

Story — Quliyanguaq

QULIYANGUA'UCHIKAMKEN. – I WILL TELL YOU A STORY.



Photo: Ouzinkie children listening to a story. Smith Collection, courtesy of Tim and Norman Smith.

Among societies without a written language, storytelling is one way to record history. People pass family accomplishments, survival techniques, and social values from generation to generation through each other rather than books. Alutiiq people often embellished stories with drawings or transformed them into songs to help people remember their content and reinforce their messages.

Stories held a great deal of information about daily life in the Alutiiq world. They warned travelers of the treachery of strangers, urged community cooperation, and explained unusual events. The man of winter, a story told to noisy children, warns that those who misbehave may cause bad weather. Through this story, children learn that poor behavior can have consequences for an entire community. Other stories probably helped to preserve information about infrequent events like catastrophic volcanic ash falls or tsunamis. Because these events occurred hundreds of years apart, they were not experienced by every generation. Stories helped communities remember environmental disasters, record their effects, and preserve information about the ways people coped.

Storytelling remains a popular form of Alutiiq expression. A good speaker is encouraged to share his or her knowledge, teaching others through personal tales and a good dose of humor.