

ADVENTURES ~ in ~ TRADING



By Patricia Partnow · Illustrated by Dan Miller



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- *in* -
TRADING

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Alaska Native Education Program, North Slope Borough School District

BARROW, ALASKA

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North Slope Borough School District
Barrow, Alaska

ISBN-13: 978-1-59549-007-0
ISBN-10: 1-59549-007-8

A publication of the Alaska Native Education Program
North Slope Borough School District
Funded by the U.S. Dept. of Education Grant #S356A060013

Based on information from Arctic John Etalook (Itaalluk) recorded
and compiled by Grant Spearman in affiliation with the North Slope
Borough Commission on Inupiat History, Language and Culture,
and the Simon Paneak Memorial Museum, Anaktuvuk Pass,
Alaska. Rewritten for students by Patricia H. Partnow.

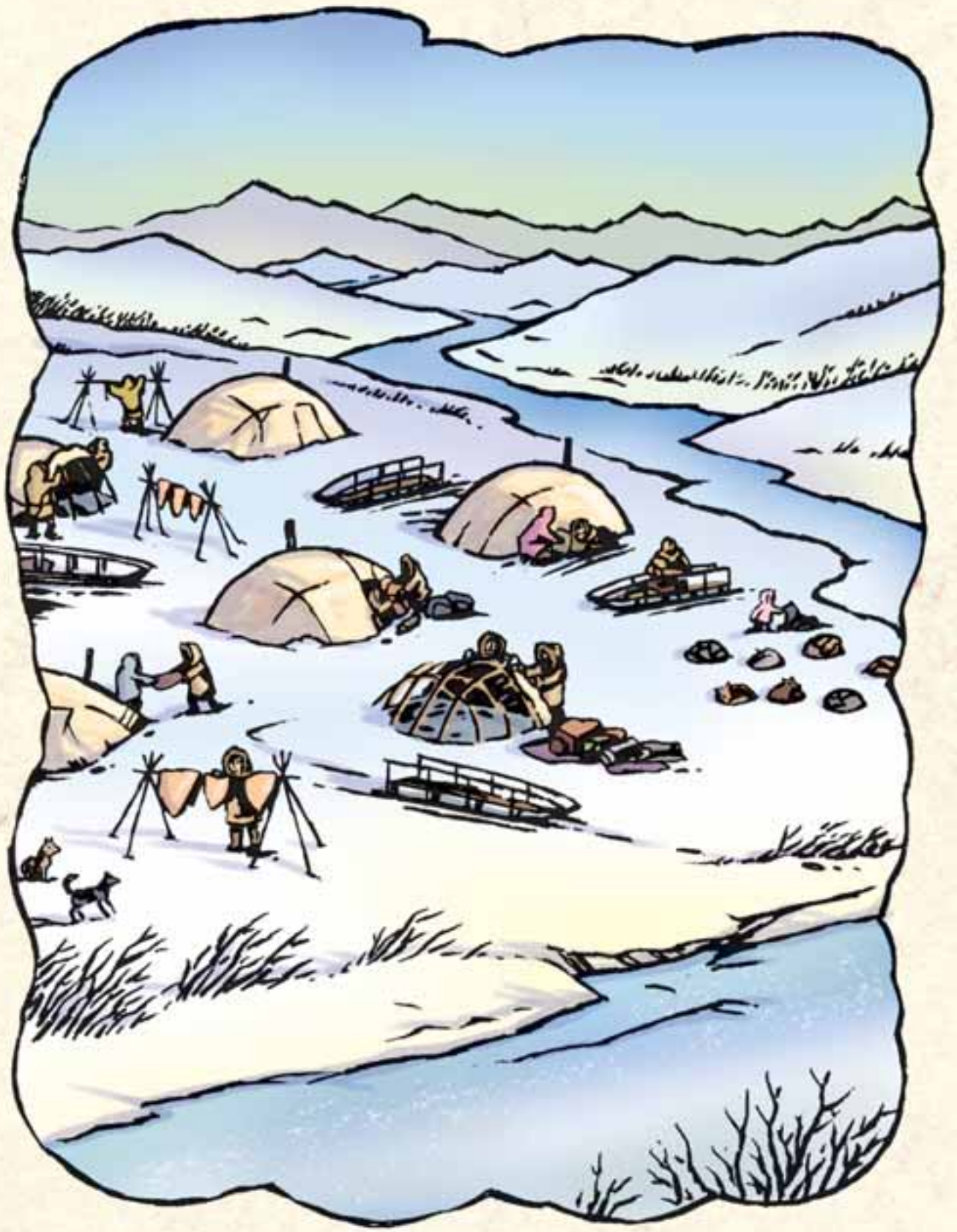
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Designed and produced by Visible Ink, Inc., Anchorage, Alaska

Printed in China



*To Arctic John Etalook,
a Nunamiu from the northcentral
Brooks Range of Arctic Alaska,
who lived the life that
Adventures in Trading tells.*

*Arctic John devoted hundreds of hours
describing the details of everyday
life in the early 1900s so that children
of the North Slope could understand
and appreciate their heritage.*



PART 1

ITAAĽĽUK GOES TO NIGLIQ

*It is springtime.
The year is 1900, though the Nunamiut family of
young Itaattuk does not use calendars.*

*The family breaks camp for their trip north from the
Brooks Range to the Arctic coast. They're going
to the Nigliq trade fair held every year
at the mouth of the Colville River.*



They travel for days down frozen rivers.



*When the geese start flying overhead
and the ptarmigan start turning brown,
they know the ice will soon break up on the river.*



They hurry to their boat cache camp – Uqsrukuvik – where they have stored their umiaq frames all winter.

Here they will wait for the river ice to melt.



They lash the skin covers onto their umiaqs...



and sew new clothes.



They practice dancing...



and they fish for grayling through the ice.



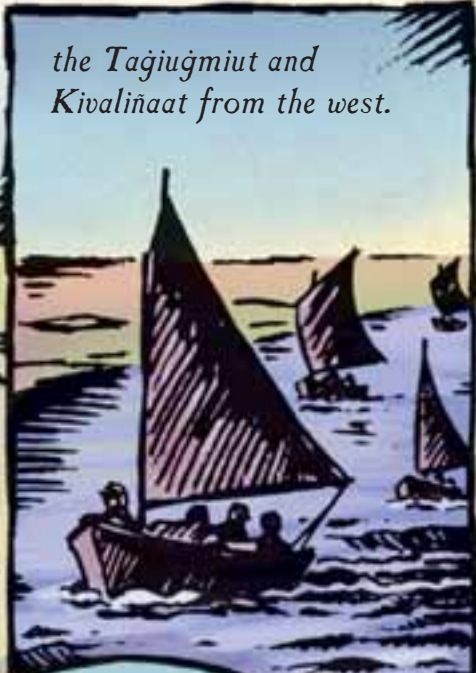
Finally! The ice is out! They float down the river to the coast...



Itaattuk's Nunamiut family arrives early with the first group of inlanders. They quickly unload their boats and pitch their tents.

They wait for their trading partners...

the Tagiugmiut and Kivaliñaat from the west.



There might also be some Itqilich from south of the Brooks Range.



And Inuit from the east, beyond the Mackenzie River in Canada.



They haven't seen their partners for a whole year! When they arrive, Itaattuk's family helps them unload their boats.

*The people gather to celebrate day and night.
The sun never goes down, and the people only stop
feasting and dancing when they're too tired to move.*



*Itaattuk's family gets up the next day after a good sleep.
His uncle Paamiu is anxious to start trading.*



And the men have also hunted caribou,



foxes,

marmots,

wolves,

grizzly bear,

wolverines,

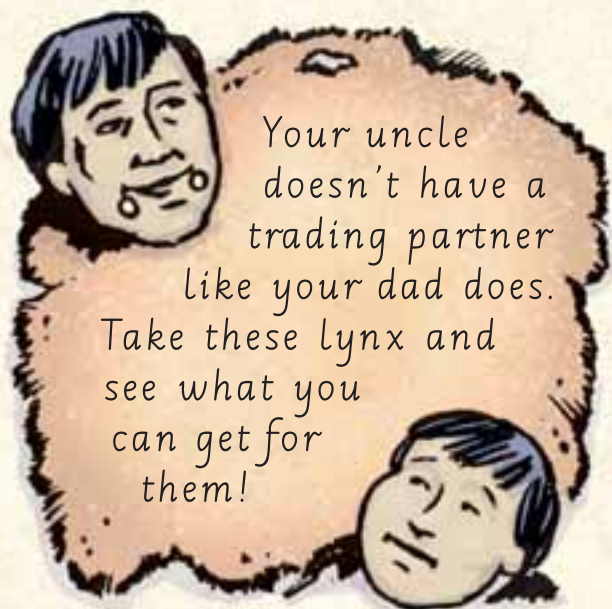
and sheep.



*The women have scraped the furs.
They have made strong sinew
thread from the tendons.*



Your uncle
doesn't have a
trading partner
like your dad does.
Take these lynx and
see what you
can get for
them!





I'm Itaattuk, son of Aqsiataaq. My uncle says you might want these lynx.

Mmm...not today.



Naumi



Naagga



No



Finally, at the fifth tent...

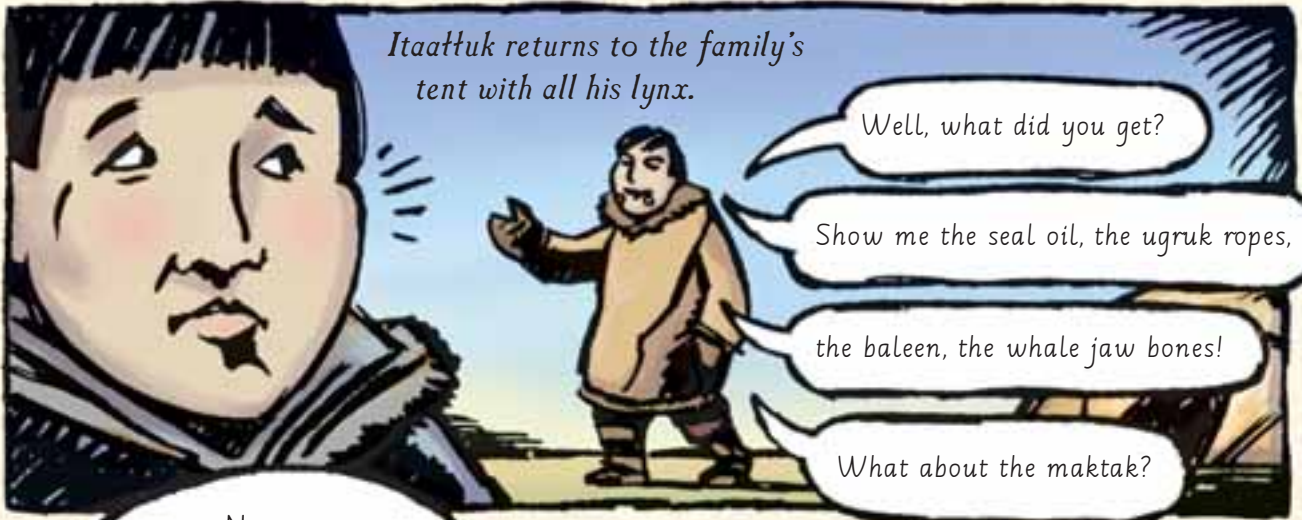
OK, here. I'll give you this bag of flour for a lynx pelt.

Itaattuk thinks: That's not enough for several days of trapping, and three more to prepare each skin.

As Itaattuk sadly walks away, the coastal trader calls out to him:

You know, it's Sunday! You shouldn't trade on a Sunday. The preachers tell us this is the day we devote to God, not trade.





Itaattuk returns to the family's tent with all his lynx.

Well, what did you get?

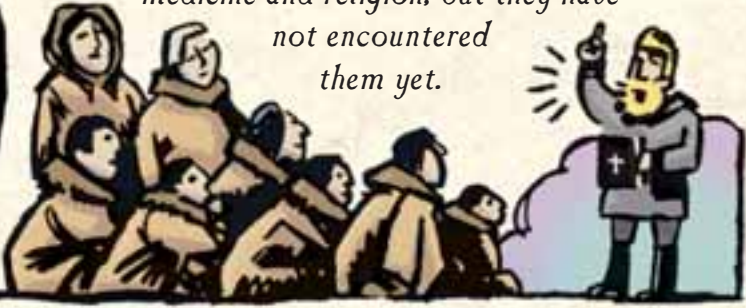
Show me the seal oil, the ugruk ropes, the baleen, the whale jaw bones!

What about the maktak?



No one would trade with me. They said it's Sunday and they don't trade on Sunday.

Itaattuk's parents have heard about the new Tanik preachers who have come north with medicine and religion, but they have not encountered them yet.



The next day, Itaattuk's father Aqsiataaq barter with his trading partner.

His uncle urges the boy to try again with his lynx pelts.

OK



Today, the *Tagiugmiut* ARE willing to trade those things that *Itaattuk's* family needs to survive.



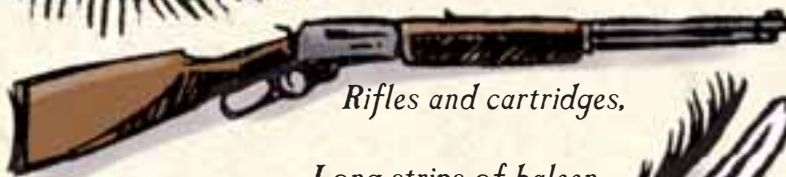
Maktak and rope made of walrus or sealskin



Waterproof boots of sealskin



Walrus ivory for making fishing lures and other tools.



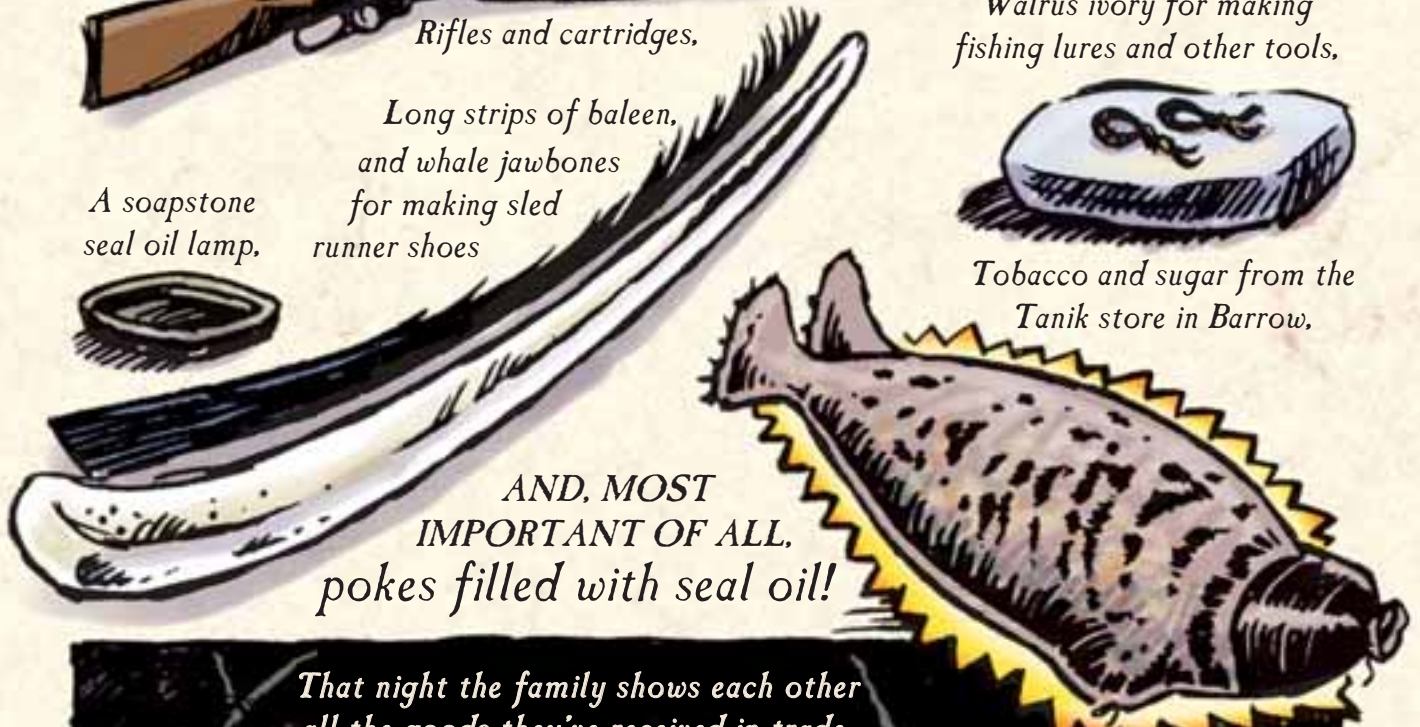
Rifles and cartridges.

Long strips of baleen, and whale jawbones for making sled runner shoes

A soapstone seal oil lamp.



Tobacco and sugar from the Tanik store in Barrow.



AND, MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL, pokes filled with seal oil!

That night the family shows each other all the goods they've received in trade.



The next day, Itaattuk's Nunamiut family talks with coastal Tagiugmiut who have become Christians.



Soon Itaattuk understands why their coastal trading partners would not trade on Sundays.

EVERYTHING HAS A STORY

Ataata, how did the Taġiugmiut get all these things?

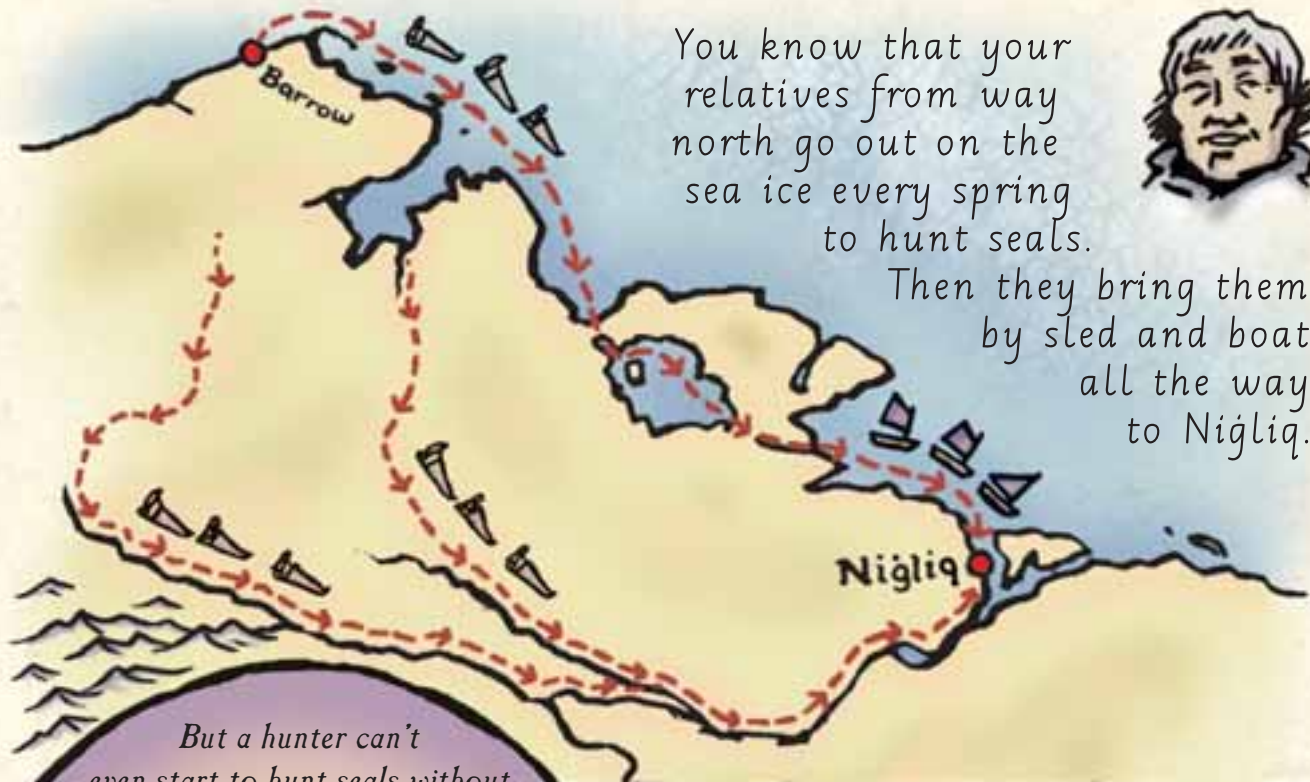
Everything has a story.



You know, Itaattuk, this poke filled with seal oil began with us. If we hadn't hunted for caribou and wolverine, we might never have gotten this seal oil.

But Ataata, we don't hunt seals. How do caribou and wolverine turn into seal oil?





You know that your relatives from way north go out on the sea ice every spring to hunt seals.

Then they bring them by sled and boat all the way to Nigliq.

But a hunter can't even start to hunt seals without good clothes.



And his wife can't make good clothes unless she has the right furs. She'll need ugruk and polar bear from the coast...



and caribou and wolverine from the land.





And where do you think her husband got the caribou and wolverine for their clothes?



Right here at the Nigliq trade fair — from us!

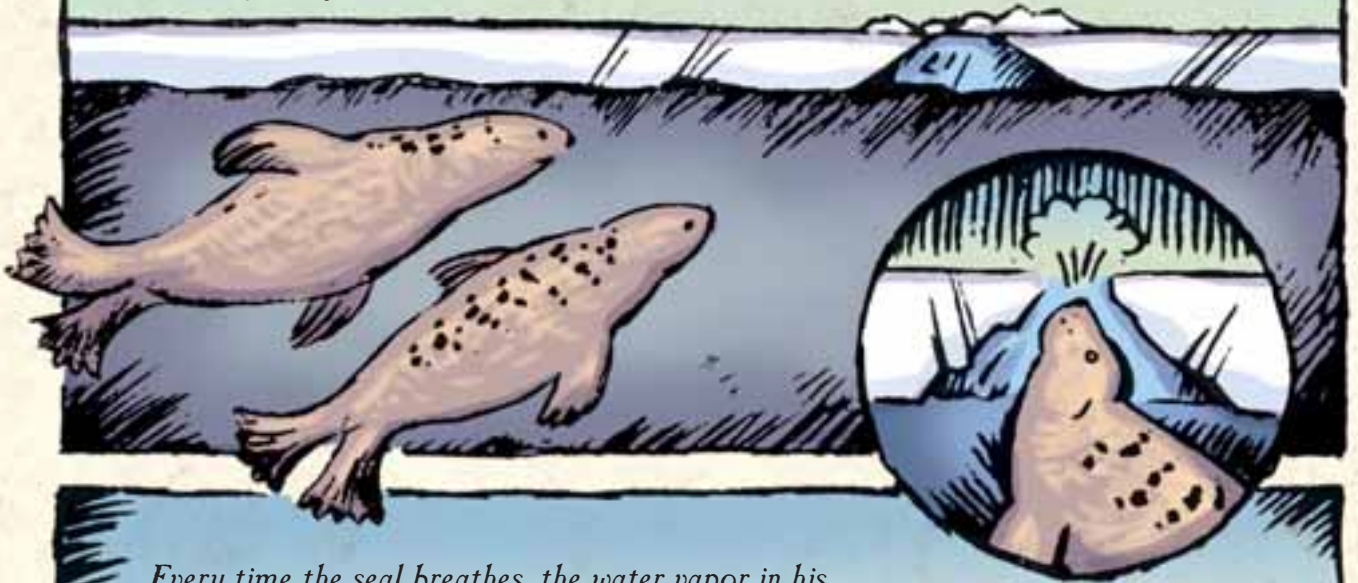
Besides clothes, before the hunter even thinks about going out on the sea ice, he has to make sure his hunting gear is ready.



And he has to train his dogs.

While the hunter has been getting ready, the natchiq has been living in the ocean, keeping away from polar bears.

Those seals can stay under the ice for a long time, but they need to come up for air every now and then. They scratch holes in the under side of the ice so they can get air.



*Every time the seal breathes, the water vapor in his breath freezes. This forms a cone of ice over the hole.
The hunter looks for these cones.*



His dog sniffs out the breathing holes. Then the hunter jabs his ice pick through the cone to be sure it's still open.

If the hole is open, he probes its shape so he can take proper aim when the seal returns.

If a hole is frozen over, the seal has stopped using it.





Then the hard part starts. The man has to stand over the hole he has chosen until a seal comes to it.

Sometimes he might have to stand there all day. He can't move, or the seal will see his shadow and be suspicious. It will stay away from that hole.

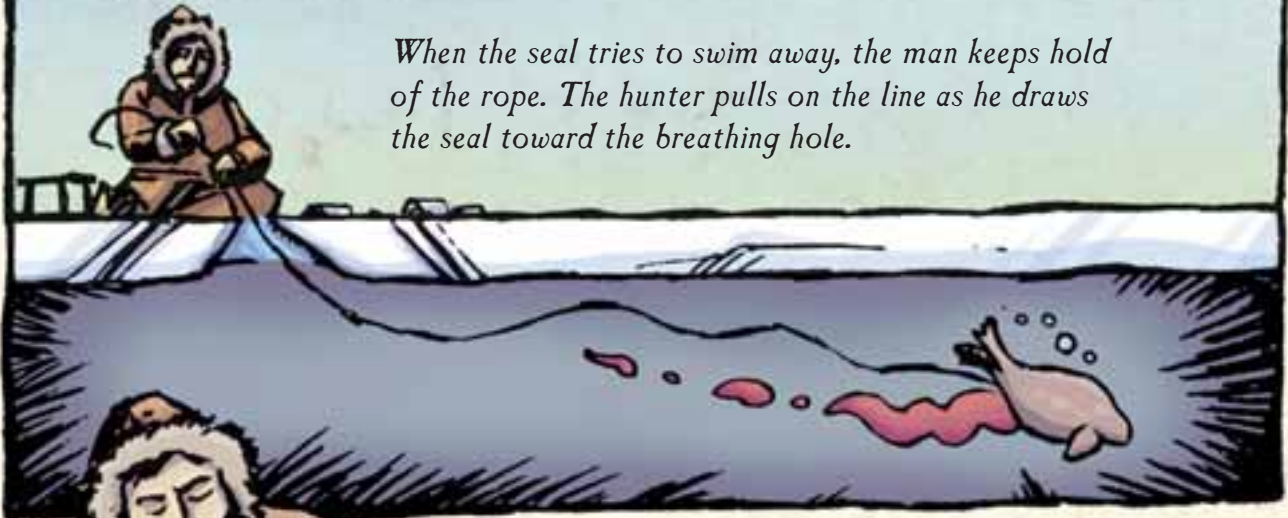
The hunter must be ready to harpoon the seal as soon as it comes.

When his quarry appears...





You've seen those spear heads the *Tagiugmiut* use. They come off the shaft when the seal is speared. They're attached to an *ugruk* rope.



When the seal tries to swim away, the man keeps hold of the rope. The hunter pulls on the line as he draws the seal toward the breathing hole.



Then he pulls the seal through.



The hunter's work is done, but his wife's is just beginning...

She gives the seal a drink of fresh water so its spirit won't go thirsty.



Then she has to remove all the meat and bones without cutting the skin.



She has to turn the skin inside out and cut off the blubber with an ulu.



Then she takes all the blubber and cuts it into strips.

She stuffs the blubber into the poke where it will render into oil.



So every time we trade some furs to the Tagiugmiut we're helping them get more seal oil for us.

Seal oil is our life!

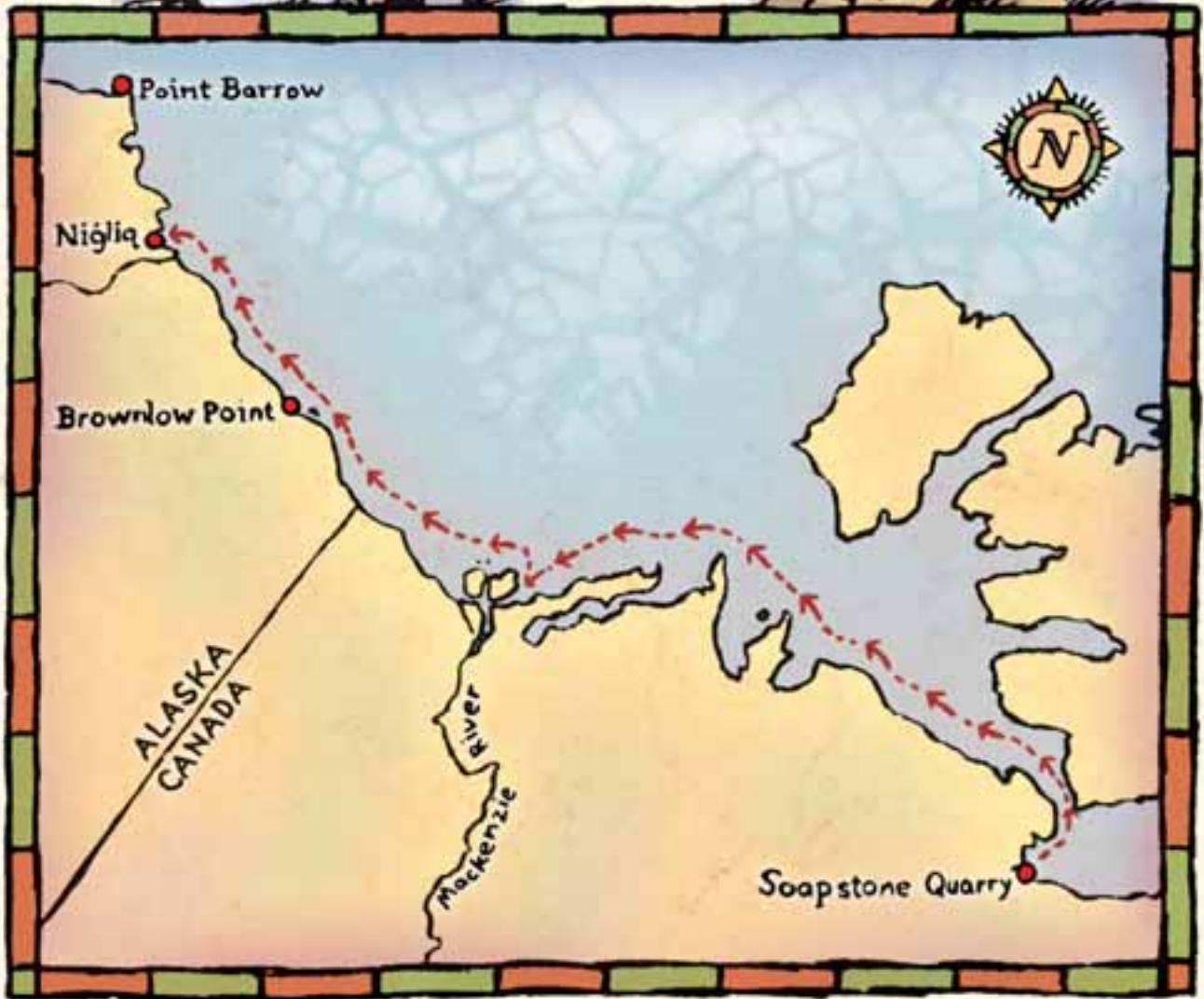


THE LAMP'S STORY

What's this stone lamp's story?



It came from the east, from Canada.



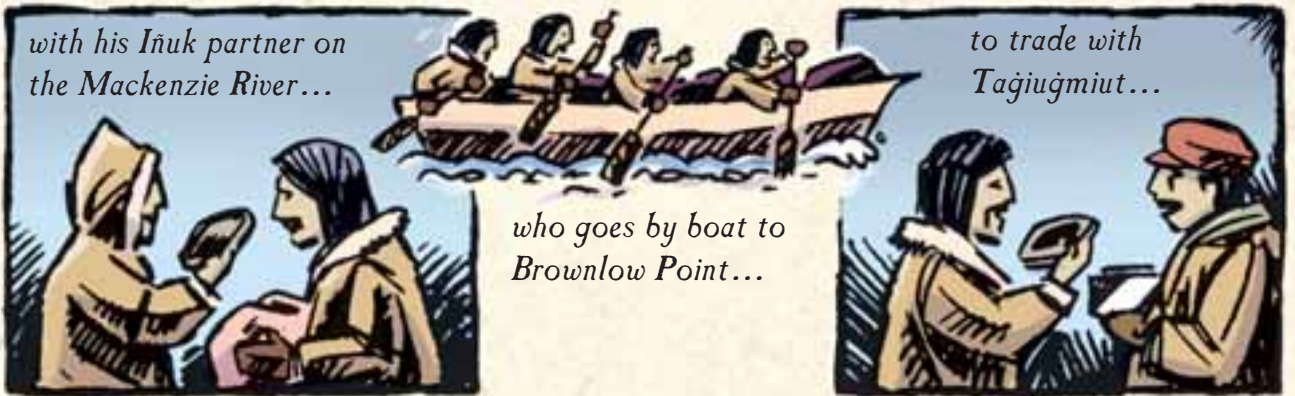


A Copper Inuk chisels out a lump of soapstone from a big quarry.

He then shapes a lamp from the soapstone.



He travels with his dog team over the ice, so he can trade...



with his Inuk partner on the Mackenzie River...

to trade with Tagiugmiut...

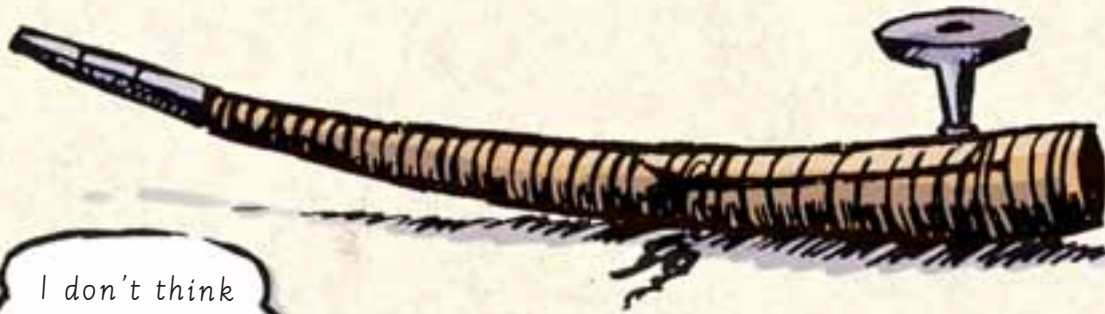
who goes by boat to Brownlow Point...

who trades it for a lynx skin...



from Itaattuk right here at Nigliq!

THE STORY OF THE TOBACCO



I don't think
the Inuit made
this tobacco!



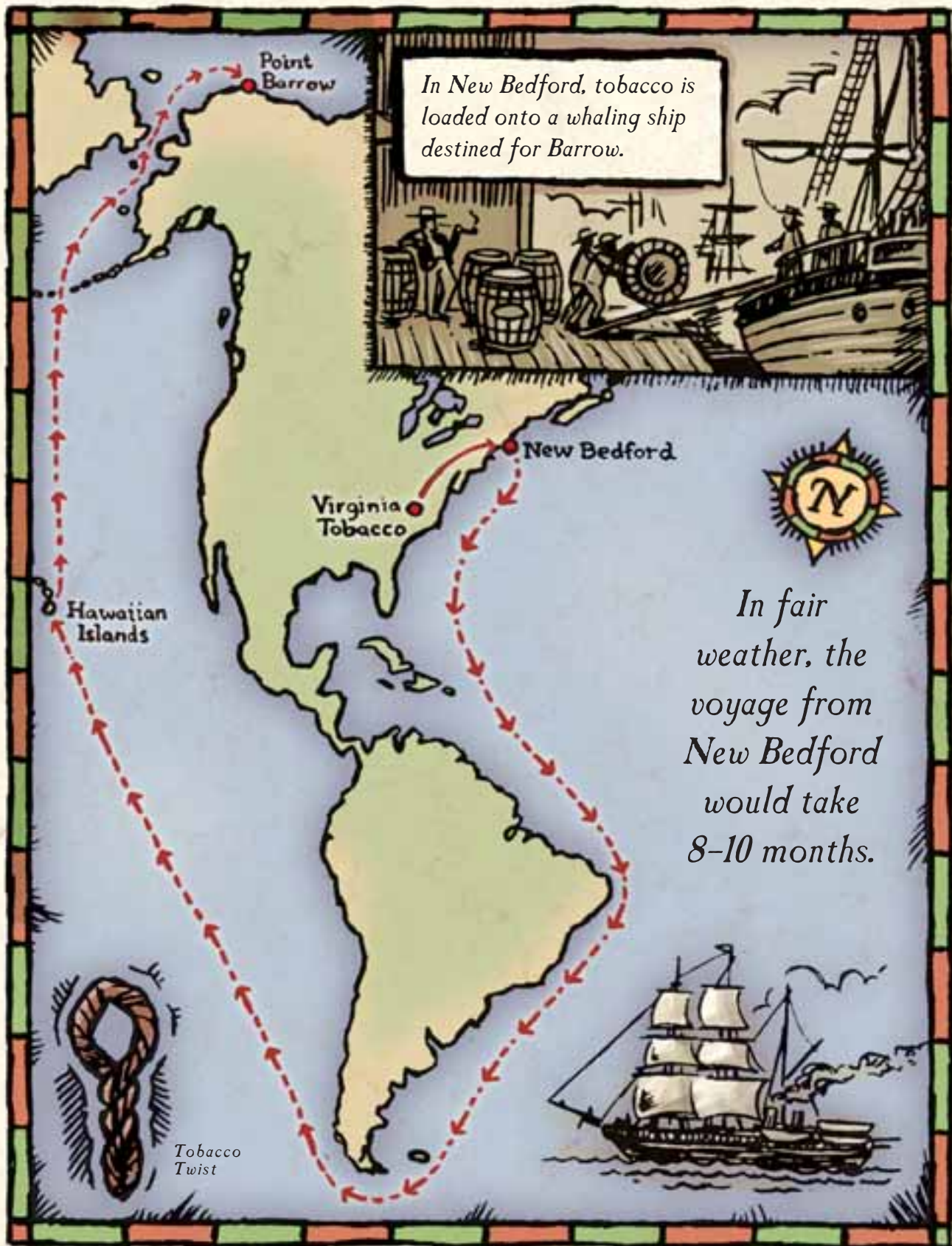
No, it comes from far away,
way down south. The whalers
brought it and traded it to the
Tagiugmiut. But I don't
know where it came from.



*Ataata was right.
The tobacco came from far away....*



HARVESTING TOBACCO IN VIRGINIA



In New Bedford, tobacco is loaded onto a whaling ship destined for Barrow.

In fair weather, the voyage from New Bedford would take 8-10 months.



PART 3

GOING HOME

Back at Nigliq, people are breaking camp, loading their umiaqs with seal oil and other trade goods.

This was a good fair. Now let's go back to get ready for winter!



The family heads upriver, back to their boat cache camp, where they'll await freeze-up.



Then they'll load the sleds and return to their hunting grounds in the Brooks Range.



There they will renew the cycle of survival by hunting, trapping, sewing and preparing for the next year's trip to Nigliq.





EPILOGUE

Itaattuk and his family could not know that there would not be many more trade fairs at Nigliq. In fact, the last trade fair anywhere in Arctic Alaska was held in 1920.

When our story takes place, just after 1900, many Tagiugmiut were already trading at commercial posts run by whalers and others from outside of Alaska. The posts carried goods such as metal tools and pots, rifles, cloth, tea, flour, and sugar. These items made life easier, but also changed many traditional activities.

Meanwhile, in the Interior, the Nunamiut were dealing with two big threats: fewer caribou in the region, and new diseases brought by New England whalers and traders. People began to die from starvation, the measles or the flu. Many moved to the coast where they could find food more easily. They still trapped for lynx, fox, wolverine and wolf, but they took the pelts to the trading posts instead of waiting for the annual fair. By the 1920s, trade fairs had become a thing of the past.

Nowadays the Messenger Feast, or Kivgiq, draws people from all over Inupiaq country. Unlike long ago, when people traveled by foot and boat to Nigliq, today they fly or drive their snow machines to Barrow. People from across Alaska's North Slope come to celebrate with games, dancing, contests, and gift exchanges in the tradition of the trade fair. The spirit remains strong!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Arctic John Etalook's daughter, Louisa Kakianaaq Riley, and others including Katherine Ahgeak, Marilyn Gamboa, Emma Mongoyak and Leona Okakok, transcribed and translated many hours of Itaattuk's memories to preserve the legacy of his generation.

Grant Spearman, as researcher and curator of the Simon Paneak Memorial Museum in Anaktuvuk Pass, recorded and compiled numerous tapes and documents recounting the experiences of Itaattuk and many other Nunamiut Elders. His work laid the foundation for this and several other culture-based instructional units now used in our school district.

Jana Harcharek provided invaluable cultural, historical, and linguistic support throughout this effort.

The Commission on Iñupiat History, Language and Culture funded the Itaattuk recordings as well as many other projects to research and document the knowledge and experiences of our ancestors. Without IHLC's generous support, this book, and its instructional materials, would not be possible.



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