

## **Fund for Teachers Power Point Script**

**Angela Russ and Annie Gibavic**

**Newark Street School**

**Newark, Vermont**

**ALASKA: Operation Salmon Adventure**

### Introduction

Each year our school holds a community cultural celebration in honor of a teacher who brought culture to us through Eastern European music. This year the Evanne Weirich Memorial Celebration will focus on the salmon fishing and totems of the Tlingit Tribe of Southeast Alaska.

### The Journey

Stories of early settlers traveling by boat to Alaska for adventure, independence, and gold have fascinated me all my life. Tales of living in an isolated cabin in the woods helped to inspire both Angela and I to build and live in log cabins in Vermont. Following in these footsteps, we began our journey on the ferry from Bellingham, WA to Haines, Alaska, a 3 day trip through the inside passage. We hope to inspire our students to visit new places and follow their dreams.

The boat had its own mix of cultures, with people sleeping in tents on the deck, in lounge chairs under heat lamps, in the movie theater, or in state rooms. The weather was beautiful and the scenery was amazing, as the vastness of Alaska became more dramatic the further north we traveled.

We stopped at several isolated towns which are only accessible by boat or plane, and became aware that many people in Alaska don't travel too often. Sometimes we feel isolated in Vermont, but this can also lead to a deeper sense of community. In Alaska, different towns could seem as if they were in different worlds. Sometimes a whole community was towed by a barge!

Whales breached and salmon surfaced, glaciers and snow-capped mountains appeared, and after 3 days we disembarked at the beautiful town of Haines, in the heart of the homeland of the Tlingit Tribe.

## The Culture

A major goal of our trip was to learn about the Tlingit culture, (the totem pole natives of Southeast Alaska.) Our quest first took us to a state park in Ketchikan where we visited a reconstructed native village called Totem Bight. We met a master totem carver who taught us about her craft. This was especially important because we are planning to design and create a totem pole at our school.

Next we traveled to the contemporary native village of Klukwan that is building a cultural heritage center. We visited Cynthia, the lead teacher of the K-12 Klukwan School, who lives at the school. We set up a “sister” relationship between our two schools, Klukwan, AK and Newark, VT. Cynthia took us to meet some village members, including Lani, a master weaver. Lani has a vision of reviving her village through the creation of cultural heritage camps. Lani graciously led us on a tour of the local clan buildings.

Many of the Klukwan villagers were out fishing, as the salmon were running, but we did get to meet a mother and son as they prepared their salmon for the smokehouse next to the Chilkat River.

Finally, we visited the Sheldon Museum in Haines. It was just stuffed with Tlingit artifacts which we were allowed to photograph.

## The Salmon

Almost everyone in Alaska fishes for salmon. In Newark, we raise salmon in the basement of our school. This year we will compare this restoration process to the natural salmon migration in Alaska. One Native method of fishing is the fish wheel, which is also used by the state to monitor the salmon population. Some people use dip nets. We fished on the Kenai River using the Vermont method: a pole, hook and line.

Arriving at Fish Camp at the height of the sockeye run, we caught 4 out of the 5 varieties of salmon. Everyone at the campground where we stayed was set up to smoke, can, vacuum seal or freeze their winter’s supply of fish. Waders and raincoats were definitely in style. It was light for 20 hours a day, so some folks fished for 24 hours straight. Many of our Vermont students embrace the culture of hunting and deer camp. They will certainly be able to relate to the Alaskan culture of fish camp.

It was amazing to catch, filet, cook, and eat wild Alaskan salmon within an hour’s time. We found a commercial processing plant in the town of Soldatna where the workers could tell the freshness of the fish by rubbing the scales. We delivered our fish to be sealed and frozen, and were impressed with the efficiency of the whole operation. We brought fish home for our freezer, too!

## The Wilderness

Another objective of our trip was to chronicle the landforms, and the plant and animal life of the small part of Alaska we visited. For this part of our trip we rented an RV and traveled into the interior as far north as Denali National Park. Here we rode a park service bus (no other vehicles are allowed) 85 miles through the wilderness. We saw moose, dall sheep, wolves, caribou, eagles, trumpeter swans, and grizzly bears. The clouds cleared and magnificent Mt. Denali appeared for the first time in two months, coinciding with our visit to the park. We encountered jaw-dropping scenery on the Old Denali and Glenn Highways. Glaciers, woodlands, mountains, tundra, grassy meadows, lakes and glacial rivers abounded. We were afforded many opportunities to sample the indigenous salmonberries, cranberries and blueberries. We concluded our visit by making a wild blueberry pie and dining on silver salmon.

Isolated and Inspiring, Expansive and Intriguing, ALASKA!