

Kiss — Meluuwaq, Cingaq, Pucuuq

CINGARNGA. – KISS ME.



Photo: A mother kisses her baby.

Anthropologists have long speculated about the origins of kissing. Some believe it is learned behavior, a popular invention that spread widely in Roman times. Others think kissing is innate, a genetically encoded behavior that humans use to express affection and concern. Some biologists argue that when animals press their faces together it provides reassurance and signals connectedness, and that this is the evolutionary basis for kissing.

Whether you believe kissing is learned or innate, it is a widespread human practice, found among most modern cultures, including the Alutiiq people. Like many people, Alutiiq people recognize different types of kissing. The Alutiiq language reflects these differences with at least three distinct words for kiss. The first, *meluuwaq*, signifies a respectful kiss. This is the kind of kiss people use in church to greet friends and share forgiveness. It is also used in kissing icons, the images of important religious figures that adorn Alutiiq homes and churches. A *cingaq* is a sniffy kiss, where the kisser inhales. This is also a gentle, respectful kiss, the kind a grandparent gives to

a baby to breathe in their sweet smell. In contrast, a romantic kiss on the lips is known as *pucuurluku*.