

## Toad, Frog — Qetgauwartaasqaq

---

### QETGAUWARTAASQAT CUNGARUARTUT. – FROGS ARE GREEN.

---



Photo: Child holding a Western Toad from Southeast Alaska.

The Alutiiq words for toad and frog are the same—*qetgauwartaasqaq*. This word literally means “thing always jumping.” Amphibians are rare in Alaska. The state’s naturally occurring herpetofauna includes just 6 species: two types of salamanders, one newt, two frogs, and one toad. Of these animals, only the wood frog (*Rana sylvatica*) and the western toad (*Bufo boreas*) occur in the Alutiiq world. The brown, smoothed-skinned, wood frog can be found on the Alaska and Kenai peninsulas, and the green, wart-covered, western toad occurs in Prince William Sound.

Although frogs and toads are not indigenous to the Kodiak region, they were known. A ceremonial drum collected from the island features a handle with a stocky, grey-green carving that resembles a toad. This animal forms half of the decorative top of the drum’s handle, appearing behind a small mask. The toad faces the inside of the drum, where it is nearly hidden from view. This rare animal carving, paired with the humanlike face, may indicate a spiritual relationship. The mask may represent the spirit of the toad.

A legend from Prince William Sound tells of a *qetgauwartaasqaq* appearing in human form. There was once a village where the people teased a man who was different than others. Each morning, upon waking, the man would walk over people, sometimes stepping on them. The villagers made a song that mocked the man for his clumsiness. To their surprise, the man turned out to be a *qetgauwartaasqaq*, who couldn’t help the way he walked. Angry for being teased, he sucked one villager’s mouth to the side of his face. When the community plotted to kill the *qetgauwartaasqaq*, he sucked them all up and fled to the ocean. The entire village disappeared. This story reminds people not to make fun of others.