

Summary of Unakuluk · (Dear Little One) DVD

by Marie-Hélène Cousineau

In Inuit culture, adopting a child from a relative, friend or acquaintance is extremely common. Rooted in tradition, adoption is a reality with which all Inuit families have experience. Marie-Hélène Cousineau, the adoptive mother of Alexandre Apak, lived in Igloodik, a small island southwest of Baffin Island in the Arctic, for many years.

This documentary, which she directed in collaboration with Mary Kunuk, an old friend and colleague, explores Inuit family relations through the personal histories of women who have experienced adoption in one way or another. In a parallel thread, the film documents the creation of an intricate felt wall-hanging that depicts key moments from their stories.

All skilled seamstresses, these women of Igloodik use fabric to draw, cut, and embroider their personal life stories.

Notes:



Unakuluk · (Dear Little One) DVD

The Inuit Family

Documentary · 46 minutes

Content Areas

Social Studies, Language Arts

Objective

Students will learn about the characteristics of the traditional Inuit family and how these characteristics relate to Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (Khao-yee-muh-yah-tut-khang-geet) (IQ), or the Inuit way of doing things. Students will read a selection from the *Isuma Inuit Studies Reader*, “Growing Up, We Stayed with our Mothers,” and complete a Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting the lives of Inuit children 50 years ago and their own lives today.

On Day 2, students will explore the Inuit practice of adopting a child from a relative, friend or acquaintance. Students will view ***Unakuluk (Dear Little One)***, a documentary that explores Inuit family relations through the personal histories of women who have experienced adoption. Groups will create a family tapestry illustrating a significant event in their family’s life.

Materials

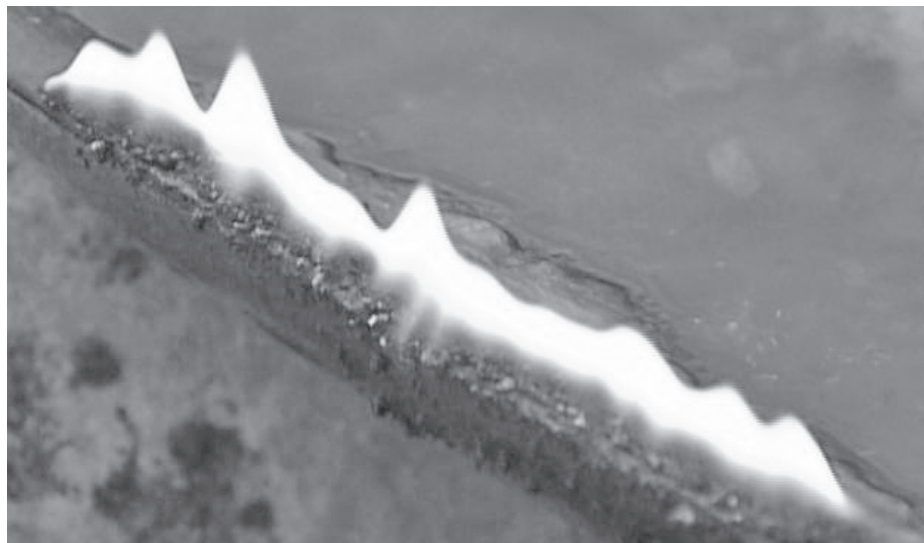
- Copies of “Growing Up, We Stayed with our Mothers,” by Apphia Agalakti Awa, in collaboration with Nancy Wachowich, *Isuma Inuit Studies Reader*, pages 184-188 – 1 per student
- Venn Diagram – 1 per student or group
- Large construction paper or mural paper and colouring supplies
- ***Unakuluk (Dear Little One)*** DVD

Activity – Day 1

- 1 Ask students to take out a scrap of paper. On it, have them write their definition of “family.”
- 2 Have volunteers share their definitions. Write on the board or overhead projector. Discuss the differences and similarities among the definitions shared.

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- 3 Write Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ) on the board. If students have completed the lesson Understanding Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ), ask volunteers what they recall about IQ. If the lesson has not yet been done, explain to students that IQ refers to the Inuit way of doing things. “IQ embraces all aspects of traditional Inuit culture including values, worldview, language, social organization, knowledge, life skills, perceptions and expectations” (Nunavut Social Development Council, 1999).
- 4 Explain that family is at the centre of Inuit culture. Elders are highly respected for their wisdom, which they pass on to younger generations.
- 5 Write “qatangutigiit” on the board. Qatangutigiit (Kha-tahng-goo-tee-geet) is the Inuktitut word describing immediate or close family relations, including parents, children, grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles and cousins. The outer family is “ilagiit” (ee-lah-geet), which often overlaps with the qatangutigiit.
- 6 Explain that cooperation and sharing are basic principles in Inuit society. When animals are killed on the hunt, they are shared; when people are in need, they are looked after. Reiterate that one of the principles of IQ is stressing the importance of the group over the individual.



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- 7 Ask students to reflect on their own families. How do cooperation and sharing play a role in their lives? Have students share examples.
- 8 Explain that “Qallunaat” (kha-dlo-naht) is the Inuktitut word for southerners and/or white people. Beginning in 1955, Igloolik children were sent to Catholic and Anglican residential schools to learn the “Qallunaat way.” (Apphia Agalakti Awa, *Isuma Inuit Studies Reader*, p.198). Many families wanted their children to remain in the camps and be raised the Inuit way, but they were forced to send their children away to school. This was the beginning of the shift away from the traditional way of life for the Inuit and toward a growing dependence on the government. “The teachers told my husband that if Solomon didn’t go to school, they would cut off the family allowance that we were getting for him. My husband said that was okay, and that is what the government did.” (Apphia Agalakti Awa, *Isuma Inuit Studies Reader*, p. 200).
- 9 Ask volunteers to share some of their favorite activities. Explain that today, Inuit children take part in many of these same activities. They bike, play ball, read books, play games, etc. But 50 years ago, families lived a much more traditional life. Many families lived in igloos or rock houses in winter, sod houses in summer. They travelled together to hunt caribou, seal, and walrus. Inuit children had many more responsibilities than Inuit or southern children living today.
- 10 Give out Venn Diagram. Have students label the first circle Children Today, the second circle Inuit Children in the Past, and the intersecting segment Things We Have in Common. Explain that students are going to read a selection about an Inuit woman named Apphia Agalakti Awa. Apphia spent most of her life travelling among camps throughout the Canadian Arctic. In the selection, she describes what it was like for children when she was young.



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- 11 Briefly review with students how to complete a Venn Diagram. Explain that in the Children Today section, students will list responsibilities they have and activities in which they take part that are different from those of Inuit children growing up during the author's childhood. In the Inuit Children of the Past section, students will list the responsibilities discussed in the selection that are different from those they have. And in the Things We Have in Common section of the Venn Diagram, students are to list anything the two groups have in common.
- 12 Once all is clear, break students into pairs or small groups, and have them read "Growing Up, We Stayed with our Mothers." When they are finished, groups complete the Venn Diagram.

Evaluation

- 1 Once students are finished, come back together as a class. Reproduce the Venn Diagram on the board or overhead projector. As students share their information, record it in the diagram.



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- 2 When all groups are done sharing, ask students if they think life for Inuit children in the past was easier or more difficult than their life today. Why?
- 3 **Optional:** As a homework assignment, have students use their Venn Diagram to write an essay comparing and contrasting their lives today with the lives of Inuit children in the past.

Activity – Day 2

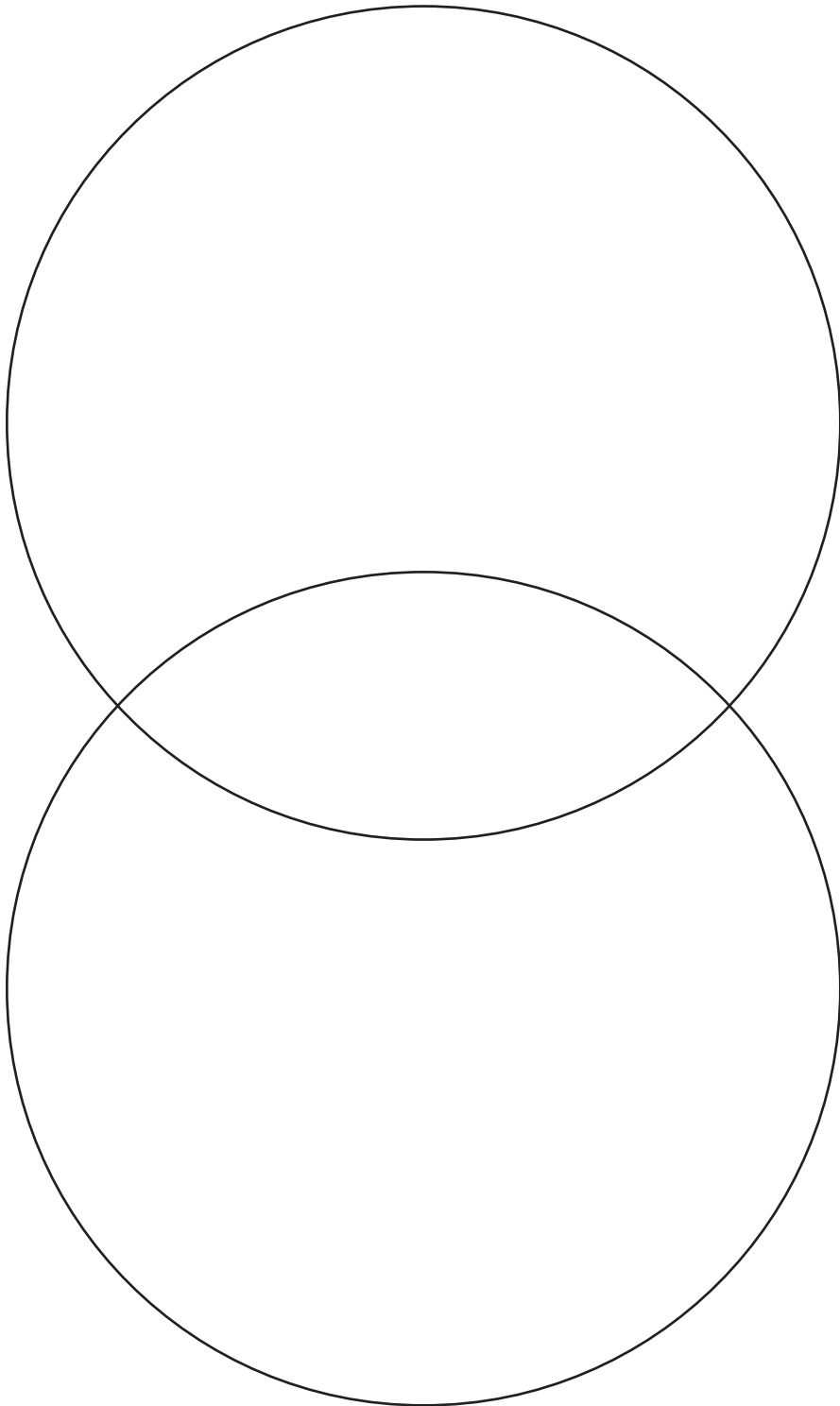
- 1 Ask students to share any experiences they have had with adoption. This will allow the opportunity to open up about personal experiences if students choose to do so, or share the experience of someone they know.
- 2 Explain that in Inuit society, adoption is done much differently. The Inuktitut word for adoption means “the one we took” or “my adopted,” describing the practice from the perspective of the adoptive parent choosing and wanting the child. Inuit do not use words such as “give up” or “give away” to describe adoption. There is no stigma attached to being adopted. Rather, it is open and flexible, and a child knows his or her birth parents and family members, often visiting with them if living in the same community.
- 3 Ask students how the Inuit practice of adoption differs from adoption in the students’ culture. Stress to students that neither way is “better” than the other. However, it is important to note that every culture has traditions and experiences from which we can learn and benefit.
- 4 In the past, most Inuit families adopted children and/or had a biological child adopted. Reasons for adopting a child were usually very practical – to help with the workload, hunting or caring for younger children. Today, the practice of adopting a child from a relative, friend or acquaintance still occurs, however the reasons vary.

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- 5 Introduce the documentary ***Unakuluk (Dear Little One)***. Explain that the film explores adoption from an Inuit point of view, through personal histories, both positive and negative, of women who have experienced adoption in one way or another. The film is directed by Marie-Hélène Cousineau, a non-Inuit woman from Montréal, Québec, who adopted Alex, a child born to an Inuit family in Igloolik.
- 6 Remind students that as with the other films, some of ***Unakuluk (Dear Little One)*** is in Inuktitut with English subtitles. Decide on a method for viewing the film and watch ***Unakuluk (Dear Little One)***.
- 7 Following the film, ask students for their reaction to the women profiled and their stories. Were all the adoption experiences positive? Discuss the individual stories and the reasons given for being adopted or adopting a child.
- 8 Ask students to recall the beautiful tapestry illustrating the various stories of adoption. Have students think about significant events that have occurred in their own families, and ask volunteers to share. Some examples could be the birth of a younger sibling, moving, a special trip or outing, a celebration, etc.
- 9 Explain that in groups, students are going to make their own family “tapestry.” Each student is to choose an important family event. On a section of the largest paper available, each student will illustrate his or her event, resulting in a group mural. If rolled mural paper is available, students could work on one class project instead of several group murals.
- 10 Once the family murals are completed, have each student share his or her event.

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Venn Diagram



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Notes:

