

Black — Tan’erluni (N), Tamlerluni (S)

URIITAT TAMLERTAARTUT. – BIDARKIES (CHITONS) ARE BLACK.



Photo: Kukumya'rngusqaq-Whistler, black painted wooden mask, Pinart Collection, Chateau-Musee, France. 988-2-151.

Black, white, red, and blue/green are the main colors recognized in the Alutiiq language. It is possible to describe other colors. You can say something is yellow, for example, by comparing it to the color of oil. But these four colors are the only ones that have their own unique terms. They are also the most common colors in Alutiiq artwork.

Alutiiq people made black paint from a variety of raw materials. Historic sources indicate that they collected a specific stone from cliff faces to make black pigment, or produced it from copper ore and from charcoal. Artists ground these materials into fine powders on rock and stored them in small skin bags. To make paint, they mixed the colored powder with a binder of water, blood, oil, or even fish eggs.

People commonly used black paint to adorn their faces, particularly those in mourning. Historic sources indicate that the close family members of a deceased person cut their hair and blackened their faces. Black paint also adorned many masks, both as a background color and as a component of designs. It was frequently used to outline facial features and to paint brows and the eyes.