

KNUD RASMUSSEN - "THE OLD AND THE NEW"

Grade Level

This lesson plan is designed to be used with students ages 12-15.

Objective

Students will read "The Old and the New" from Knud Rasmussen's Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24. Students will identify the changes in Inuit life that came with the establishment of trading posts and discuss these changes in small groups. Each student will then defend a position for or against the establishment of trading posts in the Arctic.

Estimated Time Needed

1 ½ - 2 class periods (over two days)

Materials

Copies of "The Old and the New"

<http://www.usask.ca/education/ideas/socstudies/inuit.htm>

Map of Canada for each student (Before lesson, teacher must add Thule (Greenland), Repulse Bay and Barrow (Alaska) to map)

<http://atlas.gc.ca/site/english/maps/reference/outlinecanada/canada12>

Optional: Igloolik Isuma Productions, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*

<http://www.sila.nu/journal/>

Activity

1. Introduce Knud Rasmussen (see Teachers' Notes below). Read background information aloud, share key points or give each student their own copy of background.
2. Explain that from the Thule Trade Station Rasmussen and his colleague Peter Freuchen established in Thule, Greenland, Knud Rasmussen led five expeditions from 1921 to 1924 exploring 46,000 km (29,000 miles) of arctic North America by dog sled.
3. Give each student the map of Canada/Greenland. Find Thule, Greenland and point out approximate region of exploration.
4. Explain that one of Rasmussen's expeditions was the Fifth Thule Expedition, about which he wrote a 300 page report. The expedition arrived in Repulse Bay in 1922, intent on documenting Inuit history and culture. In May 1923, Rasmussen left Repulse Bay in the company of a Native Greenland woman named Arnarulunguaq and her cousin Miteq. Their trek took them across 3,000 km (approx. 2,000 miles) of the Northwest Passage and brought them to Barrow, Alaska thirteen months later. He traveled by sledge from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean with the hopes of proving there existed a common Inuit culture that spread from Siberia to Greenland.
5. Ask students to predict what supplies they think were available at these newly established trading posts, such as the Thule Trade Station. List on the board. Remind students that the year is approximately 1920.

6. Break students into small groups. Ask students if they think the trading posts improved the lives of the Inuit, or made their lives more difficult. Allow time for discussion and have groups share their opinions with the class.
7. Decide if students are to read the excerpt of Rasmussen's report individually or in pairs. Pass out copies. (OPTIONAL: Assign both the reading and step 9 as homework and continue the lesson the following day.)
8. Have students create a table with two columns labeled Before Trading Posts and After Trading Posts. As they read, have them fill in the columns with items now available to the Inuit and the items they replaced.
9. When students are done, recreate the table on the board or overhead and have students share their findings. (OPTIONAL: If students have completed the reading and table as homework, have them share their results in teams prior to recreating the table on the board.)
10. Lead a discussion about whether or not the quality of life of the Inuit improved after the establishment of trading posts. List pros and cons shared by students. What did Rasmussen think about the changes caused by the availability of these new tools and other items?

Evaluation

Trading posts were a main catalyst for change. They brought new tools like knives, rifles and metal pots that were so effective they made some very important craftsmanship, hunting skills, and environmental knowledge obsolete within a few generations. On the other hand these very same things significantly increased chances of survival in the Arctic.

Explain that students are to choose a position either in support of the establishment of trading posts in the Arctic or against this practice. Have students write a short essay defending their position. Explain that they are to support their position with information from the class discussion and Rasmussen's report.

Ask for volunteers to share their essays.

References

Robinson, Gillian, Isuma Inuit Studies Reader. Montreal: Isuma Publishing, 2004.

Kessler, Deirdre, Isuma Teacher's Resource Guide, Montreal: Isuma Publishing, 2004.

Isuma Publishing – A Division of Igloolik Isuma Productions: <https://store.isuma.ca/>

TEACHERS NOTES

Between 1921 and 1924, explorer Knud Rasmussen explored approximately 46,000 km (29,000 miles) of arctic America, resulting in his famous "Great Sledge Journey." During this time, Rasmussen collected and described numerous Inuit folktales, songs and poetry. In this lesson, students will be introduced to Rasmussen and read excerpts from his Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-1924.

KNUD JOHAN VICTOR RASMUSSEN

Knud Johan Victor Rasmussen (June 7, 1879 - December 21, 1933) was a Greenlandic polar explorer and anthropologist.

Rasmussen was born in Jakobshavn, Greenland. He went on his first expedition in 1902-1904, "The Literature Expedition" with Jørgen Brønlund, Harald Moltke and Ludvig Mylius-Erichsen to examine Inuit culture. In 1910 he established the Thule Trading Station at Cape York (Uummannaq), Greenland as a base. He went on several expeditions between 1912 and 1919, including traveling over the Viscount Melville Sound and crossing the Northwest Passage by dogsled.

From 1921 to 1924 he went on his famous "The Great Sled Journey" to collect and describe Inuit songs and legends. For that effort he gained a post at the University of Copenhagen. He was also patron of the first long polar movie "SOS Iceberg" (directed by Leni Riefenstahl).

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