ShoreZone in the Classroom

Using Coastal Imagery for Youth / Elder Film Workshops & Curriculum Design
2012 Film Workshop Background

Combine ShoreZone Coastal Mapping with Youth / Elder Film Workshop Model in Kaktovik & Pt. Lay
Minimal Equipment Requirements

- Built-in-Cameras on Macs
- iMovie
- iPhones, hand-held cameras, school or personal cameras

Equipment accessible in Alaskan schools
Connecting Elders’ Stories to ShoreZone Imagery
Integrating ShoreZone with Alaska State Standards & the Inupiaq Learning Framework
Tracy Burns working on her film “Weather or Not”
Sense of Place: Using New Media to Share Traditional Stories

Maeva Gauthier and Maria Acemah

All truth contains a contradiction. Contradiction is the point of the pyramid.
-Simone Weil, Gravity and Grace

We land in Kaktovik on Barrow Island on the North Coast of Alaska and emerge from a small plane that resembles a papercraft traversing the ethereal arctic skies. We are held by a whale boneyard and polar bears, already visible on the horizon. Kaktovik is a village of 500, uniquely situated on the north slope of Alaska, the only village in the vast land of north known as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; about 80% of the residents are Inupiat. Subsistence hunting still plays a vital role in the culture and economy of locals. Yet this small village has much in common with other rural Alaskan villages that experience the sometimes-painful sense of dichotomy in our times. Elders versus youth, Whale-hunting versus video games, Inupiat versus English. Living off the land versus rising ocean toxicity levels. Traditional ways versus Western ways.

Our purpose in coming here is to help youth make documentary films about the changing shoreline. We are all too aware of the socio-cultural-ecological tensions between the old days and modern times. Yet we come to Kaktovik to support the unique ways that youth are able to take the best elements of all worlds and weave them together. Youth in Kaktovik carry movies and cameras alongside the splendid moments when a whale is harvested and the village savors the delicious (and learned) taste of肌肉, or whale skin. We will spend the coming week working with youth to interview elders to make short documentary films that relate to the core of life on the island: stories of changing coastlines and water, stories conveyed by using innovative technologies.

The stories of Kaktovik elders are informed by an early upbringing largely without white people and Western influences. Additionally, they have watched global warming eat away at their land, which is changing before their very eyes. -360 Miles Southeast of Barrow, Kaktovik is far closer to Canada (-400 miles). The international border seems artificial as families, villages, and languages are in common over the divide. While Inupiat have lived in the region for ~10,000 years, the land has been highly politicized in the past 150 years as federal policies and oil companies contend over their own interests in this tragically rich and stark landscape. As the only village within the highly contested Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), Kaktovik elders and community members have been forced to become savvy in navigating between their culture and Western interests in their land and resources. During our work in Kaktovik, we hope to use the Inupiat and Inupiat enabling visual forms to emerge through making our documentaries.

Tracy Burns filming for her movie about coastal erosion during the 2012 Sense of Place project in Kaktovik.
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She had been struck by power of imagery to trigger reflections and stories from villagers throughout coastal Alaska about the footage. She realized what an amazing opportunity it was to combine the innovative, interactive website footage of coastlines with the linguistic and story-telling wisdom of elders and to engage young in the process. Maria Acemah, working for Media Action, specialized in leading film workshops in rural Alaska to connect youth and elders through living stories and new technology. The Arctic Slope Community Foundation, composed of community members from the Arctic Slope, chose to provide the cost-share for the project Sense of Words that identified the contamination of coastal coastline from a helicopter, using their footage in films, and sharing these films at a community screening. The urgency of this storytelling process comes directly from the context of global warming's rapid and dramatic impact on Alaska's changing coastlines.

Two sisters and aspiring filmmakers raised in Kaktovik — Tracy and Brittany Burns — dove into a film topic that was as natural as breathing for them: stories about the changing coastline. Their grandparents' underground freezer, a storage unit dug into the permafrost, to store meat and berries through the summer, was in the process of plummeting into the
2013-’14 ShoreZone North Slope Borough School District Curriculum Design Project
Looking Forward: Next Steps
2015 Ilisagvik College ShoreZone Summer Film Workshop