like protrusion at the center of the back where it meets the body of the parka. A man’s hood is straight. A Barrow-area woman kept her baby on her back inside her parka, not in the hood as did Inuit women.
4. According to Martha Aiken, “styles” refers to making fancy style parkas, and “sickness” refers to the 1918 flu epidemic.
5. According to Martha Aiken, it was hard to acquire cleaned skins and when ready-cleaned skins (e.g., calf skin) became available it was easier to make parkas. The sudden changes due to the loss of lives from the 1918 flu epidemic and due to the availability of ready-made skins led to fancy parka trims not being made as skillfully anymore. This happened not just because people died, but because changes came and people changed. In the past, some fancy parkas trims were embroidered with dyed long caribou neck-hair. There are some Elders who know about this type of trim and the use of white caribou belly-skin like Bertha & Mary Lou Leovitt in Barrow.

## History

This is a young woman's fancy parka for festivals and ceremonies, made of reindeer skin. The U-shaped bottom edge is a traditional feminine style that is no longer made.(1)

Reindeer are semi-domesticated caribou and were historically acquired in trade from Chukchi herders on the Siberian side of Bering Strait. Starting in 1892, the U.S. government established reindeer herds in northwest Alaska. Their light-colored fur is highly valued.(2) Starting in 1892 the U.S. government established reindeer herds in northwest Alaska.

The term *qusujjaq* is used for a parka worn with the fur facing out. According to Martha Aiken, Ronald Brower Sr., Jane Brower, Doreen Simmonds, and Kenneth Toovak, the white fur on this parka is from the belly of the reindeer, and the brown fur is from its other parts, including leg skins used to make the vertical panels. The seams and bottom are trimmed with wolverine fur. Along the lower edge are a strip of alder-dyed skin, decorative lines of brown fur and red yarn, and a triangular patch of bleached sealskin. Elders added that the fine work shows the young woman's skill as a seamstress. When people gathered at festivals they were looking for marriage partners, and if a woman could sew clothing like this she would be highly prized.

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1. Bruce, "Report [Fiscal Year 1892–93]," 110; Dall, *Alaska and Its Resources*, 22, 141; Fitzhugh and Crowell, eds., *Crossroads of Continents*, 214; Michael, ed., *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels*, 110; Murdoch, *Ethnological Results of the Point Barrow Expedition*, 110–11, 113, 118–20; Nelson, *The Eskimo about Bering Strait*, 30–35; Ray, "The Eskimo of St. Michael and Vicinity," 35–37; Simpson, "Observations on the Western Eskimo," 244; Thornton, *Among the Eskimos of Wales, Alaska*, 34.

2. Gordon, "Notes on the Western Eskimo," 78; Michael, ed., *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels*, 110; Ray, "The Eskimo of St. Michael and Vicinity," 35.

## Rabbit-skin parkas

Stephan John, Stanley David, and Rachel David wear rabbit-skin parkas at Tetlin, circa 1936. Arctic hare (rabbit) pelts are very warm and light, though not very durable. Athabascans in Alaska have used them to make many kinds of clothing for both children and adults, including blankets, parkas, coats, caps, shirts, pants, vests and socks. Also, Arctic hares are an important source of food.

Photo courtesy the Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Tetlin Collection, 1987-0114-00052.

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



## Child's parka

**Object name:** Child's parka

**Alaska Native object name:** *geh dhah ik*  
"rabbit-skin parka"

**Language of object name:** Dinjii Zhuh K'yaan

**Culture:** Gwich'in Athabascan

**Region:** Porcupine & Peel Rivers, Alaska/Canada

**Short description:** "Up in the Allakaket area it gets really, really cold, especially a long time ago. These women who were older than me said they remembered playing outdoors in really cold weather, and you know it was cold because they used to go like this [exhales] and their breath just sizzled. They had rabbit-skin clothes like this, and the cold didn't bother them." — Eliza Jones, 2004

This Gwich'in parka for a child is made from a double layer of Arctic hare skins sewn back to back. This was made for everyday wear during very cold weather. Rabbit skins are light and extremely warm, although not very durable, and were used for blankets and all kinds of clothing. Because the animals are common and easily captured, parkas made from their skins were considered to be undistinguished; the well-off preferred marten, wolf, wolverine, and caribou garments. Nonetheless, hare parkas and pants were so useful that people wore them long after giving up other types of traditional clothing.

**Dimensions:** Length 82cm

**Category:** Clothing

**Museum:** NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

**Catalog number:** 071053.000

**Accession date:** 1917

**Source:** Donald A. Cadzow (collector)



## Elders Discussion

### Making rabbit-skin parkas (1)

**Eliza Jones:** When we made parkas for our children like this, we usually put cloth parka over it so that make it last longer. And then sometimes we wore it with the fur turned to our body or most of the time, I think that's how we wore it. And then the rabbit skin, after you sewed all the rabbit skin together, you sew a cloth to the back of it. That makes it sturdier. First you quilt it down, and then you quilt it across.

In the summertime, we stayed in camp with my grandma, Cecelia Happy. And in August on the Koyukuk River, there's not much fish and the men would go out hunting. And then grandma would take her sewing project out. She had all these tanned rabbits hides, and she sewed them together. And then she draped them over something, and then took the flannel. She was telling me that she was going to teach me how to sew, so I sat next to her. And we're sewing this flannel to the rabbit skin.

And the way she sewed, her needle go click, click, click – just real regular, uniform. And I would be sitting there, by her, trying to make that noise, but my hand was little bit clumsy I guess [laughter]. But we wore this, some of my children wore this, and then later there was other kind of material that came along and we used that. But we sure wore that as children.

And the other thing – I heard this one from Sally [Hudson] – was that they took rabbit's hide, after they tanned the hide, you drape it over a pole, and then you cut a strip into it. And you pull on it. And as you're cutting it up, you're rolling up this thing and you make ball of string, with this rabbit's hide. And then she said they like crocheted it with their finger, and then they make it into a parka. And she said, as a child, she had a whole suit that had the pants attached to it too. Then the rabbit skin, after it get older, the fur gets all matted, and that makes it even warmer. Does that have a backing? Oh no, you said it's lined with rabbit fur?

**Aron Crowell:** Seems to be fur. Why don't you look?

**Eliza Jones:** I don't really want to touch it because the fur really flies. Oh my, lined with rabbit fur. I've never seen one like that, because as I said, we sewed cloth to the back of it and then make a cloth parka over it. And I call this *ggol tlaakk* (rabbit-skin parka).

**Judy Woods:** I call it *ggol tlaakk* (rabbit-skin parka) too.

**Phillip Arrow:** *Ggux da'* (rabbit parka).

**Trimble Gilbert:** It's easy word for our language: *geh* (rabbit), *geh dhah* (rabbit skin), *geh dhah ik* (rabbit-skin parka).

## Using rabbit skin

**Judy Woods:** I seen my mom make like she said. They stripped them and then that skin would just roll just like yarn. And she made a blanket for my brother out of it, out of that rabbit skin. And that was for inside mittens and for your socks, for inside your boots. They even used to have bag of cut-up rabbit skin in a bag for people to put in their mitts [when] their lining get old. I made a sleeping bag with hood on it for my son when he was baby, because we stayed in tent.

**Phillip Arrow:** I seen they make blanket, but I never seen something like this. And long ago, ahead of my time, they always carry stuff out their trap line on their back. And they try to make things light as they can. So they use (rabbit skin) blanket. I never did try it, but they say it's sure warm. They make lots of use for that rabbit skin.

**Eliza Jones:** Oh yes, never throw rabbit skin away.

**Phillip Arrow:** But you gotta have the right cover on both sides, so it'll last longer.

**Trimble Gilbert:** So they use blanket too, and they said it's both side, big blanket. And they use it long time in winter, cold weather. And when they said cold weather, mean it's seventy-below that time when we grow up.

**Judy Woods:** That's true.

**Trimble Gilbert:** Now the climate has changed, so it's warmer and warmer up there. I think some people still using it for right here (neck). When you travel long ways, cold weather gets into your parka right here (neck). So they're still using it. And some people use some in their pocket too for that cold weather. They use it inside the boots too, I remember that, inside the gloves and even scarf too I remember. You know the wind is always get in to here (throat) so they put it right here. I never seen one, but then I heard the story about it, and my mom tell me. Ft. Yukon is about hundred and fifty miles by trail, dog team they used to travel all the way down. And there's the old man came in from Ft. Yukon with dog team, and my mom said that old man wear that old outfit like this. People said this is hundred-percent warm. It's light too, they said. And they're good eating too, that rabbit, good eating.

**Judy Woods:** Oh, yes. Tanning hide. In the winter is when we save lot of this rabbit skin, they're tougher. Tan them. They were easy to tan.

**Trimble Gilbert:** Well, I remember that it's easy to skin it too. Sometime we don't even use knife, just by hand.

**Eliza Jones:** Very easy, mm-hmm.

**Trimble Gilbert:** And we skin it, and a lot of time I see people hang it outside and dry in the wind, and then the way they tan it, I remember, is when they just hold it and like that (circular scrubbing motion). And it's easy to, it's soft.

**Judy Woods:** It's soap (used to tan it)?

**Eliza Jones:** Yes, just wet it with a little soap and work it, and it tans.

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[From discussion with Phillip Arrow, Trimble Gilbert, Eliza Jones and Judy Woods at the National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of the American Indian, 5/17/2004-5/21/2004. Also participating: Aron Crowell (NMNH), Kate Duncan (Arizona State University) and Suzi Jones (AMHA).]

1. In this entry, the Elders speak in different Athabascan dialects: Phillip Arrow, Deg Xinag; Trimble Gilbert, Gwich'in; Eliza Jones, Central Koyukon; and Judy Woods, Upper Koyukon.

## History

This Gwich'in child's parka is made from a double layer of Arctic hare (rabbit) skins, sewn back-to-back so that fur faces both to the inside and outside of the garment. It comes from the general region of the Peel and Porcupine rivers along the Alaska-Canada border. There is a matching set of trousers with built-in feet (NMAI 071504.000).

Arctic hare pelts are very warm and light, although not durable. Alaskan Athabascans used them to make many kinds of clothing for both children and adults, including blankets, parkas, caps, shirts, trousers, vests, socks, underwear, and duffel for insulating boots.(1) Because hares are a common and easily captured animal, parkas made from their skins were considered to be undistinguished; the well-off wore more luxurious garments of marten, wolf, wolverine, or caribou.(2) Nonetheless, hare fur clothing was so useful that people wore it well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century in some places, long after most other types of traditional skin garments had been discontinued.(3)

There are two ways of making hare pelts into clothing. The first is to stitch together whole skins, as on this coat and trousers.(4) The second is to cut the skins into long strips, making a kind of fur yarn that can be "crocheted" into parkas, blankets, and other items.(5)

Arctic hares were, and still are, quite important as food animals, although they go through cycles of increasing and declining population. Koyukon author Sydney Huntington wrote that, "When hares suddenly erupted in great numbers, Koyukon elders explained that the winter-white animals had 'fallen from the sky with the snow.'"(6) Traditionally they were taken singly using snares or arrows and in large numbers by communal drives.(7)

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1. Carlo 1978:47-48; Hadleigh West 1963:288; Madison and Yarber 1981a:65; McKennan 1959:78, 1965:44; Nelson 1973:141-142; Osgood 1936:40, 44; Osgood 1970:253-256, 270; Schmitter 1985:5; Steinbright 1984:78

2. Carlo 1978:48; Osgood 1970:253-254

3. Thompson 1994:55

4. Carlo 1978:47

5. Huntington 1993:139; McKennan 1959:84, 1965:39,44; Osgood 1936:71; Steinbright 1984:78

6. Huntington 1993:140

7. Hadleigh West 1963:159-160; McKennan 1965:32; Mischler 1995:617; Nelson 1973:130-143; Schmitter 1985:9; Simeone 1995:10; VanStone 1978:34

## Yup'ik family

A Yup'ik family wears fur parkas in front of their home in Togiak, Alaska, in 1927. Each *atkuk* (parka) – whether it is made for an infant, child or adult – is carefully sewn to make sure its wearer stays safely warm.

Photo by Otto Geist, courtesy of the Anchorage Museum, B92.33.21.

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



# Parka

**Object name:** Parka

**Alaska Native object name:** *atkuk* "parka"

**Language of object name:** Yugtun

**Culture:** Yup'ik

**Region:** Southwest Alaska

**Short description:** "This is from – I don't know – a place where they have lots of muskrats!" — Neva Rivers, 2002

This man's parka is made from more than 40 muskrat bellies and was worn during cold weather, including outdoor activities like hunting and traveling. It has a wolf and wolverine-trimmed hood and white caribou fur trim. Muskrat makes a very warm coat that is also light in weight. A woman's role as clothing maker had social and spiritual meanings. The designs she sewed expressed personal and family identity, and well-made, beautiful clothing helped her husband as a hunter because it pleased the animals. A fine parka demonstrated her sewing skills as well as her husband's success as a provider.

**Category:** Clothing

**Museum:** NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

**Catalog number:** E176103-0

**Accession date:** 1897

**Source:** Edward W. Nelson (collector)



## Elders Discussion

### Examining & identifying

**Neva Rivers:** This is made from muskrat stomach side. And this, as is it decked up with trims and all, these are for the men. For the men or for the boys.

**John Phillip, Sr.:** Wolverine (trim at bottom edge of parka).

**Virginia Minock:** *Iluqligellriigneck-llu negilirluni. Tang. Iluqliqlutek negilik.* Wolf-aq wolverine-amek *iluqlingqerrluni.* (It has a ruff that is inside it too. Look. A ruff in inside the other. Wolverine is inside the wolf.)

**Neva Rivers:** Mm-hmm. They put a wolverine in here (brown trim at bottom edge of parka body and sleeves) and colored one (red band above wolverine trim). And this one is a sheared reindeer (white trim at bottom edge of parka). Some are sheared, but some of the animals, they have shorter hair near the leg area. And they put fancy red (pattern on white trim) that we have seen, all those red ones from Russian side. *Unuuguq-qaa tungulria* (is that one (narrow trim above white trim) a black one)?

**Joan Hamilton:** *Ii-i, pinganani* (yes, it seems to be.).

**Neva Rivers:** And they use a wolverine in here (tassels on parka shoulders). It's the same thing as they did in here (trim at shoulder same as at bottom of parka). If it's not from the tail of a wolverine – this little lining (narrow trim), that black one – they sewed it on like us. They put reindeer (chin) hair in here. *Man'a-llu negilia* (and this part is the ruff), around the face. This is for (making it) wind-proof, so the wind won't go in their face.

**Joan Hamilton:** It's protection from the wind.

**Neva Rivers:** They put wolverine in here (first outermost layer of ruff, where ruff meets hood). Wolf (second layer, behind long-haired layer of ruff) so this (long-haired third layer) don't rub off that fast they put this on back. And the long one (long-haired third layer). And they put this one in here (fourth layer in front of long-haired layer) to protect this one (long-haired layer). And they put this one next to the wolverine (fifth, innermost layer). They (ruffs) protect against the wind, that's why it's made like this all the way.

**Virginia Minock:** *Nacanmi kelua* (what about the back of the hood)?

**Neva Rivers:** And the hood would be fitted. And they will put on a *naquguteq* (belt) if it's too windy, to protect against the wind. This is for the boy.

**Virginia Minock:** And the hood is made of?

**Neva Rivers:** *Makut tamalkurmeng* (all of these pieces) are the muskrat stomach part.

**Virginia Minock:** What are those red little dots? Yarn?

**Joan Hamilton:** That is *kassartaq* (a manufactured item), that red we saw. They're pieces of that.

**Virginia Minock:** O-oh, red blanket.

## Wearing

**Joan Hamilton:** *Caaqameng tua aturlallruatgu* (when were they used)?

**Neva Rivers:** *Tava atkukluki wangkucicetun-wa uksumi atkukluku* (just like us they used them for parkas in the winter).

**Aron Crowell:** Would this be a parka for the summertime?

**Neva Rivers:** They don't have much change of their clothes. They have to use it year round.

**Aron Crowell:** Do they ever have furs on the inside too?

**Neva Rivers:** Some do. If they have enough, they put fur inside and outside. Fur out since they have no cloth at that time to put over on them. This is for all year round, as long as you have a need to wear a parka. *Fur out-alriit maqanruut* (the fur-out ones are warmer), the ones that we wear. That's why a lot of the people make them fur-out, because it's warmer.

## Using fur

**Suzi Jones:** So, what area do you think that's from?

**Neva Rivers:** This is from – I don't know. A place where they have lots of muskrats (laughs). But they have to go out from that place to get all those, to hunt all those muskrats. They hunt in the springtime. *Piliqellrulliniami wani-w' makuneng una atkungqertuq aqsaitneng* (since he caught many muskrats, he has a parka made of the muskrat abdominal area).

**Suzi Jones:** What are the qualities of muskrat fur compared to other kinds of fur.

**Joan Hamilton:** *Ilait-qaa assikenrularait nenglliraqan maqanruluteng* (do some like these better, are they warmer when it's cold)?

**Neva Rivers:** Yes, *maqanruut* (they are warmer).

**Suzi Jones:** Is it as warm as mink? Or warmer?

**Joan Hamilton:** Same as mink.

**Neva Rivers:** Same.

**Suzi Jones:** And squirrel?

**Neva Rivers:** Squirrel (parkas) have to have two (layers), one outside and the other inside.

**Joan Hamilton:** Because it's too thin.

**Neva Rivers:** The ones made from squirrel have lots of holes. To protect against the wind they make another one for inside. They use both inside with hair and outside with the hair, because squirrels (skins) are very thin.

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[From discussions with Joan Hamilton (Yupiit Picirayait Cultural Center and Museum), Virginia Minock, John Phillip, Sr. and Neva Rivers at the National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of the American Indian, 4/22/2002-4/26/2002. Also participating: Aron L. Crowell, William Fitzhugh, and Stephen Loring (NMNH), Suzi Jones (Anchorage Museum), and Ann Fienup-Riordan.]

## History

This muskrat parka for a man or boy, of medium length with a wolf and wolverine-trimmed hood, is a northern Yup'ik style described in historic sources for St. Michael and the Yukon River (1) and Nunivak Island (2). Women's parkas in this region were longer than men's, with rounded hems and splits that extended up the sides nearly to the waist (3). Farther south along the Kuskokwim River, parkas of both sexes were ankle-length and usually hoodless (4). Kuskokwim styles of parka decoration were far more elaborate, and the tradition of the "fancy parka" continues there today (5).

Muskrat skins (a single layer) and Arctic ground squirrel (double layers) were used for winter parkas because these furs are light in weight but very warm (6). However, caribou (or its domesticated cousin, the reindeer, introduced to Alaska in the 1890s) is also quite warm and also more durable, making it perhaps the most desired material for winter clothing (7). Wolverine hair is ideal for parka hood ruffs because it does not collect the frost produced by breathing, and its long hairs block the wind to prevent frostbite. Wolverine cuffs (as on this parka) help to warm the wrists (8).

John Kilbuck, writing about Yup'ik trade on the Kuskokwim River in the 1880s, reported that seal oil from the coastal villages was sought by people from up-river villages, who brought muskrats and other interior furs to the coast for trade: "The upper river people anxious to get a supply of oil for light – and likely for a particular festival in mind for the coming winter, drift down stream in their birch bark canoes loaded with squirrel skins or muskrat skins – the former tied in packages of 45 and the latter of 33 – each package is considered enough to make a parka for an adult man, while 40 & 30 respectively make a woman's parka"(9).

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1. Nelson 1899:31; Ray 1966:35
2. Curtis 1930:9
3. Curtis 1930:9; Nelson 1899:35; Ray 1966:37
4. Nelson 1899:31-32; Michael 1967:211-12; Varjola 1990:250-51
5. Beaver et al. 1984:76-82; Meade 1990
6. Meade 1990:230-31; Ray 1967:35
7. Issenman 1985; Ray 1967:35; Stenton 1991
8. Ray 1966:35, 107
9. Fienup-Riordan 1988:11-12

## Ceremony, Celebration: Sugpiaq Elder

Sugpiaq Elder and Lucille "Leubava" Fedosia Antowak Davis (1926-2012), born in the village of Karluk on Kodiak Island, grew up speaking Sugcestun (the Sugpiaq language) only but was not allowed to speak her Native language at school. In a 1997 interview she said, "Never forget your ancestors. I'm speaking to you, your generation, and your children. Don't let them forget where they came from. Be who you are and don't let anyone change you."

Photo by Carl C. Hansen, courtesy of the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



## Parka

**Object name:** Parka

**Alaska Native object name:** *qanganaaq*  
"ground-squirrel parka"

**Language of object name:** Sugt'stun (Koniag dialect, Alaska Peninsula subdialect)

**Culture:** Sugpiaq (Alutiiq)

**Region:** Alaska Peninsula

**Village:** Ugashik

**Short description:** "The woman who sewed this parka used a lot of small pieces and obviously didn't throw things away. I'm sure she didn't, because these are very tiny pieces of sea otter, which she would have saved. It appears that she didn't waste anything; she even left the feet on some of the squirrels!" —Susan Malutin, 1996

The furs used for this man's ceremonial parka suggest relative wealth and status. It was sewn from forty-eight ground squirrel skins with the tails left on. Tassels of valuable sea otter fur and strips of red wool cloth and white ermine fur accent the horizontal seams; fringes of red-dyed squirrel skin ornament the vertical ones. White caribou fur appears on the collar, cuffs, shoulders, sleeves, and chest, and strips of mink were added to the shoulders. Decorative tabs made of red cloth, caribou hide, and dyed seal esophagus are attached to the back of the collar.

**Dimensions:** Length 121cm

**Category:** Clothing

**Museum:** NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

**Catalog number:** E90469-0

**Accession date:** 1884

**Source:** William J. Fisher (collector)



## Elders Discussion

(1997)

**Martha Demientieff:** When I'm out there berry-picking, I have a picture in my mind of my ancestors – we don't know how many thousands of years back – and I see their clothing, and I see them picking the same kind of berries I'm picking, with the same feeling about this is for my children – this is going to be so good. This is food for our body and for our soul. It's something that our grandmothers have done forever, we don't know how long. And you feel pretty protected knowing that you're still walking the path that they walked ahead of you. It's wonderful, knowing this for now my Alutiiq path. I'm very aware that every elder is a teacher, and that's a big responsibility. Now, the clothes I wear, the material things I have – I haven't lost them but they've shifted. Now, the masks are on the wall. The dress is only used for special occasions. The fur boots are my best clothes that I wear only for big important events. Some of those Native clothes are still practical – big beaded fur mitts, and parkys (parkas) and ruffs and all that. But a lot of the other things have shifted to not for everyday use, but for more ceremonial or celebration.

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[From discussions at the 1997 Elders' conference for planning the exhibition *Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People*. Recorded at the Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository in Kodiak, Alaska.]

## History

Traditional parka materials reflect Sugpiaq access to both coastal and interior animals. Caribou, bears, foxes, lynx, wolverines, marmot, ground squirrels, ermine, mink, seals, sea otters, river otters, and various sea birds were used, and whale, seal, sea lion, and bear intestines were employed for waterproof coats.(1) After contact, Russian rulers forbade Alaska Native use of sea otter and fox furs because of their commercial value; Gideon said that such clothing would be “torn off the person’s back.” Other furs were restricted as well, and nearly everyone was forced to wear bird-skin parkas, formerly the dress of poor people and slaves.(2)

This man’s parka, probably intended for ceremonial use, suggests relative wealth and status. It was sewn from forty-eight split ground squirrel pelts with the tails left on. Tassels of sea otter fur and strips of red wool cloth and white ermine fur dangle from the horizontal seams, which are also accented with ermine piping; fringes of red-dyed squirrel skin ornament the vertical joins. White caribou fur appears on the collar, cuffs, shoulders, sleeves, and chest, and strips of mink adorn the tops of the shoulders. Decorative tabs made of red cloth, caribou hide, and dyed seal esophagus attach to the back of the collar.(3)

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1. Beaglehole, ed., “The Journals of Captain James Cook,” 349–50; Birket-Smith, *The Chugach Eskimo*, 63–66; Crowell, Steffian, and Pullar, eds., *Looking Both Ways*, 46–49; Davydov, *Two Voyages to Russian America*, 150–52; Gideon, *The Round the World Voyage*, 65–67; Holmberg, *Holmberg’s Ethnographic Sketches*, 38–40; Merck, *Siberia and Northwestern America*, 122; Shelikhov, *A Voyage to America*, 53–54; Varjola, *The Etholén Collection*; Zaikov, “Journal of Navigator Potap Zaikov,” 1–3.

2. Davydov, 152; Gideon, 48, quote from 66; Golovnin, *Around the World on the Kamchatka*, 114; Lisiansky, *A Voyage round the World*, 194; Merck, 102.

3. Hunt (“The Ethnohistory of Alutiiq Clothing,” 87–101) provides a detailed discussion of this parka and its ethnohistorical context.

## Wearing parkas

Maligutkaq (Chauncey Maligutkak, left) wears a birdskin *atkuk* (parka) made with murre skins and Anengayuu (James Aningayou, right) wears a *sanighqaaq* (ceremonial gut parka) made with walrus intestines and adorned with auklet crest feathers. Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, circa 1930.

To learn more about birdskin parkas, visit:

<https://learninglab.si.edu/q/ll-c/W4o8K4pBDVcFswN2#r/883795>

To learn more about ceremonial gut parkas, visit:

<https://learninglab.si.edu/q/ll-c/8hFM1iJm5mBYpn0#r/695675>

Photo by Leuman M. Waugh, Courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian, N42764. Name and location information from *Faces We Remember: Negarnikegkaput* edited by Igor Krupnik and Vera Oovi Kaneshiro, 2011

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



## Birdskin parka

**Object name:** Birdskin parka

**Alaska Native object name:** *atkuk* "parka"

**Language of object name:** Yupigestun

**Culture:** St. Lawrence Island Yupik

**Region:** St. Lawrence Island, Alaska

**Short description:** "My grandma used to spend the whole summer cleaning auklets. Keep them in a wooden barrel, soak them in there, and then use a scraper to clean, clean, clean. The back of the skin would be white."— Elaine Kingeekuk, 2007

St. Lawrence Island Yupik women made parkas from the skins of auklets, ducks, cormorants, murres and other birds. In the *Lore of St. Lawrence Island* (1987), elder Hilda Aningayou said, "Bird skins make very good and warm parkas. With a birdskin parka, one will never freeze to death." This one was sewn from crested auklets with a dark-colored guillemot skin at each shoulder. The average parka required about eight-five crested auklets, thirty-five murres or puffins, or twenty-five cormorant skins.

**Dimensions:** 127.0 x 118.0 x 19.0 cm

**Category:** Clothing

**Museum:** NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

**Catalog number:** 118010.000

**Accession date:** 1923

**Source:** Mrs. Thea Heye (donor)



## Elders Discussion

### Identifying

**Lydia Apatiki:** *Kiyang aatkat whangkuta uliimaaput apamta aagkut uliimaaghít.* (We mostly made our own clothing, our late ancestors did.) *Una atkuggaq maaten akuzimghhutkegkefut sukilpameng uliimaaghuuq.* (The parka that we spoke about is made from crested auklets.) *Puvitkelghii qikmiraaghmeng. Unegnangallu qikmiiraaghmeng uliimaaghuuq.* (It has a ruff of dog fur. The bottom edge is also dog fur.) *Maqaghllaget. Napiisiit.* (They [birdskin parkas] are warm. They were for hunting.) *Napistet ghhuusigalkangi qayughllak maqaghqengngwaaghluteng aatkameng whaten napikayuget. Qepghaqaghtughllagtut.* (Hunters never became cold, because they dressed warmly in clothes like this, those who usually go hunting. Lots of work was needed to make them.)

**Elaine Kingeekuk:** *Nanegat siivanlleghet qavngaq qiighqaminguq qerngughunneghmeeggni Sivuqami.* (Old men, elders long ago, there would be island gatherings at Sivuqaq [Gambell].) *Atkugitgun liigikaqegkangit.* (They would recognize a person from their parka.) *Qiighqami taakwani metghaghtuqat metghaghmenguq atkugtuulluteng.* (On a certain part of the island, those that have plenty of eider ducks would use duck parkas.) *Naghuyatuqat naghuyameng atkugluteng. Sukilpaq ngelqaq.* *Atkugitgunnguq liisuqaqit naken pimatangit qiighqami.* (Those with plenty of gulls, would use gull parkas. Crested auklet, pelagic cormorant. They recognize where they come from on their parkas.) *Entaqun Kiyalighamelnguut taakut metghameng kiyang atkukelghiit.* (I think those from Kiyalighaq used eider duck parkas.)

### Making

**Lydia Apatiki:** *Whani entaqun qafsina over hundred-nguuq atuqegkaat.* (On this one, they probably used over a hundred [crested auklets].) *Katam entaqun piigyuuumanghata simighaqluki.* (It seems that because these [skins] were easy to tear, they would replace them.) *Extra-lightluteng.* (They would have extras.) *Whangaqun little over sanguuq forty entaqun atkusquughaghmun.* (For comparison, I used a little over forty [skins] for a small-sized parka.) *Kinengllallghi kukragniiteghllagtut.* (The process of drying them is simple.) *Aallengam apeghtughaqmininga, aghvigtughwaaghluksi keligaqluki.* (The way Adeline Aningayou taught me, we would wash them thoroughly while scraping them.) *Meghqun pikaqanka Joy-meng soap-eklunga.* (I've done them in water, using Joy soap.) *Sipegtaghluksi eslakun qaaggun llilaghtughluksi.* (The water is squeezed out, and they are placed outside.) *Unaamingani aghhneghani esghaqumteki tagnaghqwaaluteng alla aghvagyaghqaagut.* (The next morning when it gets to be light outside, if we see that they have darkened we wash them again.) *Mesiighluksi.* (Getting all the oil out of them.) *Wetku qateghhneghaata kinellghi taawa.* (It is only when they have become white that they are really dry.)

**Angela Larson:** *Ukut uyaqghwi iikluki paamnangi natengiighhaq 1 inches sangwaa 2 inches.* (The necks were taken off, and one inch or two inches from the backs.) *Neqaangi qaamkut temtii siqetqeqkangit uultaqeqkangit amiirii melqwi qamanlluki.* (They would strip the meat off of the body and turn the fur [feathers] inside.) *Taaqneghminiki taagken akmagutat... Kepegkat sangulukilli? Ghhutet?* (When she was finished with that, she would then...What were those wooden kegs called... *Ghhutet* [urine tub]?)

**Lydia Apatiki:** *Aa ghhutet.* (Yes, urine tub.)

**Angela Larson:** *Tamavek kanaghquutaqii.* (She placed them in those.)

**Elaine Kingeekuk:** *Tawavek ghhutegnun kanaghnaqneqghmegteki nagataqa Aghhaayam allngughniiqii.* (When they placed them in the [urine] pail, I heard Aghhaaya say that they were letting them “dive in”.) *Aqlaghsgighluki maaten apellghatun.* (They dried them, as she said a while ago.) *Aqlanghata ikughluki qugiinii. Neghaqeqkangit quginiillu. Kingikaam neghaqii.* (When they were dry, they took the fat off. They also eat the fat. Kingikaq eats them.) *Taagken kanaghlluki meghmun pineghmegteki allngughniiqiit.* (Then they put them in [the urine pail] and that action is called “letting them dive in”.) *Allngughtaqiinnguq kiilqusiq. Keligtughaqluki tawaten ughvickun.* (They would let them “dive” all summer long. Then they would scrape them with an ivory scraper.)

## **Wearing**

**Merlin Koonooka:** *Uum esghaaqaaluni tuuyngani umuqutelighluni nangrugnayukata.* (On this one we see that the shoulder has been reinforced with an additional layer to protect against wear.) *Akmaghquyneqhtuqat qamughyuneqhtuqat neqniineghmeggn neqenneghmeeggne sikugni.* (They would always pack things on their backs and pull loads when they were out hunting, when they caught game on the sea ice.)

**Lydia Apatiki:** *Kitum aapghaqii un’gavenguq sikugnun piyaaneghmeeggne unaangumaneghmeeggne qamaatameng taglaghaqelghiit.* (Someone said that when they would go hunting on the ice and catch a seal, they would be pulling it home.) *Qama qesighteghllaget.* (They would sweat a lot inside [their parkas].) *Legannguq taakut aghinghata atkuggateng uusluki aataqit.* (They would flip their parkas inside out when they became wet.) *Kinellghi qamanlluki taakut qaayngi yukutaghtekat legan freeze dry-aaqelghiit. Kiinghaqelghiit.* (The dry part would be inside, and the outside that was damp would freeze-dry. They would dry up.)

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[From discussion with John Apassingok, Lydia Apatiki, Ralph Apatiki, Sr., Elaine Kingeekuk, Christopher Koonooka, Merlin Koonooka, Angela Larson and Jonella Larson White at the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center at the Anchorage Museum, January 2012.]

**Estelle Oozevaseuk:** Those look like auklets with the guillemot shoulders.

**Branson Tungiyan:** So these are guillemots (dark skins at parka shoulders). *Samsegghaghag* (pigeon guillemot), black birds with orange feet.

**Jacob Ahwinona:** Yes, but these (parka body)?

**Estelle Oozevaseuk:** *Sukilpaagut.* (They are crested auklets.)

**Branson Tungiyan:** *Naghuyaaghaanayukata.* (I thought they might be young sea gulls.)

**Estelle Oozevaseuk:** No, they're not like that.

**Branson Tungiyan:** There's two kinds, crested and tufted.(1)

**Aron Crowell:** So these are the tufted auklets?

**Estelle Oozevaseuk:** Yes, crested are the small ones and white.(2)

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[From discussion with Jacob Ahwinona, Estelle Oozevaseuk, Marie Saclamana and Branson Tungiyan (Kawerak, Inc.) at the National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of the American Indian, 5/07/2001-5/11/2001. Also participating: Aron Crowell and Bill Fitzhugh (NMNH) and Suzi Jones (AMHA).]

1. "Tufted" is probably a reference to parakeet auklet.

2. She may be referring to a parakeet auklet.

## History

St. Lawrence Island women made light, warm parkas from the skins of ducks, cormorants, murres, loons, crested auklets, and puffins. Other arctic and Bering Sea cultures had similar parkas, which were worn in both winter and summer.(1) Hunters used nets to catch crested auklets at their rookeries near Gambell village. Although no longer used for parkas, crested auklets are still important on the island as a subsistence food.(2)

Men's and women's bird parkas were similar in design. An average sized coat required about 85 crested auklets, 35 murres or puffins, or 25 cormorant skins, stitched together with whale or reindeer sinew.(3) Bird parkas were reinforced at the bottom and cuffs with dog or seal skin, with dog fur around the hood to protect the face from wind and cold.

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1. Giddings 1961:140; Hughes 1964:7; Moore 1923:341-42; Nelson 1898:31; Ray 1966:40; Silook 1976:20

2. Paige et al. 1996

3. Silook 1976:20

## Traveling by kayak

Two Unangȃ men travel by kayak near St. Paul Island, circa 1904. They wear gut parkas made from sea lion intestine to protect them from water and wind. The kayak cover is made with sea lion hides and has a split bow to cut through waves and strong tides. To watch videos about the Alaska Native tradition of making gut parkas, visit:

<https://learninglab.si.edu/q/ll-c/xsomrdKzrwbm59LX#/r/30517>

Photo courtesy of the Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks, UAF-728-027

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



# Gut parka

**Object name:** Gut parka

**Alaska Native object name:** *chigda̱* "gut parka"

**Language of object name:** Unangam Tunuu

(Eastern Aleut and Atkan dialects)

**Culture:** Unanga̱ (Aleut)

**Region:** Aleutian Islands, Alaska

**Village:** Attu

**Short description:** "The intestines were cleaned and blown up, then dried in the air, in the sun. They didn't cut them until they dried, and then they split them open. It could be sea lion or bearded seal or any big sea animal." —Maria Turnpaugh, 2003

Women sewed feather-light but strong waterproof parkas from the intestines of sea lions, harbor seals, fur seals, whales, and brown bears. This gut parka was made from sea lion or fur seal intestines, according to Unanga̱ Elders Vlass Shabolin and Mary Bourdukofsky, and was worn to protect a person in wet weather and while traveling by kayak. To make a gut parka, intestines were cleaned and dried, split open to make strips, then sewn together with sinew thread using double-fold watertight seams. The hood, which has a drawstring for the face, was sewn separately and attached. On this parka, red, blue, and black yarn was worked into the seams for color. Kayakers wore the parka in combination with a spray skirt that fastened around the cockpit to seal the boats from waves.

**Dimensions:** Length 110cm

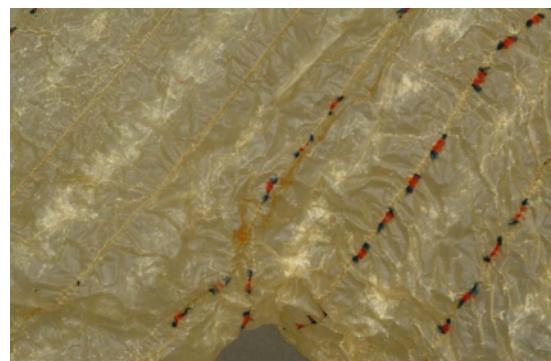
**Category:** Clothing

**Museum:** NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

**Catalog number:** E383185-0

**Accession date:** 1869

**Source:** Army Medical Museum (collector)



## Elders Discussion

### Identifying & explaining

**Aron Crowell:** What is the Unangañ name for [this object]?

**Vlass Shabolin:** *Chaĝtalisaχ* (gut parka, rain gear).

**Mary Bourdukofsky:** It's rain gear, but they usually called it *kamlieka* (parka, rain gear, rain parka; from Russian term).

**Aron Crowell:** And how were these made? It's beautiful sewing. Are the intestines prepared the same way?

**Mary Bourdukofsky:** Yes, they're prepared the same way. The intestines are cleaned and blown, then dried in the air, in the sun. They didn't cut them until they dried, and then split them open. It could be sea lion or *ugruk* (Iñupiaq word for "bearded seal") or any big sea animal you could find.(1)

**Maria Turnpaugh:** I don't think we had *ugruk* around where we came from.

**Mary Bourdukofsky:** Sometimes they will find it around Pribilof Island after a big storm. The wind blows it. If they kill them around St. Lawrence Island, they can drift all the way to the Pribilof Islands and people used to take parts of it to use. I never saw anyone wear this kind of *chaĝtalisaχ* or *kamlieka* in my time. It could be early 1900s. I think they were still wearing them in the Aleutian Chain.

**Maria Turnpaugh:** Old George Berrinon used to wear his once in a while, but I've never seen anyone else that I can remember. We had one in our house, but it was gone when we came back after the evacuation.(2)

**Mary Bourdukofsky:** The neck part is longer.

**Aron Crowell:** Can you point to what you mean?

**Maria Turnpaugh:** This neck part here where you would put the drawstring tight is larger than that one (see E168576-0).

**Vlass Shabolin:** It covers all around the face here and makes it seaworthy I think, because the water won't come down through your neck. It's wrapped up to your chin.

**Daria Dirks:** Well, maybe that person is taller.

**Mary Bourdukofsky:** Yes, I think this is for a big person.

**Aron Crowell:** So that would just wrap really tight around your face with that string.

**Vlass Shabolin:** Yes, then you pull it back a little bit if they make it smaller and then tighten it up around your face, like you had an elastic band around your rain gear. With this one here they have to be in a single kayak or a three-man kayak.

**Maria Turnpaugh:** The bottom used to have a drawstring and you'd tie it around the opening of the kayak so the water wouldn't come in.

**Vlass Shabolin:** Waterproof.

## History

**Aron Crowell:** The acquisition date is 1943.

**Mary Bourdukofsky:** We were just talking about this. They said nobody was in Attu in 1943, because the Japanese . . .

**Vlass Shabolin:** Invaded there in 1942.

**Maria Turnpaugh:** And took the people as prisoners.

**Aron Crowell:** Well, 1943 would be the day it came to the museum.

**Mary Bourdukofsky:** Somebody must have found it there after the people evacuated.

**Aron Crowell:** It could have been collected in 1930 actually. Sometimes the acquisition date is the same as the date it was collected if someone got it to the museum right away.

**Vlass Shabolin:** Somebody donated them.

**Aron Crowell:** Yes.

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[From discussion with Mary N. Bourdukofsky, Vlass Shabolin, Maria Turnpaugh and Daria Dirks (Tanadgusix Foundation) at the National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of the American Indian, 4/07/2003-4/11/2003. Also participating: Aron Crowell and Bill Fitzhugh (NMNH) and Suzi Jones (AMHA).]

1. According to Vlass Shabolin and Mary Bourdukofsky, the intestines of a sea lion or bull fur seal were probably used to make this big kamleika. Fur seal intestines were usually used to make *kamleikas*. The esophagus of a fur seal is used to make hats.

2. In September 1942, the Japanese successfully captured the islands of Attu and Kiska and took its inhabitants as prisoners of war. In response, the United States military conducted a mandatory evacuation of the remaining Aleutian Islands and interned the people in civilian camps in Southeast Alaska for the duration of World War II.

## History

The *chaĝtalisax̂*, also known by the Russian name *kamleika*, was a lightweight waterproof garment that Unangan women created from the intestines of sea lions, harbor seals, fur seals, whales, or brown bears. Other tough membranes such as the skin of a whale's tongue could be used.(1) The gut taken from one sea lion was enough to make two coats, according to John Gordieff. The intestines were cleaned and dried, split open to make strips about 1 ¼ inches wide, then sewn together with sinew.(2) The hood, which has a drawstring for the face, was sewn separately and attached.(3)

Women made watertight seams by sewing a double fold with fox or whale sinew thread in a combination of running and overcast stitches.(4) On this garment, red, blue, and black yarn was worked into the seams for color. Women used bird or fish bone needles, replaced by iron ones in Russian times.(5)

The *chaĝtalisax̂* was essential dress for kayak hunting. Used in combination with a spray skirt which fastened snugly around the rider's waist, a man and his boat were completely sealed off from the waves.

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1. Bergsland and Dirks, eds., *Unangam Ungiikangin kayux Tunusangin*, 111; Black, *Aleut Art*, 152–55; Laughlin, *Aleuts: Survivors*, 56; Liapunova, *Essays on the Ethnography of the Aleuts*, 205–9; Merck, *Siberia and Northwestern America*, 71; Sauer, *An Account of the Geographical and Astronomical Expedition*, 156.

2. Hudson, ed., *Unugulux Tunusangin*, Oldtime Stories, 200.

3. Liapunova, 205–9.

4. Black, 152–53; Liapunova, 207, 210; Merck, 77.

5. Liapunova, 210; Merck, 77; Sarychev, *Account of a Voyage of Discovery*, 2:8.

## Parkas for sled travel

Iñupiaq men and women wearing fur parkas pose for a photo by their packed dog sled, ready to travel in Northwest Alaska in 1881. The parka worn by the woman in the center has a pair of tusk-shaped designs near the neck, a U-shaped hem, and a longer length than the men's parkas. The U-shaped style is an older design for women's parkas and had a practical function of making it easier for her to move around, while still having a fancy design along the bottom hem. A closer look shows there are wolverine tassels on her parka. The use of wolverine demonstrates that her family has skilled hunters, since it is very difficult to take animals as fierce as wolverines. The other woman sitting on the sled wears a cloth cover over her fur parka,

called an *atikluk* in the Iñupiaq language. The men's parkas on the right also have the tusk design. The Iñupiaq people consider wearing this design as a way to be protected from walrus. Walrus have poor eyesight and might see the design as another walrus, making it the animal not aggressive toward a hunter if seen from a distance. At the same time, wearing the tusk design also expresses spirituality: it is a way to honor the animal's spirit, offering thanks to the animal for "giving itself" to their family during the hunting season.

Photo by Edward Nelson, courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, NAA 01426300

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



## Men in fancy parkas

Iñupiaq men pose for a photo during a 1916 trading fair in Nome, each wearing a fancy fur *atigi* (parka) and *kammak* (pair of boots). Trading fairs were important in the past, especially when the hunters of a family went to conduct the trading. These young men often showcased their "wealth" by wearing a fancy fur *atigi*: he could attend because his family had successfully harvested enough food for the winter; he was a very good hunter who provided furs for his wife to make his *atigi*; and his wife had the talent to sew such beautiful,

complicated work. The *qupak* (fancy trim) designs at the parka bottom, boot tops and mitten cuffs clearly demonstrate the skill and creativity of the woman who sewed them and were unique to her family. A fancy *atigi* shows hard work, honoring those who provide for them, and distinctions between families through their *qupak* designs.

Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-ppmsc-02336  
Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



## Essay // Iñupiaq Parkas

Written by Amelia “Amy” K. Topkok (Iñupiaq) and edited by Dawn Biddison, 2020

In Iñupiaq history, women learned to tan animal skins and sew fur garments to keep their family warm and safe. It is important to have warm clothing, since Alaska can have up to nine months of winter with very cold, harsh weather. Since the turn of the nineteenth century, the way skin-sewers make Iñupiaq parkas has changed. In this essay, we will look at parka design changes, and at the materials and work needed to complete a parka. I interviewed two Iñupiaq women who have made skin-sewing a treasured part of their world and are generously sharing with others what they learned from their sewing projects.



The Iñupiaq fur parka – called an *atigi* in our language – shown here was collected by John Murdoch at Utqiāġvik (formerly known as Barrow), Alaska in 1881-1883 and is in the collection of the National Museum of Natural History (E74041). It is U-shaped at the bottom, and it is made from caribou skin for the main body, wolf for the ruff on the hood, and wolverine for the trims at the bottom, mid-section, and shoulder. This is a women’s parka style made from the



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1800s to early 1900s. Later fur parkas, from around the 1940s on, are straight-bottomed, and traditionally, the women's parkas were longer. The designs shown on this older *atigi* include "tusks" at the sides of the hood on the back and front. My understanding is that the tusk designs are a form of respect to the spirits of walruses, an animal revered as a source of food and for the materials it provides for making many things including tools and clothing. Another important feature is the ruff. This one is thick enough to provide protection from the cold wind to keep the face warm. Some ruffs made today – called Sunshine ruffs – are more elaborate with multiple layers of wolf, wolverine, and beaver fur. A man's *atigi* is different in design from a woman's *atigi*. It is shorter with a straight cut at the bottom, and it has *qupak* (fancy trim) at the bottom and cuffs. *Qupak* are family-specific designs and can be animal-shaped, geometric, or anything a skin-sewer can create.

When looking at a fancy *atigi*, I think of the hard work it takes to make one and of the supplies and skills a skin-sewer must have. Making a fancy *atigi* can take many months to complete. Skin-sewers look at previous parkas made by family members and use designs and techniques of fine sewing passed down to them. They also must be able to gather the skins needed, either through having a very good hunter in the family or being able to purchase furs or trade for them with other families. This takes a considerable amount of time. Skin-sewers cut out the largest pieces of fur first and then the smaller pieces. All good skin-sewers do not throw out any of the leftover pieces. I think that the *qupak* came from using those very small pieces, creatively sewn into elaborate patterns.

In the past, Iñupiaq mothers taught their daughters that when they became a woman, they must have a fancy *atigi* to showcase the fine skin-sewing skills of their family, making her valuable to a future husband. It was a tradition that emphasized the great need for well-sewn clothing, but the fancy designs also highlighted creativity and preserved family designs. A fancy *atigi* also demonstrated that a woman was a hard worker and able to listen to directions well when instructed in the complex techniques of skin-sewing. Fancy *atigi* designs and techniques have been passed down by skin-sewers from one generation to the next, but this happens for very few people today. I spoke with two women who are learning, practicing, and teaching skin-sewing today, Nasugraq Lane and Mary Lou Sours.

Nasugraq Lane of Point Hope talked to me about learning to make an Iñupiaq parka:

"I knew I had the ability to sew. When I was younger, there were those that praised my work and made me feel good for what I was working on, whether it was in skin-sewing, carving, making mukluks. My aunt also gave me photos to work from, and I used newspaper to make the measurements. My Dad, when I was bettering myself, said he was proud of my work."

Nasugraq learned to skin-sew through encouragement, having a positive attitude of what she could accomplish, and most importantly by not giving up. She also had Elders that kept encouraging her and allowing her to grow as an artist with multiple talents.

Mary Lou Sours, a skin-sewer who lives in Noatak, talked to me about the importance of teaching and learning:

“I fill in the void of teachers [like long ago], to anyone who is interested [in skin-sewing]. I don’t like to keep things to myself, and it is important to praise more than correct someone in sewing. Long ago, every family had a skin-sewer, but they have now a different way of life. There are not too many people [today] that do dog-teaming or trapping to have a connection back to their culture. I am so happy to learn now, and when I look back at my life when I was younger, my eyes were not open to learning our culture. It makes me feel like I wish that I could have learned earlier in my life.”

Mary Lou shares her culture by teaching sewing and connecting with her Elders. She visits with people who still have the knowledge of how to skin-sew, how to make the different stitches, how to tan furs, and how to finish projects. In the past, the passing of knowledge from an older family member to the younger generation was interrupted by destructive events that happened in Alaska, including the younger generation being sent off to boarding schools and separated from their parents and extended family, and the loss of Elders knowledgeable about the old ways who died due to past pandemics. In addition, more recently skin-sewing was not seen as a viable way of supporting a family. Despite these challenges, I am finding that there are still people who see skin-sewing as important, a healthy activity, and a healing process for what the Iñupiat may have lost.

Making a fancy *atigi* can take up to a year to complete and is usually made for a special occasion or for someone special. A skin-sewer honors a person’s accomplishments or their status in the family, such as a daughter or son graduating, or a granddaughter or grandson participating in a festival. Following this tradition, fancy parkas are also handed down as heirlooms. I inherited my grandmother’s fancy *atigi* after she died, gifted to me by my father. It is a privilege to be its caretaker, and my hope is to re-create it one day with the help of my youngest sister, who is now the skin-sewer of our family. This way, my grandmother’s parka pattern will become an heirloom in our family too.

Mary Lou Sours also learns from past skin-sewers by holding and looking at the backs and insides of older skin-sewn items to understand how they are made. More and more Iñupiaq skin-sewers are visiting museums to examine *atigi*, *kammak*, *qupak*, and other items in collections to learn about patterns that came from their village or region. Alaska Native peoples also learn

about their heritage through local museums and cultural centers created to house traditional objects from their region and help inspire younger generations to learn from their people's past.

Today, wearing a fancy *atigi* is on the rise. State-wide events like the Alaska Federation of Natives conference, Festival of Native Arts and World Eskimo-Indian Olympics have competitions, traditional dance performances, and exhibits that showcase beautifully-made Alaska Native clothing, and are often broadcasted to reach audiences across the state. Just like Fashion Week in New York, these events are a chance for Alaska Natives to proudly wear their fancy parkas, made with different styles and designs that showcase the ingenuity, creativeness, and hard work of skin-sewers. The number of skin-sewers may not be as high as in the middle of the twentieth century, but through the efforts of people like Mary Lou and Nasugraq and the use of technology for sharing information with more people, the number is increasing.



## Essay // Stories Within: Great Aunt Bessie's Parka

By Amelia “Amy” K. Topkok (Iñupiaq) and edited by Dawn Biddison, 2020

Many Iñupiaq people wore fancy fur parkas to show their wealth and express their cultural identity. They understood that their parka represented themselves and their family, especially if their family was successful at hunting and trapping. I would like to share with you a parka that my aunt Mary Sue Anderson shared with me, which she inherited from her mother Elizabeth “Bessie” Barr Cross after she passed away. As I talk with people about parkas and other Iñupiaq clothing, I’m finding out that stories exist behind every skin-sewn item and valuable connections from the past to the present.



This is a photo of my great aunt Bessie, fishing in the Kotzebue Sound in the 1950s. Her fancy parka was one of a few that she owned, but by far one of the fanciest that her mother made for her. The photo was taken for a postcard advertisement by Wien Airlines for tourists to visit Alaska Natives in Kotzebue. Although this photo was staged, my great aunt wore a fancy parka to show the pride she has in her culture and her values. I talked with my aunt Mary Sue about one of my great aunt’s parkas – photos below – and she shared memories about it, including who made it and how she made it.

When I sat down with my aunt Mary Sue, we looked at the back and front of the parka and talked about the materials we saw. The parka was made from six different furs: Arctic ground squirrel for the body; wolverine, wolf and beaver for the ruff; calfskin for the black and white trim designs; and wolverine for the trim on the bottom and sleeves and

for the tassles. My aunt recalled seeing her grandmother Emily *Paizuzraq* Kiyutelluk Barr trapping squirrels at *Ublasau*, a former winter reindeer herding camp northeast from Shishmaref. “I remember my grandmother who liked to travel back to summer camp when I was just nine years old. I saw her trapping the [Arctic ground squirrel] skins and tanning them, and that it was a year-long process. Making a fancy parka took her a long time. I don’t think she made more than one a year.” Her memories show how knowledge passes from one generation to the younger generation, including stories of actual experiences. They also show how one must be



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very resourceful in gathering the skins needed for parkas. Mary Sue also shared, "My grandmother loved trapping those squirrels. She knew that she was going to use them and was happy to get them." I also talked with Mary Lou Sours, a skin-sewer who lives in Noatak. She told me, "I like to look at the backs of the fancy parka, especially the back of the hoods to see what skins were used. It tells us a lot." Being able to see a parka in person can teach you how to see all of the parts needed to put it together.

Mary Sue shared more memories. "My uncle Gideon (Barr, Sr.) was also a fine trapper. He made sure his family had enough Arctic ground squirrel skins for their fancy parkas, as well the other skins needed." It takes more than 40 squirrel skins to make a fancy parka. Nearly all parts of a squirrel skin were used: the back area was used for the parka front, the belly area for the parka back, and the head area for the hood. In the Barr and Eningowuk families, reindeer herding provided them materials for many fancy parkas, since their family had the largest herd on Seward Peninsula.



"It was a simpler time. She (my grandmother) was a very spiritual person, and she lived a more traditional way. She lived when it was still a custom to give a seal a cup of water into its mouth



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after killing it, helping their spirit to find its way back to the ocean, [so it] can give itself to us in future times." Imagine the process of thinking from the skin-sewer's point of view when making a parka. She evaluates what materials are needed and how to piece it together, and she thinks of who to make it for. This is a spiritual process as well, giving honor to those who they love, and allows the skin-sewer to be creative. And it is a personal challenge to complete the complicated work of making a parka. When I look at the workmanship, I admire the small stitches, the careful measurements, and the designs to keep one warm, all while still expressing Iñupiaq and family heritage.



*Qupak* is the Iñupiaq word for the fancy trim of black and white designs, often made in the past from sheared caribou but today more often made from calfskin, which was introduced into Alaska. The close-up photos above of the parka hood and bottom show the *qupak* Bessie's mother Emily designed with calfskin. The measurements of the *qupak* include a skin-sewer using their hands and fingers. I learned that the sizes of the cut *qupak* pieces are relative to the length of the index finger between the first and second joints. Long ago skin-sewers did not have rulers or inches, so the hand was a way to measure and figure out sizes for the trim width and length. The width of the trim is three to four fingers wide, making it the preferred width for seeing it

from a distance. When someone wears a parka, its distinctive design elements allow people to identify each other when covered up in cold weather, indicating which family or village they come from. Other parts of the parka have specific meanings, but today, as more Elders are passing, we are losing those meanings. I asked my aunt about why certain panels were placed in certain locations of the parka, and she said she didn't know. She was part of the generation who were sent away from home to a distant boarding school, and she also spent part of her life outside of Alaska, which didn't allow her to learn about making fancy parkas and about skin-sewing traditions.

Through our conversations, my aunt and I have reached the conclusion that there were deeper meanings in the making and wearing of a fancy parka. A parka connected its wearer with the spiritual worldview of the Iñupiaq people by wearing so many valuable skins of revered animals. A parka also represented many Alaska Native values such as hard work, honoring our Elders, love of children and spirituality. Wearing a fur parka also gives the wearer a sense of belonging to their people by sharing it with others through displaying their beautiful and complex parka at special events. It was a hard life long ago, trying to survive in the deep cold of a land where winter persists for more than nine months out of the year. We Iñupiat have realized that as modernization has taken over the everyday clothing of those living in the North, there are still valued garments such as fur fancy parkas that become heirlooms in families, especially for those who were lucky enough to have skin-sewing traditions passed down from one generation to the next.

## Wearing an *atikluk* (repeated)

Jana Harcharek wears an *atikluk* (summer shirt) she made using fabric and a pattern based on this historic fur *atigi* (parka) from the National Museum of Natural History. The fur *atigi* was collected by John Murdoch in 1883 at her home village Utqiagvik (Barrow), and she found an illustration of it in the Smithsonian publication *Ethnological Results of the Point Barrow Expedition* (1892), now a public domain book available for free download online. Today many Iñupiaq women wear an *atikluk* to work, during travel from home, at important meetings, for special occasions, and on any day. Jana wore this *atikluk* at an Iñupiaq language and culture seminar held by the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center at the Anchorage Museum in 2011.

According to the Iñupiaq dictionary written by linguist Edna Ahgeak MacLean, an *atikluk* is a "cloth cover for a fur parka" and "commonly called a 'snowshirt.'" This definition refers to its historic use. According to Iñupiaq Elder Ron Aniqsuaq Brower, Sr., men wore a white *atikluk* when hunting game as "camouflaged covering in white snow," and women wore them "to go over their fur parkas."

Photo by Dawn Biddison, courtesy of the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska

To learn about parkas and more from Iñupiaq Elders and culture-bearers, visit:

<https://learninglab.si.edu/q/ll-c/6DMoTfdLBJBWmfDT#r/30286>

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



## Skin-sewing today

Willy Topkok (right), an Iñupiaq originally from Teller, wears a fancy parka he sewed at his artist's table during the annual Alaska Federation of Natives convention in Anchorage. He stands next to his cousin Sean Topkok who wears a sealskin vest, a more modern design that became popular to wear inside instead of a heavy fur parka.

Long ago, skin-sewing was mostly done by women, but today men take on the work too. Willy made the body of his parka from calfskin and the ruff from wolf and wolverine. He designed a figurative fabric and thread trim at the bottom, sleeve ends and

"fancy panels" at the shoulders. He used sealskin to make a pair of "walrus tusks" pointing down from the hood, a design traditionally used by the Iñupiat. Willy started skin-sewing later in life and attributes his abilities to his grandmother "Auk" Gussie Topkok who he watched sew while growing up. He advocates for education, learning your heritage, and for continuing traditions as a way for leading a healthy lifestyle.

Photo by Amelia K. Topkok, 2017

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



## Fancy parka traditions

Mary Sue Anderson, an Iñupiaq, wears a fancy *atigi* (fur parka) worn on special occasions made by her grandmother, the late Iñupiaq skin sewer Emily *Paizuzraq Kiyutelluk* Barr. Mary Sue's family is originally from Deering and Kotzebue, Alaska, and her grandmother is originally from the northern Seward Peninsula near Shishmaref and Deering. This photo was taken around 1996, and the parka was sewn in the 1940s for Mary Sue's mother, Elizabeth "Bessie" Barr Cross. It became part of the One-Percent-for-Art collection at the Maniilaq Health Center in Kotzebue, Alaska. Bessie's *atigi* is a fine example of fancywork, with *qupak* (fancy trim) made from traditional designs handed down from generation to generation. Displaying the parka at a regional health center allows many other people to appreciate the finely detailed work, and it is a safe space to protect family heirlooms. Unless stored under the right conditions of a dry and undisturbed space, furs often deteriorate quickly due to moisture, wear-and-tear, and fading from exposure to sunlight. Many *qupak* designs were lost due to damage, and if families did not have new skin-sewers to carry on the designs for future heirlooms.

Photo by Chris Arend, courtesy of Mary Sue Anderson

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



## Competing in a fancy parka

Angelica Telfair wears regalia – a fancy fur parka, matching mittens, mukluks and ivory earrings – made by Iñupiaq artist Nasugraq Lane for the Miss Top of the World competition in 2016 and 2017. The contest is part of the Fourth of July festivities held annually in Utqiaġvik, Alaska, one of many fur parka competitions across the state. Modeling regalia is one element contestants are judged on. When asked what she would like young women to learn from her by a journalist from the Arctic Sounder, Angelica answered: "I want girls to be inspired to be the voice of our people. I want them to know it doesn't matter where you come from, what color you are, or what you look like, your voice matters. You can change the world even if you come from a small village. It is important to advocate for the things that are important to you."



Photo courtesy of the World Eskimo Indian Olympics and Angelica Telfair

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska

### Regalia detail: Qupak

This photo shows a close-up view of the qupak (fancy design) on the regalia. The regalia includes the atigi (fur parka) and mukluks (fur boots). The qupak is an original design by Nasugraq Lane and features a bowhead whale fluke in the center of each hexagon. It took Nasugraq about a year to complete the regalia.



### Regalia detail: Sunshine ruff

This photo shows a view with her parka hood up, showing the sunshine ruff around the edge. This type of ruff is a special design sewn with two layers of different fur, creating a beautiful look and practical effect for blocking wind. The outer layer is of wolf, then an inner layer is of wolverine, and a small band of beaver is next to the face. It is believed that the fur of the animals holds the spirits of different attributes that can be transferred to the wearer.



Photos courtesy of the World Eskimo Indian Olympics and Angelica Telfair

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska

## Essay // The Values of Iñupiaq Clothing

Written by Amelia “Amy” K. Topkok (Iñupiaq) and edited by Dawn Biddison, 2020

Alaska is a large state with a small population, and even smaller group of Alaska Native peoples. The Iñupiaq people, my people, have lived in the north and northwest regions of Alaska for thousands of years, where both land and sea animals abound. Because of the cold climate and the many different environments of mountains, sea, and tundra, we have our own worldview that includes a strong desire to showcase our cultural identity by wearing clothing that is distinctively Iñupiaq. Expressing our cultural identity allows us to continue improving our well-being and to continue sharing our beliefs with people who may not be familiar with them. Since long ago, Elders believe that one must act and do things in a proper manner to honor the spirits of our ancestors and to honor animals who give themselves to us, both ensuring our survival. Honoring our ancestors includes carrying on what they have taught us by making clothing that represents Iñupiaq heritage. We will look at how making Iñupiaq clothing, and learning and teaching these skills, express our values.

### Values

Iñupiat Ilitqusiat is that which makes us who we are. Our traditional values are the foundation of NANA. We embody these values in our words and actions.

Knowledge of family tree	Humor
Love for children	Humility
Avoid conflict	Respect for Elders
Knowledge of language	Spirituality
Cooperation	Respect for others
Family roles	Respect for nature
Sharing	Domestic skills
Hard work	Hunter success
Responsibility to tribe	

Adapted from NANA Regional Corporation, Inc. (2020), *Iñupiat Ilitqusiat Values*, <https://www.nana.com/about-us/mission-values>

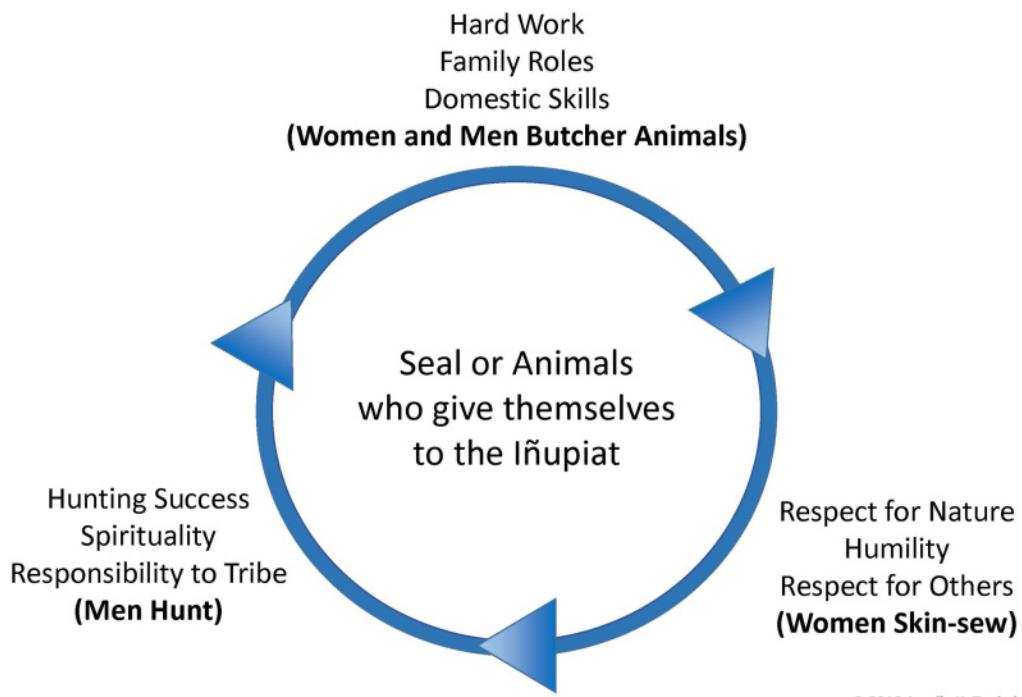
The screenshot above is the NANA Regional Corporation’s *Iñupiat Ilitqusiat* (“the real people’s values”), the name for our Iñupiaq core traditional values, created by Elders in the 1970s and 1980s. This set of values was created by interpreting the old Iñupiaq stories from long ago,

reviewing long-held beliefs and rules about how to live, and deciphering traditional knowledge. The values are shared so that younger generations may learn how to live in a world where there are the uncertainties of food security and enduring a cold-climate environment. Skin-sewing is a traditional Iñupiaq activity that carries so much knowledge through stories and represents our Native values during its different processes. Skin-sewing traditions also pass down knowledge of the ways to properly make clothing that is warm and comfortable, as well as attractive. I would like to talk about some of these values that I learned from skin-sewers.

I grew up in Kotzebue and in Nome in the 1970s and 1980s, and during those years I saw my mother skin-sew many sealskin garments. I grew up knowing my family and others valued the *atigi* (fur parka), sealskin mittens, beaver trapper's hats, and *kammak* (mukluks or fur boots) that were worn every day. There are many other people in my community and region who grew up in similar circumstances in Alaskan villages, but they ended up learning more about skin-sewing than me because – I think – of their desire to challenge themselves. Nasugraq Lane, an Iñupiaq skin-sewer originally from Point Hope, learned to skin-sew at a young age. She spoke with me about her upbringing, as well as her desire to skin-sew:

“I’ve been a carver for about eighteen years, and on and off I would do [skin-sewing] projects, such as mukluks, and some smaller stuff that I would try out. I started out doing little kid’s mukluks and the *qupaks* (fancy calfskin trim on parkas), and my *Aaka* (grandmother) would do hers as well [alongside me]. I wasn’t really raised too much around her but when I did visit, I would see some of her stuff that she was working on. As I got older, I started to show her [my skin-sewn projects], getting proud of my work along the way, and then it wasn’t too long that she started asking me to do a few things for her like the *qupaks* because her eyes were getting bad.”

Nasugraq has learned both from Elders in her family and from looking at other resources to understand how to sew items and to take on the challenge of completing projects for her children. She also shares her sewing techniques with others. To me, this demonstrates the Iñupiaq values of “Hard Work” and “Responsibility to Tribe.” It is “Hard Work” to spend many hours on a sewing project when there are modern-day activities that also need to be done. It is “Responsibility to Tribe” to make clothing that represents the culture and that can be worn every day.



© 2018 Amelia K. Topkok

The cycle of Iñupiaq subsistence in relationship to Iñupiaq values from the Northwest Alaska region of Kotzebue and surrounding villages. © 2018 Amelia K. Topkok

To understand the values present during different activities, I created this diagram to outline the cycle of what an Iñupiaq family must do for their survival. As an example, let's look at the activities a family does to get materials needed for skin-sewing. Traditionally, the man of the family goes out hunting. He experiences "Spirituality" out on the land when he connects his spirit with the animals he is hunting. The hunter experiences the value "Respect for Others" when he gives water to a seal he just caught, pouring it into the seal's mouth. This practice shows how the hunter gives respect to the seal's spirit, in return for the seal giving itself to him. By putting water into the seal's mouth, the hunter fulfills the seal's spirit longing to return to the sea and thereby ensures future hunting success. The hunter demonstrates "Responsibility to Tribe" when he shares the food he catches, feeding more people than just his family. By "Sharing," the hunter also ensures that in the future, if he is not able to catch any animals, other families will share their catch with him, and his family will not go hungry. When the hunter experiences these values, his wife or daughter learns about them when he shares stories. His wife or daughter would think of these values while skin-sewing with the furs obtained through his hunting and extend those values into their sewing.

Skin-sewers also share Iñupiaq values as they teach techniques and designs from one generation to the next. “Respect for Nature” is an essential tradition to think about when handling any furs, like respecting the spirits and personalities of animals. Mary Lou Sours, an Iñupiaq skin-sewer who lives in Noatak, Alaska, said that when planning projects, there are a lot of things to think about, like knowing when to harvest good-quality materials. “You need to get the skins at the right time. The best time was December or January long ago, because the animals’ fur is the thickest then. Now we have different seasons, and it’s a warmer climate for longer periods of time and that affects the animals’ fur.” By respecting nature, you gain knowledge of an animal’s life and habitat, and you learn about the seasonal changes in materials. Skin-sewers also practice the values of “Humility” and “Respect for Others” to learn and increase their skills. Mary Lou shared:

“I noticed after a while my stitches were like “cave-man” stitches [on my early projects]. Through trial and error, I learned how to make better sewing. To help me skin-sew, I have pictures [I studied] of really nice skin-sewn projects that my family and others have done. Some of those pictures are from Lena Sours, my grandmother who lived to be 110 years old. Her stitches are tiny, and really perfect.”

“Humility” is being able to look at your own progress and to be humble about learning what you can. Mary Lou expressed that when she recognized how she needed to learn and when she honored the expertise of her grandmother at skin-sewing. “Respect for Others” relates to honoring the person teaching you and incorporating what you are taught by listening to and abiding directions from your teacher.

Building connections to the past are important for the Iñupiaq people, and this can be done by continuing to learn about cultural heritage and participating in traditional activities like skin-sewing. Each skin-sewn project carries stories: who made it, when it was made, and why was it made. Each *atigi* or *kammak* honors the person who receives it, and the hard work behind it shows love to the person who receives it. Mary Lou and Nasugraq both said that they love what they do and are glad to share what they learned with others. They hope that more people will be interested in picking up a needle and thread and challenging themselves to make something that is traditional, strong, and a fine representation of Iñupiaq culture, so they can pass on that knowledge and give Iñupiaq clothing to their children or their loved ones as special heirlooms.

## Additional resource: How to Make a *Qaspeq/Atikluk*

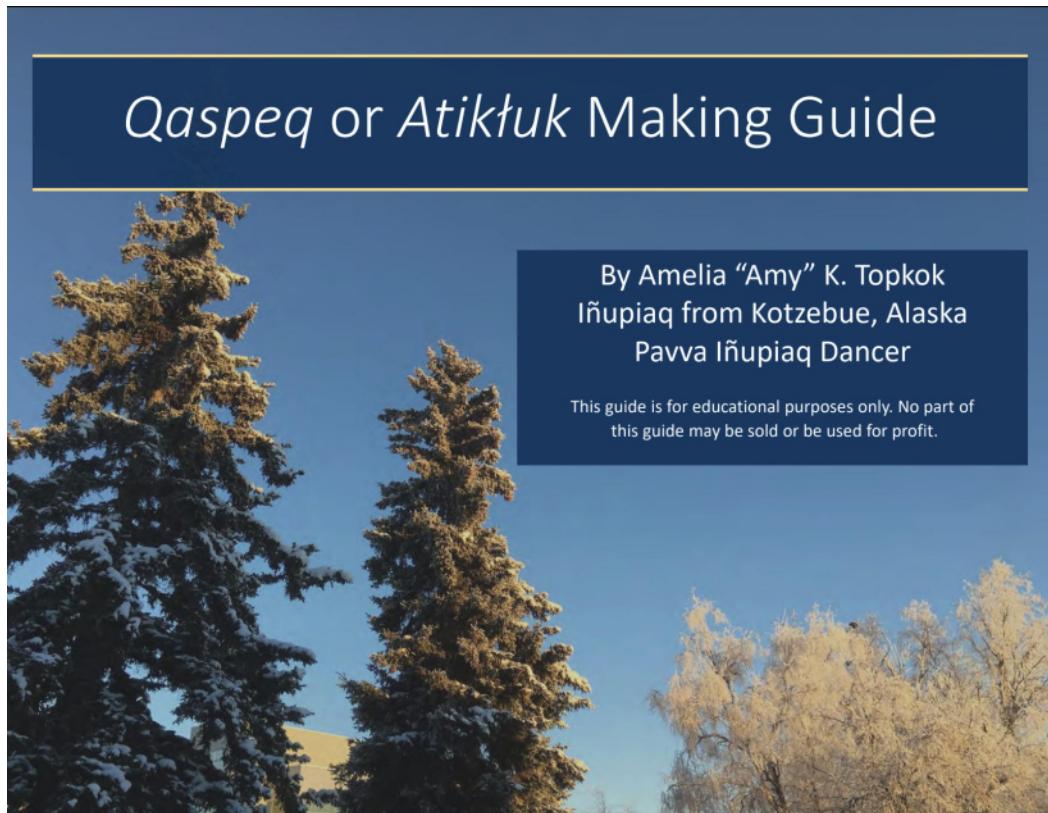
By Amelia "Amy" Ahnaughuq Topkok (Iñupiaq)

Note: Yup'ik sewer Nikki Corbett from Bethel, Alaska, provides online video tutorials on making aqaspeq at her website Sew Yup'ik, <https://sewyupik.com/classroom-fun/>.

Alaska Natives, especially the Yup'ik and Iñupiaq peoples, adapted the traditional fur parka into a new type of summer shirt or dress as they acquired fabric over the last 100 years. The Yup'ik qaspeq and Iñupiaq atikluk have become a contemporary addition to many wardrobes, of many colors, trims, and ruffles and can be worn at work, school, or special events. This guide is meant to be an introduction to how I have learned to make the atikluk for myself and for others. Please enjoy using this guide to help you make a special garment that I hope you can cherish for many years to come. Since the Yup'ik qaspeq and Iñupiaq atikluk are part of Alaska Native heritage, we hope that you will use this guide respectfully.

If you are not Alaska Native, what you make with this guide should be for personal use only and not be made for sale or any other type of profit. Thank you for your consideration.

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska



# Qaspeq or Atiktuk Making Guide

By Amelia “Amy” K. Topkok  
Iñupiaq from Kotzebue, Alaska  
Payva Iñupiaq Dancer

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this guide may be sold or be used for profit.



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*Qaspeq or Atiktuq Making Guide*

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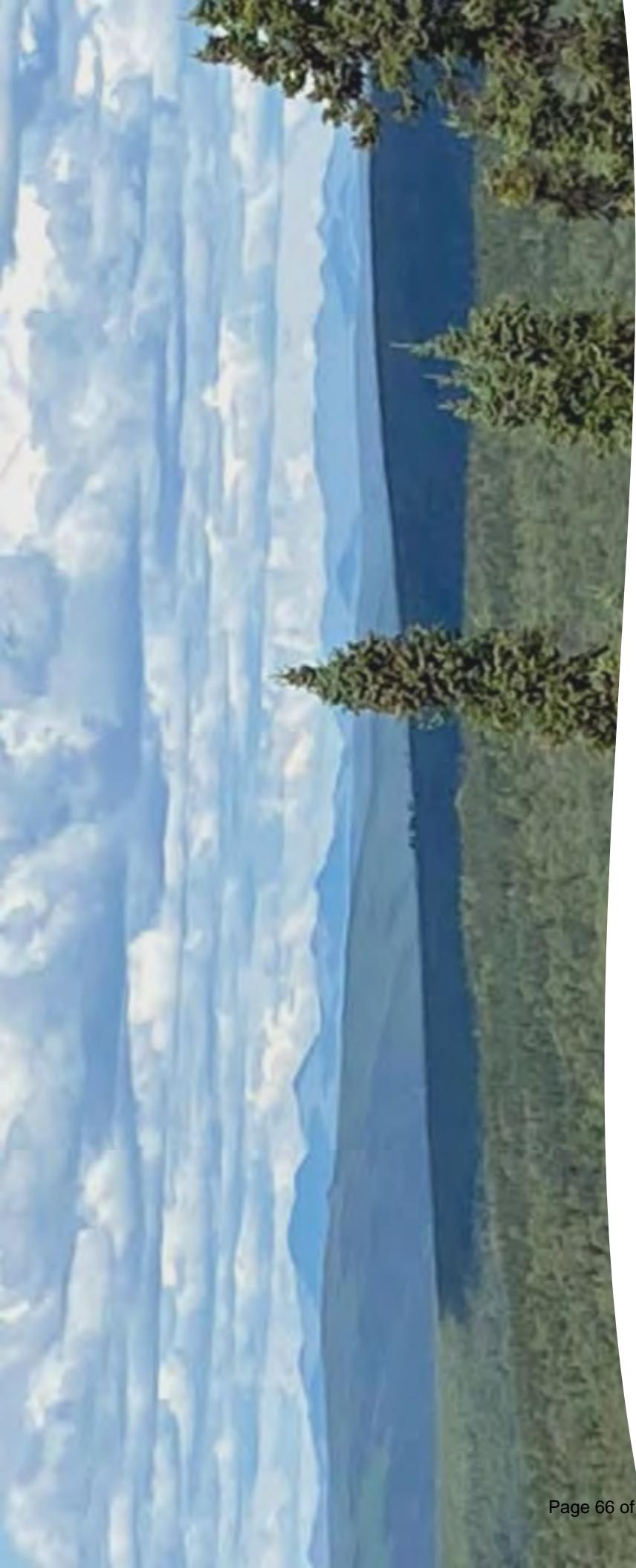
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Artwork and photos by Amelia K. Topkok.



### *Introduction*

Alaska Natives, especially the Yup'ik and Iñupiaq peoples, adapted the traditional fur parka into a new type of summer shirt or dress as they acquired fabric over the last 100 years. The Yup'ik *qaspeq* and Iñupiaq *atiktuq* have become a contemporary addition to many wardrobes, of many colors, trims, and ruffles and can be worn at work, school, or special events. This guide is meant to be an introduction to how I have learned to make the *atiktuq* for myself and for others. Please enjoy using this guide to help you make a special garment that I hope you can cherish for many years to come.

*Quyana!* (Thank you!)

Amelia "Amy" Ahnaughuq K. Topkok



A. Body cut out, and folded from front to back, and folded once from side to side

B. Finished sewn qaspeq or atikluk, folded in half

In making a *Yup'ik qaspeq* or an *İñupiaq atikluk*, you will need a regular long sleeve shirt that fits you loosely. It's best to wash and iron your fabric before you work with it. Fold the shirt like above (B), and then fold the fabric to match your estimated length and width, starting with the largest piece first, the body (A). Measure out your width at the bottom, the bust (under the arms), and the length of your arms, trying to match the shirt, but don't forget to include a hem on all sides. Keep your long sleeve shirt handy to re-check your length of your arms/cut measurements. You can use a ruler or keep your measurements handy on a piece of paper to keep track. TIP: The bottom of the body is wider than the bust (under the arms), creating a slight bell shape. Do not cut the head hole more than 2.5 inches deep or 4.5 inches width folded (9 inches long when unfolded), or the hole will be too big.



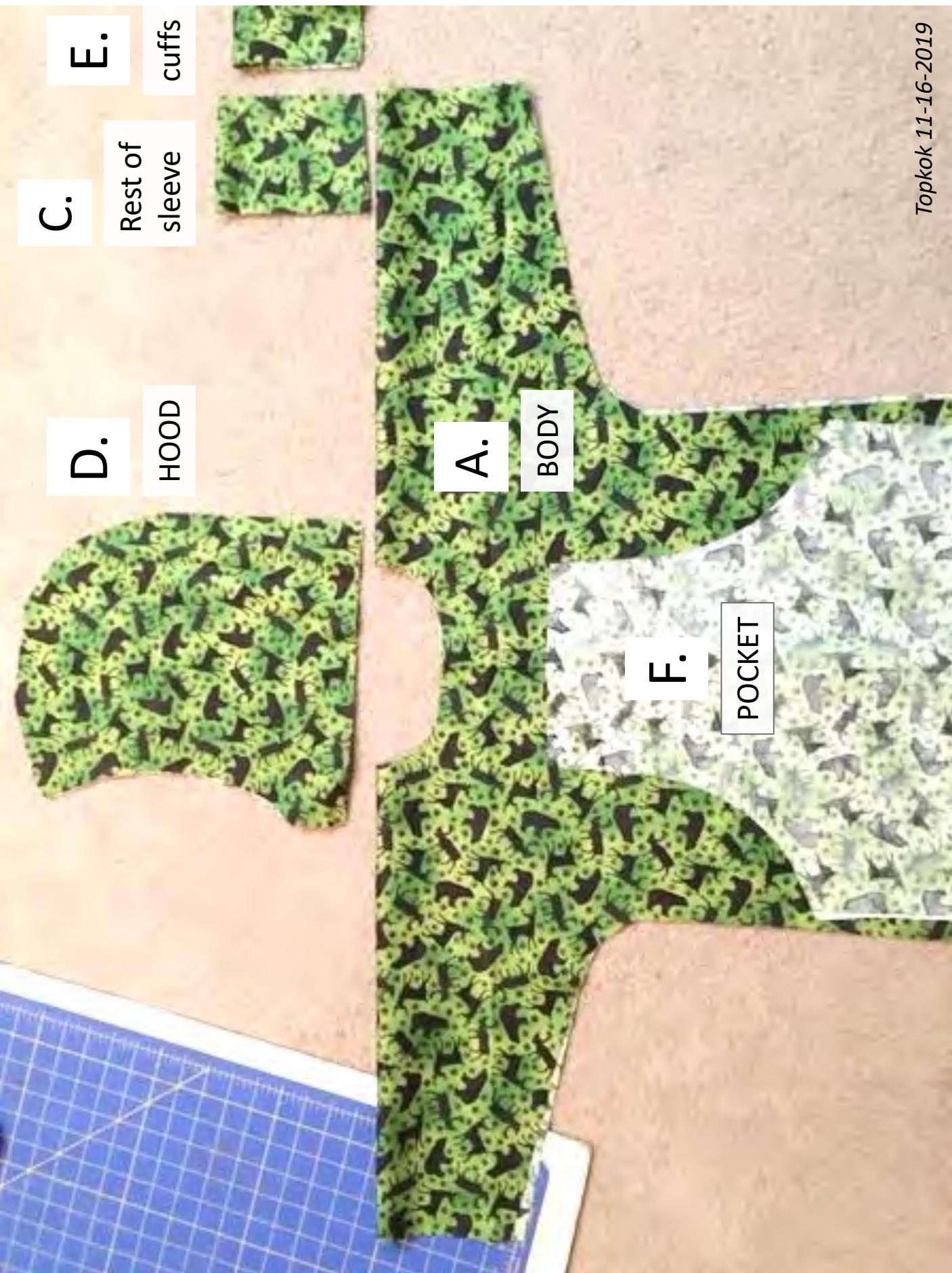
Topkok 11-16-2019

A. While still folded, iron the middle from top to bottom, so you know where the exact middle of the body is. This line is what you will later match your pocket to. Open the body, folded from front to back, after cutting it. The neck hole is approximately 2.5 inches deep and 4.5 inches wide from the middle of the neck (when the body is fully folded from front to back and left to right).



Topkok 11-16-2019

You will need to cut out the body (1), a hood (1), cuffs(x2), a pocket (1), and the remaining sleeve portion (x2). You can also have a ruffle (1) at the bottom of the body for a women's *qaspeq* or *atiktuk* but realize that more fabric will be needed by about another yard or two yards. A ruffle piece can be 7 – 10 inches tall, and three times the length of the bottom of your body, and if you do not have enough length, this can be pieced from two or more pieces of fabric. Please remember to include the hem edges when cutting it out, and for the double hem on the bottom (see last page).



Your cut pieces are shown above. Remember to leave enough room for hems. Note: The pocket will be facing right side out, and not placed as shown in picture.

Topkok 11-16-2019

E. Cut out your cuffs. They will end up being a full fold when sewn to the end of the sleeve. Leave enough width for an inside hem that will be folded to the inside. Sew the hems after cutting. Keep ironed to help them stay straight and insert the sleeve end into the hemmed cuff and pin.



Topkok 11-16-2019

F. For the pocket, I usually measure 18 inches wide and 12 inches tall, with the curve as shown. After cutting, iron the pocket in half (from top to bottom) so it will align with your fold in front of your cut-out body. This picture shows the pocket with the first hems folded. The last part to hem are the curved parts in a double hem.

## cuffs

E. This shows the cuffs. One is folded with hems and one is open. Sew the side hems, and iron folded (see blue line for fold line) to be ready to sew to the arms. The sleeve ends are inserted into the fold and sewn shut. Then you can add the trim onto the cuff, closer to the sewn edge of the sleeve and cuff.

## E.

## F.

F. This pocket is already sewn and hemmed on all sides. On the front of the pocket is where the trim will be sewn, with folding in the ends of the trim to the back of the pocket. Do not cut the curve too curvy, as it will be harder to sew the trim to match the curve.

## D.

D. The hood can be one piece and folded in half when cut out or cut out in two pieces to make your hood. Sew those together and sew the double hem in the front curve that surrounds the face. The blue line shows the fold in the fabric if it is one piece.

D.

D. This is a close-up picture of the folded hood, folded inside-out and double-hemmed in the front. Now this is ready to sew to the neck hole of the body.

It is traditional to have a large curve in the front where the face will be. Be careful to not have a small hood, as you want it to be large enough to go over your head and be able to cover the top to reach your forehead. In the traditional days, it was sewn with a point at the top, but today it is not as common to see (see blue line).





**SEWING TRICK:** When sewing your hems, you do not need to leave much room to continue sewing the next item (see above). This saves on time and thread. Once the sewing is clear of the needle and you are done sewing several pieces, cut the threads to separate the pieces. NOTE: do not overlap the pieces or they will be sewn together.

Close-up of the sewn short arm piece onto the body. Then on the end of the sleeve, you will sew the cuffs on.

TRICK WITH CUFFS: I usually add a couple of pleats to the sleeve end to make it slightly poofy when inserting it into the cuffs. This is optional, as you can cut the sleeve extension (end of the arms-see red line) to closely match the cuff lengths, but it will be constricting or too tight around the arms. I tend to keep these pleats about two finger widths apart, and not too close to the middle or to the cuff ends (see blue lines).

I also measure the cuff length (circle when sewn) be large enough so I can pull my sleeves up to my forearms. If too small, then it is hard to pull my hands through the cuffs after sewn. It is good to test your lengths by folding the cuffs around your hand and wrists as if they were already sewn, to see if you can comfortably put your hands through.





When the pocket is all hemmed on all sides, pin the trim to where you want it on the front. Usually the trim is placed not far from the edge of the curve. Do not cut the trim end yet (as shown above), unless you leave enough length so you know it will be long enough when sewn. This is because the trim can move slightly when sewn and may end up being too short. Fold in the trim to the backside of the pocket when you reach each end. Sew the trim onto both sides of the pocket.



Topkok 11-16-2019

When your pocket is completed, pin it approximately just under the armpits, to about 2 to 3 inches from the bottom. Use the ironed folds (see blue line) as a guide of where the exact middle will be. This photo shows approximately where you want to pin your pocket (NOTE: Do not pin the pocket inside-out like this photo).

Sew the hood onto the neck hole but sew from the back of the neck forward. This ensures that you will sew it on straight.  
TIP: Iron a crease onto the middle of the neck on the body and match that to the fold of the back of your hood.

Once you sew your cuffs onto your sleeves, then sew your trim onto the edge of your cuff where it meets your sleeve, covering the sewn line.

Once the hood and cuffs are sewn, then turn the whole body inside-out and sew the sides to close it. I sew from the cuffs down the sleeve then to the bottom of the body, so that the cuffs are aligned.



If you are adding a ruffle, then see next page.  
If no ruffle, then double hem the bottom and then add the bottom trim last.

**CONGRATULATIONS! You are done!**



H.



G.



#### RUFFLE INSTRUCTIONS

At the bottom of the finished body, you will add your ruffle. Cut the ruffle approximately 7 to 10 inches wide times three lengths of the bottom of the body. Fold the cut ruffle length-wise in half and sew closed at the end, forming a long circle, and double hem the bottom by about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch (it doesn't matter which end). Then pin the unhemmed side of the ruffle onto the finished body with the fabric facing each other. See G. for a close-up of the inside.

Start pinning on each side with a pleat on the ruffle to the body, then pin with pleats in the middle (see blue lines above), then add pleats in between each of those points until you are satisfied, and the ruffle is all pinned onto the body. See H. for a closer detail on the ruffle bottom. Then sew ruffle carefully onto the bottom of your body and add the bottom trim last (see trim placement above).



#### *Acknowledgements*

I would like to thank my sons and my husband Dr. Sean *Asiqtaq* Topkok for inspiring me to learn and teach our Inupiaq dances and songs, and being able to share our culture throughout many parts of the world; my mother Minnie E. Barr and my sister DeeAnn Barr of Shishmaref for showing me how to persevere in our sewing traditions; and especially thank you to the Greatland Traditional Dancers of Anchorage Yup'ik Elder Marie Tyson for showing my husband how to make a *qaspeq*, who then taught it to me. *Quyana!*



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## Additional resources: Cultural curriculums

The Chugachmiut Heritage Preservation Program "endeavors to preserve and revitalize the heritage and language of our Chugach Region" in Alaska. They offer "Heritage KitCurriculum/Lessons" that cover an extensive range of topics including clothing. The resources are available for free online as downloadable PDFs insets for four different grade levels. Additional topics include: Celebrations, Food From the Sea and Traditional Weather Reporting.

Photo credit: Screen capture of homepage for curriculum "Clothing" by Mary Babic (08-27-2020), courtesy of the Chugachmiut Heritage Preservation Program

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska

**CLOTHING**  
By Mary Babic

OVERVIEW   LESSONS   RESOURCES   BIBLIOGRAPHY   KIT INVENTORY   CHECK OUT KIT

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDING:

**The local natural resources used to fashion traditional clothing incorporated elements of function, identification, and practices for the people and lifestyle of the Chugach Region.**

Essential Questions:

1. What properties of the natural resources made clothing viable for various elements of the environment?
2. Why is clothing significant to the physical and spiritual aspect of the Chugach culture?



## Additional resource: How to tan dried squirrel hides

As you have learned from this unit, Arctic ground squirrel skins are used to make Iñupiaq and Yup'ik fancy fur parkas. Other Alaska Native peoples also use squirrels for garments. Yup'ik artist and seamstress Merna Lomack Wharton "Nasek'taq" has shared her techniques for home-tanning dried squirrel hides in the March 2020 entry on her website "Nasek'taq: Yup'ik/Alaska Native contemporary and traditional arts and crafts" (<https://nasektaq.com/page/2>). On Merna's site, you can also see a fancy fur parka and other clothing that she makes, including fur boots, slippers and hats. You can find videos online about how to snare and skin squirrels. Squirrels for making a parka are snared to prevent damaging the hide.

Source: Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska

## Home Tanning Squirrels

March 18, 2020

Alaskan Parka, Artic  
Ground Squirrel parka,  
Qaliq

Alaska Parky Squires,  
Parky Squires, Tanning  
squirrels

There is no better squirrels than the Kuskokwim Mountain squirrels-at least so far by my experience. These are thick and huge! I can't wait to sew them together!



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QAQIUTELQA QALIQ  
COMPLETED QALIQ



Juror's Choice Award at  
Fairbanks Arts Association  
Spring Juried Exhibition in  
2019

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KIPUCUKUVET PILIAMNEK: I  
TAKE SPECIAL ORDERS

