

EXAMINING INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON THE HISTORY OF FAIRBANKS:
A HISTORICAL FICTION WORK FOR FOURTH GRADE STUDY

By

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Abstract

A historical fiction story, *Carried by the current: a history of Fairbanks, Alaska in the Tanana Valley*, told in eight chapters, is an attempt to tell the story of the history of Fairbanks, Alaska with an emphasis on the perspective of the Indigenous people of the area, and how the settling of the city and surrounding area affected their lives. There is a need for educational resources that are told from perspectives other than that of the conqueror, as well as a need for representation of people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. This story can stand on its own or be incorporated into a unit study, providing a background of Indigenous ways of life pre-Russian contact, how Indigenous people in the Tanana Valley reacted to Westerners coming into their territory, and how their ways of life changed as a consequence. The story is written for an audience of 4th or 5th grade students in an urban Alaska public school setting.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 A sense of place

A key part of an individual's sense of self is drawn from where they come from. When we leave our homes and meet other travelers, the first question asked is usually, "where are you from?" People tend to answer this question in a variety of ways- either where they were born, where they currently live, or someplace in between where they feel most strongly connected- the place that they feel is a reflection of who they are or how they would like to be seen. I first discovered my own sense of place and what it meant to me to be an Alaskan when I left the state to go college in Oregon. Being accustomed to the limited variety of plant life in Alaska, I was struck by the diversity of flora in Southern Oregon and I had to laugh when people referred to the hill nearby as a "mountain." What they called a river looked like a creek to me, and they couldn't believe how nonchalantly and regularly I consumed salmon in all forms- as if it were abundant! I began to realize that the experiences that shaped my identity as an Alaskan were connected to the land and the resources and experiences it provided. Though I am from an urban area, subsistence activities like berry picking, hunting, camping, and fishing were a regular part of my seasonal rhythm, and made me feel connected to the land and the Indigenous peoples who have been stewarding and taking part in those activities for thousands of years. It is difficult to live in Alaska and not feel a connection to the environment, because even if you live in an urban area, the elements will seek you out and affect your life on a daily basis. Whether it is bloodthirsty swarms of mosquitos or 40 below temperatures, you will contend with nature and it will become a part of you.

In addition to feeling a connection with the land where I grew up, I had many opportunities to learn about Indigenous ways of life from the Athabascans of Interior Alaska. My parents, Bill and Linda Pfisterer, and my older siblings lived for ten years in Fort Yukon, Alaska before I was born, so stories of village life were part of our family lore. After moving to Fairbanks, my parents worked closely with the people of Minto, sometimes going there to teach art classes. My father published two books when I was a child, *Shandaa: In my lifetime* (1982), with Belle Herbert of Chalkyitsit, and *K'aiiroondak: Behind the willows* (1993), with Richard Martin of Fort Yukon. I have early memories of sitting on the floor near my dad as he listened to audio recordings of his interviews with Richard Martin and other contributors to *K'aiiroondak* and worked on his book of stories. At one point I had the opportunity as a child to visit Old Minto fish camp. I have also lived next door all my life to Ray Barnhardt, a prolific writer on topics of Alaska Native education, and I remember attending dinner parties at his house as a child, where we were occasionally gifted with dances, songs, and stories by some of the Athabascans in attendance. As a teenager I had the privilege to take several semesters of Alaska Native Art with the late Ron Manook at West Valley High School. I loved the diversity in types of art we were taught- beading one day and carving driftwood the next. I was also struck by the diversity of students in the Native Arts classes- the classes appealed to students from all cliques, not just the "art kids." Having so many opportunities to interact with Athabascan culture throughout my life has solidified that culture as one I identify as part of my own Alaskan heritage- part of what sets me apart from Americans from the lower 48 states, and the culture that was presented to me and celebrated most as a child, more so than my Norwegian or German heritage. Yet always I am aware that I am an outsider to this culture. I can look in at it from the outside, but as a White urban woman, I am not a part of it, though it may be a part of me.

1.1.2 Teaching local geography and history

I began my teaching career as a homeschool teacher. I used the Waldorf methodology to teach my own children from kindergarten through sixth grade. The first time I taught the 4th grade Local Geography and History block, I relied heavily on the *Live Education!* curriculum. Though the curriculum advises including a study of the Indigenous peoples of the local area, the main focus of the block is on how geography shaped the local industry and economy, emphasizing the first settlers and how the community grew out of the available resources (Rosenbloom & Bischof, 1999). With this direction, the main lesson block that I shaped was, regrettably, a colonizer's history of our local area. As I look back on that block and compare it to what I have since learned about place-based education and Indigenous education, I wish I had taken a different approach. The purpose of this project is to present an Indigenous perspective on the history of the Tanana Valley as it developed from a pre-contact era into a land presently settled by prospectors and grew into a multi-industrial community. This work of historical fiction may be used as part of a social studies unit for 4th grade students in a public Waldorf school setting that addresses the Local Geography and History main lesson block as outlined by Waldorf pedagogy. It may also be useful to teachers in other schools who do not prescribe to the Waldorf pedagogy. The unit will focus on Interior Alaska, placing heavy emphasis on Alaska Native peoples: their culture, ways of life, and interactions with the land. It is my intention to attempt to "decolonize" this main lesson block by providing stories from a marginalized perspective, which may then become a resource to other Waldorf teachers in a greater effort to decolonize the Waldorf curriculum as a whole. It will also be a valuable addition to curricular materials in non-Waldorf settings as teachers seek provide students with a variety of perspectives of historical events.

1.2 Place-Based Education

1.2.1 Development of Place-Based Education in Alaska

Public school education in Alaska has a long and sorted history, beginning with segregated schools in the early 1900s. Schools for White children were provided by the territorial government of Alaska while schools for Native children were run by the United States Government Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) (Cotton, 1984). The two school systems offered vastly different opportunities for students, most notably the lack of village high schools for Native children, forcing families to choose between ending their child's formal education after middle school or sending their children to regional boarding schools. These boarding schools proved disastrous for an entire generation of children whose language and culture were forcibly taken from them in an attempt to assimilate the students to the dominant Western culture (Cotton, 1984). As a result, a great deal of cultural knowledge that had been passed down through generations was lost, and Native languages became endangered or altogether forgotten (Lipka, 2002). In 1972, the *Tobeluk v. Lind* case (also known as the Molly Hootch case) determined the school situation in Alaska to be racist and detrimental to the well-being of students and villages (Cotton, 1984) and paved the way for education reform in Alaska.

Many subsequent years were spent building village high schools, and experimenting with different ways of teaching the children whom they served. Approaches that had the greatest impact on student achievement included offering classes in the local Native language (Gilmore & Wyman, 2013) and in the local Native culture and ways of knowing (Lipka, 2002). Despite efforts to include these aspects into the curriculum, students who were a product of this era of education who went on to study at the University of Alaska Fairbanks reported that they had faced discrimination and had felt misunderstood, abused, and neglected by their teachers

(Gilmore & Wyman, 2013). In 1994, the Alaska Natives Commission reported that outside efforts to control and shape Alaska Native Education had failed, and decided that change would need to come from within the communities themselves (Barnhardt, 2012). The commission developed a plan to overhaul what was being taught in village schools, and how it would be taught. The Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (AKRSI) was begun as a way to systematically integrate Indigenous knowledge systems into all aspects of education and create a bridge between culturally relevant education and existing educational systems. The AKRSI provides a framework for the implantation of place-based education in Alaska. Place-based education can be defined as “an approach to curriculum development and instruction that acknowledges and makes use of the places where students live to induct them into the discourses and practices of any and all school subjects” (Smith, 2013).

1.2.2 Student Outcomes of Place-Based Education

The AKRSI was a monumental achievement in terms of inter-tribal cooperation. Annual events brought participants together, and five themes: Native ways of knowing/teaching, culturally aligned curriculum, Indigenous science knowledge base, Elders and cultural camps, and village science applications, were incorporated by all regions in the state into a comprehensive curriculum that was then assembled into a database by the Alaska Native Knowledge Network. Performance standards for cultural context that were developed by the initiative were adopted by the State of Alaska for use in schools both rural and urban, and a set of curricular materials was prepared for use by any school districts who wish to use them. Over ten years, participating school districts saw significant increases in student achievement, Native students attending college and pursuing STEM careers, and decreases in drop-out rates when compared with school districts that did not participate in the initiative (Barnhardt, 2012).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Waldorf Curriculum

The first Waldorf school was established in 1919 in Stuttgart, Germany for the children of employees of the local cigarette factory (Steiner, 1997). Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925), a scientific, literary, and philosophical scholar, was asked to outline an approach and curriculum for the school, which he did over the course of 14 lectures and additional discussions with teachers over the course of two weeks (Steiner, 1997). There was an understanding that these lectures would form the basis for teachers to continue to develop the curriculum out of their own impulses, based on an understanding of the child as a developing physical and spiritual being (Steiner, 2000). It is generally understood by practitioners of Waldorf Education that the “spiritual” part of the approach is not meant to impart any specific religion upon the students, but rather is a recognition that human beings have a spiritual nature which is expressed through many different religions and cultures. Steiner’s indications arise from the understanding that the incarnation of human beings happens gradually over the course of childhood and that at different stages growth, we meet the incarnating child with activities and subject matter that that serve to gradually awaken their thinking and feeling lives, and strengthen their developing will (Steiner, 2000). Steiner’s approach to education can best be summed up by this quote from an essay written by Steiner in 1898,

Primary schools have the enviable task of making the young people into real people in the truest sense of the word. There the teachers must ask themselves what natural talents are hidden in every person and what they must bring out in each child so that the pupil may finally realize his own humanity in balanced integration. Whether the child will one day be a doctor or a ship-builder need not

concern the pedagogue who teaches him at the age of six. His task is to make him into a full human being. (Stockmeyer, 2015, p.27)

Although Steiner's indications are often vastly different from the approach commonly used in schools, he was adamant that state standards of education also be followed so that students would have no trouble if they moved to a different school and that Steiner schools would not be considered a less serious or rigorous education than any other school.

Over the last 100 years, Waldorf schools have become popular world-wide, both as private schools that follow Steiner's indications very strictly, and as public charter schools, which often consider themselves "Waldorf inspired" because they may not have the resources or desire to offer every feature of a Waldorf school. As this educational movement has spread, it has become apparent that the curriculum laid forth by Steiner will need adjustment, both to account for geographical differences and the current era, and also to become more inclusive and representative of the diverse cultures that utilize it. The sentiment of Waldorf education as a continually evolving curriculum was introduced by Steiner, who stressed the importance for children to understand the world first through that which is familiar- animals, plants, and land features, so that they can learn to really connect with their surroundings (Steiner, 1997). However, the complexity of the Waldorf curriculum can be intimidating to those new to the method, and particularly to the ever-growing population of homeschool families, which often have little or no previous experience as an educator. This has caused many teachers both in the home and in schools to be overly-reliant on the work of other teachers. As Craig Giddens wrote in the introduction to Steiner's *Discussions with Teachers*,

[...]these indications are not meant to be copied by teacher after teacher. If they were, they would become quickly “out of date.” Rudolph Steiner’s training method was, instead, to elicit a lesson from the teachers themselves, and only then to make his own contribution based on what was presented. (Steiner, 1997, p. 12)

Even more pressing for our current moment in time than the possibility of the curriculum going stale through lack of individual creativity on the part of the teacher is the possibility that, unchanged, the Waldorf approach as it comes to us from 1919 Germany could, in fact, have a colonizing effect on other cultures (Boland, 2016). It is not just that we need to, for example, talk about Alaskan birds rather than birds commonly found in Europe, but that we need to look at the values and world view of the Indigenous peoples of our local area, reassessing history from their perspective, in order to teach in a way that truly reflects our students and their time and place in the world (Boland, 2016). It was my goal in the course of researching and writing this story to deconstruct the traditional Local History lesson block and rebuild it through a decolonizing lens. This lesson block is arguably the most important one in the K-8 Waldorf curriculum to attempt this with, as it is inherently a place-based unit and is the foundation upon which we begin to shape the students’ understanding of their local area. Ultimately what needs to occur in Waldorf schools world-wide is this same deconstruction and rebuilding on a macro level- with the entire K-12 Waldorf curriculum. However, it may be more effective for this work to be done by individual schools in order to truly tailor what is taught to each specific place. Some schools have already begun this process, such as the Honolulu Waldorf School, where attempts to decolonize the curriculum and adjust it to meet the values and needs of the students they serve were documented over the course of 12 months (Boland & Demirbag, 2017). Led by Jocelyn Romero Demirbag, teachers worked with their curriculum in cycles of plan/ act/ observe/ reflect with the idea of

awakening a sense of place in the teachers and helping them to see how place could be utilized in their curriculum. Demirbag then observed the teachers to see what changes occurred in their teaching over the course of the year. She found that the teachers had gained a deeper understanding of the time and place in which they live and could see the need to change the way they were teaching to better reflect that time and place so that what was being taught at school was strongly connected to the lives of the students outside of school. Most of the teachers did change what they were teaching due to the work that was done, and felt it imperative that the school identify for itself what a Waldorf school in Hawaii should look like (Boland & Demirbag, 2017). This study shows how effective change on the school-specific level can be and may serve as a guide for other schools who wish to do the same.

2.2 Storytelling

It is common practice in Waldorf schools for teachers to research topics to be taught, and then write their own stories that illustrate concepts or bring to life certain time periods. The goal is to enliven the material for the students, because human minds do not remember decontextualized information nearly as well as they remember stories and information that is placed in the context of necessity. Another reason that storytelling is such an effective method of teaching is that it allows listeners to see the experiences of others through their own perspective (Wilson, 2008), which is especially important when the perspective being shared belongs to a marginalized group. Storytelling has also been the major mode of transmitting information across generations for many cultures, including the Indigenous cultures of Alaska since time immemorial.

When it comes to the first people of the Tanana Valley, I have found that it is no small task to find the appropriate materials to create a story that would be useful in a classroom. It is not research that could reasonably be expected for each teacher in a school, as they loop with their students through the grades, to accomplish for the sake of one unit of study. I, therefore, hope to create a resource that would provide this difficult-to-find information in a format that is readily accessible to teachers and could either be read in installments over the course of a four-week unit, or, as would be common in a Waldorf school, for the teacher to learn and retell the story in the oral tradition over the course of the unit.

3. Review of Literature

In creating a story to tell my fourth graders about the early history of the Fairbanks area, I pulled information from accounts given by Athabascan Indians who lived in the Tanana Valley and nearby villages along the Yukon River, as well as accounts written by prospectors and historians. I had originally planned to focus closer to Fairbanks itself, but I was surprised to learn how widely the Athabascans of the area moved around throughout the year, and I found that this range is not only representative of their movement, but also necessary in order to find enough information to pull from, as the area immediately around Fairbanks was not the location of a previously existing settlement, and the effects of its founding rippled not just along the Tanana River, but up to the communities of the Yukon River as well. My goal was to provide an image of the ways of life of first inhabitants of this area before a Western influence, and then to show how things changed for them after having contact with traders, missionaries, and gold prospectors during the time when the town of Fairbanks was first established. My story includes some accounts of E.T. Barnette and other first settlers in order to give the history of Fairbanks itself, but these perspectives are limited and serve to give context to the evolving story of the Athabascans, whose perspective is centered. My initial research has provided me with several biographies, story collections, and historical accounts. I will focus the first part of this literature review on four of them: *According to Mama* (Anderson & Loftus, 1956), *The Life I've Been Living* (Cruikshank, 1986), *Howard Luke: My Own Trail* (Luke & Jackson, 1998), and *The Tanana Chiefs: Native Rights and Western Law* (Schneider, 2018).

My story begins in a pre-contact era where the people sewed their own clothing from caribou hides and cooked meat in birch bark baskets, heated with hot stones (Anderson & Loftus, 1956). *According to Mama* (Anderson & Loftus, 1956) contains detailed descriptions of life

during this time period. The account is that of Helen David Charlie who was likely born in the 1860s and lived in the area of the Goodpaster river near Healy Lake. It is recounted by Helen's daughter, Laura David Anderson, as she told it to Audrey Loftus. I have included information from this book about customs and ways of life before contact with Westerners, including their summer and winter dwellings, how they traveled, their clothing, and the food they ate and how it was prepared. Several methods of preservation are described, including smoking and burying. One of the earliest changes from the coming of Westerners that is mentioned was the appearance of copper pots and pans, which were greatly prized. Later, traders began to arrive in the villages, often starving and begging for food. After the traders came the missionaries, who gave the people new names and told men they could only have one wife, changes that would have been very significant to the people. This is a very short book, only 33 pages, but in it is contained much of the wisdom that other books lament the loss of.

Moses Cruikshank's book, *The Life I've Been Living* (1986), picks up where Anderson's story leaves off. Cruikshank's early recollections include hunting with a variety of guns, so trading was well-established between his people and outsiders long before his time. He is guessed to have been born between 1902 and 1906 in what is now Chalkyitsik (Cruikshank, 1986). Cruikshank recalls his grandfather trading with the Hudson's Bay Company and Cruikshank himself began attending school at the mission school in Nenana at about 8 or 9 years old. His story represents the experience of an Athabaskan child who grew up knowing the influence of outsiders while still being taught the old ways. Cruikshank had dealings with every type of White person who came into the area: traders, missionaries, prospectors, military men, and riverboat men. At the age of 12 he was hired to labor on the narrow-gauge railroad between Fairbanks and Nenana, and he later worked at a government sawmill in Nenana. As a young

adult he mined for gold and ran a trapline. Cruikshank's attitude towards the Westerners was opportunistic. He saw their industries as ways to make a living for himself and he seems to have tried just about everything. But it is easy to see how much of the Native lifestyle would be lost in one generation living as he did- away from his people much of the time, and though he still knew how to live off the land, he did not depend upon it in the same way his parents and grandparents did.

Howard Luke's memoir, *Howard Luke: My Own Trail* is an account from a similar time period. Luke was born in 1923, when Fairbanks was a well-established community. His family lived in Nenana when he was young, and Luke traveled frequently by river between Fairbanks and Nenana, eventually making his own camp on the South side of the Tanana River at the site of the old Chena Village. Though Howard's stepfather worked on the Alaska Railroad regularly enough to purchase items like sugar, flour, and tea, the family still moved around, hunting game and preserving meat in the old ways. Much of what Howard recounts are the values of his people- helping those who are in need or too old to work for example, and how leading a good life leads to gaalee'ya, or "good luck" which to me seems like a version of karma. He also frequently discussed the importance of storytelling to pass on values and lessons, and the way that stories were woven into everyday activities, not just told around fires or at ceremonies. Like Cruikshank, Luke took part in the growing industries of Fairbanks. His family began to depend upon a monetary income to live in new ways. Luke was involved in dogsled racing and boat racing, while also making a living from trapping furs and commercial fishing. There is a point in his story where he recounts his camp becoming a stop on the Binkley family's riverboat tour. He says that when the people ask him what he eats and how he cooks, he says, "I tell them I live just like them. I eat just like them. I got propane stove. I've got everything, just like they do" (p.71).

By this time Luke and his family were no longer living the traditional Native lifestyle, and as the book begins to wrap up, he talks about seeing the need to revitalize his heritage and share it with young people before it becomes lost forever. It is easy to see from his account how young Native people of the area could easily get swept up in the “progress” that came with the outsiders and their ways, while not realizing what they were giving up or losing along the way. I think Howard Luke is a great example of someone who lived in both worlds and saw the importance of preserving the Native lifestyle before it became too late.

In addition to the personal accounts listed above, I gathered information from *The Tanana Chiefs: Native Rights and Western Law* (Schneider, 2018). This resource is possibly the most to-the-point as far as exploring Native viewpoints on the founding of Fairbanks and the other developments that came with the influx of more White people to that land. It lays out how in a short span of years, the area went from being Native land with few White people who needed help from the Natives in order to survive to being a place where Natives felt pushed out and no longer needed or wanted. One issue that is brought up is the concern that arose from the people of the Goodpasture tribe that the new telegraph line would bring more White people through their land. Although the intention, they were told, was to keep more messengers out of the area through use of the communication wire, it ended up having exactly the effect they feared, as White hunters, trappers, and prospectors began to use the trails created to travel through the area (p. 18). Government officials, as early as 1898, had noticed a significant depletion in the number of salmon available to Natives in the river, and were receiving complaints from Natives asking that the White settlers not harvest wood from their lands. Soon they were forced to grapple with the idea that somehow Russia had sold Alaska to the United States and that now this land, which was once free for all to roam, was being divided into private

properties, which they seemed to have no way of obtaining for themselves or keeping out of the possession of those who were depleting their once abundant resources. The July 1915 meeting of seven chiefs from tribes on the Tanana River with Judge Wickersham was the first time that Native voices were allowed to be heard in an official capacity. During this meeting, Judge Wickersham urged the chiefs to consider the creation of Indian reservations or other methods of land allotment in order to preserve some of the land for Natives before it was all claimed by the incoming colonists. This idea of course did not sit well with the chiefs, because it confined them to much smaller areas than they were used to occupying during the course of the year and therefore represented a dramatic shift in their way of life that made their demise almost certain. In the end, the chiefs asked for trade schools to be created along the Tanana River and that the new industries springing up along the river be opened up to Native employment. It seems that rather than limit themselves in their range of territory, they would insist upon having the option of fitting into the new world that was creating itself around them. The book continues on to reflect on the fallout from decisions made and not made at that meeting and how Native life has changed because of it.

After reviewing these materials, my impression is that the Athabascans of the Tanana Valley and Yukon River Valley were generally hesitant to welcome the influx of outsiders, but that many of the changes that came early on were welcome: increased trade brought tools that enhanced their way of life, but slowly caused them to rely on outside influences for some of the new supplies like flour, sugar, and tea that they developed a taste for. Employment opportunities for young adult Natives lured them away from their families and traditional ways of life and before they even realized what was happening, those ways were lost to them. By the time some individuals started to recognize the loss of their culture, the young generations were no longer

interested in learning. This is a heartbreaking story that was difficult to tell to my fourth graders. My hope is that the optimism of Howard Luke and his attempts to bring back his culture, and other culture bearers who pass on traditions is a balm to ease the pain of this story, and that offering activities that teach traditional skills along with this story will help the children feel that they are already making a difference by not letting the Athabascan culture die out. I do feel that it is important for the children to feel like progress is being made towards righting the wrongs of the past, and teaching them about traditional Native ways is one small way they can feel that. I also feel that it is important to confront painful events in our history so that mistakes are not repeated. I aimed to make my story and my unit rich with cultural experience so that my students can feel immersed in Athabascan culture, as I have felt while reading these accounts.

In order to give a historically accurate picture of the settling of Fairbanks, I relied heavily on two sources: *Crooked Past: History of a Frontier Mining Camp*, also published under the title, *E.T. Barnette: The Strange Story of the Man Who Founded Fairbanks* (Cole, T., 1991), and *Fairbanks: A Gold Rush Town that Beat the Odds* (Cole, D., 1999). *Crooked Past* is a meticulously researched history of the Fairbanks gold rush, with attention given to the perspectives and history of both well-known players such as E.T. and Isabelle Barnette, James Wickersham, and Felix Pedro, but also gives more information about such lesser-known characters as Jujiro Wada and Frank Cleary. I used *Crooked Past* in creating my vision of what Isabelle Barnette's experience of being left on the banks of the Chena River must have been like as well as other episodes relating to the Barnette family. *Fairbanks* gives a comprehensive history of Fairbanks which includes gold rush times, aviation, World War II, the boom and bust economy, and historical figures. I used this book more extensively in the last chapter of my story, as I discussed the growth of Fairbanks.

Felix Pedro is a figure that is never left out of the history of Fairbanks, yet often there is very little written about him. In order to help flesh out his character, I relied on a comprehensive biography that I found online at the Alaska Miner's Hall of Fame (Bundtzen, 1998). This biography discusses his home town of Fanano, Italy, which I personally visited in 2009. I used both my personal experience and information in the biography to describe where Pedro came from, and I used the Hall of Fame biography to describe his immigration to the United States and the travels that brought him to Alaska. Some aspects of his character and personality came from my own imagination.

Another aspect of my story that is seldom described in detail is the caribou fence. I found a wonderful description of such a fence in *The Alaska Native Reader* in a chapter by Charlene Khaih Zhuu Stern (2009). Not only does she describe the construction of the caribou fence and the terrain where it was built, but also the collective effort put forth by men, women, and children of multiple families, and the cooperation and forethought required to carry out such an operation. I used the caribou fence scene in my story to show the fluid nature of Athabascan communities – sometimes working together in large groups from different families and other times (as later in my story) living in smaller, more isolated family groups.

Two other sources that I used for reference in the writing and illustrating of my story were, *Benhti Kokht'ana Kenaga': Minto Lower Tanana Athabascan Pocket Dictionary* (Tuttle, 2009) and *A River's Many Faces: Depictions of Life on the Yukon River* (Farciot & Everette, 2021). I used the Athabascan pocket dictionary for naming my characters and finding certain words that are used in the story, and for the pronunciation guide to those words. The exception to this was the use and meaning of the word, "ch'eno" for which I used the definition found in *Crooked Past* (Cole, T., 1991). I used Athabascan words sparingly and tried to keep them to

words that would be easier to pronounce, since a detailed pronunciation guide would have been beyond the scope of this project to include. I struggled with naming my characters because I was not able to find any information about naming practices in the area, and the resources I used did not usually reveal people's Indigenous names. Bill Pfisterer notes in the introduction to *Shandaa: In my lifetime* that Indigenous names were usually not used publicly out of respect (Herbert & Pfisterer, 1982), which is likely why I did not find examples. However, it felt wrong for Tsuya to have a Western name because when she is introduced in the book her family has had little contact with outsiders. The word "tsuya" means "bird" according to the *Minto Lower Tanana Athabaskan Pocket Dictionary*, and I thought it would make a sweet name for my main character, and be easy to pronounce. A few other names are mentioned in the story and have more literal translations. Tsuya mentions the medicine man, Deyeneh, whose name means "medicine man," and her Aunt Sok'eya, whose name translates to "aunt" (Tuttle, 2009). Although these names are not likely to be historically representative, they add some Athabaskan words to my story and could conceivably be the names Tsuya would have called these people.

A River's Many Faces (Farciot & Everette, 2021) is a compilation of photographs of Athabascans who lived along the Yukon River between 1882 and 1885. I referenced this book both for accuracy in clothing and tool use in my illustrations, and I also studied the pictures in this book as a model of facial structures so that my Athabaskan characters would look distinguishable from my Caucasian characters. I was surprised, when studying the pictures in this book, to find that Athabascans dressed in western clothing much earlier than I would have expected. I reflected this finding in my illustrations.

4. Statement of Bias

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of this project, as well as its reason for existing, is the challenge of overcoming my own biases as a White woman in teaching Indigenous culture and history in a public-school setting. Much of the way I was taught and what I was taught in my formal education came from a colonizer's viewpoint, and that perspective has been ingrained in me and must be unlearned in order for me to re-frame history and understand cultures from a point of view that I can only imagine. I have been privileged to grow up in Alaska in the comfort of a modern home with every desired convenience, while also enjoying the gifts of the land- all of the pleasures that the hunting and gathering lifestyle provides, without the hardships faced by those people who actually depend upon that way of life for their survival. It is humbling to think of the many ways I have benefited from and been influenced by living near the beautiful culture of a people who have been pushed out of their traditional lands, abused, and dehumanized so that I could live unmolested in this extraordinary place.

Another bias I face is a ten-year relationship with Waldorf education. There are many things about Waldorf education that speak to me deeply as a teacher and as a parent, and I don't think I would have become a teacher if I had not found this method. All of my experience as a teacher has been connected with Waldorf education, including my teaching internship, which I completed at Boreal Sun. During the time I homeschooled my children there were aspects of the curriculum that made me feel vaguely uncomfortable, but it was often unclear to me why, and I often deferred to the commonly held belief among Waldorf teachers (especially those with less understanding of Waldorf education) that this was all deeply thought out, and that I should trust Rudolph Steiner, because often, when I dug deeper, I found reasoning that seemed right. However, there were also times in reading Steiner's indications and materials by other teachers

who interpreted his work where I did feel that Steiner, like most others of his time, held outdated beliefs that, as a parent, I could choose to ignore and instead teach in a way that felt more in line with today's and my own standards of morality and social justice. As a classroom teacher, I am compelled to look at these issues more critically, as I am influencing more than just my own children, and the potential for doing harm through colonist teachings is much greater. At the same time, I wonder how much harm was potentially indirectly done by not looking at these issues more closely when I taught my White sons with material that I still find problematic, but with a better sense of why it is a problem and with less confidence in some of Steiner's indications. The idea was brought up at Boreal Sun that perhaps the inherent racism presented in Waldorf education is good reason to renounce Steiner entirely, rather than simply cherry picking that which feels right, as I was able to do as a homeschooling parent. This is a question that I have grappled with this year, and which was the topic of contentious debate among the staff at my school. As for myself, I can safely say that I renounce any teachings by Rudolph Steiner that are racist or misogynistic in nature, and that it was my priority and intention to look critically at all aspects of the fourth-grade curriculum this year, though this project only focuses on a part of it. Moving forward, I intend to do the same in subsequent grades as I loop with my class.

5. Project Methodology

5.1 Setting

The success of place-based education is being felt in rural and urban areas alike. For this reason, schools across the state of Alaska are beginning to integrate place-based instruction into their curriculum. The issue of the Waldorf curriculum being out of sync with the time and place where we are teaching has come to the forefront at Boreal Sun Charter School, where I will be teaching 4th grade during the course of this project. Boreal Sun is a K-8 public charter school, where teachers loop with their students in grades 1-5 and 6-8. My first year with this class was their 3rd grade year, during which we were fully remote for three quarters of the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There were 24 students enrolled in the class, but one continued as a remote learner during the course of this project due to health issues in the family and the resulting need to stay out of school until COVID-19 vaccines become available to children under 12. The class was made up of 15 male and 10 female students. The students were between 9 and 10 years old. Three students identify themselves as Alaska Native.

During the schoolyear prior to the one in which this project took place, parents at Boreal Sun Charter School approached the school board and our school's governing body, the Academic Policy Committee (APC), with complaints about racist views of the Waldorf movement's founder, Rudolph Steiner, and with concerns that some of the aspects of anthroposophy, as taught by Rudolph Steiner could be influencing the way some teachers at the school are delivering materials and handling classroom management. Although the school's founders dispelled the notions of our school passing on any teachings that are religious in nature during the period of initiating the charter for the school with the school board, the board has since had a complete turnover of membership, and therefore expressed concerns about those particular

allegations from parents, requesting that the school put forward a plan for improvement in the areas of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and assure the school board that spiritual beliefs are not being taught by teachers at our school. In response, our school has begun a process that will continue throughout the year of offering training to the staff in DEI, as well as creating an official statement denouncing the racist views of Rudolph Steiner, adopting or creating a land acknowledgement statement, and creating a DEI council with the goal of addressing the immediate concerns and helping to create a safe environment for Boreal Sun's student body. Members of the school board have also visited our school and observed teachers and students at work.

5.2 Elements of the Project

5.2.1 The Story

Story telling is the backbone of the Waldorf curriculum. As an approach that seeks to utilize the child's spiritual nature while also developing free-thinking individuals, teaching through stories excites the child's mental activity in a way that allows concepts to remain flexible rather than creating fixed concepts (Steiner, 1996). In Alaska, teaching through stories is also a place-based approach, as it reflects Alaska Native storytelling traditions. The story I created was written in such a way that it could be read aloud or told in the oral tradition. I have also created chalkboard art that can serve as inspiration for other teachers' chalkboard drawings, or as illustrations for my story in published form.

My story, *Carried by the current: a history of Fairbanks, Alaska in the Tanana Valley*, centers the perspective of an Athabascan girl named Tsuya. The story covers a period of almost 100 years where we see Tsuya's family first living a traditional Athabascan lifestyle of hunting and gathering and gradually having more and more contact with outsiders. As the story

progresses, the perspective sometimes shifts to historical figures in order to tell the story of the founding of Fairbanks, but returns to Tsuya and her children, giving an idea of how Alaska Natives of the area were affected by the settling of Fairbanks, and how they interacted with the new town and the influx of people and industry. Issues that were of great importance to the Tanana Athabascans and Alaska Natives across the state such as disease, food shortages, and land claims issues play a central role in the narrative.

I tried to be as historically accurate as possible when presenting historical events in the story. For example, Chapter 7, which portrays the first meeting of the Tanana Chiefs, was written with the original transcript of the meeting as a primary source, and everything in quotations within that chapter is either a direct quote or a summary of longer quotes. I found myself surprised, when writing that chapter, by the concern that was expressed by Fairbanks representatives for preserving the Native way of life, as well as the priorities of the Alaska Natives and their plea for help from the U.S. government. I presented the meeting as closely as possible to what transpired without placing judgement, preferring to offer my readers a chance to come to their own conclusions. To counterbalance what could be seen (from the plea for help) as the Alaska Natives allowing outsiders to have too great an influence on their future, I made sure to give my fictional Native characters a great deal of agency in order to portray the Athabascans accurately as a people who have forged their own way into the future through education and a strong will to both preserve their traditions and to thrive in the modern, Westernized world.

Another place where my audience may question my narrative is in the experience given of boarding schools and participation in the Fairbanks economy. Although a great deal has been written about the atrocities of boarding schools in other parts of Alaska, as previously discussed in this paper, the biographical sources I used while writing this story did not describe such

conditions in the schools in the Tanana Valley. From what I gathered in my research, students in the Tanana Valley were not forcibly removed from their homes or forced to attend school against their will. School was described as being hard work, since students were expected to work for their food, and students were not allowed to speak their Native language, but since I did not find accounts of abuse by those who wrote memoirs in the Tanana Valley, I have not included them in my story. This is not to say that abuse did not occur or that conditions in schools were ideal. However, I only included in my story the type of accounts that I was able to find in biographical sources from the Tanana Valley, and did not invent situations in order to fulfill an expected narrative. I think it will be important, when my class studies Alaska as a whole, to discuss the boarding school experiences of Alaska Natives around the state to give a more comprehensive view of what school was like for Alaska Native children.

5.2.2 Annotated Bibliography

To assist teachers in conducting their own research of Alaska Native cultures and stories, as well as the history of Fairbanks, I have also created an annotated bibliography that includes resources that I found useful in teaching about the history of Fairbanks, and in giving the students a deeper experience with the people of this land, for example John Smelcer's, *The Raven and the Totem: Alaska Native Myths and Legends* (2015) for traditional Athabascan stories. Additionally, I included read-aloud book selections to give further examples of the Native experience of Interior Alaska with books such as, *The Way of Our People* (1997) and *At the Mouth of the Luckiest River* (1995), both by Arnold Griese.

5.2.3 Student Activities

The main activities in this block were inspired by the Storypath (also known as Storyline) approach (McGuire, 1997; Tarrant, 2019). After telling the first chapter of the story, I gave them

an idea of where the story was going to go and what characters would come into it, and asked students to create a character. I gave them a list of questions to help them decide who their character is, who lives with them, what their primary occupation is, and where they live. Students made visual representations of their character with paper dolls (template was provided) and then used the question sheet to write a paragraph about their character.

As a class we made a large map of the Tanana Valley including the Yukon and Tanana Rivers. I penciled in where the rivers would go and the students worked together to paint the rivers blue. We added dots for Alaska Native Villages and labeled them with their names.

For the next activity, students thought about what kind of home their character would live in and decided where they wanted their character to live. They made their shelters out of paper and placed them on the map. This activity took an interesting turn when students started having arguments along the lines of, “We wanted this to be a small village with just our friends, but they are putting their houses too close to us,” or “I wanted my character to live alone out here in the wilderness, but he put a cabin where I imagined my hunting area to be.” In essence, the students found themselves living out the same land claims issues that were faced historically by the Alaska Natives. The students wanted me to intervene and put down boundaries or make rules about properties or village planning, but I told them that there were no such rules back then, so I could not protect their Native villages from prospectors who wanted to put up a cabin. We had several great class discussions surrounding this issue, including how different groups of people view land ownership. Most students were easily able to make the connection between what they were experiencing and what the Alaska Natives experienced, but a few students had a hard time moving past their feelings that another student had wronged them by coming into their space on the paper.

The last major activity associated with the story was the creation of a newspaper page. I gave the students a large (11"x17") paper made to look like the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner with several elements outlined. First, students wrote a news story that tied in with what they heard in my story or from other sources of information that we had about the time period. They drew a picture to go with their story. Next, they drew a picture of their character based on the paper doll they made earlier and wrote an opinion piece from their character's perspective regarding the news story they wrote. They also interviewed another student in the class about their story in order to get another character's opinion about the issue. Last, they had two boxes in which they could create either an advertisement or an announcement that was historically relevant.

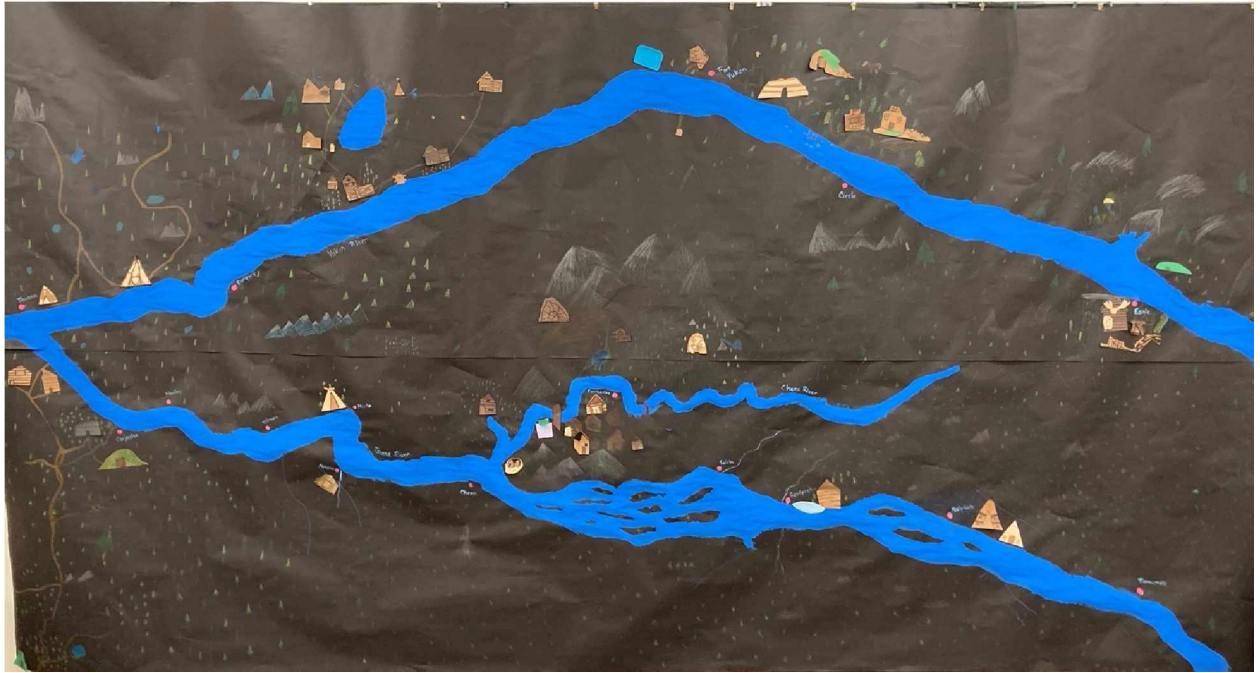
In addition to the work we did surrounding the story, I collaborated with our school's handwork teacher, Mrs. Collins, to guide the students through a Native beadwork project. The students learned the traditional two-needle style of beading, working on felt cloth (rather than the traditional moosehide.) We completed this project during our handwork time (two 40-minute lessons per week) over the course of about three weeks.

Throughout the year, we participated in field trips that related to this block. In December, as part of a main lesson block on traditional Athabascan stories and ways of life, we visited the Museum of the North for a special exhibit on Alaska Native Artwork. During our block on Fairbanks history, we went to Fort Knox gold mine and to Gold Dredge 8 so that students could learn about open pit gold mining and placer mining. They had the opportunity to pan for gold and go home with a few flakes. We tried to schedule a trip on the Riverboat Discovery but unfortunately, the Riverboat was too short-staffed to do field trips this year due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

For our final activity, I borrowed a kit from UAF's Museum of the North that gave us materials to put on a play of Fairbanks History. The script and costumes were provided in the kit, and the students performed the play as a reader's theater for a few other classes and also for their parents and family members. This play was the more traditional telling of the history of the town from the perspective of the prospectors and others who settled here. It did mention some of the issues that were important to Alaska Natives, but that was not the focus of the play. After our parent performance, we invited family members to come into the classroom to see our map, character outlines, and newspaper stories.

Other activities that we did not get to but could be incorporated into this block include: a hike on Ester Dome or Murphy Dome so students could see sweeping views of the Tanana Valley such as the view Felix Pedro would have seen while prospecting and that the local Athabascans would have long been accustomed to; a canoe float down the Chena River; a bike trip through downtown Fairbanks; a visit to the Alaska Room at Anne Wein, which was closed this year due to Covid-19; the Morris Thompson Cultural Center; a Native art exhibit; a visit by an Alaska Native Elder to the class to teach a skill or tell a story. One possible project that could be led by a guest such as this would be smoking salmon or preparing another traditional food. We did have the privilege of hosting an Alaska Native storyteller at one point in the year, which was a wonderful experience.

Student Work Samples



5.3 Time Frame

The story I wrote could be told in installments, twice per week for four weeks, as would be the typical flow of a Waldorf main lesson presentation. It could also be read faster as a read-aloud, or could be read by individual students at their own pacing.

I taught this as my final unit of fourth grade in spring of 2022, so I wrote the story between January and April of that year. Once the school year was over, I reflected on how the story unfolded and made adjustments where necessary and then put everything together for a final review during summer session of 2022.

5.4 Limitations

One major limiting factor in this project was time. Because I needed to present the story to my students before the end of the year, I only had until April to finish the story. Writing a story of this length turned out to be harder than I thought it would be and I found that when the time came to tell my story to my students, I was two chapters shy of the full story that I had planned. Part of this was also due to wanting to tailor the end of the story to what the students needed and also gauge how able they would be to understand complex issues like land claims. After watching them go through their own version of land claims issues, I decided that they would be able to handle the chapter I had planned about the Tanana Chiefs conference. I was able to write that chapter while teaching the unit, but the end of the school year and all of the extra activities that come with it prevented me from having time to tell the last chapter. I plan to make up for this deficit by reading my students the finished story at the beginning of next year, especially because they became fascinated with the fact that I was writing a story and expressed an interest in seeing/hearing it in its finished form.

I am also limited by perspectives: my own, and those that are readily available to me. My own perspective, though it can be broadened through research, is ultimately limited to my own experiences. In researching the perspectives of others, I found that I needed to rely a great deal on those perspectives that have already been recorded and published. I did not have a great deal of time to seek out and form relationships with Alaska Natives who may have other memories or accounts from the time period I researched, so I had to depend upon the research that has already been done to gather those perspectives. I was able to include Alaska Natives during the course of teaching this year, in order to bring cultural activities to my students, but on a more limited scale than I had hoped. Our school hosted a Tlingit storyteller, which my students enjoyed, and an Alaska Native artist visited my class to help with bead work. I had hoped to connect with Interior Athabascans to have them review my work for feedback, but despite reaching out to several individuals, I was unable to find an Interior Athabaskan who was willing. Other Alaska Natives that I reached out to felt that they were not qualified because they are not Athabaskan or their families are not from the immediate area. One person explained to me that most of the Athabascans from this area died of disease and those who did not moved to Minto. I was, unfortunately, unable to connect with any Indigenous person who was willing to give feedback on my work.

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