

**Learning Activity:****Protecting My Arctic Home**

Activity Type	Reading and Writing
Focus Area	English Language Arts, Social and Emotional Learning
Time Required	30–45 minutes

Overview

The Arctic is home to 4 million people, 400,000 of whom are native to the land. Indigenous communities have upheld cultural traditions and played essential roles in the care of their local ecosystem for many generations. The article [“Protecting My Arctic Home”](#) is a young Indigenous woman’s firsthand account of her way of life and the lives of those around her, and how life has changed in recent years because of climate change. Learners will read and discuss the article before engaging in a writing assignment that allows them to consider Indigenous perspectives and the effects that climate change has on Indigenous Arctic communities as well as on their own communities.

Objectives**At the completion of the activity, learners should be able to**

- use illustrative language to describe the Arctic setting, based on the author’s portrayal
- identify the author’s feelings about what is happening in her region, based on the tone and language of the text
- compare and contrast the author’s way of life, including the changes she is experiencing in her community, with their own experiences and ways of life



Children of commercial fishers outside a cabin in Ekuk, Bristol Bay, Bering Sea, Alaska



Standards

Common Core English Language Arts

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
 - Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.6
 - Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

Materials Needed

- Pencils
- Copies of the article titled ["Protecting My Arctic Home"](#) (included)
- Copies of the student handout (included)
- *Educator's Resource Guide* (for reference)

Vocabulary

- **Algal blooms:** a rapid and excessive growth of microscopic algae or bacteria in a freshwater or marine ecosystem
- **Ecology:** a branch of science concerned with the relationships between living things and their environment
- **Ecosystem:** the living (e.g., humans, polar bears, fish) and nonliving (e.g., air, ice, water) components of an area that interact with each other in an interconnected way
- **Food insecurity:** being unable to consistently access or afford adequate food
- **Indigenous** native or local to a particular area or environment
- **Marine:** of or relating to the sea
- **Migration:** the process of moving from one region to another



Activity Procedure

Part 1: Teacher Preparation

- Determine if learners will complete this activity in small groups, in pairs, or independently, based on their reading levels.
- Make sure that each participant has a copy of "[Protecting My Arctic Home](#)" (included reading material) or can access it on an electronic device. Distribute copies of the included student handout as well.

Part 2: Introductory Discussion

- To prepare for the activity, ask learners to take a few minutes to fill out the pre-activity section of the student handout sheet that challenges them to think about the place where they live and what makes it unique. To help them develop ideas, have students answer the questions about local traditions, the people that make up the area, and how they interact with the natural environment around them.
- After everyone has had an opportunity to consider the questions, invite volunteers to share their insights with a partner or with the larger group.
 - Then, pose this question: Do you think that people who are not from the area that you live in would be aware of or understand any of your community's traditions or ways of life?

At the completion of this activity, students should be able to answer the key question.

KEY QUESTION: In the article, what was the author effectively able to portray about the impacts of climate change on her environment by writing in the first person?



The sea now freezes later as a result of climate change in Ittoqqortoormiit, East Greenland.



Part 3: Activity

- Introduce the activity: They will read an article written by a young Indigenous woman from the Arctic. As they read, they will encounter “pause to process” questions embedded in the text to reinforce reading comprehension. They should answer the questions before proceeding to the next section of the reading.
- After everyone has finished reading and answering the process questions, discuss the following as a group:
 - How is living in the Arctic different from living in the area where you live? How might the two environments be similar?
 - What surprised you about the author’s experience living in the Arctic? Was there any part of the story that you could relate to?
 - Based on this story, what are some ways that the Arctic is changing?

Part 4: Reflection and Assessment

- Have learners independently complete the post-activity short answer questions on the student handout sheet.
- As a follow-up assignment, have learners write their own narrative account, similar to the article, about the environment in which they grew up and how they have experienced change in their communities. Students should think about their answers to the pre-activity questions regarding their surrounding ecosystem, community traditions, and how their communities rely on nature.
- For a fun way to assess student comprehension on topics associated with the Arctic, go to the Wild Classroom Kahoot! Collection [Habitat spotlight: the Arctic](#).



Wrangell, Alaska



Extended Learning Options

- The author mentioned many challenges that her community has faced. Have learners brainstorm solutions that the community could try to implement to overcome those challenges.
- The [original article](#) includes slightly more advanced vocabulary. If that version better meets the reading abilities of your learners, then use it and place the “pause to process” questions on a separate handout.

Additional Resources

Use the information found at the following links to enhance the class discussion, if desired, or share the links directly with learners as appropriate.

- **Webpage:** [Arctic](#)
- **Webpage:** [Arctic Communities](#)
- **Web story:** [The end of the road for Pebble Mine](#)
- **Web story:** [Alaska Resilient and Rising](#)
- **Web story:** [A Changing Arctic](#)
- **Web story:** [Six ways loss of the Arctic ice impacts everyone](#)

For more fun classroom activities with a focus on wild species and conservation, visit wildclassroom.org.



Protecting My Arctic Home

by Alexandria Abuzanuq Ivanoff

(modified, with permission, from the [original article](#))

My earliest memories are on the water, shivering in the boat on the way up to fish camp, wind whipping through my hair. As we got further up the river, the waterway narrows and trees hang over the shore like a canopy. Distant hills grew larger as we approached, and the land seemed to stretch on forever. Up here, fish used to run in the thousands and so, without fail, we would return with our tubs filled to the brim. Back at the fish racks I played and watched while the strong women effortlessly stripped the pieces of fish as they told humorous stories with loud belly laughs that followed. We eagerly awaited the delicious salmon—the first fish to arrive after our long, chilly winter. We cut the salmon into thin pieces and hung them to dry and smoke.



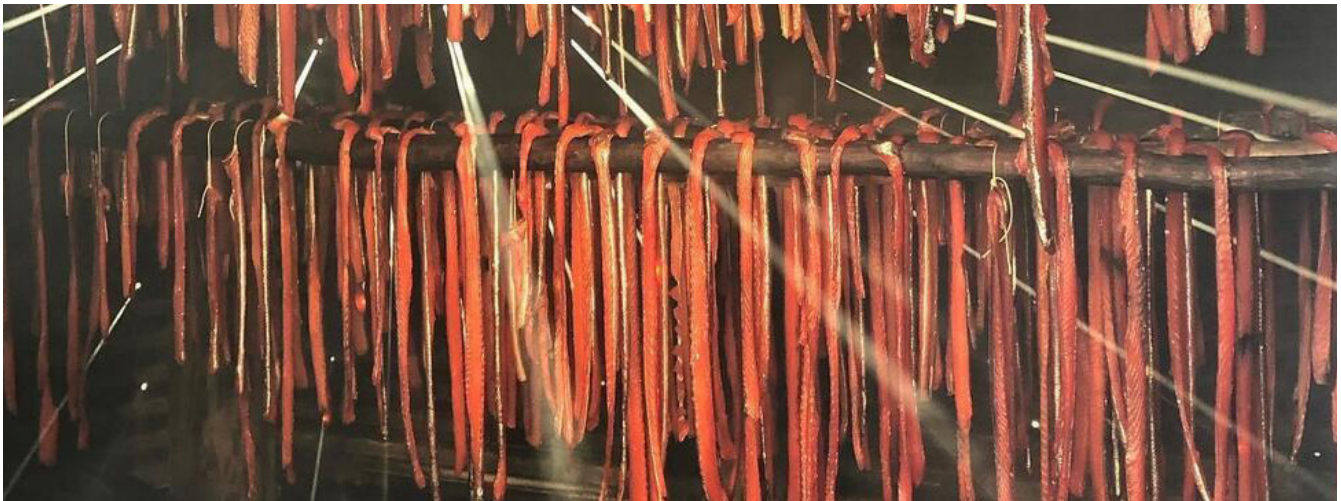
My family has always been eager for the hard work of life. Indigenous survival is based on hunting and gathering practices guided by thousands of years of traditional ecological knowledge that our ancestors learned and passed down through generations. My grandmother is the reason that my family and I carry some of this knowledge today. With love and patience, she has passed down the skills it takes to use and prepare every part of an animal. She taught us not to waste.

In the last few years, my family has struggled to fill our freezers with salmon as we see fewer and fewer of these fish return to our rivers and streams. Today, the work that once took my grandmother a few days takes us twice as long. The salmon that we harvest today are younger and smaller, forcing us to put 10 more fish away to equal what we once had.

PAUSE to PROCESS: Describe the SETTING of the Arctic

Warming oceans and the impact on fish populations

The number of fish in the water has been declining due to the temperature increase in the oceans. Not only has this rise in temperature affected the salmon populations, but also other marine life have been swimming north to colder environments. Without salmon and crabs in the area, many people who have depended on fishing for food are unable to feed themselves. In 2006, more than 75% of food collected in the Bering Strait, a narrow passage of water that separates Asia (Russia) from North America (Alaska), came from the ocean. However, today this type of harvest is just not possible.



The sun shines through the author's family's smokehouse as the king salmon strips hang.

PAUSE to PROCESS: How are humans affected by the warming ocean temperature?

Shipping traffic is on the rise

Rising temperatures and winds are creating another problem for wildlife and people, too: increased shipping.

At one point, the ice was so thick that ships were unable to move through the waters. However, as the planet warms and the sea ice melts, there are new routes in the Bering Strait—and with it, a drastic increase in shipping. For many ships, moving through the Arctic takes less time than traveling along other routes and passageways. These vessels often travel through delicate marine habitats and Indigenous hunting grounds, which increases the risk for collisions with hunters and marine mammals. A collision can result

in damage or loss of transported goods such as oil and natural gas and a spill would devastate the region. There is little infrastructure available to clean up such a disaster.

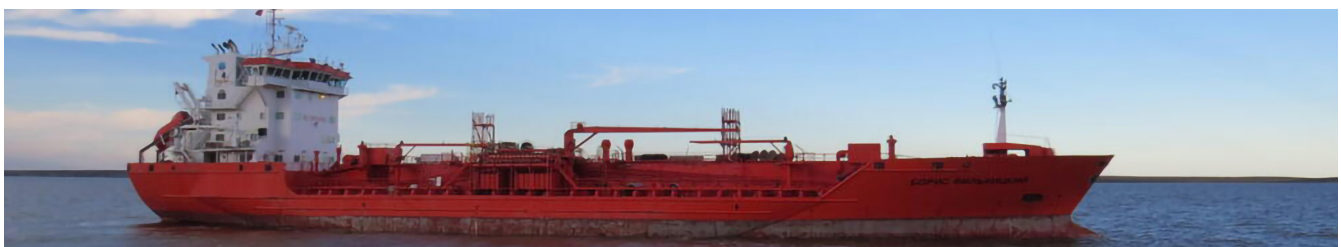
And even if there were no additional accidents, ships increase noise pollution and light pollution, disrupting communications among animals and their migration patterns. And waste from ships scatter throughout the ocean: discharges of sewage that can lead to oxygen depletion, spread pathogenic bacteria and viruses, and increase nutrient levels in the surrounding ecosystem, possibly leading to toxic algal blooms.

PAUSE to PROCESS: Why are so many more ships traveling through the Arctic now than before?

Shipping takes a toll on local culture

However, now the shipping through the area poses risks for people in the region as well. The large ships' routes can interfere with Indigenous hunting grounds, forcing the hunters to take longer, more extensive measures to find the resources that they depend on to survive. This is detrimental to the ecosystem and the people in the Arctic. If one part of the food chain or landscape changes, the entire ecosystem is impacted, and animals and the Native villages can suffer from food insecurity. An entire population and culture rely on a healthy ocean ecosystem—one that we've maintained for generations. We can't let that slip away.

PAUSE to PROCESS: What are the negative impacts that ships have on the local communities?



A large vessel passes through the Russian Arctic.

Protecting My Arctic home

My home is precious to me. If we lose the Arctic, the entire Indigenous culture that has been kept alive like a burning flame could die and thousands of people could be displaced.

Keeping the Arctic alive means protecting its people. I am now the one to stand with pride, slicing each precious salmon into strips for hours on end, working with such care as if these fish were gold. I look forward to passing down to my future children



the knowledge that my grandparents worked so hard to pass down to me.

Together we can sustain the gorgeous region that I come from and protect the delicate, amazing ecosystem that has nourished us for thousands of years. This thriving, beautiful land and the people who call it home should thrive for generations to come. We must act now to protect this wild, wonderful place.

Elizabeth "Abuzanuq" Ivanoff, the author's grandmother, was one of the most knowledgeable and culturally grounded women in the community. Although she never received a high school diploma, she lived the traditional lifestyle with her whole being and taught many in the community how to process and prepare Native food.

PAUSE to PROCESS: Why is it so important to protect the people who live in the Arctic and their cultures?



Protecting My Arctic Home: Student Handout

Pre-activity:

Take a few minutes to think about the place where you live and what makes it unique. Consider local traditions that you have grown up with—where and how you get food, the people who make up your community, and how people interact with the natural environment around them. Answer the following questions to help you gather your thoughts:

- How do people near you relate to the environment around them?
- Are there farms nearby that grow or raise or distribute meats, dairy, fruits, or vegetables?
- Do you live close to woods that people spend time in for fun or to collect firewood?
- Are there rivers or lakes that make up the local watershed and might help provide water to homes?
- Are there nearby bays or oceans that people visit and that provide local seafood?
- Are there festivals throughout the year where people enjoy local resources?

Post-activity:

What is the author's opinion/perspective regarding warming oceans?

Why do you think the author wrote this article? What is she hoping to achieve?

Why is it important to hear from local or Indigenous people when considering how to support the environment around them? What insights can these people provide that others (not from the area) would not have?