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### UCIITILAT LITNAUWITAARTUT. – THE SCHOOL TEACHERS ALWAYS TEACH.

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Photo: Ouzinkie school in the 1930s. Hender Toms collection, courtesy of Melinda Lamp

Children in Alutiiq communities learned traditional skills by playing and working with adults. Children’s toys were miniature replicas of adult tools that helped youth practice the essential activities of a subsistence lifestyle. By age six, girls were weaving mats and assisting their mothers with household tasks. They learned to process fish with tiny ulus and practiced parka making with miniature skin-working boards. Boys began instruction in hunting at about eleven, playing with miniature bows and arrows. They also worked wood with toy wedges and adzes and fought mock battles with replica war clubs and shields.

Games of skill helped to teach hunting skills, promote teamwork, and foster friendly competition. Young and old enjoyed throwing darts at a swinging porpoise model or tossing discs at a target on a seal’s skin. Lessons in Alutiiq history and values were taught with stories. Stories recounted the pursuits of famous ancestors, discussed the dangers of wandering far from home, and gave examples of model behavior. And each community had at least one ritual specialist, a person with expert knowledge of songs, dances, and legends who helped to teach children about the origins of the Alutiiq universe.

Western-style schooling began in the Russian era with the founding of both secular and parish schools. Some Alutiiq people even traveled to Siberia to advance their education.

These schools embraced bilingualism and helped to create the first texts written in Alutiiq. In contrast, American schools, introduced to most communities by the early twentieth century, sought to assimilate Native children. Teachers imposed a strict English-only policy, physically punishing those who spoke in Alutiiq.

Today, schools are more sensitive to the educational needs of Native children. Each of Kodiak’s Alutiiq villages has a public school that provides classes and acts as a community gathering place. Administrators, teachers, and parents work hard to include Alutiiq traditions in lessons and provide experiences that transmit Native culture and values to the next generation.