

Writing Projects



*On youth speakers of Kalaallisut,
the Greenlandic language...*

*Per Langgaard, a member of the Language Policy
Working Group, presented evidence of a significant
drop in the number of young people in Greenland
who speak Danish as a mother tongue. He believes
that this is due primarily to a drop in the Danish
population following the establishment of home rule.
As a result, young Greenlanders no longer enjoy the
'free Danish education' they once had,
resulting in a growing number of children
who speak only Kalaallisut.*

*From An Overview of Current Language Initiatives in Greenland,
Office of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut*

Biographies

What is a Biography?

A biography is a record of someone's life. It can include important life events, such as birth date and place, family life as a child, marriage, births of sons and daughters, date and place of death. There are many other details that make a person come to life for us as we read: activities or jobs held over a lifetime, important events or circumstances, beliefs and values that guided the person's way of life.

Ideas for Biographies

- The literacy group could write biographies of their own parents, grandparents or other family members. If people are writing about an ancestor who has passed away, they may be able to get information through books, magazine articles and through interviewing relatives and other people in the community.
- The literacy group could decide to record the lives of all the Elders in the community. Check first to see if recordings have already been made of these Elders' lives. If recordings already exist, you could write biographies based on listening to those interviews. If no recordings exist, you could get permission to interview these Elders.
- Members of the group may also want to interview Elder's family members to get their viewpoint of the Elders' lives.
- Take photographs to include in the biographies or look for old photographs from private collections, books, magazines or archives.
- When the research phase is complete, the facilitator teaches lessons on the writing process, the elements of a biography, writing non-fiction, syllabic keyboarding, grammar and other topics as needed. These can be in the form of mini-lessons as the work progresses.
- Work through the steps of making notes and writing various drafts of the biography, using peer editing and consultation to get feedback on your work.
- Type the final drafts on the computer, adding scanned or digital photographs and graphics if you want.
- Put the biographies together in booklet form: make a cover; give credit to the authors and the people they interviewed. Inside the front cover of the book, write the date and place that the book was created. Add dedications to special people if you want.

- Make the booklets available to residents of the community and family members. Your group could give them as gifts for Christmas or for other special occasions.
- The book can be used as reading material for future literacy groups.



*“We have always been told never to give up
or think it’s too late to learn, because it’s
never too late even if you are grown up.
Even those of us who are grown up
still look for someone more knowledgeable
in areas we don’t know as yet.
It’s like that when it concerns the
Inuit way of life, because even we
the older people have regrets for not
having paid attention more closely
to what our Elders tried to teach us.”*

Donald Suluk in Inuktitut, Winter 1987

Books

Ideas for Creating Books

- Your group could consider creating a book from the material you have researched.
- Decide on the topic and focus of the book. You may not be able to use all the information you have collected; select information that would be the most interesting for readers in your community. For example, it could be a small booklet on how to make one tool or prepare skins. Or it could be a larger book on the whole process of making kamiik – from preparing the skins to the finished pair of kamiik. Or it could be a collection of life stories, family or community history.
- Decide who will write each section of the book. Will you write in pairs, small groups or as individuals?
- Decide if you want to add photographs or graphics.
- The facilitator teaches mini-lessons on the writing process, writing non-fiction, grammar, syllabic keyboarding and any other topics as they come up during the progress of the work.
- Work through the steps of making notes and writing various drafts of the book, using peer editing and consultation to get feedback on your work.
- Type the final drafts on the computer, adding scanned or digital photographs and graphics if you want.
- Put the sections together in booklet form: make a cover; give credit to the authors and the people they interviewed. Inside the front cover of the book, write the date and place that the book was created. Add dedications to special people if you want.
- The book can be used as reading material for your literacy group and future literacy groups and schools.

For ideas on different ways to make books, see the NWT Literacy Council web site: www.nwt.literacy.ca. Click on *Family Literacy*, then on *How to Kits*, then on *Bookmaking*.

Comparisons

Beliefs, Lifestyles, Land Forms, Legends...

Ideas for Comparisons

- Comparing regions or time periods can make for interesting research and topics for writing.
- Perhaps in your community there are people originating from several different areas. Group members could research information about the area that their family comes from – then compare information from these areas.
- Choose a theme for your comparison: lifestyles, hunting techniques, sewing techniques, clothing pattern styles, tool making techniques, legends, geography or land forms, weather, spiritual beliefs, birthing customs, approaches to raising dogs and running dog teams, just to name a few.
- You could also look at a theme over different time periods. For example, compare hunting techniques in 1940 and now.
- Decide what information you want to learn about your theme. Brainstorm a list of the questions you hope to find the answers to.
- Look for recorded interviews, books, magazines, videos and other sources that can help you answer your questions.
- Brainstorm names of people who come from different areas or were around in earlier times and may be able to help you with your comparison research.
- Break into small groups or pairs to divide up the research work. Each group can work on two or three questions. Or one group could research all the videos, while another group looks at written resources and another group interviews Elders.
- Plan ways to organize your information. (See *Preparing for the Interviews* in *The Process of Collecting Oral Histories* section.)
- Create a comparison chart that people can add information to as they find it:

Dog Raising and Dog Teaming

Question	Back River Area	Repulse Bay Area
What were the qualities of a good sled dog?		
How many dogs normally in one team?		
At what age were dogs ready to work?		
At what age did youth first begin to drive dogs?		
What were the dogs fed?		

- You can, of course, compare more than two areas or time periods.
- Post the comparison chart on the wall where people can easily add new information. Add new questions as you think of them. Include photographs, drawings or diagrams if they add to the information.
- Once all the information is complete, group members can write short essays based on the comparison chart.
- The facilitator teaches mini-lessons on writing paragraphs, on linking words used for comparisons, on syllabic keyboarding and other topics as needed.
- Work in pairs or small groups to get feedback on your writing and help with the editing process.

E-mail for Elders

Ideas for E-mail for Elders

- People in your community may have relatives in another community. Partner with a literacy group in that community to set up a program where Elders from each community can e-mail their relatives regularly.
- The facilitator makes sure the literacy group is confident in their computer and e-mail skills first. The facilitator can teach mini-lessons on syllabic keyboarding if necessary. Literacy group members should feel comfortable using e-mail and have many chances to practice before you begin the project.
- Advertise your group's project in the community.
- Match up Elders with literacy group members. The group in the other community will be doing the same.
- Set up e-mail accounts for the Elders.
- If any Elders aren't literate in syllabics or don't want to learn the keyboard, someone can type for them while they dictate their message. Others may want to learn about computers.
- Show Elders how to take digital pictures to e-mail to their relatives.
- Create a special weekly time when Elders can come to check their e-mail.
- Literacy group members could keep journals about their experiences.
 - ☒ How has the regular contact with the Elder affected your approach or attitudes?
 - ☒ What are your thoughts and feelings about the project?
 - ☒ How do you feel about this chance to use Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun in a meaningful way?
 - ☒ Have you learned new or traditional vocabulary?
- Literacy group members could also keep vocabulary lists or personal dictionaries of any new words learned from the Elders.

Historical Fiction or 'Faction'

What is Historical Fiction or ‘Faction’?

'Faction' or Historical Fiction is an imaginative story that is based on true facts. This is a good writing assignment for the end of an oral history project. After all the information is collected, you can write a fictional story about a real-life character or about a fictional character, set in the time period you were studying in the oral history project. You should try to work into the story as many details as possible about life in that time period – details that you learned through your oral history research.

Ideas for Writing ‘Faction’ or Historical Fiction

- When all of your oral history research is finished, brainstorm facts that you learned. For example, think about what life would have been like for YOU in the time you were studying. What was life like in winter? In summer? What materials were available? Who would your friends be? What chores would you have done daily? What would you have done for fun? What would the camp look like? How would children interact with their parents? And so on...
- Write the brainstormed ideas on flip chart paper.
- Post the flip charts on the wall where people can see them while they are writing.
- Try a visualization technique: The facilitator or one of the group members takes the group through a visualization process. The group closes their eyes while someone paints a verbal picture for them of a scene from the time they are going to write about. The group members imagine the visual picture in their minds.
- The whole group could also do this visualization together: everyone closes their eyes and one person begins to verbally describe a scene (perhaps from a fishing camp in 1950). The others jump in as they get ideas to contribute. Everyone in the group tries to imagine a detailed mental picture of the scene.
- After the visualization, people can jot down in point form some of the images that came to mind. These notes can be used and expanded upon on for your 'faction' story.
- Each person can work individually on his or her own 'faction' piece. But meet regularly with a friend to share peer editing and consult with the facilitator as you move through the writing process

- Or you can try a group writing process, with several people contributing to one story. Divide into small groups or try it with the whole group writing and editing together on flip chart paper. The group process might be helpful when group members lack confidence to write on their own. They will be able to go through the writing process supported by their peers.
- The facilitator teaches mini-lessons on the writing process, syllabic keyboarding, grammar and any other topics as they come up during the progress of the writing.
- The ‘faction’ stories can be used as reading material for your group and future literacy groups.
- See *History Workshop* in the *Building Language and Literacy Skills Through Oral History Projects* section for more ideas about writing ‘faction’ or historical fiction.

Examples of Historical Fiction

Neeluk an Eskimo Boy in the Days of the Whaling Ships, by Frances Kittredge, illustrated by Howard Weyahok Rock. Published by Alaska Northwest Books, 2001, ISBN: 0-88240-545-4

Northern Lights The Soccer Trails, by Michael Arvaaluk Kusugak, illustrated by Vldyana Kryorka. Published by Annick Press Ltd., 1993, ISBN: 1-55037-338-2

The Lamp, the Ice, and the Boat Called Fish, by Jacqueline Briggs Martin, illustrated by Beth Krommes. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001, ISBN: 0-618-00341

L^{2^*} (Amaruq), by Uvinik Qamaniq, illustrated by Craig Clark. Published by Baffin Divisional Board of Education, 1998, ISBN: 1-55015-121-5

Letters to Ancestors

Ideas for Letters to Ancestors

- Proceed with your oral history project, listening to audio recordings about life in past times or interviewing Elders.
- As a group, discuss what it must have been like to live in those days. You can discuss as a whole group or break into small groups or pairs and then come back together to share your ideas. Hold a free discussion or create questions to guide the discussion, such as the following:
 - ☒ What qualities must our ancestors have had to survive and live well?
 - ☒ In what ways do you think life was easier or harder in traditional times?
 - ☒ What do you admire most about your ancestors?
 - ☒ What would you say to your ancestors if you could speak to them?
- The facilitator or one of the group members can take notes on flip chart paper during the discussion.
- The project is to write a letter to an ancestor. Write to one specific ancestor in your family, to a namesake, or to ancestors in general if you don't know someone specific from your family history.
- Using the notes on the flip chart paper as a guide for ideas, each person writes a letter to an ancestor. If you could talk to this family member right now, what would you say to her or him? What would you tell your ancestor about the world today? About their family today? What are you thinking and feeling? What would you want them to know about the changes that are happening?¹
- Think about using the Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun that the ancestor would have used. Remember traditional vocabulary you learned during the research phase.
- Later you could write a response from your ancestor. What do you think the ancestor would say back to you? What would his or her response be to the changes in the world and to your thoughts and feelings?

¹ Adapted from *Culture, A Way to Live* by Yukon College

- This could also be a way to begin an oral history project. Hold the group discussion before you begin the project. Each group member writes a letter to an ancestor. The letter is sealed in an envelope and kept in a special place until the end of the project. The project proceeds - doing research, conducting interviews or listening to recordings, studying a specific oral history theme and creating a presentation. When the project is complete write another letter to the same ancestor. Each group member can then open the original letter and compare it to their most recent letter. How has this project changed your approach, your attitude or your understanding of the past?
- The letters can be kept for the group's children or made into a booklet that can be used as reading material for other literacy groups and schools.

Letter Exchange

- Focus on one particular story told by an Elder. Group members pretend they are the people in this story. Choose partners and, pretending to be the characters in the story, write letters to each other about the situation that happened in the Elder's story. One partner writes the first letter and the other responds. Write and exchange the letters without worrying about editing – grammar, spelling, etc. When literacy group members have opportunities to concentrate on ideas instead of the mechanics of writing, they will feel less inhibited about writing. Consider this letter-writing exchange to be a form of journal writing.
- Several letters may be exchanged in this way.
- When the letter-writing process is complete, you may want to consider editing the letters – depending on the final purpose of the activity. Partners can work together in the editing process.
- The facilitator teaches mini-lessons on the writing process, syllabic keyboarding, grammar and any other topics as they come up during the progress of the writing and editing.
- The letters can be typed on the computer and published in book form with the original transcript or a summary of the Elder's story.

Writing

- This is an opportunity to learn about special people in your community or area today or people who lived there in the past – your local heroes!
- When you are doing your research you may come across exciting stories of people’s great accomplishments or successes. Or you may decide at the beginning of your project that the purpose of your research is to look for these kinds of stories.
- They could be stories of survival, great hunts, politics, art, love, creation or perseverance through great difficulties.
- Collect the recordings or written stories of these heroes.
- You can work as individuals or divide into groups. Each group or individual chooses a story that interests them.
- Each group or individual works at writing the story of one local hero, based on the recorded or written interviews. You may have to add details that weren’t explicitly explained in the story, but rely on your research to make the details as realistic as possible.
- Proceed through the writing process using peer consultation and editing to refine the composition.
- The facilitator teaches mini-lessons on the writing process, syllabic keyboarding, grammar and any other topics as they come up.
- Type the stories on the computer and put them together in book form. Include photographs, illustrations or graphics if you want.
- People in the group can enjoy reading each other’s stories.
- These stories can be used as interesting reading material for future literacy groups and in schools.
- You could also make a video about a local hero. (See *Videos* in the *Active Projects* section.)
- Literacy group members could read the stories on the radio so other families can hear them too. (See *Storytelling on the Radio* in the *Oral Projects* section.)

Modernizing Stories

Ideas for Modernizing Stories¹

- After listening to an oral history recording or to an Elder telling a story, literacy group members can write the story, but set in modern times.
- Imagine that the story is happening today, in present times.
 - ☒ What present-day people would be in the story?
 - ☒ How would the setting change?
 - ☒ How would the details of the story change?
 - ☒ Would the story end differently?
- Record people's ideas on flip chart paper so they can refer to them as they write.
- Continue through the writing process, using peer consultation and editing to get feedback on the stories.
- The facilitator teaches mini-lessons on the writing process, syllabic keyboarding, grammar and any other topics as they come up.
- Try to use some of the vocabulary used by the storyteller. While listening to the stories, you could make lists of unfamiliar words or keep a personal dictionary.
- Consider publishing the modern stories and the traditional stories side-by-side in a booklet.
- The modernized stories will make interesting reading for your literacy group and future literacy groups.

¹ Thank you to Elisapee Flaherty, teacher in Kimmirut, for the idea of modernizing stories.

Newspapers

Ideas for Creating a Newspaper

- Literacy group members can become ‘journalists’ and create their own newspapers.
- After your group has done some of your research and people are familiar with the different sources of information, you could begin planning for your newspaper.
- Start by looking at different newspapers to see what types of articles there are. Notice the difference between articles, commentaries and editorials. Look at book and film reviews, cartoons, birth and death notices and classified advertising. Make a list of all the different forms of writing you find in the newspaper.
- Notice the layout of newspapers. Look at how bilingual newspapers like *Nunatsiaq News* lay out articles in Inuktitut and English.
- In small groups, read some of the articles and discuss the forms of newspaper writing. The facilitator can teach mini-lessons on different journalistic writing forms.
- Brainstorm different types of writing you would like to have in your newspaper. Look at the list you made earlier.
- Literacy group members could create a newspaper for a specific day in the past, say 1972, 1940, or 1840! It depends on the interests of the group and the type of research you have already done. Imagine what would have happened in one week of that year. The newspaper could cover just your community, your region or the whole of Nunavut. Think about people who may have been down south at school or in the hospital. What stories could you include about them? Maybe you would like to include advertising – imagine the kinds of supplies, equipment and other goods that people needed in that time period. What would the weather have been? What about birth and death notices?
- Or choose a specific historical time – for example, when modern Inuit met the Tuniit on Southampton Island, or when the first Qallunaat whaling boat came to Cumberland Sound – and imagine what people would have experienced on one particular day in that time period.

- If the literacy group is interested in how people celebrated special occasions, such as Christmas, date your paper December 28, 1956 and talk about celebrations that happened in different communities or camps that Christmas.
- If the group is writing a newspaper from a date in the past, think about the forms of Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun that would have been used then. Try to use some traditional vocabulary Elders' used in interviews.
- Or the group could write a modern day newspaper. Include events, politics and issues that are happening in Nunavut today. You could interview people, including Elders, to get their ideas or opinions on these topics. You could write an article that includes quotations from both older and younger people. As writers, you will need to use critical thinking skills to put together information from several sources (synthesis) and to show in your article how the different opinions relate to each other and to life in modern times (analysis).
- Decide if your newspaper will be in Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun only – or will it be bilingual. Think about your purpose for creating this newspaper. Is your goal to strengthen Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun literacy skills? If so, writing the newspaper in Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun only will create important reading materials in that language. Readers will not be able to resort to reading the English versions, if their English literacy skills are stronger. Interesting photographs and headlines will lead people to try harder to get information from the articles.
- Interviewing people in Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun will help strengthen oral language skills.
- Divide into pairs or small groups to work on different stories for the newspaper. Or some people may prefer to work independently.
- Those with stronger literacy skills could work with beginning literacy learners. Or those with weaker literacy skills could work on advertising and other pieces of writing that include less text and some art or photos.
- The facilitator teaches mini-lessons on the writing process, journalistic approaches, syllabic keyboarding, grammar, vocabulary and other topics as they come up.
- Use peer editing and consultation throughout the writing process to get feedback on your work.

- Include digital and scanned photographs. Photographs of people from the community, ancestors and family members will interest people and make them want to read the articles.
- Create headlines that make people want to read on. Articles about familiar topics, ancestors and their history and local community events will be interesting reading material in Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun for people in your community. An interesting headline will encourage them to read the articles.
- You could have a group of people responsible for layout and design of the newspaper.
- You could appoint one group to act as editors, or different groups or individuals could exchange their work for editing purposes.
- The group may want to use a newsletter template on a word processing program.
- The newspaper could be produced on 8½" X 11" paper or 8½" X 14" paper.
- Distribute the completed newspaper in the community and to schools. Your newspaper will make great Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun reading material for future literacy groups and schools.



Poetry and Song

Songs are Thoughts

*Songs are thoughts, sung out with the breath when
people are moved by great forces and ordinary speech
no longer suffices.*

*Man is moved just like the ice floe sailing here and
there out in the current. His thoughts are driven by a
flowing force when he feels joy, when he feels fear, when
he feels sorrow. Thoughts can wash over him like a flood,
making his breath come in gasps and his heart throb.
Something like an abatement in the weather will keep him
thawed up. And then it will happen that we, who always
think we are small, will feel still smaller. And we will fear
to use words. When the words we want to use shoot up
of themselves – we get a song.*

Orpingalik¹

Some of your group may be interested in writing poetry or songs based on your oral history research. The thought of writing a poem can be a bit scary for some. So read a few poems aloud and discuss them before starting to write your own. Read poems or songs together to create a chorus. Look at songs to see how they are similar to poetry. Read or listen to traditional pisiit and use them as models to write your own work.

Ideas for Writing Poetry

- You could start your poetry writing sessions by writing about common things that you find in your home or your meeting area. Look at the object carefully; touch it; smell it. Try free-writing: write words or phrases that come to mind as you examine the object; describe the object. Try putting your list of words and phrases together in different ways. Don't worry about rhyming.

¹ From *Songs are Thoughts Poems of the Inuit*, edited by Neil Philip, published by Doubleday Canada, Toronto, 1995

Twizzler

*Red, long, shiny, juicy, twisted
twizzlers – Buy it!*

*Chewy, juicy, strong tasting
strawberry smile-making taste –
too good to be true!*

*Pure strawberry twizzlers in my
mouth on a cool day.*

by John Tugak

from All Ours 1992

- Write a group poem. Choose a topic. Brainstorm words and expressions about that topic. The group chooses and rearranges some of the words and expressions on the brainstormed list to create the poem. The facilitator or one group member writes as the rest of the group decides how the poem will go.
- Write poetry about childhood memories, cherished relatives or friends, or special objects.
- Use photographs to inspire poems. Describe the photograph. Don't worry about the form – just write down the ideas as they come to mind. The great thing about poetry is that thoughts that come in phrases and sentence fragments can be used in poems – as is! Complete sentences are not necessary as in other forms of writing.
- Learners could write poems from their journal entries. They might be based on responses to interviews, moving encounters with relatives or Elders or other significant journal entries.
- Write poems that are conversations between two people.

Anaana,

I wish I were wolf.

Son,

You'd be too hungry.

Anaana,

I wish I were falcon.

Son,

You'd be too proud.

Anaana,

Carry me on your back.

That yes

*Right away!*²

- As the group reads and writes poetry, the facilitator can point out techniques such as using metaphors and similes to paint verbal pictures. For example: safe and secure as winter ice; the dancer's hands flutter like the wings of a bird.
- At first you can provide models or templates for writing different kinds of poems to get people started.

Write a haiku

Haikus are a Japanese form of poetry that has 17 syllables arranged in a three-line pattern:

Line 1 – 5 syllables

Line 2 – 7 syllables

Line 3 – 5 syllables

Leave out unimportant words

Snow gently falling.

Covers a man made landscape

Beauty returns home.

*by Issac Arngna'naaq
from All Ours 1992*

² Adapted from *Enriching our Lives; Poetry Lessons for Adult Literacy Teachers and Tutors* by Francis E. Kazemek and Pat Rigg, published by International Reading Association, 1995

Write a five-line poem

Bring a special item from home – something old, something interesting or no longer used daily, something that holds special memories:

Line 1 – Write down the name of your special item

Line 2 – Write two words that describe the item (adjectives)

Line 3 – Write three action words (verbs) that tell what the item does

Line 4 – Write a thought about the item

Line 5 – Write the word you wrote on the first line – or write a related word

*Mom
beautiful feisty
caring supporting sharing
I love you so
Helen*

Write an eight-line poem

Here you are asked to describe certain things, but be sure not to actually name them. Change the topic to make it fit your own theme.

Line 1 – Describe the most beautiful animal you can think of. A short phrase of description will do.

Line 2 – Describe what you feel like inside when you are very happy.

Line 3 – Describe the colour you like best and why you like it.

Line 4 – Describe the smell of something you love.

Line 5 – Describe a beautiful place that you love being.

Line 6 – Describe the sound of something very beautiful and peaceful.

Line 7 – Describe the tastes or textures that you really like. You may want to compare them to something else.

Line 8 – Describe a scene of love and caring.

After you have written the poem, reread each line. Take out words that don't seem to add to the meaning; move words or phrases around to make the sound or rhythm better; add a title.³

³ Haiku, five-line poem and eight-line poem from *Reading in the Classroom* by Carol Tapsell, published by Aurora College, 1999

- Write a pisiq or song. Find examples of pisiit; many of them tell stories. Listen and use them as models to tell the stories you learned in your oral history project.
- Look back at the lists of Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun vocabulary you have learned during your oral history project. Put these words and phrases together to make a poem.
- Write poems about the months and the seasons and the activities that happen each month.
- Write group poems. Each person in the group thinks of a phrase to start a poem: eg. Peace is..., Culture is..., Love is..., Family is..., Survival is... Write the phrase on a piece of paper. Then exchange papers and write five or six line poems in which each line begins with the phrase you received. Or each person writes one line of each poem and then passes the paper to the next person.
- Make shape poems. For example, if the poem is about an inuksuk, write the poem in the shape of an inuksuk or if it is about a star, place the lines to form the shape of a star. Or... Draw a picture in the centre of a round circle of paper; write the poem that goes with the picture in a circle around the edge of the paper.

Poetry by Nunavummiut

The Yearling

They call me master

These four seasons of mine

Come, I will show you

Meet Father Winter

North Wind – I call him

Blizzard is his profession

He leads

Then comes Mother Spring

Sunrise – she answers to

She is the centre of all activities

A reason for winter

Next is Daughter Summer

Climax! She always does

She nurtures all offspring

Even plants multiply

Last comes Son Fall

Action – he never questions

Just a yearling – young and willing

He will lead someday

Mush! Four seasons of mine! Mush!

by Emil Arnalak

Arviat, Nunavut

How Do I Love Thee

*I loved your beautiful face
With skin so soft
And those tender loving eyes that only saw a precious child
And that wonderful loving smile you gave me.*

*I loved your touch
That was ever so gentle and warm
I felt you holding me as if I was the only one
With the most loving arms and caressing me as we lay together
Ever so gently stroking my hair and reassuring me you loved me.*

*Most of all, I loved you with all my being
Never had anyone loved me as you did
I can still feel your presence ever with me
I thank you for showing me how to love
Had it not been for you, I may never have loved
You are in me, and ever will be.*

*Though I miss you daily
Your touch, your eyes, your presence will I never forget
For you had been the most wonderful loving gentle and warm
Grandmother I ever had.
Thank God I was chosen to be your grandchild and namesake
to love
And to carry on your love.*

by Nellie Kusugak⁴
Rankin Inlet, Nunavut

⁴ From *Kinship and Relationship Module, Inuktitut Language Arts Curriculum*, developed by Nunia Qanatsiaq, Department of Education, Arviat, 2003

Other Worlds

For Pihuaq Omilgoetok

*With an ulu Pihuaq slices off caribou
from the rib cage on the floor, offers us
dried meat dipped in goose grease.
Her smile is slow, broad like a qulliq,
the seal oil lamp her mother
used to light in the dark iglu*

*She shows us traces of carbon in her wrists
where she tried to tattoo herself as a girl
to look like her grandmother, a beauty
with etchings up and down her arms,
parallel lines on her face –
old women had drawn
sooty threads under her skin*

a little at a time.

*Television catches pihuaq's attention:
on PBS, the History of Women's Fashion –
during World War II when nylons were scarce
a model draws a black line up the back of her legs.*

*Pihuaq's voice comes softly from deep in her gut,
works its way into words that halt at the throat
as she rhymes her children off her fingers:
Eva, Alice, Anna, Meyok, Akoluk, Sammy, Bells.
The litany omits the three who died – wounds
she's not ready to open for strangers.*

by Margo Button⁵
Cambridge Bay, Nunavut

⁵ From *The Elders' Palace*, Iniqnirit Qalgiat, by Margo Button with Natasha Thorpe, published by Oolichan Books, BC, 2002

A Poor Man's Prayer to the Spirits⁶

In winter, when there is only little blubber oil in the lamps, and people are anxious lest they go out altogether, the hunter can make a new catch by repeating the following words early in the morning when the day is just dawning:

You, fatherless and motherless

You, dear little orphan

Give me

Kamiks or caribou,

Bring me a gift,

An animal, one of those

That provide nice blood-soup,

An animal from the sea depths

And not from the plains of earth

You, little orphan,

Bring me a gift.

Poetry Resources

Songs are Thoughts; Poems of the Inuit edited by Neil Philip, published by Doubleday Canada, Toronto, ON, 1995, ISBN: 0-385-25458-X.

The Elders' Palace Iniqnirit Qalgiat poems by Margo Button with Natasha Thorpe, published by Oolichan Books, Lantzville, BC, 2002.

Enriching our Lives; Poetry Lessons for Adult Literacy Teachers and Tutors by Francis E. Kazemek and Pat Rigg, published by International Reading Association, Newark, DE, 1995. ISBN: 0-87207-137-5. Available through Grass Roots Press.

For the Love of Poetry; Literacy Scaffolds, Extension Ideas, and More by Nancy Lee Cecil, published by Peguis Publishers, Winnipeg, MB, 1997, ISBN: 1895411-87-4. Peguis Publishers' web site: www.ideasforteachers.com

Reading in the Classroom, by Carol Tapsell, published by Aurora College, Fort Smith, 1999. Available from Director of Policy and Programs, Aurora College HQ, Fort Smith, 867-872-7012.

⁶ From an article in *Inuktitut* magazine #75, 1992 – 'Rasmussen's Meeting with Martha Tunnuq's Family in 1923'

Starting Writing with Art

Ideas for Starting Writing With Art

- For those with limited writing skills or little confidence with writing, try beginning with an art project. This would work well with an arts and literacy program, but could be used in any literacy program. Some people who are beginning literacy learners may be wonderful artists. This type of project gives them a chance to demonstrate their talents within the literacy group.
- Rather than extensive research, you may want to listen to several recorded stories or ask Elders to visit your group to tell stories.
- People can create drawings, paintings, pastels, models, sculptures, or any art form – based on the stories. They could create one piece of art or a series to illustrate their concept of the story.
- When they've finished with their artwork, they partner with a fellow group member or the facilitator to talk about their drawing. The partner scribes (writes) the artist's words, which then become the artist's story. The story can be used for reading and writing practice in many ways.
- For a group project, fold a large piece of paper into 16 sections.¹ This activity is like group storytelling, but through illustrations. Ask people to draw the visual images for a story inspired by oral history interviews. One person begins the story by drawing a picture in the upper left corner. The paper is passed from person to person, with each one adding a new drawing to show what happens next in the story. When the illustrations are finished, pass the paper around the group again and take turns telling the story orally from the illustrations. You can write this group story on flip chart paper and use it in many ways for reading and writing practice. Or you can use this activity as a stimulus for individual writing.
- This art and writing activity could become an illustrated story booklet that your literacy group and future literacy groups or schools can read.

¹ Thank you for this idea to Julie Ogina, Nunavut Literacy Council Board Member and Inuinnaqtun teacher in Cambridge Bay

Theme Magazines

What is a Theme Magazine?

A theme magazine is a written, audio or visual project which includes separate works that all relate to a chosen theme. The individual works can be done by the literacy group members and collected from other sources as well. The separate written, oral or video pieces are formatted into an attractive format by the creators of the theme magazine.

Ideas for Creating a Theme Magazine¹

- You may decide to create a theme magazine based on your oral history research.
- Small groups, pairs or individuals can work together to create their own theme magazines. Or the whole literacy group could work together on one magazine.
- A theme magazine could be either a written production or an audio or video production.
- Decide on the theme for each magazine, based on themes you noticed in your oral history research. For example, your theme might be *Elders' Words of Wisdom for the Future* or *When People Care, They Do Amazing Things* or *Marriages Then and Now*. (See *Choosing the Theme of your Project* in the *Process of Collecting Oral Histories* section for more ideas.)
- Look at different types of magazines, such as *Inuktitut* magazine, *The Beaver*, *Up Here* or *Time*, and listen to magazine-type TV or radio programs on APTN, CBC North or southern TV channels. As a group, talk about the characteristics of a theme magazine.
- There are many choices to include in a written magazine: articles explaining an idea, a piece of persuasive writing, interviews, art, poetry, book and film reviews, cartoons, photographs, legends or myths, advertisements. In an audio or video magazine you could also include music and drama, as well. But all the pieces should relate to the theme.
- You might review books, videos or other sources that you used in the research phase.
- The creators of the magazine should write some of the material, but you can add some that you collected from various other sources.

¹ Adapted from *Theme Magazine* by Irene Schmidt, in *MATE Files*, published by Manitoba Association of Teachers of English

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*“Many of our most common and
effective medicines derive from
wild plants, but Western scientists have
studied only a tiny proportion of
plant species for their medicinal value.
If potential cures for crippling diseases
are being shredded into pulp or shipped
across an ocean as plywood,
we may never know about them.
By “we,” I mean the mainstream cultures
of wealthy nations. Indigenous peoples
often know a great deal
about the natural world,
and part of the knowledge
lies embedded in their languages.”*

Mark Abley in Spoken Here