The Wider World & Scrimshaw Teacher Resources

new bedford
whaling museum

The Wider World & Scrimshaw is organized by the New Bedford Whaling Museum

June 14-November 11, 2024

https://www.whalingmuseum.org/exhibitions/wider-world-and-scrimshaw-content/

The *Wider World & Scrimshaw* exhibit takes the New Bedford Whaling Museum's scrimshaw collection (objects carved by whalers on the byproducts of marine mammals) and places it in conversation with carved decorative arts and material culture made by Indigenous community members from across the Pacific world and Arctic. Native communities across Oceania, the Pacific, and Arctic have cosmologies related to whales, distinctive maritime traditions involving marine mammals, and vibrant carving styles. They were also impacted by commercial whaling ventures, and the external pressures from colonialism and Western exploration.

This interdisciplinary, community-driven, and collections-focused project engages questions about identity, place, and material, and considers how exploration and whaling impacted the production of material culture in this diverse region between 1700 and today. The exhibition showcases over 300 objects, paying particular attention to ones that indicate cultural and material exchanges. How did Pacific world communities encounter whalers and influence items produced, and how did whaling (internal and external) impact these communities and their unique art forms?

Open-ended questions probe visitor expectations about different cultural products from Oceanic material culture and Arctic carvings to engraved sperm whale teeth, and explore issues related to trade, markets, taste, and patterns of popular consumption; assumptions about materials (coconut shells, whale teeth, walrus ivory, human hair), their circulation, and animal agency; differences between cultural and commercial value systems; disciplinary hierarchies related to craft traditions, folk-art, anthropology, and "fine" art; and gender roles, for making and consumption.

A diverse advisory board contributed to this exhibit and helped explore the rich cultural traditions, carving forms, and material exchanges that emerged and were shaped by cultural contact across the Pacific world over the past three centuries.

This resource guide includes selected objects, images, and text from the exhibit. Student activities are also available as printable worksheet pages.

Sperm Whale Teeth

Sperm whales have about 46 teeth, which were prized for scrimshaw. After extracting the teeth from the whale's mouth, they were scraped smooth and polished. Crewmen kept, traded, or decorated them as personal souvenirs or for the mass market. They made designs freehand or with a template. Artists copied popular visual culture from magazines, others pictured what they saw at sea. Engraved whale teeth are considered an iconic scrimshander's artform and the pinnacle of whaling art.

The exhibit includes 25 teeth made by documented Black, Cape Verdean, Azorean, New England, Māori, and Australian Aboriginal makers depicting Arctic or Pacific Island landscapes. Some identify where the whale was taken, as in "near the Galapagos" or "near Juan Fernandez." One records the successful capture of a sperm whale on January 7, 1836, off the coast of New Zealand by a whaleman from Wiscasset, Maine. These teeth demonstrate how whalers traveled across the Pacific and highlight individual exploits or identities.

Whaling crew lists record hundreds of names of men born in the Pacific, from New South Wales, Tasmania, New Zealand, and Peru, to Guam, Chile, Tahiti, Sandwich Islands, and Australia. These individuals are almost all described as dark, Black, or brown. Whaleships were interesting spaces. While not absent the racism that defined the Euro-American worldview, they required order, followed a strict hierarchy, and ability was rewarded. No matter his color, a skilled man could get ahead on the right whaleship.

Explore:

Look carefully at this carved sperm whale tooth and answer the questions below.

Aboriginal maker once known (Aboriginal Australian, possibly Eden), Dreamtime tooth, 1800s. Engraved sperm whale ivory, 2 5/8 x 5 1/4 in., New Bedford Whaling Museum, 00.195.47.

1. Describe what you see carved on the tooth.

2. What is happening in the image?

3. What do you want to know about the person who carved the tooth?

The “Dream Tooth” was likely executed by an Australian Aboriginal whaler, perhaps from Eden, an area on the South Coast of New South Wales. Whaling ships operated around Eden starting in 1791, and the first shore whaling venture founded in 1828 employed local Thawa Aboriginal people. The tooth pictures six men sailing a proa (boat). One wields a harpoon. A sperm whale lurks beneath. On the other side, a man stands aloft with a boomerang in flight. The outlines are distinctively patterned.

How does this description change your understanding of the carving?

Look carefully at these carved sperm whale teeth.

What do you notice? What do you wonder?

Maker once known, pear and flower tooth, ca. 1850. Engraved sperm whale ivory, 2 3/8 x 1 x 6 in., New Bedford Whaling Museum, 2001.100.144.

Maker once known, view of Huahine, Society Islands, 1800s. Engraved sperm whale ivory, 2 3/8 x 7 3/4 in., New Bedford Whaling Museum, 2001.100.1410.

Moses R. Denning (ME, US, 1806-1884), Moses Denning tooth, ca. 1840s. Engraved sperm whale ivory, 3 5/8 x 2 1/4 x 10 1/8 in., New Bedford Whaling Museum, 2001.100.581.

Create:

What would you carve on a sperm whale tooth?

Consider:

What choices did you make about your carving?

How did the shape of the sperm whale tooth influence your carving?

What would someone else need to know to understand your carving?

Explore More:

New Bedford Whaling Museum Scrimshaw Art Activity
https://www.whalingmuseum.org/classroom-tool/scrimshaw-art/

Mystic Seaport Museum Scrimshaw Resource Set
https://educators.mysticseaport.org/sets/scrimshaw/

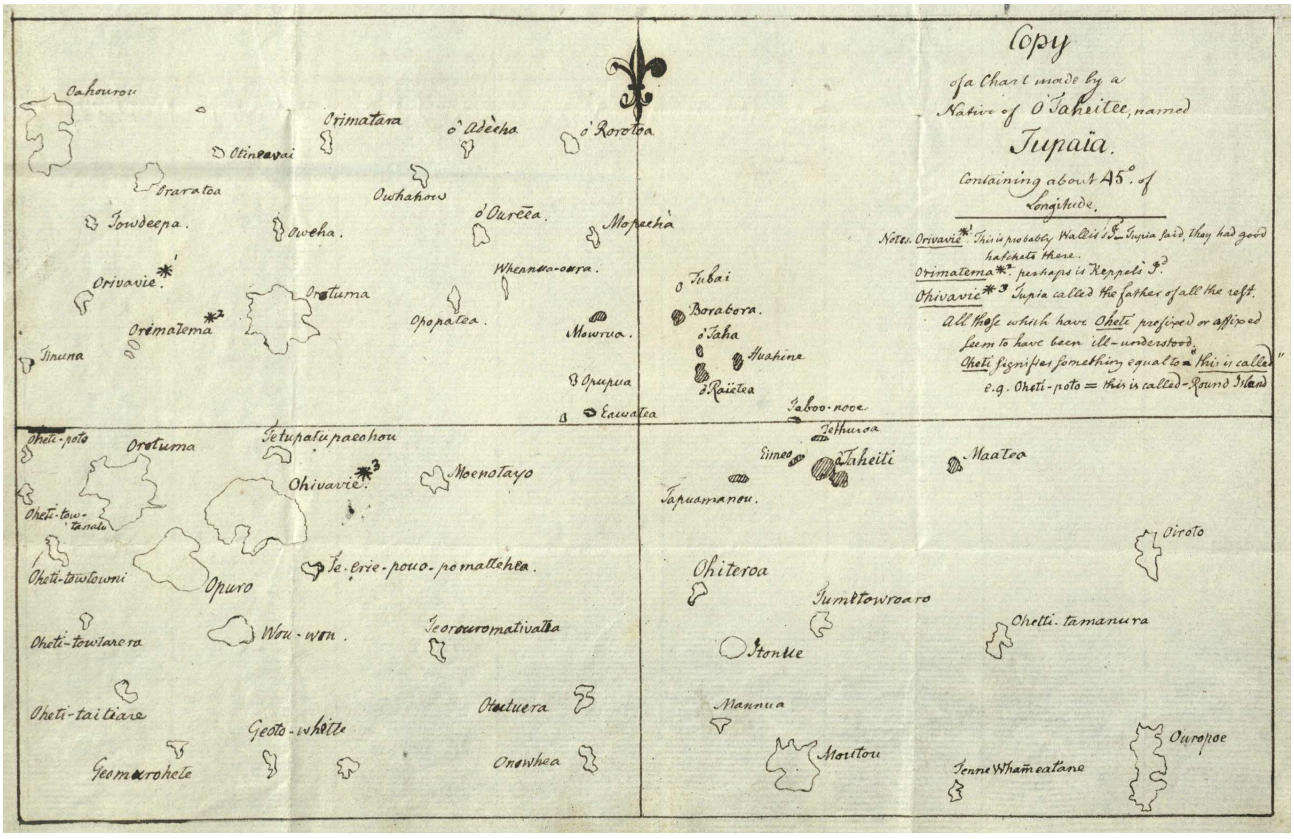
Mapping and Indigenous Knowledge

This exhibit uses a combination of historic and contemporary maps to explore relationships between people, animals, and places.

Our spatial and ecological relationship to our surroundings, how we "know" the world and imagine our place within it, is informed by our culture. Maps are symbolic interpretations of space that demonstrate different relationships, like the communal, political, topographical, or ecological. They are symbolic and often informed by choices or biases.

Explore:

Look carefully at this map and answer the questions below.



Tupaia (Ra'iātea, 1725-1770), "Chart of the Society Islands, with Otaheite [Tahiti] in the Center," July-August 1769. From *Charts and Maps Made During the Voyage of Discovery in the South Pacific Ocean, by Captain James Cook, Commander of the Endeavour, in 1769 and 1770*. Image courtesy of the British Library Archive, Add. 21593 C.

1. What symbols do you recognize on this map?

2. What do the lines and shapes mean to you?

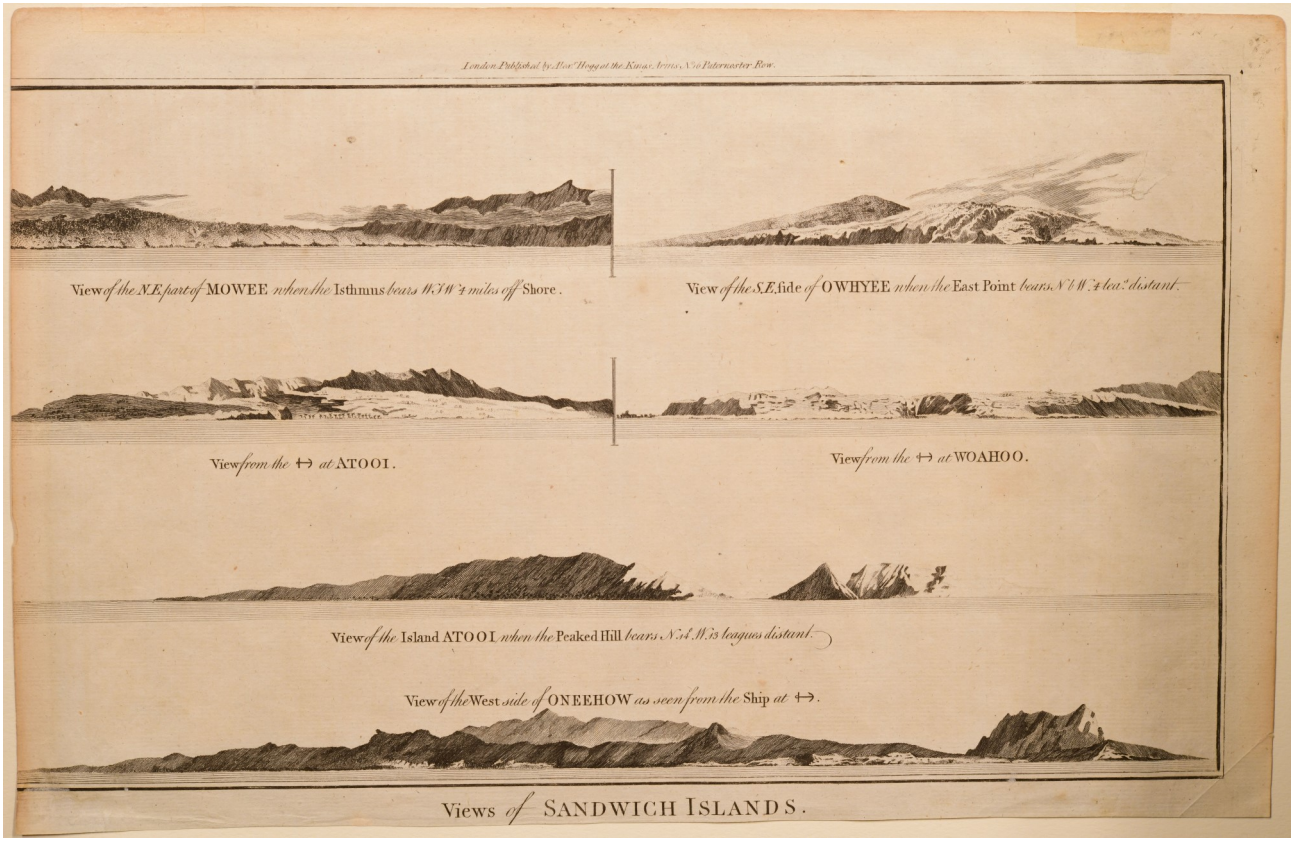
3. What would you need to know to use this map for navigation?

Tupaia's map is sophisticated wayfinding, based on the careful transference of generational knowledge, continuity of tradition, and oral storytelling. It is not organized by a European standard of measurement or cardinal directions. Because of this, for 200 years Europeans thought it was wrong. This map affirms Pacific Islanders' strong sense of place within their oceanic world.

Tupaia (c. 1725-1770), a navigator and priest from the island of Raʻiātea, made this map of over 70 islands for English mariner James Cook around 1769. The map represents a conversation between an Indigenous navigator and a Western explorer with differing perspectives on how to organize time and space. Look at the map. Notice the placement of the islands and distortion of space between them. Notice how Tupaia's home, the island of Raʻiātea, is the center of the map? Today, we know Tahiti to be the center of commerce and government, but for Tupaia, his home island was the spiritual center all other islands were organized around. He and ancient navigators of the past would have oriented their voyages as sailing in and out of Raʻiātea, using the shape of the islands to tell us where the best harbor to sail into would be located. Some islands may seem farther away because of the strong currents that make voyaging to them long and difficult. Other islands that may physically be farther away might be a less difficult journey because strong favorable winds push you in their direction. How would you map this? – Terava Kaʻanapu Casey, Kanaka Maoli and Māʻohi historian

How does this information change your understanding of this map?

Look carefully at "Views of Sandwich Islands" and answer the questions below.



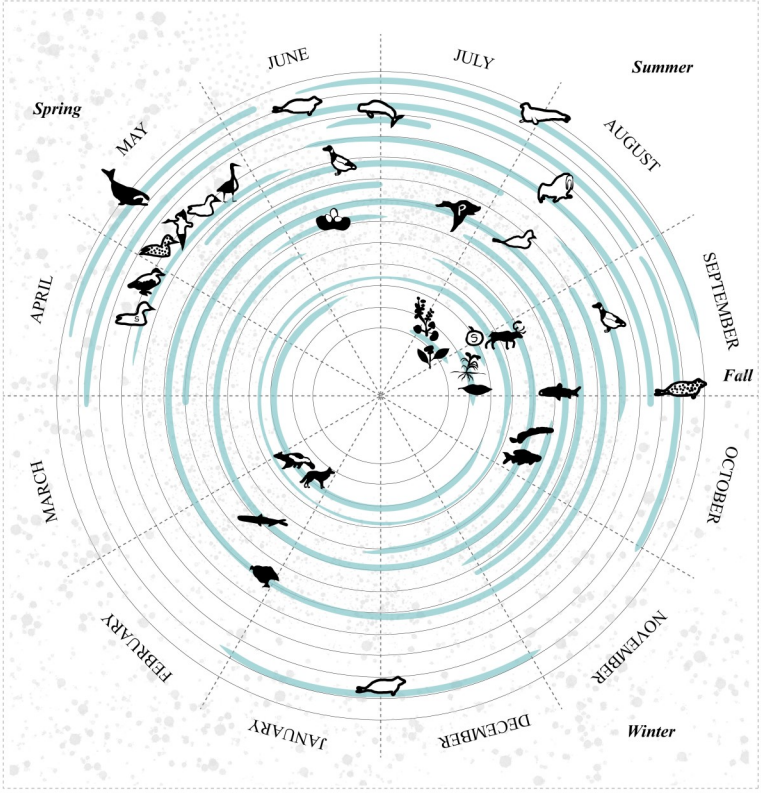
William Bligh (UK, 1754-1817), "Views of Sandwich Islands, Mowee, Owhyhee, Atooi, Woahoo, Oneehow," ca. 1786. Copper-plate engraving, 8 1/2 x 14 1/4 in., New Bedford Whaling Museum, 2001.100.7049.

1. What symbols or shapes do you recognize?
2. Why might a sailor draw islands from this perspective?
3. How is this view of islands in the Pacific Ocean different from Tupaia's map? How is it similar?

The Sandwich Islands are also known as Hawai'i. How does this change your understanding of the map?

Beginning in the 1790s, New England whalers began hunting whales in the Pacific, from Peru to Aotearoa (New Zealand). Merchants and Christian missionaries followed. The latter arrived in the region in 1797, bringing a new religion and moral and social order. Sometimes these individuals stayed, had families, and adapted to Island life. Other times tensions erupted. By 1850, over 100 whaling vessels visited Hawai'i annually. US consulates were established in Fiji in 1844, Samoa in 1856, and the Marshall Islands in 1881. Across the Pacific, ports like Lahaina, Paita, Huahine, and Apia attracted US whalers, who traded goods, signed on crew, established expatriate communities, and collected souvenirs.

Look carefully at this seasonal round (ecological calendar) for the community of Ulġuniq (Wainwright, Alaska) and answer the questions below.



This figure illustrates a seasonal round (ecological calendar) for the community of Ulġuniq (Wainwright, Alaska) with insightful contributions, direct participation and generosity of the leadership and community members of Wainwright, Alaska.

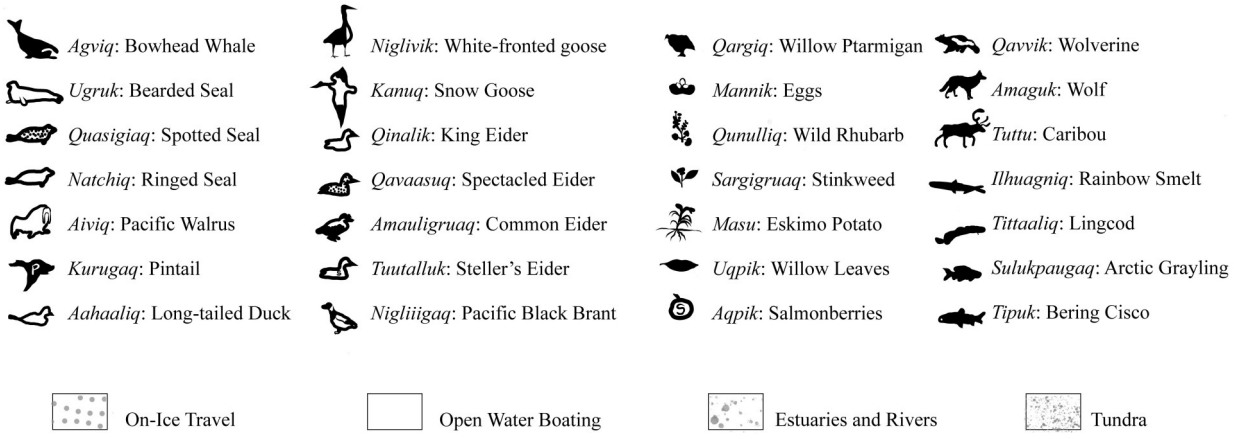
Published in "Role of Biodiversity in Ecological Calendars and its implications for Food Sovereignty: Empirical assessment of the resilience of indicator species to anthropogenic climate change." Kassam, K.A.S. & Bernardo, J. (2022) Department of Natural Resources; the Environment and American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA; Department of Biology, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, USA.

1. What symbols do you recognize on this map?

2. How does this map combine time and place?

3. What knowledge do you bring to your understanding of this map?

How does this key change your understanding of the map?



Indigenous communities have long histories with marine mammals, including walrus and whales, from harvesting the bodies and bones that wash up on the shore to coastal hunting practices. Subsistence traditions are done in concert with the regional ecosystem but are often in conflict with Federal laws and regulations that aim to protect marine mammals from widespread hunting.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act passed in 1972 prohibits taking of marine mammals—including harassment, hunting, capturing, or killing—in US waters and by US citizens on the high seas. This includes whales, dolphins, seals, sea lions, walruses, polar bears, sea otters, and manatees. Most widespread conservation legislation, like the MMPA, treats communities the same, cutting Native people off from traditional lifeways. In most cases, the burden is placed on Indigenous communities to self-organize, petition, or sue Federal and state entities to allow them to continue sustainable hunting practices.

After sustained activism, the Iñupiat achieved the right to hunt bowhead whales in 1998, Native Alaskans regained walrus hunting rights at Qayassiq in 1997, in 2024 the Aquinnah Wampanoag successfully claimed the right to harvest and bury a right whale that washed ashore dead on Noepe (Martha's Vineyard), and in 2024 Indigenous leaders of Aotearoa (New Zealand), Otaheite (Tahiti), Pule'anga Fakaru'i 'o Tonga (Tonga), and Kūki 'Airani (Cook Islands) signed a treaty granting whales legal personhood. The Makah have been fighting since 2005 to sustainably hunt gray whales in the Pacific Northwest (a right protected by an 1855 treaty) and still do not have a final decision.

These examples demonstrate how, despite food scarcity and traditional ecological practices that mirror the demands of western scientific conservation, Native people continue to face challenges to their sovereignty and way of life. In the past five years, Federal bodies and western science has begun to recognize Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) as an integral tool towards achieving sustainable ecological relationships. TEK is the on-going accumulation of practice, knowledge, and belief about relationships between living beings in a specific ecosystem acquired by Indigenous people over thousands of years through direct contact with the environment and handed down through generations. The future of conservation will, hopefully, increasingly be an effort of partnership and shared custodianship.

Create:

Draw a map of a place that is important to you.

Consider:

What did you include? What did you leave out?

What would someone else need to know to understand your map?

How else could this place be represented on a map?

Explore More:

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Teaching Resource: First Collisions
https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/learn/for-educators/teaching-resources/teaching-resource-first-collisions

Mātauranga Land of Voyagers
https://maatauranga.co.nz/index01.html

Exploring Our Fluid Earth: Teaching Science as Inquiry—Traditional Ways of Knowing: Polynesian Stick Charts
https://manoa.hawaii.edu/exploringourfluidearth/physical/navigation-and-transportation/wayfinding-and-navigation/traditional-ways-knowing-polynesian-stick-charts

Seeing Each Other | Seeing Ourselves

US and European prints, paintings, and publications demonstrate an interest in solidifying the myth of discovery and conquest of the Pacific world through visual means. Such scenes constructed visual imaginaries about far-off territories colonial audiences would never physically reach, and regularly primitivize Indigenous cultural groups and traffic in Native stereotypes. Rarer examples turn the mirror back, revealing how explorers, whalers, and other colonizers were seen and recorded on the visual and material culture produced by Indigenous makers.

A walrus tusk shows reindeer, seals, and whales, Iñupiaq hunters with firearms on dog sleds and fishing from umiaqs, and US whaling ships and whalers. A group of mission school drawings by Iñupiaq children record the intimacies of community life. These illuminate communities from within, presenting a rich counterpoint to traditional settler colonial histories, and — in so doing — they emphasize survivance and futurity. Such objects question the directions of the gaze (who looks at who), and reframe cultural contact as a space of negotiation and exchange that is not in the past but continues today.

Explore:

Look carefully at this drawing and answer the questions below.

Iñupiaq makers once known (Inuit nunaat), possibly Port Clarence Mission School, *Iñupiaq men holding cultural belongings*, ca. 1890. Pencil and ink on paper, 3 1/2 x 7 7/8 in., New Bedford Whaling Museum, 1914.35.4.

1. Describe what you see in the drawing.

2. What is happening in the image?

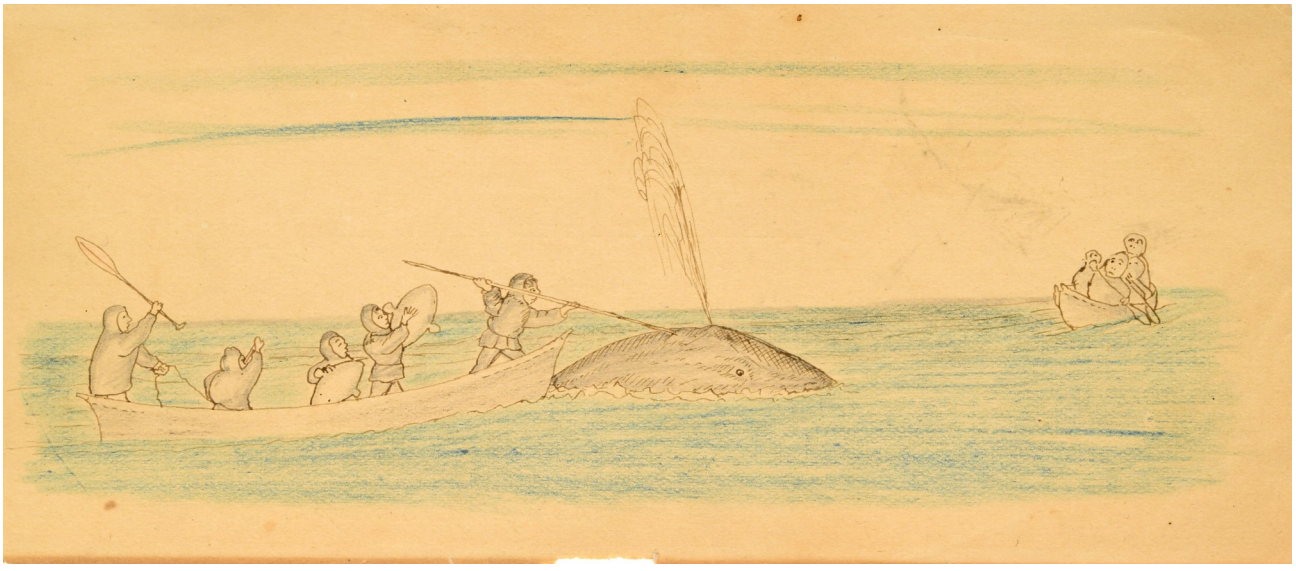
3. What do you want to know about the person who drew the image?

These drawings were probably made by students of Tom and Ellen Lopp, who staffed a mission school on the Seward Peninsula in the 1890s. The school worked to assimilate Iñupiat children and youth, and the drawings were used as evidence of their success. But the pictures have more complex meanings. For the Iñupiaq, adapting to changing circumstances is a centuries-old tradition. Pictures like these might best be understood as adapting traditional ways of sharing information about Iñupiaq life to new media. – Elizabeth Hutchinson, Barnard College

How does knowing this drawing might have been made by a student at a mission school change your understanding of the image?

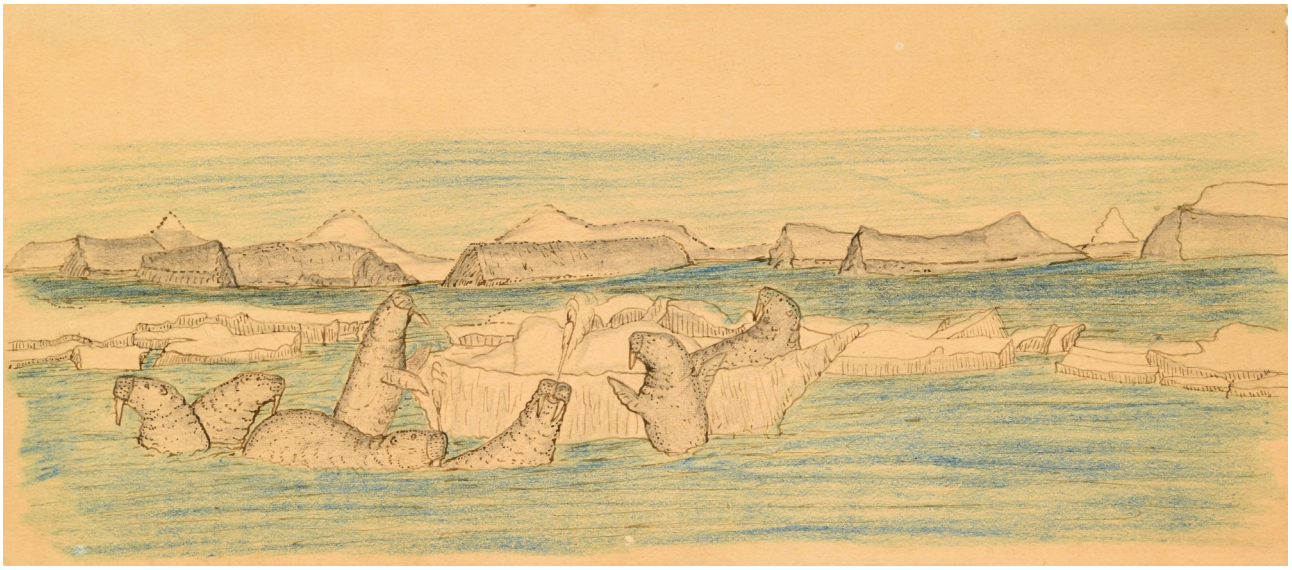
Look carefully at these drawings.

What do you notice? What do you wonder?



Iñupiaq makers once known (Inuit nunaat), possibly Port Clarence Mission School, *Whale Hunt*, ca. 1890. Pencil and ink on paper, 3 1/2 x 7 7/8 in., New Bedford Whaling Museum, 1914.35.13.

Iñupiaq makers once known (Inuit nunaat), possibly Port Clarence Mission School, *Iñupiaq woman and child*, ca. 1890. Pencil and ink on paper, 3 1/2 x 7 7/8 in., New Bedford Whaling Museum, 1914.35.10.



Iñupiaq makers once known (Inuit nunaat), possibly Port Clarence Mission School, *Walruses*, ca. 1890. Pencil and ink on paper, 3 1/2 x 7 7/8 in., New Bedford Whaling Museum, 1914.35.14.

Create:

Draw a picture of your life today.

Consider:

What did you include? What did you leave out?

What did you choose to share about your life in the drawing?

How would the picture change if you knew people from other places would see it?

Explore More:

Messages across Time and Space: Inupiat Drawings from the 1890s at Columbia University https://edblogs.columbia.edu/AHISG4862_001_2015_1/

New York Times "War against the Children" The Native American boarding school system – a decades-long effort to assimilate Indigenous people before they ever reached adulthood – robbed children of their culture, family bonds and sometimes their lives. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/08/30/us/native-american-boarding-schools.html

Washington Post They Took the Children The Hidden Legacy of Indian Boarding Schools in the United States https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2024/american-indian-boarding-schools-history-legacy/

Nunavut Animation Lab: Qalupalik
https://www.nfb.ca/film/nunavut_animation_lab_qalupalik/