



# Inuksuk

(Ee-nook-sook)

- Objective:** The students will create Inuksuit relevant to the Iditarod and describe their importance to both the race and the Arctic region.
- Materials:** Background Information (included). One or a combination of the following: a variety of rocks (varying sizes), blocks, scrap pieces of wood, Legos, woodchips, corks, number cubes or anything creative that can be stacked into a shape.
- Time:** 20 Minutes
- MN Standard:** **Social Studies**—*World History: Beginnings of Human Society*  
The student will demonstrate knowledge of selected attributes and historical developments of various ancient societies in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe.
- Students will illustrate or retells the main ideas from stories that disclose the origins, history and traditions of various cultures around the world.
- Social Studies**—*Geography: Interconnectedness*  
The student will give examples that demonstrate how people are connected to each other and the environment.
- Students will analyze how the physical environment influences human activities.
- Set Up:** Divide the students into small groups with a designated workspace (an open table or open floor space) and distribute the stacking materials to each group.
- Process:** Begin by asking the students common questions about the Inuit People. Examples: What part of the world do they live? What are some traditional foods and clothing? What are some modes of transportation used both in the past and the present? Etc.... Give the students some background information about the Inuit People and explain that the Iditarod race travels through parts of Alaska where many Inuit people live today (if necessary for your students, make sure they understand that Inuit people today have modern living conditions much like their own). Because of the climate and terrain of these regions, people living here use the snow and ice in their everyday lives. Snowmobiles are the main mode of transportation in many of these areas, as well as dog sleds. Show the students the provided pictures of the Inuksuit or visit one of the listed websites below for more pictures. Have them practice pronouncing the word. Explain that Inuksuit are used in a variety of ways as explained in the background information.
- It is each group's task to create an Inuksuk for the Iditarod mushers. The students will spend time working together to create an Inuksuk with their given materials (if the students are having trouble keeping their Inuksuk standing upright, have them lay it down on the ground). When finished the students will present their Inuksuk and explain its significance to the mushers of the Iditarod.

## Background Information

The Inuit, native peoples of the Arctic, inhabited the area thousands and thousands of years before the Europeans “discovered” it. The earliest groups arrived between 30,000 and 80,000 years ago, and by 5000 B.C., were well established across the Arctic. They are described as *circumpolar* because groups of these natives live in all the lands circling the North Pole, from Russia to Alaska, Canada to Scandinavia.

Their livelihood in early days came from hunting whales, polar bears, seals, seabirds, and other sea creatures, following the caribou herd migrations across the tundra, and later, herding reindeer (in Scandinavia). They build igloos and huts to live in. At one time all of the natives were called simply “Eskimos” by explorers, but the Inuit, the original settlers of the Arctic, are made up of several different groups, and today most people refer to them by their correct names: Thule Inuit, Yupik, Inupiat, and Inuvialuit, depending upon which area of the Arctic they inhabit.

Inuksuk (Ee-nook-sook) or Inuksuit (Ee-nook-sweet) are stone figures created by the first inhabitants of the Canadian north, the Inuit. Inuksuk is the singular form, and inuksuit is the plural form. The Inuit have lived in the areas now called Canada, Alaska, and Greenland for thousands of years and inuksuit can be found in all these regions.

The word "inuksuk" is an Inuktitut (Ee-nook-tee-toot) word meaning "to act in the capacity of a human" and comes from the word "inuk" which can be translated as "human being". Inuktitut is the language of the Inuit people.

Inuksuit come in a variety of shapes and sizes and have many functions. As indicators, inuksuit have been used to mark safe or dangerous crossing places, treacherous water, falling rocks, a caribou crossing, good hunting, good fishing and many other things. (Many of the given examples in this lesson are shaped similar to human forms, however, many other forms exist).

Inuksuit also function as instruments of navigation and astronomy, for instance to indicate the best way home, to point to the position of the mainland from a distant land or to point to the North Star.

Inuksuit can serve in a spiritual capacity as well, to indicate a place of death, a place where life is renewed or where spirits reside, where judgments or decisions are made or where celebrations and festivals are to be held. An inuksuk may also indicate an object that should not be approached or touched or an object that brings good fortune.

These are only a few of the many ways that the Inuit communicated important information to those who came after them.

## Information Sources

*Polar Explorers for Kids: Historic Expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctic with 21 Activities* by Maxine Snowden. Chicago Review Press: Chicago, IL. 2004.

*The Inuksuk Book* by Mary Wallace. Owl Books: Toronto, Ontario. 1999.

*The Inuksuk* hosted by Oriana Communications Inc.  
[www.pinnaclefarms.ca/ORIANAsite/AboutNameandLogo/InuksukNew.html](http://www.pinnaclefarms.ca/ORIANAsite/AboutNameandLogo/InuksukNew.html)

*Arctic Inuit Art* by Judith Varney Burhchttp. [www.arcticinuitart.com/culture/inuk.html](http://www.arcticinuitart.com/culture/inuk.html)

