

## Three — Pingayun

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### PINGAYUNEK CARLIANGQ'RTUA. – I HAVE THREE CHILDREN.

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Photo: Three student carvers, culture week, Ouzinkie School.

Counting is a skill that children around the world learn at a very young age, and although quantifying objects comes naturally to humans, the world's societies count in many different ways. Counting systems reflect the mathematical concepts of a culture, which are influenced by language, social practices, worldviews, and even subsistence activities.

Speakers of Indo-European languages like English use the decimal system, a three-thousand-year-old way of counting based on the number ten. Although Alutiiq people adopted this system in the modern era, the traditional Alutiiq counting system is based on the number twenty: the total number of fingers and toes found on a person. This system was once shared with speakers of related Native languages from Kodiak to Greenland.

In the base-twenty system, people make numbers larger than twenty with reference to twenty. To say thirty, for example, a speaker would say "*suinaq qulnek ciplluku*," a phrase that translates as "ten above twenty." Today, however, Alutiiq speakers typically follow the base ten counting system where thirty is *pingayun qula*, or "three tens."