

Legend — Unigkuaq

CUUMI UNIGKUARNGUTAALLRIIT. – BEFORE THEY ALWAYS USED TO TELL (LEGENDS) FAIRY TALE STORIES.



Photo: Painted box panel from Karluk One Site, Koniag, Inc. Collection, possibly showing the layers of the universe.

In the English language, the word “story” is a broad term that can be used to describe many different types of tales, from fairy tales to newspaper articles. Not so in the Alutiiq language, where there are distinct terms for story and legend. In the Alutiiq world, a story—*quliyanguaq*—is a tale that recounts historical events. An Alutiiq story may describe a family member’s kayak journey, a bear hunt, or the life of an ancestor. Alutiiq stories are factual and related to the events of daily life. People tell stories for entertainment, to share their experiences, and to teach history.

In contrast, legends—*unigkuat*—are tales that explain the world. Origin stories, the chronicles of heroes, and Raven tales fit this category. In the Alutiiq world, legends explain the cosmos: the origins of people, the stars, and the animals. One familiar *unigkuaq* tells how Raven brought light to the world; another explains how people descended from the sky in a bladder. Like stories, legends are filled with helpful information. They reveal the nature of things unseen and provide lessons about values. A young man who helps his family is rewarded. A girl who fails to follow directions loses her lover.