

FAMOUS ALASKANS

What do we learn from famous people?

Level: Intermediate (grades 3-5)



Background

"Benny Benson is one of the most respected and revered people in Alaska history. As the creator of Alaska's flag, he overcame tremendous personal tragedy, and transformed hardship into triumph. He is honored in Alaska as streets, schools, and monuments commemorate his remarkable contribution to our state." *Eight Stars of Gold*

*13-year old Benny Benson holds a handmade flag.
Photo, Alaska State Library PCA01-1921;
Flag, Alaska State Museum III-0-3081*

Summary

After reading the story of Benny Benson, the designer of the Alaska flag, students select other famous Alaskans to research. Students share their information in a written or oral report.

Estimated Time

120 minutes + time for research (2 - 3 class periods)

In this activity students will focus on the following:

Alaska Content Standards

English/Language Arts:

C1-4. Complete projects

- D4. Explain and defend a position orally, in writing and with visual aids as appropriate.

History:

B2. Understand the people that have shaped the history of the state

C1. Use appropriate technology to access, retrieve, organize and present historical information

Assessments

- Use appropriate scoring guides to evaluate the different products. Have students respond by writing or saying what they would do differently to improve their project.
- Provide a "Visitors Comments" book or sheet of paper for others to record their thoughts and ideas. Have the students read the comments and discuss what they would do differently or the same on another project.

Activity

Step One: Discuss and make chart

- Ask the students "What does 'famous' mean?" Encourage as many ideas as possible without making any judgments about accuracy.
- Ask the students "Who do you think of when I say, 'name a famous person'?" Make a list of the different names on the board.
- Ask the students to help organize this list by thinking of ways the people listed are similar or different. These might include types of work or what made them famous (sports, entertainment, government officials) men or women, dead or alive, Alaskan or from other places, etc.
- Show the students 'Chart: Famous Alaskans.' Tell them they need to find the information to fill in the row about Benny on the chart from the story you are going to read. You may want to review a few vocabulary words before reading. (See Vocabulary.)

Step Two: Read and research

- Have your students read the story of Benny Benson on pages 10–11. (Depending on your student's reading ability, you may read it to them or see "Techniques to Vary the Reading.") Work together to fill in the facts about Benny on the chart.
- Tell the students that Benny Benson is considered a "Famous Alaskan." Ask the students what other famous Alaskans they can name. Make a list. Have the students discuss how they could find out information about the other Alaskans.
- Help the students choose a person to research. The class may want to learn about "famous Alaskans" in their community or from a particular time in history.

- Select presentation format(s) that are acceptable for sharing the information. Such as a poster, one-page written report, oral presentation, picture with captions, etc. Create a scoring guide or rubric to help the students understand what is expected from using the format selected. (See Scoring Guides: Famous Alaskans)

Step Three: Present and evaluate

- Depending on the presentation format selected, provide enough time so that each student can present and receive feedback about how well he/she did. Display the reports, posters or pictures in the classroom or a hallway. Consider making a collection of the students' work, putting the reports together and printing a book for the school and classroom library.

Materials

- Materials are dependent on the presentation format (poster, written report, picture with captions, etc.)
- Chart: Famous Alaskans
- Exhibit catalog: *Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag* by India Spartz, Alaska State Museum, 2001. Pg. 10

Vocabulary

famous adj. Having fame
fame n. Reputation, especially for good; being well known. Pages 10-11 for Benny Benson
amputate v. To cut off, especially by surgery
comical adj. Funny
revered v. To regard with deep respect, love
unanimous adj. In complete agreement
William Paul n. Alaskan Native leader and legislator

Resources

Exhibit catalog: Spartz, India. *Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag*. Juneau: Alaska State Museum, 2001.

State of Alaska
www.dced.state.ak.us/tourism/learn/learn26.htm
 This website lists over 20 famous Alaskans with brief biographies, it is a good starting place for student research.

ILOVEALASKA
<http://www.ilovealaska.com/guide/people/>
 This is an excellent site for locating Alaskans from a wide variety of occupations and areas of fame

Juneau School District
www.jsd.k12.ak.us/
 Do a search for "Elizabeth Peratovich" to locate the home page with information, student essays, pictures and teacher resources.

State of Alaska, Governor's archive
www.gov.state.ak.us/LTGOV/eliz98.html
 This includes information on the 1998 Elizabeth Peratovich celebration in Juneau, with good information and picture.

Valley Native News
www.akcache.com/community/nativelinks.html
 This site is an excellent source of links to Alaska Native information for the whole state.

50 States website
www.50states.com/bio/alaska.htm
 This site has a list of famous Alaskans. It requires an additional search to find more biographical information.

SCORING GUIDE FOR FAMOUS PERSON REPORT

Teacher may add what is expected for different presentation types, such as an oral report or a poster.

Indicators (What should be visible or obvious?)	Try again	This will work	Wow! This is great!
Is the information about the famous person interesting, well organized and personalized?	The information about the person presented is so boring that the audience goes to sleep.	Clearly presents interesting and important information about the famous person. The audience listens and has a few questions.	The information about the famous person is so interesting and clear that the audience feels they would like to meet them in person. Many questions are asked.
Is a credible/ believable source for information used in the research?	Gives no source.	Uses at least one credible/ believable source.	Uses 2 or more credible/ believable sources. Compares which source is more believable and why.
Is your person an historically famous person?	Gives no explanation about why this person is considered famous	Presents the usual reasons why this person is famous.	Goes beyond the usual reasons for fame and includes personal ideas about why this person is famous or important.

CHART: FAMOUS ALASKANS

Who?	When did she/ he live?	Where did she/ he live?	What did she/he do, or why do we remember her/ him?	So What? What can we learn from her/ him?
Benny Benson				

