Indian Education for All

Model Teaching Unit

Language Arts - Secondary Level

For Velma Wallis' Two Old Women: An Alaska Legend of Betrayal, Courage and Survival

Montana
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- Language Arts -
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For

Two Old Women: An Alaska Legend of Betrayal, Courage and Survival

By Velma Wallis

Unit written by Dorothea M. Susag

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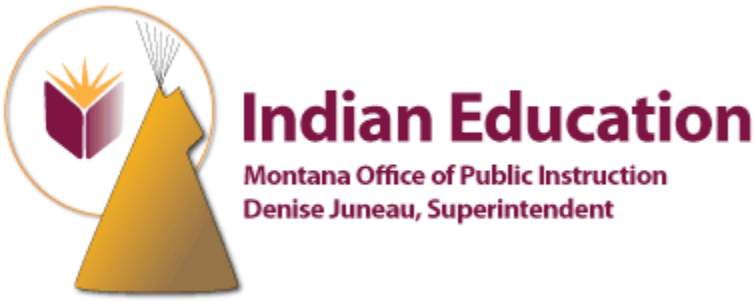

Model Teaching Unit
Language Arts
Secondary Level for
Velma Wallis' *Two Old Women: An Alaska Legend of Betrayal, Courage and Survival*

Unit written by Dorothea M. Susag dotsusag@3riversdbs.net

Anchor Text

Wallis, Velma (1993). *Two Old Women: An Alaska Legend of Betrayal, Courage and Survival*. Illustrated by Jim Grant. Seattle, WA: Epicenter Press.

Fast Facts

Genre	Creative Non-fiction
Suggested Grade Level	Eighth Grade
Tribe (s)	Athabascan/ Gwich'in
Place	Interior Alaska, near present-day Fort Yukon and Chalkyitsik
Time	Pre-contact with Europeans , possibly 600 years ago

About the Author and Illustrator

The following is excerpted from the biography of Velma Wallis on her website http://www.velmawallis.com

"Velma Wallis' career as a bestselling author may have been destined from the start, but it most likely would have seemed improbable – if not fantastical – to her as a young girl growing up in a remote Alaskan village. [Her] personal odyssey began in Fort Yukon, Alaska, a location accessible only by riverboat, airplane, snowmobile or dogsled. Having dropped out of school at the age of 13 in order to care for her siblings in the wake of their father's death, Wallis passed her high school equivalency test - earning her GED - and then surprised friends and relatives by choosing to move into an old trapping cabin 12 miles from Fort Yukon.

"… she survived on what she gathered from hunting, fishing and trapping – a daring and strikingly independent lifestyle during which she struggled to define her personal identity.

"In fact, it seems difficult to separate Velma Wallis from the imagery of hardship and the mere pursuit of survival itself. . . .

"…it seems possible to read *Two Old Women* as a kind of metaphor for Wallis' own childhood and role as a once emerging – but now accomplished – writer whose legendary tale has sold 1.5 million copies and has been translated into 17 languages worldwide.

"…a group of University of Alaska students taught by Lael Morgan – co-founder of Epicenter Press along with Kent Sturgis – started a grass roots effort intended to raise enough money to publish the manuscript. Since that time, Wallis has written two additional books – *Bird Girl and the Man Who Followed the Sun* and also *Raising Ourselves*.

"The now middle-aged author currently divides her time between Fort Yukon and Fairbanks along with her three daughters. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including both the 1993 Western States Book Award and the 1994 Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award for *Two Old Women* as well as the 2003 Before Columbus Foundation Award for *Raising Ourselves*."

See "Editor's Afterword" by Lael Morgan (141-145) for more about how *Two Old Women* was finally published.

The illustrator, James Grant Sr., was born in 1946 in Tanana, an Athabascan village. Raised in California, he now lives in Fairbanks, Alaska. While serving in the U.S. Army, he traveled around Europe, paying attention to masters of art. "His art includes mask making, wood and ivory carving, bronze casting, oil painting, and pen and ink (146)."

Text Summary

Out of her Athabaskan heritage, through mothers and daughters, passed down through generations of many more mothers and daughters, Velma Wallis tells this Athabaskan legend of two seemingly frail and complaining women. They are members of a Gwich'in hunter-gatherer band that "roamed the area around what is now Fort Yukon and Chalkyitsik, one of eleven distinct Athabaskan groups in Alaska (Wallis 137)."

During one particularly bitter winter, the tribe faces certain starvation. Out of concern for all his people, the chief reluctantly decides they must leave the two elderly women, Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak, behind. It is the most practical decision because the women are crippling the tribe's need to continue moving, their only chance for survival.

They are left with their personal belongings, fur to cover their shelter, and gifts discreetly left by Ch'idzigyaak's daughter and grandson to help them survive. However, the women face certain death if they do not help themselves, and so they decide they might as well "die trying." Using memories and skills learned long ago, they not only survive but they reach a position to aid their tribe. And so we have a story of survival, of ingenuity, of the strength of interdependence, and finally of reconciliation with those who abandoned them. Fearing it would die with the elders, Wallis has written down this powerful story that addresses problems of aging, care for the elderly, survival in nature, commitment to relatives and community, and the age-old conflict between the rights of the individual and the common good.

In Wallis' own words in her memoir, *Raising Ourselves*, she explains how the story of the two old women dramatically changed the way she saw herself and her people. "I almost believed that drinking and drugs were all we as native people had ever been about until that day when my mother first told me the story about the two old women. Then I saw clearly that we were once strong and grounded, with a long history of survival. I saw hope that we could still be the people we once were, not in the literal sense, but possessing the same pride that our ancestors had before the epidemics and cultural changes (211)."

Materials

- Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum www.alaskanative.net
- Alaska Native Knowledge Network— http://ankn.uaf.edu/index.html
- Allen, Minerva **(Assiniboine)**. *Spirits Rest.* Hays, MT: Hays/LodgePole Title IV Program. Graphic Arts Students.1981.
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- Greene, Jennifer K.**(Salish).** *What I Keep.* Greenfield Review Press: Greenfield Center, New York. 1999.
- *Honoring Native Women's Voices: A Collection of Stories*. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College. 2006.
- Jaeger, Lowell, ed. *Poems Across the Big Sky: An Anthology of Montana Poets.* Kalispell, MT: Many Voices Press, Flathead Valley Community College. 2007.
- National Center for the Study of Adult learning and Literacy. (NCSALL). http://www.ncsall.net/?id=208
- *The Snow Walker* DVD. Based on *The Snow Walker* by Farley Mowat. Charles Martin Smith, director. 2004.
- TallMountain, Mary **(Athabaskan)**. *The Light on the Tent Wall: A Bridging.* Los Angeles, CA: University of California American Indian Studies. (12) ISBN 978-0-935626-34-4. 1990.
- Wallis, Velma **(Athabaskan/Gwich'in).** *Raising Ourselves: A Gwitch'in Coming of Age Story from the Yukon River*. Kenmore, WA: Epicenter Press. 2002.
- Wallis, Velma **(Athabaskan/Gwich'in)**. *Two Old Women: An Alaska Legend of Betrayal, Courage and Survival*. Seattle, WA: Epicenter Press.1993.
- Williams, Maria **(Tlingit).** *How Raven Stole the Sun.* Illustrated by Felix Vigil. New York: Abbeville Press and National Museum of American Indians. 2001.

Essential Understandings and MT Content Standards

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">Essential Understandings - Big Ideas</th><th colspan="2">Montana Content Standards</th></tr>
<tr><td>X</td><td>1-There is great diversity between tribes.</td><td></td><td>4-Tribes reserved a portion of their land-base through treaties.</td><td rowspan="2">Reading – 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 2.1,2.2, 2.6,4.4, 4.5, 5.3, 5.5</td><td rowspan="2">Writing – 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 3.3, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2, 63, 6.4</td></tr>
<tr><td>X</td><td>2-There is great diversity between individuals within any tribe.</td><td>X</td><td>5-History is told from subjective experience and perspective.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">X</td><td rowspan="2">3-Ideologies, traditions, beliefs, and spirituality continue through a system of oral traditions.</td><td></td><td>6-Federal Indian policies shifted through seven major periods.</td><td rowspan="2">Literature – 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6. 2.1, 2.4, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.3</td><td rowspan="2">Social Studies – 1.1, 2.6, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 6.1, 6.3, 6.4</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>7-Three forms of sovereignty exist in the US - federal, state, & tribal.</td></tr>
</table>

Please see OPI web-site for detailed information on *Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians* (http://www.opi.mt.gov/pdf/indianed/resources/essentialunderstandings.pdf) and Montana Content Standards (http://opi.mt.gov/Curriculum/Index.html#gpm1_8)

Learning Targets

- I make connections from my reading of *Two Old Women* to my life and to the world outside my classroom.
- I ask questions and make predictions, and I visualize what's happening in *Two Old Women*.
- I identify main ideas, combine background information with the main text, draw inferences from contextual clues and from details and figurative language to better understand the levels of meaning in *Two Old Women* and the poetry in this unit.
- I compare and contrast themes and ideas in *Two Old Women* with poetry and film.
- I respond to the writing in *Two Old Women* in a variety of written modes and genres, as well as speaking and listening and making appropriate oral and media presentations.
- I understand how the six traits of writing appear in *Two Old Women* and how they contribute to its effectiveness.
- I use the skills exhibited in *Two Old Women* as models for my own writing.
- I know my own strengths and weaknesses in reading and writing, and I set goals for improvement.
- I know how historical and cultural influences give meaning to *Two Old Women* and other related works.
- I apply the steps of the inquiry process to understand *Two Old Women* and apply my understanding to the larger world.
- I understand and can explain whatever contributes to conflict and cooperation within groups through my reading of *Two Old Women.*
- I understand the way groups and individuals within the larger group can meet human needs and contribute to personal identity.
- I appreciate the uniqueness of Athabascan people and their heritage while I also understand the aspects of our common humanity, both within and between cultures that *Two Old Women* portrays.

Day by Day Plan - Steps

4 Week Unit

With permission, portions of this unit are excerpted from units created by Libby Kuntz, Harlem Schools, and Janet Sprague, Cut Bank Schools.

This unit provides an extensive bibliography of reliable resources for teachers, utilizing primary sources and documents whenever possible. These resources provide opportunities for students to go beyond the anchor text to build their understanding of Gwich'in history and culture, to better understand the history and culture of Montana Indians, to make literary connections between a variety of texts, to develop their own skills in reading and writing, to practice discussion and collaboration, and to help them better understand themselves and others while appreciating our common humanity.

Although the unit is divided into numbered days, teachers may use their own discretion about how much time each activity or reading assignment might take. The activities and writing assignments are merely suggestions to help students engage with the text and to build their understanding.

Chapter summaries are provided to help teachers look ahead. But teachers may also use them as strategies to help struggling readers. Each chapter summary is followed by three levels of questions. Depending on the ability of the students, teachers may select questions from any or all levels. The questions may also be used as quizzes to check reading and comprehension. However, between the levels, there is some content repetition in questions, so teachers may choose to disregard some.

Day One

1. **Pre-reading Research:** Using inquiry and the Internet, introduce students to the historical, geographical, and cultural contexts of *Two Old Women.*

> *Teacher Tip:* The first days of the unit should foster students' curiosity and engagement while they build background knowledge that moves from general to the specific.

   Procedure:
   - Without collaboration, students will each write one known fact about Alaska or its people on a 3x5 card. Grouping like facts together, post the cards vertically on a sheet of butcher paper, leaving enough room for additional facts to be posted to the right of each. On another 3x5 card, each will write one "I wonder" question about Alaska and its people. Similarly, post the question cards on another sheet of butcher paper.
   - Divide the class into three Internet research groups, with each searching one of the three websites below. For the rest of the period, students will search for "facts" about culture groups, geography, and history and for answers to at least one of their "I wonder" questions. Using 3x5 cards, they will write additional facts or an answer to one of their questions. Post cards on the butcher paper sheets to the right of their original cards.
     - Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum www.alaskanative.net
     - Alaska Native Knowledge Network— http://ankn.uaf.edu/index.html

   (Students should become aware of the diversity of indigenous people)

2. **Portfolio #1:** Each student will write a paragraph response to this activity using this prompt: Considering the facts and questions you first wrote and the information you gained during your Internet search, what did you find *Disturbing or Interesting or Confusing or Enlightening*? Write for fifteen minutes and write one more "I Wonder" question that your research made you think about.

Day Two and Three

1. Groups will share the results of their Internet search and ask their "I Wonder" questions.
2. **Pre-reading questions:**
   - What is a culture group?
   - Who are *indigenous* people? Athabascans? Gwich'ins? Tlingits?
   - Where are Fort Yukon and the Yukon River located?
   - What do you think *Two Old Women* will be about?
   - What are ways people trick nature or trick others to make their lives better? (i.e. irrigate in arid climates)

   Student Resources:
   - Maps from *Two Old Women* and www.alaskanative.net
   - "About the Gwich'in People" (137-140) Using the notes in Appendix A of this unit, as students read this section, guide them in the creation of more "fact" cards that they may want to add to the butcher-paper sheets. If some of their first cards are proven false or vague, they may want to remove them and replace them with new information.

- "Just Wrinkles" in *What I Keep* by Salish poet, Jennifer Greene, who lives on the Flathead Reservation. The old woman's wrinkles "remember things she can't." Students might use this poem to imagine what the main characters in *Two Old Women* may have looked like. How does this poem use personification to draw a positive picture of old age?
- *How Raven Stole the Sun* by Maria Williams (Tlingit). Although this particular story is not Athabascan, the story-line is similar. "The Tlingits say Raven became a pine needle in the cup of the Chief's daughter, the Athabaskans believe Raven turned into a small fish. In the Inujit version, Raven transforms into a piece of moss."(26) This children's book is relevant here because it typifies the traditional stories that Velma Wallis would have heard. It also provides a way of understanding *Two Old Women* because the women trick nature, trick themselves, and they trick the rest of their people. They survive when no one thought they could.
- **Summary:** This is the Tlingit version of the trickster, pure white Raven, who wants to save his people from total darkness. So he sets out to steal the stars, moon, and sun from a greedy Chief who keeps them in boxes. He begins by transforming himself into a pine needle that the chief's daughter eats. Nine months later, she gives birth to a baby boy who plays with the chief's boxes and he releases them. When the chief discovers the trickery, he traps the Raven inside a house. Raven escapes through the very small smoke hole, and his feathers turn completely black. There is also a Glossary of Tlingit Words, photos of artifacts, background and photographs of the Tlingit People, and information about the author and illustrator.
- *Raising Ourselves* (26, 3 paragraphs) Read aloud from Wallis' memoir. Here she describes her grandmother as an example of an ordinary Gwich'in woman. "But according to my mother, ... Everyone knew his or her role in the cause of group survival."

3. **Portfolio #2:** Identify four areas of activity or behavior that you can compare or contrast a Gwich'in woman's role with women's today. Begin with a statement similar to this: The roles of women in my family differ from (or compare with) the Gwich'in in four ways. Follow that lead sentence with eight sentences. Write a one-sentence statement about each of four areas and from each culture. For example, you may begin with "In my family, women . . . " and follow that with "But in the Gwich'in society, women . . ." Write a one-sentence conclusion statement.

Day Four

1. **Assign:** Introduction (xi-xiii)
   Chapter Summary: Velma Wallis writes how she came to know the story of the two old women as her mother told it to her. She explains the importance of oral stories and the tragedy that occurs when "someone from another way of life" misinterprets the story, often resulting in the stories as written being "accepted as history, yet they may not be truthful." The Introduction closes with a theme and lesson in the *Two Old Women* story:

   > *There is no limit to one's ability—certainly not age—to accomplish in life what one must. Within each individual on this large and complicated world lives an astounding potential of greatness. Yet it is rare that these hidden gifts are brought to life unless by the chance of fate.*(xiii)

2. **Cooperative Group Activity:** Unless otherwise suggested, students will discuss the following questions and select the most controversial or interesting response to share with the rest of the class.

Recall-level Questions

- Why does the author want to be like her mother when she becomes an elder?
- What does this author believe the story of *Two Old Women* taught her?

Interpretive-level Questions

- The author says, "Stories are like gifts given by an elder to a younger person." How can stories be gifts?

3. **Assign: Chapter 1 "Hunger and cold take their toll"(1-16)** Students should be prepared to answer questions about this chapter in their groups.

Chapter Summary: During one particularly bitter winter, a nomadic band of arctic Alaska Gwich'in people faces certain starvation. For some time, they have cared for two elderly women, Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak. But now, out of concern for the rest of his people, the chief and council reluctantly decide they must leave the two women behind. It is the most practical decision because the women are crippling the tribe's need to continue moving, their only chance for survival. The women are left with their personal belongings and fur to cover their shelter. Discreetly, Ch'idzigyaak's daughter gives her mother a bundle of babiche, and her grandson leaves his hatchet in a tree to help the women survive. Devastated with the seeming betrayal, the women face certain death if they do not help themselves. However, they don't want to give up, so they decide to prove they have "the right to live."

Teacher Tip:

- To facilitate student's cooperative skills and interaction with the text through class discussions, as well as respect for each other, you may create discussion groups of 3-4 students selected at random.
- Discuss the differences between the following terms: conversation, discussion, debate, socializing, small talk, argument, and storytelling.
- Tell students they will be obligated to this same group for the duration of the unit. Having the assignment read before the discussion group meets is a primary obligation.

Workshopping
Guidelines for Students

1. Follow directions for grouping and for each assignment
2. Respect the rights of other groups (i.e. only interact with members of your group)
3. Respect the right of each person's right to speak during each discussion period.
4. Select a scribe and speaker from your group for each day's assignment.
5. Cooperate with others in your group by taking responsibility for yourself and respecting the right of all to learn.

Day Five and Six

1. **Cooperative Group Activity:**

Recall-level Questions

- What are two reasons The People face starvation?
- Why do the hunters eat first?
- What do the two women's names mean?
- How have the women helped The People?
- What shared character flaw do Ch'idigyaak and Sa' have?
- What is the decision of the council and chief regarding the women?
- Who are Ozhii Nelii and Shruh Zhuu?
- What do they leave behind for the old ones?
- What is babiche? Caribou?

Interpretive-level Questions

- Why do band members agree with the decision?
- Why don't Ozhii Nelii and Shruh Zhuu protest the decision to leave the old ones behind?
- How is Shruh Zhuu different from other boys?
- Why did Sa' believe they were being treated unfairly?
- What does Sa's comment that they should "die trying, not sitting" say about her character?
- Explain the irony in her statement "let us die trying, not sitting."

2. **Writing Activity:** Reinforce the **6 Traits of Writing** using many examples from *Two Old Women.* Page 4 in *Two Old Women* demonstrates the following traits very well.
   - **Organization:** Effective use of transitions to establish a logical pattern**.**
   - **Sentence Fluency: V**ariety of beginnings.
   - **Word Choice:** Poetic language and skillful use of repeated sounds (i.e. alliteration)

3. **Portfolio #3: Write in response to the following Evaluative-level Questions**

- If this were happening to you, which of the women would you be more like? Explain your answer in a complete paragraph.
- Did Shruh Zhuu's action take courage? Explain your answer.

4. **Assign: Chapter 2 "Let us die trying" (17-29)** Students should be prepared for group discussion following their reading.

Chapter Summary: The women gather fire embers from remaining fires, make nooses out of babiche strips to snare rabbits, and Sa' throws the hatchet and kills a squirrel for dinner. Appreciating that no one took their caribou-skin tent and robes, the women begin to realize how the The People have cared for them. The younger woman, Sa', finally convinces Ch'idzigyaak , the more bitter and complaining one, that it's better they die trying to survive rather than just giving up.

> *Teacher Tip:* In her "Foreword" to *The Light on the Tent Wall,* the poet's mentor, Paula Gunn Allen, writes about Mary and the poem "Good Grease":
>
> "Mary TallMountain is Coyote, and like the quintessential old survivor, she knows that if you're going to face death, and if you're going to engage the sacred, you'd better have your sense of humor intact (3)."
>
> You may use the poem to talk about hunting, but you can also make connections to irony in *Two Old Women* where humor exists midst suffering. Humor in the form of irony is one of the most important ways humans survive. Refer to Appendix B, "Literary Terms Study Guide" for a definition and examples of Irony.

Day Seven and Eight

1. **Introduce Koyukon Athabascan poet, Mary TallMountain,** and the poem "Good Grease" (12) in *The Light on the Tent Wall: A Bridging.*

It's the time of hunger, with "no meat in the village, no food for tribe and dogs. No caribou in the caches." Then the speakers-- "we children"—watch the hunters carry a caribou home, rejoicing in what it will bring to themselves and to the "old ones" at home—"oozing, dripping and running down our chins, brown hands shining with grease."

2. **Cooperative Group Activity:**

Recall-level Questions

- How do migrating bands keep fire alive from camp to camp?
- How did the women first use babiche?

- What two animals do the old women kill first?
- What did the old women use for shelter?

Interpretive-level Questions

- Ch'idigyaak says, "What a pampered pair we have been." How has she changed?
- How are the women responsible for their being left behind?
- Why did the women decide to leave the place where The People left them?
- Why did they cover their faces?

3. **Writing Process Activity:** Reinforce the **6 Traits of Writing** using the following pages as examples.
   - **Ideas:** Sensory Images add details (21-23)

4. **Portfolio #4:** This chapter describes in detail a series of **activities of the women**: building a fire, salvaging embers, making rabbit snares, killing a squirrel, building a shelter, catching a rabbit.
   a. **You are the illustrator:** draw one of the activities to go along with the description
   b. **You are the editor of a manual for living in the wilderness:** make a numbered list of the steps for doing one of the activities.

5. **Portfolio #5: Written response to Evaluative-level Questions**
   - Sa' says that they can do "little more than they expect of themselves." What does she mean? Can people really do this? Explain your answer.
   - The poem "Good Grease" puts the tragedy of near starvation in the same context as playing with dripping grease. In *Two Old Women*, Velma Wallis also uses humor when times are most difficult. Write about a time when you or someone you've seen has laughed or joked around when something bad was happening. Did it help you?

6. **Using sheets of butcher paper**, each group will begin **two Character Maps**, one for each woman.

   In each day's group meeting, students will add one detail from their reading in response to each of the following questions for each character:
   - What does the character say?
   - What does she do?
   - How do the other characters feel about her?
   - What decisions does she make, and what are the consequences?

   (They may write on the paper directly or attach slips of paper or 3x5 cards to the sheet)

7. If time and practicality permits, students might actually learn how to do, and practice doing, one of the activities.

8. **Assign: Chapter 3 "Recalling Old Skills" (31-44)**

Chapter Summary: The women make snowshoes and snare a rabbit. They move on to avoid bad memories and possible enemies to a place they remember where there are many fish. They pack up their belongings, using the caribou skins as sleds, and walk until they are exhausted. Making camp, they dig pits in the snow and build fires. The next morning, despite their aching joints and freezing lungs, their fatigue and swollen feet, and the short daylight hours, they continue on to the middle of a frozen lake. The next day the same, with Sa' helping the elder Ch'idzigyaak get up and moving despite her misery, they finish the crossing of the lake. They both know if one gave up, both would die. After

four days, they come to a slough that reminds Sa' that they are on the right trail. At times, their conversation makes them both smile.

Day Nine, Ten and Eleven

1. **Cooperative Group Activity:**

Recall-level Questions

- What do the old women use for shelter?
- Identify what they see and the places they cross in the first four days.
- Because of their age and the cold, what physical difficulties do the women experience?

Interpretive-level Questions

- Why do the women decide to leave the place where The People have abandoned them?
- Why does Sa' smile when she thinks about what they have accidentally left behind?
- What are "taboo stories" and why are they called that?
- Why do they worry about crossing the river that's frozen over?

Evaluative Questions

- Is it believable that the women remember the skills for survival that they themselves hadn't used for so long? Explain.
  What is the most serious danger the women face? Why?

2. **Mary TallMountain's poem, "The Women in Old Parkas"** in *The Light on The Tent Wall* (83)

Poem Summary: With clipped words and phrases, punctuated with breaths in the terrible winter cold, the speaker describes old women who trap muskrat, make soup, preserve what little kerosene they have left, and continue to sew. They survive on memories of stick dances, people singing, and then laughter at "little lines of rain" bringing the promise of spring.

Activity: Ask students to imagine they've gotten their vehicle stuck in the snow in -25 temperature and the motor has quit working. What do they feel in their limbs and face? How do they try to keep warm? What would they think about? What would it feel like to try to talk? Have students do a choral reading of the poem, paying attention to the sounds and spaces in the poem. Consonants and pauses between words, as well as short phrases and incomplete sentences, reinforce the feeling of cold. Draw attention to the sensory details in *Two Old* Women that show how the women are suffering from the cold and from the condition of old age.

3. **Continue the Character Map** of each woman.

4. **Writing Activity:** Reinforce the **6 Traits of Writing** using the pages 36-38 as examples of Figurative (sensory) imagery that shows strong **ideas** and effective **word choice.**

5. **Portfolio #6: Technical Writing Activity**
   The women make snowshoes, pack possessions in caribou skins, make camp, and they dig pits in snow. **You are the editor of a manual for living in the wilderness:** make a numbered list of the steps for doing one of the activities.

6. **Research Activites:**
   - **Research** snowshoes and materials various people might use to make them, and if time permits, students may want to make snowshoes.

- **Research the physical problems** of people as they age: arthritis, bone loss, vulnerability to cold, macular degeneration, etc.

> *Teacher Tip:* Because there are many questions for Chapter 4, you might want to divide the questions, with each group taking a portion and reporting their responses to the rest of the class.

7. **Assign: Chapter 4 "A Painful Journey" (45-73)**

Summary: Again, the women have pushed themselves beyond what their bodies can stand, and both consider freezing to death. But Sa' is hungry and Ch'idzigyaak's bladder is full, so they rise to a new day. After eating the rabbit head and broth, they move on to follow the river, pulling their belongings with ropes around their waists. The sixth day, Sa' sees an opening to the creek they are looking for. After crossing the river, they see remains of the fishracks they had hung so long before, and they feel like they have "come home." However, they experience conflicting emotions about having finally arrived while they remember their abandonment. The next day, they prepare for the colder weather ahead. Never having been close before they were abandoned, and now that they are settled, they begin to share memories of their family and childhoods. Ch'idzigyaak remembers the time the family left her grandmother behind. Sa' remembers how she grew up more interested in what boys did than girls and how her family accepted her. She tells Ch'idzigyaak about the time she stood up to the chief on behalf of an old woman he wanted to leave behind. The event changed her life. Preoccupied with keeping warm in the increasing cold, the women spend their idle hours telling stories and weaving rabbit fur blankets and clothing. They survive the winter and snare a willow grouse, the first change of meat from rabbit, squirrel, and beaver since they began their journey.

Day Twelve

1. **Cooperative Group Activity:**

Recall-level Questions

- How long did it take the women to reach their destination?
- What do they find when they get there?
- How do they prepare for the cold weather coming?
- What do they talk about?
- What are evidences of the colder temperatures?
- What good fortune comes with the warming temperatures?
- Ch'idzigyaak tells Sa' of the time her grandmother was left behind.
    - What was the grandmother's condition at the beginning of the story?
    - What was the little girl afraid her people might do?
    - How did the little girl feel about the decision to leave her grandmother?
    - How did the grandmother's life end?
- Sa' tells Ch'idzigyaak stories about growing up.
    - What did she like to do?
    - How did she react to the chief's decision to leave an old woman behind for the sake of the group?
    - After the old woman died, what did Sa' realize was important?
    - How did Sa's man die?
- Over the winter, what habit did the women lose?

Interpretive-level Questions

- What does Sa's mean when she says "My mind has power over my body …"?

- Why did Sa feel like she had "come home" when they arrived at their destination?
- How is the women's relationship changing?
- How do they overcome their loneliness?
- How do they encourage each other?
- How is their communication different from the past when they were with The People?
- What do the women have in common?
- Where is the humor or irony in this chapter?
- How has their attitude towards their situation changed by the end of the chapter?

Evaluative Questions

- The day they arrive, they have traveled longer than the previous day when they almost gave up. How does hope affect people and what they are able to accomplish? Give examples.
- Why does Ch'idzigyaak remember the "unhappy" story about her grandmother? How does that story help the readers understand Ch'idzigyaak and their situation?
- How have Sa's youth and the way she grew up helped her in their present situation?

2. **Continue the Character Map** of each woman.

Day Thirteen

1. **Role Play Activity:** Ask for volunteers to portray Ch'idzigyaak and Sa' as each tells her childhood story.
2. **Venn diagram Activity:** With the class as a whole, compare and contrast the three stories of old women being left behind: Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak, Ch'idzigyaak's grandmother, the old woman in Sa's story. Who displays the most sensitivity to the women in each situation?

3. **Portfolio #7:** Write about what you would do with your extra time if you were in their situation? What two possessions--that wouldn't be affected by the cold and wouldn't require electricity--would you keep? Why? Begin this way, "If I were in the same situation as the old women, I would spend my extra time . . . . . " Then say, "I can think of two things I would keep with me. . . . . "

Day Fourteen

1. **Map Activity:** Superimpose the map of routes taken by the Gwich'in before "the coming of Western culture" (74-75) on top of a current map of Alaska or a Google Earth site. Or use the Map of Yukon Flats *Neegoogwandah*, Traditional Hunting Grounds in *Raising Ourselves* pp. 154-155. In your groups make a list of what's changed in the landscape in the last 50 years. Consider roads and buildings, changes in the river due to the dam or flooding.

2. **Read Mary TallMountain's poem, "*Ggaal* Comes Upriver"** in *The Light on the Ten Wall* 14-15) to help students understand what the salmon mean to the Gwich'in Athabascans and to these women. Ask students to think about how the salmon's struggle and fight for life compares with the two women and their survival.
   Poem Summary: *Gaal* is Athabascan for King Salmon. In early May, she begins her journey from the Bering Sea to the Yukon River—"the place of the Midnight Sun"-- to spawn. Along the way, hidden nets try to catch her and the others, but she "jackknifes free" and "sweeps on upriver." This is a poem of survival against mighty odds.

3. **Assign: Chapter 5 "Saving a Cache of Fish" (77-91)**

Summary: With the coming of spring, they catch muskrats and beaver and freeze and dry the meat. Because Ch'idzigyaak and Sa' don't trust the "younger generation," the women decide to move to a safe place where no one will want to go because of the mosquitoes. They spend their spring and short Arctic summer fishing and hunting. After drying the meat, they use their ingenuity to store and protect their supply from predators. One day, with the summer hunting finished, Sa' decides to explore a hill near their camp, and she finds "vast patches of cranberries." With little fear, she chases and follows a rutting bull moose, but finally gives up. Back at camp, Ch'idzigyaak is worried about her friend who has been gone so long. They collect cranberries and stack wood for the coming winter. Their days fall into a "routine of collecting wood, checking rabbit snares, and melting snow for water," and they spend their evenings "keeping each other company" while they try not to think about those who abandoned them.

Day Fifteen

1. **Introduce Jennifer Greene's poem "Hunting"** in What I Keep (65) A member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and also Chippewa/Cree, Jennifer Greene was raised on the Flathead Reservation where she now lives.
   Summary: The speaker observes an eleven-year-old boy, "surrounded by the sound of pine needles/bumping each other in the wind." Waiting, he thinks of bubble gum he can't afford and how his mother will admire him if he brings home a deer.
   - Talk about the images and ideas in this poem and how they might compare with what the women might see and feel as they hunt. Does age really matter?

2. **Portfolio #8:** Using Greene's poem as a model, think of a time you hunted or did something you hoped your parents would admire. Begin your poem with an image of the place where that happened and include a strong verb. Write a free-verse poem that makes the reader see and feel the experience.

3. **Cooperative Discussion Questions:**
   Recall-level Questions
   - What were the steps involved in catching muskrat?
   - How did they protect themselves from mosquitoes?
   - How did the women catch and preserve fish?
   - How did they protect their cache from the bear and ravens?
   - What does Sa' find when she leaves the camp one day?

   Interpretive-level Questions
   - Why did the women want to find a safe place?
   - Why had they torn birch bark from trees and why did they feel it was a mistake?
   - How does this episode foreshadow future events?
   - Contrast the encounters with the bear and the moose? Why did the women succeed with one and not the other?

4. **Continue the Character Map** of each woman.

Day Sixteen

1. **Portfolio #9 Response to Evaluative-level Questions**
   - Ch'idzigyaak and Sa' have changed. Have they found happiness? Begin by defining happiness and then explain your answer.
   - Every day throughout the story so far, the women make choices. Identify one choice that you think is important. Explain the effect of the consequences on their lives.

2. **Presentation Activity:**
   In this chapter, the women catch muskrats and beavers in nets and traps; they fish, store food, keep off mosquitoes, use the insides of fish, and prepare for winter.
   Group Presentation - Using very specific ideas and words, poster illustrations and props, each group will select and explain one of these activities to an audience of third-grade students.

Day Seventeen

1. **Read from pages 151-165** in Wallis' *Raising Ourselves*, **Chapter 14**. This is Velma's introduction to life at *Neegoogwandah* and her realization that she would have to "face the wilderness" on her own. Students will appreciate how much of her own experience is part of the *Two Old Women* story as she tells it.

2. **Assign: Chapter 6 "Sadness among The People" (93-105)**

Summary: A year later, the band again suffers from extreme hunger and fatigue. Recalling his inner turmoil at having left the women, the chief believes it was the right thing to do. When the band returns to the same site, they find no trace of anyone having died there. The chief instructs one of the elders, a guide named Dagoo, and three hunters to find out what has happened to the women. While it has taken the women days to travel to their first camp, it takes these expert runners just one day. But with at each campsite, the hunters realize no one has been there in a long time. Just when they are most discouraged and fear they'll never find the women, the hunters see the places where bark has been torn from birch trees. Dagoo sends his men in opposite directions, and he decides to follow the most unlikely path. Discouraged again, Dagoo suddenly smells smoke from a campfire. After calling his men back, he tells them he believes the women are alive and near. The chapter ends with his calling out the women's names as he waits in silence for their reply.

Day Eighteen

1. **Cooperative Discussion Questions:**

Recall-level Questions

- What has happened to the band in the last year since they left the old women behind?
- What do they find when they return to the place where they left the women?
- Who does the chief choose to find the women?
- What two signs let the old scout know he was traveling the in right direction?

Interpretive-level Questions

- Why had the chief resisted the urge to go back and get the old ones?
- What evidence indicates the chief's decision has disturbed his people?
- Why does the chief select Dagoo?
- What does Dagoo understand about the chief?
- What does Dagoo hope to accomplish as he sets out to look for the women?
- How does Wallis build suspense in the search for the women?
- How does Dagoo differ from the three other men in his party?
- How can you explain the silence that follows Dagoo's call to the women?

Evaluative-level Questions

- Is the chief's self-hatred justified? Explain your answer.
- Dagoo is hopeful of finding the women alive. How could this event help the rest of the band?
- Why is the most unlikely path the most reasonable for Dagoo to follow?

2. **Assign: Chapter 7 "The Stillness is Broken" (107-121)**

Summary: "Loneliness and time" have healed Ch'idzigyaak and Sa's bitter memories. Their hate has "numbed," and they can talk about how much they miss The People. At first when they hear Dagoo's call, they are afraid, but they respond with "We are Here!" However, as Dagoo approaches, he finds the women with spears, prepared to defend themselves and their cache. Promising them no harm, Dagoo tells them he must tell the chief. Still cautious, Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak invite the four hunters into their tent and feed them dried fish and rabbit broth. The men are shocked with the health of the two women, especially in contrast with their hunger. After listening to Dagoo's pleas and promises, and after discussing the situation between themselves, Ch'idzigyaak and Sa' decide to help the band. That evening they trade stories: Dagoo tells them the story of the band's struggles during the last year, and Sa' tells how the women have survived.

Day Nineteen and Twenty

1. **Cooperative Discussion Questions**

Recall-level Questions

- What had healed the women's bitter memories?
- How do the women react when they first hear their names called?
- What lesson has Dagoo learned since The People had left the women behind?
- What makes the women's "hearts soften"?
- What are Sa's terms of their agreement to help The People?

Interpretive-level Questions

- Why are the women reluctant to respond to Dagoo?
- What kept the reunion from being entirely joyful?
- How have the women changed and what does Dagoo admire about the two women?
- How did the women's strength impact the way Dagoo felt about himself?
- Why do the women decide to help the band? How do they feel about losing some of their precious food?
- What have the women learned about themselves?
- What have the women gained from this reunion?

> *Teacher Tip:* Following the reading and discussion of Chapter 7, allow one class period for students to prepare for and practice the role-play activities. They will decide if they will stand or sit or face each other, and most important, how each will feel about him/herself and what each wants out of this exchange. A discussion of non-verbal communication behaviors can preface the exercise.

Evaluative-level Questions

- Should the women be afraid? Explain.
- What is trust? What does it look like in actions and words? What is betrayal? What does it look like in actions and words?
- How could they know that they could trust Dagoo and his men and the chief?
- What was the most important skill or attitude that the women possessed that helped them survive? Explain.

- What might The People learn from the survival of the women?
- What is pride? Who has the most pride in this story? Is it a good thing or not? Why?

2. **Role Play Activity:**

Have students volunteer for two role play assignments:

- **Two students will Role Play** the discussion between the two old women as they try to decide whether to trust and help the men and possibly the rest of The People.
- **Six students will Role Play** the meeting between the women and Dagoo's men as they eat and talk.
- **Four students will Role Play** the discussion between Dagoo and his men as they go to tell the chief they have found the women.

3. **Continue the Character Map** of each woman.

4. **Portfolio #10:** Without naming any names, write about a time when you felt betrayed, or when you betrayed someone else. What did you do? Did the friendship or relationship survive the betrayal? Explain.

5. **Assign: Chapter 8 "A New Beginning" (123-136)**

Summary: When Dagoo and his men return to the chief, they tell them the women's wishes – that they don't trust them, and they don't want to see them. In their meeting after Dagoo's return, the council men confess their error in leaving the women behind and say they will "pay them back with respect." Still, their excitement over a possible reuniting gives them energy as they pack up to move to the outskirts of the women's camp. The chief and Dagoo go into the camp and face the women. These are their concessions: "We will give you enough food for The People, and when it becomes low, we will give you more food. We will give you small portions at a time(125)." For many cold days, The People share and "ration" the food the women give them, but they are "forbidden" to go near the camp. Finally, out of curiosity and a desire to see family, Ch'idzigyaak and Sa' agree to have visitors. So the relationships improve. However, Ch'idzigyaak's daughter and grandson never come, until one day Shruh Zhuu approaches her as she goes to gather wood and asks for his hatchet. This reunion is followed by her reconciliation with Ozhii Nelii. The women are given honorary positions within the band, and The People promise and never again abandon an elder.

Day Twenty-one

1. **Cooperative Discussion Questions:**

Recall-level Questions:

- What were the conditions of the agreement with the old women?
- What lesson had hardship taught the people, not only about the old women, but about themselves as well?
- How does it happen that Ch'idzigyaak finally sees her grandson and daughter?
- What do the people learn about how they will treat any elder from on?

Interpretive-level Questions:

- Why were the old women reluctant to take too much from The People?
- How do The People show their respect for the elderly women?
- How was Ch'idzigyaak's heart healed?
- Where is the *irony* on page 128?
- What does the well-trodden path between the two camps suggest?

- Why does it take Ozhii Nelii so long to see her mother?
- Where is there evidence of forgiveness in this chapter?
- Identify situations in the entire book where individuals apologize or admit they are wrong. In each case, what motivates the apology? What are the consequences of apology?

Evaluative-level Questions:

- Problems in this story occur because of misunderstandings. Explain one of the misunderstandings and how it was cleared up. How could the problem have been avoided?
- Why were the women able to succeed at surviving when the tribe could not?
- What did the women gain and lose by being abandoned?
- How would the story change if these were two old men instead of two old women?
- Name three lessons the two old women learned through the experience of being separated from The People. Which was the most important? Explain your answer.
- What are the ways people demonstrate respect in this story? Explain how each situation defines respect.
- How do *Two Old Women* and the poems included in the unit support the "Essential Understandings of Montana Indians"?

2. **Read two poems that may reflect the feelings of the women by the end of this story, and a third that may represent the kind of death these women will look forward to, one that comes at the end of a life well lived:**
    - "Alive" by Minerva Allen **(Assiniboine)** from *Spirits Rest.*
      The speaker feels alone and wonders about life, if it's steered by destiny or choice. Like the two women, she realizes that she is most alive when she chooses her own destiny.

    - There is No Word for Goodbye" by Mary TallMountain in *The Light on the Tent Wall: A Bridging.* The speaker wants to say something to her mother's sister, *Sokoya*, as her aunt leaves. But the aunt tells her, "we just say, *Tlaa*. That means,/ See you./ We never leave each other." While it is never explicitly stated, readers can imagine the many ways memory keeps us close to those we love, where "we'll see you someplace else." Could the women have said the words in this poem at the beginning of the story? How have they changed?

    - "Beautiful Existence" by Minerva Allen (Assiniboine) in *Poems Across the Big Sky: An Anthology of Montana Poets* (188) The speaker is an elder with "aching knee joints." Centered in ceremony and spiritually complete, the speaker is able to regard Death as friend. Perhaps Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak can look forward to this good death, the kind that comes at the end of a full life.

Day Twenty-two

1. **Complete the Character Map** of each woman.

2. **Students will revisit the original butcher paper sheets** with cards of facts and questions. In Cooperative Discussion groups, they will create at least 10 more fact cards that come from what they've learned. Depending on the kinds of facts and the areas of information, teachers may want to divide the "fact card" assignment according topics. Looking at the questions they asked at the beginning, they will discuss which ones have been answered and which have not. Although time may not permit, they can also talk about how they might answer those questions.

3. **Provide each group with a copy of the biography of one of the women in** *Honoring Native Women's Voices: A Collection of Stories*. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College, 2006. Students will create a definition of a "strong" woman based on the information in their biography and what they've learned from reading *Two Old Women.*
   Women in *Honoring Native Women's Voices:* Norma Bixby(Northern Cheyenne), Elouise Cobell(Blackfeet), Carol Juneau(Mandan Hidatsa), Carmen Taylor(Salish/Oneida), Opal Swaney Cajune(Salish), Brown Owl Woman(Nakoda), Dorothy Felsman(Salish), Oshanee Kenmille(Salish), Adeline Mathias(Kootenai), Clara Rides the White Hipped Horse Nomee (Crow), Frances Vanderburg (Salish), and a speech by Opal Cajune.

Day Twenty-three

1. **Students will complete their portfolios,** concluding with a self-evaluation of their writing, their willingness to learn, their participation in class, their daily responsibility for reading and writing, and one paragraph of the most important idea they've learned in this unit. It might be helpful for teachers to review the "Learner Targets" at the beginning of the unit for the students.

Day Twenty-four -Twenty-nine

Assessments or Extension Activities

Assessment

1. **Student groups will be evaluated on group participation.** An example of a form the groups can fill out is found on this site: http://www.ataccess.org/resources/atk12/bp/coop_eval.pdf

2. **Each student will keep a portfolio** of all work noted throughout the unit as **Portfolio.**
   a. The portfolio will be assessed on completeness (all assignments given) and presentation (how does this best represent *me* and my work during this unit).
   b. It will include a table of contents or a list of all assignments made and completed, in order.
   c. It will conclude with a *self-evaluation* of the student's participation in the unit that will include the following: the student's self-assessment of his/her writing, the student's personal response to reading such a work, a short essay about where the student found him/herself in this novel. Students might ask themselves, how am I changed? Teachers might give them the list of "Learning Targets" at the beginning of the unit to prompt their thinking.
   d. Some individual assignments will have been evaluated for grades separate from the portfolio.
   e. The portfolio folder will always stay in the classroom for the teacher to check occasionally. To make the accounting easier, you may use numbers for each assignment.

3. **Quizzes and Daily Reading Checks and Final Test** made from some of the questions for each chapter**.**

4. **Ask students to remember someone they** know who is in his/her 70's or 80's. What does he/she say (include quotes), do (daily activities or interesting behaviors), look like? What

difficulties does he/she face every day? **They will write a description** of this person and communicate as many details as they can to make the person real for a reader. It should be typed and spell-checked, put in a folder with the person's photo on the front, and presented to the individual.

5. In *Raising Ourselves*, Velma Wallis closes with this comment: "I teach myself to look into the future and not yearn for the past and its people: to honor them through their stories but not to fall into nostalgia which caused so many people to sink into depression (212)." How might Wallis' writing of *Two Old Women* fulfill her goal to honor and to not fall into nostalgia? **Write a letter to the author that is a response to your participation in this unit.** Use portions of the above quote in your letter and write about what you have learned about yourself and your own heritage, and what you have learned about your personal responsibilities to present and future generations.

Additional Writing Activities

1. **Select an interesting, wise, most vivid sentence** from the story to share and explain your choice with the rest of the class in a discussion.
2. Each student will **interview an elder.** Students may collaborate in their discussion groups to draft a list of questions. Include one question about a story that the elder thinks the student should remember to tell his/her children. The guide for Oral Interviews in Appendix C may help with the planning for this activity.
3. **Write a short story** that takes a different turn. Consider what might have happened had the daughter and grandson spoken up in the beginning. What problem and resolution might occur?
4. Remember a hard time in the life of your community (flood, blizzard, fire, and drought) or in your family (disease, death, loss of job, injury). Show what happened (who, what, when, where, how, and why) and then how did you get past it. **Write a narrative** about the event.
5. Finish the sentence **"When I am lonely, I overcome it by...."** and then finish your paragraph by explaining how it works.
6. **Choose a character in the story**, or imagine a person we never get to meet - the leader's wife, a young warrior, another elderly woman or man. Imagine you are that person in place and time, and **write a journal from one day.** What would you see, hear, smell, touch? What would you wish, what would you learn?
7. With thirteen siblings, Velma rarely spent time alone with either parent. But she begins her memoir *Raising Ourselves* with details and images of an early morning event–a time she "savored" with her father when he took her with him as he checked his fishing wheel (16-17). Using Wallis' writing as a model of sensory images, **describe for a future daughter or son a "savored" time** you spent alone with one parent.

Teacher Notes and Cautions

- Because the unit includes a wide variety of activities and levels of questions, it may be used with students from grade levels 7-12. Teachers will need to select the questions and activities most appropriate for their grade level.

- Teachers will also make choices about the activities that will take more time and resources.

- More advanced students may read *Raising Ourselves*—a child-of-an-alcoholic story—using the guide in Appendix D. The details in Wallis' memoir deal with some very harsh realities.

Vocabulary

accessible (2)
silhouetted (19)
pulsated (54)
futile (98)
balefully (113)
nostalgia (212 in *Raising Ourselves*)
In each chapter, students may choose other words that will require definition.

Extension Activities

1. For a contemporary understanding of Wallis' homeland, watch two films:
    - *American Indian Homelands* DVD (2006), particularly the segment on the former Gwi'chin chief and tribe of Arctic Village and their efforts to curb the drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.
    - *The Snow Walker* DVD. Based on *The Snow Walker* by Farley Mowat. Charles Martin Smith, director. 2004.
      Summary: The story takes place in northernmost Canada. A pilot who brings supplies to local tribes is bringing a young Inuit woman with tuberculosis to a hospital for treatment. When the plane crashes, the pilot must depend on the girl's expertise in living on the tundra, and they both find ways to overcome the cultural and language barriers that would separate them.

2. **Writing Summaries, a Technical Writing Activity:** *Two Old Women* may be read aloud in three hours, so this writing activity may easily be accomplished in 15 minutes a day over a three-week period of time, with students doing the cooperative discussion and portfolio activities as well.
    a. Read aloud a chapter a day to students, and ask them to keep their desks free from any distractions, including pens and paper
    b. After the reading, ask students to take only 5 minutes to **write a summary of the chapter they have just heard.** When finished, have a few students read their summaries aloud and comment about what is missing and what may have been included that is not necessary in a summary. In a summary, always write in the present tense, with the tone and perspective remaining the same as the original.
    c. **Necessary** - Who? What? When? Where? Names of characters, setting, situation, and problem(s).
    d. **Not necessary** – Most images and minor details

When students write a summary each day, while providing feedback to each other, they see how they can improve their ability to listen for the kind of information necessary for focused and clear summary writing. These summaries may be added to the Portfolios of writing.

3. **Research the nutritious value** of the foods the women eat and how those foods might sustain them. What important food groups are they missing?

4. As the story progresses, students can create a **Map of their Journey**, with rivers and landscape, significant events.

5. What have you learned about the Athabascan culture from reading this story? Remember culture includes *education, government, marriage practices, parenting practices, food, lodging, vocations, values, religion.* What more would you like to know and how would you find the information?

6. **Create a family life map** following Velma Wallis' example at the beginning of *Raising Ourselves*.
    - Begin at the bottom with yourself, your siblings
    - Include a head-shot photo of each if you can, with a one-sentence detail that defines that person.
    - Build up to your maternal and paternal grandparents. If you have more than one set of parents or grandparents, you may need more space.

7. **Illustrate one of the following passages** that exemplify Wallis' strong descriptive skill.
    - The two old women sitting at the camp while the tribe walks away
    - One of the camps where the women find plentiful food and stay for awhile.
    - Sa's unusual hunt for the moose
    - The reunion between Ch'idzigyaak and her grandson or daughter.
    - A passage of your own choosing.

8. **Watch the movie *Castaway* and compare/contrast this film with *Two Old Women*** in response to the following questions:
    - How did they solve their need for food and fire?
    - How did they respond to being alone?
    - What changes in values did the characters experience?
    - What did they realize about themselves and their place in the world at the end of the ordeal?
    - How did their life experience or heritage help them survive?

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- Alaska Teacher Resources— http://www.alaskool.org/
- Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum www.alaskanative.net This Native-sponsored site provides present-tense information by and about Alaska's Indigenous people. Drag the curser over Alaska culture group map sections and more information appears.
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- Anchorage Museum— http://www.anchoragemuseum.org
- Beers, Kylene. *When Kids Can't Read, What Teachers Can Do: A Guide for Teachers 6-12.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. 392 pp. ISBN 0-86709-519-9. 2004. (An excellent resource with activities that can help struggling readers engage with *Two Old Women* and other texts)
  For example: "Tea Party" – a pre-reading activity where students are given phrases, sentences, or words on cards from a chapter ahead of time. In a circle, they share their cards and draw inferences, make predictions, put the sentences in logical order.
- Dauenhauer, Nora Marks (Tlingit poet) "A Poem for Jim Nagataak'w (Jakwteen), my Grandfather, Blind and nearly Deaf." http://www.worldofpoetry.org/usop/land7.htm
- Greene, Jennifer K. **(Salish)**. *What I Keep.* Greenfield Review Press: Greenfield Center, New York. 1999.

  About the author: A member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and also Chippewa/Cree, she was raised on the Flathead Reservation where she now lives.
- *Honoring Native Women's Voices: A Collection of Stories*. Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College, 2006.

  Summary: Created by the Tribal History Project, Salish Kootenai College, with an Introduction by Julie Cajune, the biographical histories in this collection reveal the talents, power, wisdom, and contributions of thirteen women: Norma Bixby(Northern Cheyenne), Elouise Cobell(Blackfeet), Carol Juneau(Mandan Hidatsa), Carmen Taylor(Salish/Oneida), Opal Swaney Cajune(Salish), Brown Owl Woman(Nakoda), Dorothy Felsman(Salish), Oshanee Kenmille(Salish), Adeline Mathias(Kootenai), Clara Rides the White Hipped Horse Nomee(Crow), Frances Vanderburg(Salish), and a speech by Opal Cajune. It closes with Agnes Vanderburg's wisdom: "What little you know, tell 'em. You feel good afterward; you get everything right for yourself. And some of them will listen." For young people searching for identities and stories that can help give life meaning, these women prove to be powerful role models.
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- Pumyua (Yup'ik) Alaskan Native musical group. http://tribalfunk.wordpress.com/biography/
- *The Snow Walker* DVD. Based on *The Snow Walker* by Farley Mowat. Charles Martin Smith, director. 2004.

  Summary: The story takes place in northernmost Canada. A pilot who brings supplies to local tribes is bringing a young Inuit woman with tuberculosis to a hospital for treatment. When the plane crashes, the pilot must depend on the girl's expertise in living on the tundra, and they both find ways to overcome the cultural and language barriers that would separate them.
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  About the author: Mary TallMountain was born in 1918 in Nulato, Alaska on the Yukon River. Before dying of tuberculosis, her mother gave Mary to a white doctor in the area. But this was just the beginning of the tragedy and grief that surrounded her for most of her life. Although she first published a short story in a children's magazine at the age of ten, she didn't start to write seriously until the 1960's when she worked under the direction of Laguna/Sioux poet, essayist and novelist, Paula Gunn Allen in San Francisco. Gunn Allen has written the introduction to *The Light on the Tent Wall*.

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Appendix A

Athabascan Background

From "About the Gwich'in People" (137-140)

- Larger Tribe or Language Group: The Athabascan who live between the Brooks Range and the Alaska Range. Carl Waldman and Facts on File, Inc. (2003) regards Athabascan as a Subarctic Culture Area that covers most of present-day Canada and Alaska. The Inuit, not Athabascan, live farther north.
- Band: Gwich'in People, one of eleven Athabascan groups
- Place: Western interior of Alaska, Fort Yukon and Chalkyitsik area, a boreal forest
- Rivers: Yukon, Porcupine and Tanana
- Language: a dialect of the common Athabascan roots--Navajo and Apache also.
- Source: A reference to the belief that these tribes are descended from Asians who crossed from Siberia during the Ice Age(138).
- Subsistence: Living off the land, they followed large game (moose, caribou) and small animals (rabbits and squirrels). Starvation was always a threat, and life was hard.
- Territory: Bands usually limited themselves to a traditional hunting area, with the understanding that intrusion into another's territory would invite violence. However, such encroachment was "rare."(139)
- Changes: Permanent camps and villages by 1900 due to "population declines brought on by disease, fur trade, access to trading posts, enforced school attendance." However, many Alaskan Athabascan continue to live off the land (140).

For much more about Athabascan and other Alaska Natives, see the Alaska Native Knowledge Network website: www.ankn.uaf.edu This site features Publications, Curriculum Resources, Native Educator Resources, Cultural Atlases and Talking Maps, and Cultural Resources.

Appendix B

Literary Terms Study Guide

1. **Plot –** The events that take place in a story

2. **Characters –** The people in the story (Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak are the main characters in this story)
3. **Mood –** The emotion of a story (The mood of this story moves from gloomy and hopeless to determined and triumphant)
4. **Setting –** The time and place of a story (The setting of *Two Old Women* is Interior Alaska, and the time is pre-contact, before the coming of Europeans and Americans)
5. **Legend –** A folk story about something that took place in the past
6. **Supporting Details –** Facts in the story that support the main idea or plot (Details about the cold, the difficult travel, the way the women get food, the relationship between the women, the critical events
7. **Point of view, third person –** A story that is told as if the author is outside looking in. This narrative mode might use the objective perspective (not focusing on any character's thoughts, or omniscient (revealing more than one character's thoughts) or limited omniscient (revealing the thoughts of only one character)
8. **Conflict –** The opposing forces in a story (In this story, the characters experience internal conflicts, conflicts between themselves and the outside environment, conflicts between each other and between themselves and the main Gwich'in band)
9. **Irony—**
    - Verbal Irony: words express the opposite of the literal meaning. For example:
        - "let us die trying."
    - Situational Irony: the opposite of what is expected occurs. For example:
        - The women survive when all odds are against them.
        - The band ends up depending on them rather than the women depending on the younger ones.
        - In TallMountain's poem, "Good Grease," even though they are near starving, the people relish and play while eating the caribou grease.

Appendix C

Oral Histories and Interviewing

Before the Interview:

- **Know** the purpose of the interview (to honor an elder, to learn about what he or she values, to begin to build a relationship, to receive stories the individual chooses to share, etc.).
- **Construct** basic questions (of who, what, when--birth, place, school, marriage, children, vocations, etc.) that will be answered at the beginning of the interview/tape.
- **Construct** open-ended questions (of how and why, of causes and consequences, of what's changed and what's stayed the same) and avoid any that begin with "did you" or "were you" which result in "yes/no" answers.
- **Prepare the permission paperwork, and audio equipment,** and know it works.
- **Make phone calls** to make clear the time and date of the interview.
- **Give the interviewee** a copy of possible questions before hand.
- **Arrange for an adult (mentor)** to accompany you to the interviewee's home.

During the Interview:

- **Take an adult (mentor)** with you who can fill in the spaces of questions, help keep you all at ease.

- **Eliminate background noise** - TV, other voices, furnace (if possible), telephone, refrigerator. If you are **videotaping**, be sure the interviewee is **not sitting** in front of a light or a window.
- **Keep the lighting in front of the subject and dark background.**
- **Be sure the elder is comfortable** and tell how you will respect his or her right to not answer any questions.
- **Speak clearly and loudly enough** so the elder can hear.
- **Assign one person** in the **interview group** to record the numbers on the tape recorder and the topics of discussion in a **log.**
- **Assign one person** to be the **lead interviewer**.
- **Bring a small gift in thanks -** jar of jam, cookies, bread, etc.
- **Take photographs of special objects in the home**, special room, favorite treasure, etc.
- **Plan your return** with your draft of transcription for the interviewee's inspection.
- **Tell the Interviewee** how you will use his/her gifts of story.

After the Interview :

- **Send (or deliver) a Thank You within the next day or two,** making specific and positive comments about the interview and the person.
- **Transcribe the interview,** either word for word, or summarize with direct quotes included in the summary. If it's word for word, do not include all the "you know's", the "uh's" and "um's." Cut out some of the "and's" if the person uses them to connect all ideas. Create your own ends to sentences with periods or semi-colons.
- **Return your edited draft to the interviewee** for spelling of names and correct facts. (To avoid embarrassment for yourself, be sure you've done your best to have the spelling correct).
- **Kindly let the interviewee know you have a deadline for** the assignment. Sometimes they aren't aware of the school's expectations.
- **Make another visit to the homes to pick up their corrected versions**.
- **Transform** your interview into a product: possible published transcriptions, vignettes with quotes, scrap books with photos of the house and stories to accompany them that came from the interview, life map for display in the home.
- **Give the interviewee a copy of all materials you collected and created.**

Appendix D

Raising Ourselves: A Gwitch'in Coming of Age Story from the Yukon River
By Velma Wallis

Impact of "outside world" on the Gwich'in and on Velma Wallis' family from *Raising Ourselves*

(28-29) Two belief systems existed in Fort Yukon (Christianity – Episcopal and Assembly—and traditional Gwich'in beliefs and shamanism and

(36-37) Impact of Christianity and disease on Gwich'in and Reference to Harold Napoleon (Yupik) and his book *Yuuyarag: The Way of the Human Being.* http://akmhcweb.org/ncarticles/ncarticles.htm

(44-45) Loss of children and subsequent coddling of children who live, "fine tuning of prejudices," alcoholism, reactions

(46) Father's cynicism "I sensed my father held emotions in like a layer of earth holds back molten lava."

(76) Fear of "Indians" as seen on TV and confusion of their own identities

(84-94) School, bullying, racism (90)

(106-112) Introduction of alcohol and accompanying abuse into family life and the lives of the children

(119-121) Allotment of Fort Yukon in 1970, with unallotted lands being run by a Fairbanks located Native Corporation of individuals owning "shares"

(124-130) Father's diabetes and alcoholism and death – he gave up on life and drank himself to death

(135) Mother's return to alcohol after her husband's death

(136) Liquor store opening – "The liquor itself contributed more graves than anyone wants to count."

(146) Velma assuming her mother's role in caring for her siblings

(173) Mother's strength to overcome alcoholism

(205)"We Gwich'in were straying from our tradition of caring and knowing one another. . . . Each time we freely gave ourselves over to our addictions, we were less Gwich'in."

(179) What it means to not drink or do drugs

(186-192) Job Corps in Oregon - a kind of relocation experience.

(198) Impact of alcoholism on children

(211-212) What holds the Gwich'in back from being "healed and healthy"

- Belief that it is not good to be who we are—it's better to be cowboy than Indian.
- "Reluctance to move into the future with a healthy balance of the old while we live in the new."
- "An unhealthy sense of nostalgia." We must live in the present.

Activity: Compare the impacts of and Gwich'in reactions to the "outside world" (religion, disease, alcoholism, changes in the landscape and climate, death and loss of children) to the **experience of a Montana tribe**.

Velma Wallis' life experiences in *Raising Ourselves*

(50) Description of her mother: "a resilient soul who would always be the strength behind those who were loud, boisterous, and weak in nature."

(51) A grandmother's "stories and biscuits sheltered" them from "the harsh reality that awaited them at home."

(76) Mother's stories about their ancestors.

(68) Description of Wallis' parents' nomadic movement between Fort Yukon and Neegoogwandah until 1959 when they settled in Fort Yukon. "Trapping was the only way a man could support his family then, and hunting helped him to feed his children. Many times my grandmother followed them up to Neegoogwandah, where she set up camp nearby and trapped for herself."

(100-105) Trapping in the 60s, mother's sewing, hauling water and wood, catching and drying salmon.

(73) Impact of climate: flooding of Yukon River before a dam was built in the 1960s.

(74) Impact of long days and long nights depending on time of year.

(116-119) Impact of Gwich'in belief on Grandmother *Itchoo*'s attitude about her life and its end

(151) Velma at age 16: "I wanted to learn to live and trap off the land

(168) Self questioning: "I had embarked on a quest not realizing that there would be consequence. If I was not prepared to deal with the harshness of this lifestyle, maybe I needed to bail out . . . . "

(169) "Strange beauty of Neegoogwandah" that draws her to stay.

(171, 177) Her mother's teaching of life-saving skills, how to trap muskrats, to hunt, to fish

(204-209) Impact of her brother Barry on Velma

(210)". . . our stories, the memories of our people, are the things left to hold us together ."

(211) "I almost believed that drinking and drugs were all we as native people had ever been about until that day when my mother first told me the story about the two old women. Then I saw clearly that we were once strong and grounded, with a long history of survival. I saw hope that we could still be the people we once were, not in the literal sense, but possessing the same pride that our ancestors had before the epidemics and cultural changes ."

Activity: Compare like details in *Two Old Women* with the above details. Provide each student with a copy of one of the above fifteen sections. Have them respond to the following questions: How may the details in your reading have informed Wallis writing of *Two Old Women?* Consider the landscape, the climate, how Velma Wallis would have known how to survive in the wilderness, how the women might feel, how to resolve conflicts, and what to value the most.

Appendix E

Picture Books by and about the Inuit People

- Kusugak, Michael Arvaarluk **(Inuit). *Baseball Bats for Christmas*.** Illustrated by Vladyana Krykorka. New York: Annick Press Ltd, 1990. 20 pp. ISBN: 1-55037-145-2

Summary: Arvaarluk is a little boy with asthma, and he loves Christmas, the time when "you give your most favorite thing to your best friend." Every Christmas, Rocky Parsons would bring supplies in his Norseman aeroplane to Repulse Bay, at the top of Hudson's Bay in the Artic Circle. In 1955 he brings something new, something the people have never seen except in Father Didier's books--six "standing ups" or Christmas trees. The children and their father know just what to do with them – make baseball bats, and Arvaarluk plays all spring and summer until all the bats break and it's time for Rocky to bring more trees.

The story demonstrates the power of ingenuity to create happiness, and the way a boy can prevail over a chronic condition such as asthma.

- Kusugak, Michael Arvaarluk **(Inuit). *Northern Lights The Soccer Trails*.** Illustrated by Vladyana Krykorka. New York: Annick Press Ltd, 1993. 20 pp. ISBN: 1-55037-338-2

Summary:

Beautifully illustrated, this is the sad but wonderful story of a child's loss and the comfort she receives when her grandmother tells her a story about what happens to people when they die. As a baby Kataujaq was as "pretty as a rainbow," her mother tells her, and that's why they gave her that name. In the springtime, Kataujaq goes fishing with her family. In summer, she collects rocks and picks flowers for her mother who saves them until long after they had dried up. In late summer, when the

grass would turn brown and the nights longer, Kataujaq and her mother pick berries until her hands and face turn purple from the juice. But one day her mother becomes ill with the "big sickness" and is taken by airplane to the south, and never returns. Kataujaq misses her mother. Feeling very lonely, she cries in bed at night.

In the winter, the people of their village like to play the traditional game of soccer on the sea ice with a ball made of caribou fur. Because it is night all day long, they play in the light of the stars and the Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis). The people on Baffin Island call them Aqsarniit, or "Soccer Trails." One day Kataujaq's grandmother tells her a story about what happens to people when they die and how they go up into the sky and play soccer, the game they all loved when they lived on earth. Kataujaq is comforted when she thinks of her mother being close to her every time she sees the Northern Lights. "It is a most wonderful thing."

- Rivera, Raquel. ***Arctic Adventures: Tales From the Lives of Inuit Artists*.** Illustrated by Jirina Marton. Berkeley, CA: Groundwood Books, 2007. ISBN: 13-978-0-88899-7142

Summary:

"Based on stories told by the artists, this collection includes a feature on each artist with a portrait, a brief biography and a reproduction of a print, painting or sculpture. A glossary, map, and list of further reading are also included." (Jacket information)

Appendix F

Conventions Activity

(Paragraph excerpts from Velma Wallis' *Two Old Women* are used with the generous permission (2009) of Epicenter Press, Inc.)

In the Editor's Afterword, Lael Morgan writes:

"Did I tell you about the commas?" The author had asked as she grew more comfortable in dealing with her editor. "Although I got my GED, I've always had trouble with commas. I knew most sentences have them but I didn't know where to put them, so I'd write up the story and just sprinkle them in." Finally, my brother Barry said, 'Velma, why don't you taken them out entirely until you figure it out – maybe someone will help you."(145)

- Students will punctuate the paragraph and then compare it to the final edited version in Wallis' published text, looking at how punctuation differences can affect meaning.
- **At the beginning of the workshop,** review rules of quotation marks and commas, especially *after introductory phrases and clauses, around interrupters, between items in a series, direct address.*
- Distribute a copy of the selection to groups of two so they can help each other, as "Barry" suggested. Students will provide only *end punctuation* – no commas or quotation marks.
- After 5 minutes, depending on the ability of the students, read the published punctuated text on an overhead – with only end punctuation inserted. Have groups discuss similarities and differences.
- Students will next provide *quotation marks* and *commas*. Follow the same procedure, with overhead copy of original published text.
- Discuss the ways punctuation choices can confuse or affect meaning.

From *Two Old Women* by Velma Wallis, pages 42-43, **with all punctuation removed**

On the fourth night the women almost stumbled onto the slough everything around them stood shrouded under silvery moonlight shadows stretched beneath the many trees and over the slough the women stood on the bank for a few moments resting as their eyes took in the beauty of that special night Sa' marveled at the power the land held over people like herself over the animals and even over the trees they all depended on the land and if its rules were not obeyed quick and unjudgmental death could fall upon the careless and unworthy Ch'idzigyaak looked at her friend as Sa' sighed deeply what's the matter she asked.

Sa's face creased in a sad smile nothing is wrong my friend we are on the right trail after all I was thinking about how it used to be that the land was easy for me to live on and now it seems not to want me perhaps it is just my aching joints that are making me complain.

Ch'idzigyaak laughed perhaps it is because our bodies are just too old or maybe we are out of shape maybe the time will come when we will spring across this land again Sa' joined in the joke.

With only end punctuation:

On the fourth night the women almost stumbled onto the slough. Everything around them stood shrouded under silvery moonlight. Shadows stretched beneath the many trees and over the slough the women stood on the bank for a few moments resting as their eyes took in the beauty of that special night. Sa' marveled at the power the land held over people like herself over the animals and even over the trees. They all depended on the land and if its rules were not obeyed quick and unjudgmental death could fall upon the careless and unworthy. Ch'idzigyaak looked at her friend as Sa' sighed deeply. What's the matter? she asked.

Sa's face creased in a sad smile. Nothing is wrong my friend. We are on the right trail after all. I was thinking about how it used to be that the land was easy for me to live on and now it seems not to want me. Perhaps it is just my aching joints that are making me complain.

Ch'idzigyaak laughed. Perhaps it is because our bodies are just too old or maybe we are out of shape. Maybe the time will come when we will spring across this land again. Sa' joined in the joke.

With punctuation as it appears in published text:

On the fourth night, the women almost stumbled onto the slough. Everything around them stood shrouded under silvery moonlight. Shadows stretched beneath the many trees and over the slough the women stood on the bank for a few moments, resting as their eyes took in the beauty of that special night. Sa' marveled at the power the land held over people like herself, over the animals, and even over the trees. They all depended on the land, and if its rules were not obeyed, quick and unjudgmental death could fall upon the careless and unworthy. Ch'idzigyaak looked at her friend as Sa' sighed deeply. "What's the matter?" she asked.

Sa's face creased in a sad smile. "Nothing is wrong, my friend. We are on the right trail after all. I was thinking about how it used to be that the land was easy for me to live on and now it seems not to want me. Perhaps it is just my aching joints that are making me complain. Ch'idzigyaak laughed. "Perhaps it is because our bodies are just too old, or maybe we are out of shape. Maybe the time will come when we will spring across this land again." Sa' joined in the joke."

Montana
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