

## Whaler — Ar'ursulek, Arwarsulek

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### AR'URSULEM AYAQUQTARA AR'UQ. – THE WHALER IS GOING TO SPEAR THE WHALE.

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Image: Petroglyph image of whalers, Cape Alitak.  
Courtesy of Akhiok-Kaguyak, Inc.

In ancestral Alutiiq society, each community had a set of cultural specialists. Politicians, shamans, ritual leaders, healers, and whalers were among the people with unique knowledge who served others. Some of these positions were passed down through families. Others were taught to people who showed an aptitude for certain work. Learning the job of a cultural specialist involved apprenticeship. Young people worked with an experienced mentor to study skills like healing with herbal medicine, resolving disputes, predicting the weather, and hunting whales.

A legend told by Ralph Demidoff of Little Afognak in 1962 shows how whalers passed their knowledge to the next generation. In this tale, an Alutiiq village was home to a great whale hunter. This highly skilled man would disappear for days and when he returned, a whale would wash up on the shore. A mischievous boy from the village dreamed of becoming a whaler, and so the expert hunter made him his apprentice.

To train the boy, the whaler took him on one of his journeys far from the village. Here he gave the boy tasks, taught him about hunting rituals, discussed animal behavior, shared experiences from his own apprenticeship, challenged his courage, and most of all instructed him to watch. The whaler told the boy, "Young hunting partners learn by watching what is done and by doing what they are told to do. But never by asking questions." This is the central message of the story. Unfortunately, the boy was disrespectful and did not follow instructions. He would often sneak after the whaler to watch forbidden activities. In the end, the boy failed as an apprentice and did not become a whaler.