

Activity and Teacher's Guide: *Charlie and the Blanket Toss*

By Tricia Brown / Illustrations © by Sarah Martinsen
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Charlie loves to watch his relatives and friends get thrown high in the air during the traditional Iñupiat blanket toss. But secretly, he's afraid to try it himself. At the Whaling Festival, he's ready to step up and overcome his fears. Warm humor and good energy fill the pages in this inspiring story while authentic details of Alaska Native life are shared to anchor the story in place. Glowing illustrations depict Charlie's family and village friends as they prepare for the big celebration while action scenes capture the excitement and spirit of *Nalukataq*.

Reading / Language Arts / Writing

1. Read *Charlie and the Blanket Toss* and answer the following questions:
 - a. When and why do the Native people of the Alaska's far north celebrate Nalukataq?
 - b. Why is Charlie afraid?
 - c. What is the Iñupiaq word for "grandmother"?
 - d. Charlie's *Aana* tells him a story from long ago. What did she say about her own grandfather?
 - e. How do the Iñupiaq whalers look for whales?
 - f. What is Charlie's favorite dessert? What is it made of?
 - g. What do the dancers do with their arms during the drumming and singing?
 - h. At the meal, Charlie gets full, but he goes back for a second helping. What did Auntie Katherine give him?
 - i. Who was on the sealskin blanket when Charlie and his friends got there?
2. Sharing is an important value in Iñupiaq culture. When Charlie helps to pass out shares of the whale meat and *maktak*, he feels good. Why do you think sharing food is so special for him?
3. One of the biggest lessons that Charlie learns is about being brave. What does being brave mean to you? Write about a time that you were brave. What was the result?
4. Unscramble these words found in *Charlie and the Blanket Toss*. After you unscramble them, put them in alphabetical order.

VERRES
AYERD
GIRESD
GITIA

WREC
RIAFD
YILSMF
CILBCEY



Science / Natural History

(Hint: Find out more about Barrow, Alaska, and the whaling tradition on the Internet.)

1. What animal family does the bowhead whale belong to? Name other whales that are part of this family.
2. What is the difference between a “toothed” whale and a “baleen” whale? What do they eat?
3. Do whales migrate or stay in one place?
4. What is an “open lead” (pronounced LEED) in the ice?
5. In Barrow, the Midnight Sun makes every day bright in the spring and summer. On what date does the sun go down for the winter season? When does it come back up?
6. There are no trees in Alaska’s far north. What do the people use to make their traditional whaling boats?

Geography

1. What city is farther north than any other in the United States?
2. Look at a map of Alaska that includes the neighboring country of Russia. How many miles separate Alaska from Russia?
3. To get to Barrow from Fairbanks, Alaska, what would you ride in? Circle the answer:
MINIVAN TAXICAB SPEEDBOAT AIRPLANE



Math

1. To make a traditional wooden boat, Iñupiaq women will sew together 8 bearded sealskins to cover 1 boat frame. If 4 boats need to be covered, how many sealskins will they need?
2. It’s playtime at Nalukataq! Charlie and 3 other boys are sledding down a snowy hill. Nearby, 2 girls from his class are playing catch. Also, 6 boys and girls are trying not to fall as they run and slide on the ice. How many children are playing?
3. If Charlie’s Aana can make 1 *atigi*, 3 pairs of *mukluks*, and 4 bowls of Eskimo ice cream in a month, how many of each would she have after 3 months?



Art / Games / Movement

Draw or paint what Charlie saw at Nalukataq!

OR Make a map with drawings of the eating area, the dancing area, and the blanket toss area, then cut out and color a paper doll Charlie to walk around your map.

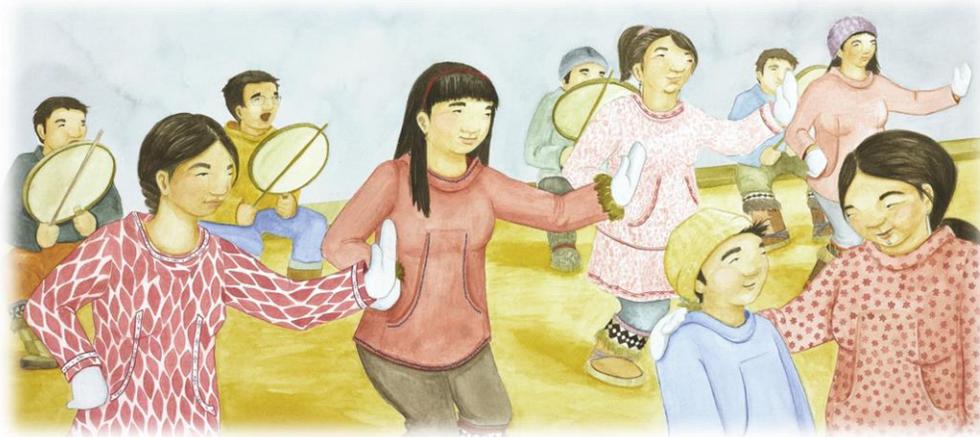
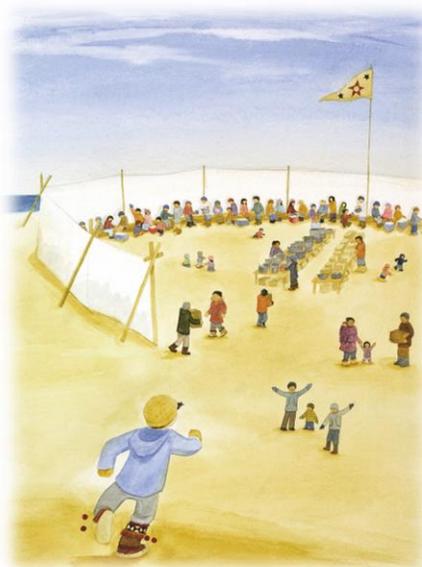
Eskimo Games: Everybody plays or cheers on the favorites at community events that include Eskimo games. Sometimes athletes travel elsewhere to compete in games that test their strength and endurance, skills that are good to have for hunters and travelers in the Arctic. Try these:

THE STICK PULL: Sit cross-legged on the floor, facing your opponent, with a grown-up's leg between you. Your knees will be touching that leg. Each of you holds the same short stick. (An 18-inch length of 2-inch dowel rod will work.) At "Go!" see who will pull the other boy or girl over onto your side. The first one to lift his or her bottom off the floor is the loser.

ONE-FOOT AND TWO-FOOT JUMP: Hang a tennis ball or a sock ball from a door frame using a string and tack. The ball should hang down to about waist height to begin and can go higher for those who are good at it. Now, standing still on two feet, try to jump up and kick the ball with one foot (but both feet have to be off the ground). Make it harder by raising the ball OR kicking the ball with two feet, then landing on two feet.

ICE CAKE JUMP: Use masking tape to create a wide "open lead" on the floor. Pretend each side is a floating piece of ice. See who can jump the farthest across the "water" without falling in. If it's too easy, make the lead wider!

Iñupiaq dancing is lots of fun and for all ages. See how dancing is a little different for men, women, boys, and girls—even non-Natives are invited to try it in the "Fun Dance." Watch this amateur video taken in Atqasuk, Alaska, and join in, copying the dancers' moves. See <http://youtu.be/iy8eX573kkg>





NALUKATAQ

This photo of the blanket toss is more than 100 years old! Nalukataq, the whaling festival, is a centuries-old spring tradition for the Inupiat, reflecting thanksgiving, sharing, and respect. The blanket toss is a favorite festival event. Neighbors and family surround one person on a tough, seal-skin “blanket” edged with rope handles. They work together to bounce the jumper high above their homemade trampoline. Would you like to try it?!

Alaska State Library P320-36; Rev. Samuel Spriggs Photograph Collection

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tricia Brown has written nearly thirty books, among them nine children's picture books, and most of them on Alaska subjects. She first moved to Alaska from the Chicago area in 1978. For the next twenty years, Tricia was a newspaper journalist, then edited *Alaska* magazine before entering book publishing in 1996. Since then, she has enjoyed writing for all ages, but especially for children who want to learn more about Alaska. Tricia travels often and is a popular speaker in schools, libraries, and events throughout the country. She welcomes invitations! See her website for author visit details at www.triciabrownbooks.com.



(Photo by Brian Lies)

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR



(Photo by Mary Virginia Stroud)

Sarah Martinsen is a designer and graphic artist who lives and works in Barrow, Alaska. She enjoys participating in Nalukataq as well as other community events this special city. *Charlie and the Blanket Toss* is her first children's book, however, she has extensive experience in illustration and design. She is an inspiring speaker, especially for children looking to follow a career in art.



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