**Sitka National Historical Park**

**DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAM OUTLINE**

**Created by Austin McCourt on March 16th, 2021**

**“Soft Gold: The History of Russians in Alaska”**

**Overview:**

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| Duration | 30-50 Minute Program |
| Location | Presented to students via software like Teams or Zoom from a remote location |
| Audience | Upper Elementary School students (4th-6th grade) |
| Topic | Reasons for Early Russian settlement in Alaska |
| Learning Standards | **See “Learning Standards” Table** |

**Goal:** The goal of this educational program is to provide students of various backgrounds, ethnicities, faiths, and statuses with a factual, curriculum-based educational program surrounding the history of early Russian exploration and settlement in Alaska. Program participants will connect this history to the history of settlement across North America, and will learn about its effects on Alaskan native peoples and the environment. Students will learn about important historical concepts like the fur trade, the trade of luxury goods, and colonialism, as well as important environmental concepts like overuse/overhunting, habitats, keystone species, and the importance of balance.

**Objectives:**

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| 1 | Objective | Students will understand what brought Russians to Alaska, and where else in the world similar enterprises were underway |
| Measuring Tool | Students will be able to describe the fur trade, both in Siberia and of beaver in North America |
| 2 | Objective | Students will know what Alaskan native people traditionally lived in the land now occupied by Sitka/Sitka National Historical Park, and why Russians chose this place to settle |
| Measuring Tool | Students will be able to describe the Tlingit, and describe the natural bounty of resources that makes Southeast Alaska such a lucrative place to settle |
| 3 | Objective | Students will be able to describe why sea otter fur was so highly valued, where it was primarily traded, and for what goods it was exchanged |
| Measuring Tool | Students will be able to explain what a luxury good is, as well as name one adaptation of marine mammal fur. Students will also be able to explain that Russians would trade for other luxury goods like tea and porcelain |
| 4 | Objective | Students will learn about the scientific concepts of a *habitat* and a *keystone species*, and why balance is important in maintaining them |
| Measuring Tool | Students will be able to describe what a habitat and a keystone species is, and what can happen if a keystone species is removed from an environment |
| 5 | Objective | Students will know that the colony of “New Archangel” was the capital of Russian America |
| Measuring Tool | Students will be able to describe what happens in a capital city and why that applies to “New Archangel” |

**Theme:** How and why Russians came to and settled in Alaska is not only important for understanding Alaskan history, but also contains themes necessary for students to understand important historical ideas/concepts like trade, colonialism, and the rights of indigenous peoples. In addition, the efforts of Russian and other non-Alaskan native fur hunters had severe scientific, environmental, and cultural effects on this region and its indigenous peoples.

**Essential Questions:** How and why did Russians settle in Alaska? What were they looking for? What effects did they have on people already living here?

**Tangible-Intangible Linkages:**

Learning about Sea Otters and other marine mammal furs, and their adaptations, will help students conceptualize the idea of a *luxury good* and why these have been so important throughout history.

Learning why the Russians wished to establish outposts and colonies in Alaska will help students conceptualize and understand important historical themes of imperialism and colonialism.

Learning about how Alaskan native people traditionally used natural resources versus how Russians overused them will encourage students to think about the ways they themselves use and/or waste resources.

**Background:**

The Fur trade, as well as the trade of other natural goods and resources, was a significant driver in the European settlement of North America. Between the French and the British, North American became divided over the issue of fur hunting, trapping, and trading- with Native Americans becoming caught in the middle of these European nations. The same is true in Alaska. Beginning in the early 1700’s, the Russians began trapping and hunting marine mammals like the fur seal and sea otters in the Aleutian Islands before steadily making their way inwards towards Pacific Coastal Alaska.

Having spread across the Ural Mountains and Siberia searching for sable, these Russian fur hunters, called Промышленники/Promyshlenniki, were experienced in hunting land animals but were poor sailors and did not know how to trap animals like the sea otter. In order to gather enough fur to make money, the Russians had to rely on the Alaskan native people they encountered like the Aleut/Unangan, Alutiiq/Sugpiaq, and the Tlingit.

Overhunting of sea otters by Russians and other non-Alaskan native fur hunters lead to significant environmental effects in the habitats traditionally occupied by sea otters. Without Sea Otters, populations of creatures like sea urchins and clams boomed, which in turn led to a downturn in kelps and other sea grasses. This led to decreased biodiversity as a result of habitat and food loss for several species of fish and sea turtles.

Eventually, the Russians realized that they could make much more profit and exert much more influence if they had a lasting colony in Alaska. Not only did they want exclusive fur trading rights in the region, they also wanted to compete with nations like Great Britain, France, Spain, and America which all had a hand in the fur trade in other parts of North America, and were beginning to seek out opportunities in Alaska as well. After settling on Sitka Bay, and battling with the local Tlingit people called the Kiks.ádi, they established the colony of New Archangel in 1804.

**Teacher’s Guide**

**Program Overview/Teaser**

How, why, and where did Russia decide to establish colonies in Alaska? In this distance-learning program, come explore the ways Russian settlement and interactions with Alaskan natives have shaped Alaskan history. Discover how important topics like the fur trade, imperialism, and resource use helped shape us- both in the past and today!

**Program Objectives:**

Students will:

1. Explore the history of the fur trade as it relates to the settlement of Alaska
2. Identify the concept of a “luxury good”, and how they impact trade
3. Learn about the coercion and subjugation of Alaskan native people by Russian and other non-Alaskan native fur hunters
4. Learn about the scientific concepts of a habitat and keystone species, and the importance of balance in an environment
5. Learn about the history of overuse or overhunting, and help them identify examples of this in their own life

**Standards Addressed**

See “Learning Standards” table

**Vocabulary and Important Concepts**

The Fur Trade, Luxury Goods, Overuse/Overhunting, Supply and Demand, Indigenous People (Aleut/Unangan, Alutiiq/Sugpiaq, Tlingit), Subsistence, Habitat, Keystone Species

**Pre-program prep**

* Assign to students or Read “[The Russians](https://www.nps.gov/sitk/learn/historyculture/the-russians.htm)” article from the Sitka National Historical Park/NPS website
* Go over the “Vocabulary and Important Concepts” section with students
* Encourage students to think of questions to ask the presenter. We usually have time at the end of a program to answer questions, and we're happy to answer overflow questions via e-mail. We love chatting with students about Sitka!
* Make sure you have a Zoom link at least a week ahead of time.
* The teacher is responsible for classroom management during the program. This includes calling on students throughout the program and helping to ensure that their answers and comments are understood by all. The teacher is also responsible for facilitating questions at the end of the program.

**Post-program reflection**

* Find out the history of the [land](https://native-land.ca/) you live on, or the history of your community
* Discuss or write about any of the following essential questions
  + Why do you think the Russian’s believed they had the right to overuse Alaskan native resources?
  + What are some “luxury goods” in our societies today? Why are these status symbols so highly desired?
  + How can you make sure you use only your “fair share” of a resource?
* [Email in your questions, comments, and feedback](https://www.nps.gov/common/utilities/sendmail/sendemail.cfm?o=4F80D5BA91DA90B990AE10AEED1EA4A36693569C12B18389&r=/teachers/classrooms/why-wilderness-distance-learning.htm)! The National Park Service loves to hear back from students and teachers about ways we can improve our distance-learning materials!

**Learning Standards**

All learning standards taken from: [Alaska State Educational Standards](file:///I:\Interpretation\SCA\2021\Austin\Misc\Alaska%20State%20Educational%20Standards.pdf), [Alaska State Science Standards](https://education.alaska.gov/akstandards/science/science-standards-for-alaska.pdf)

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| **“Soft Gold: The History of Russians in Alaska”**   * The Tlingit people and their history in Sitka * **The North American fur trade** * The Siberian Fur trade and trade with China, Luxury Goods * **Russian exploration** * **of the Aleutian Islands** * Relations between Russian fur hunters and the Aleut/Unangan and Alutiit/Sugpiaq peoples * **Overhunting of sea otters by Russian, American, and British fur traders, and its ecological effects** * Ecological concepts like habitat, keystone species, and extinction * **Russian settlement in Southcentral/Southeast Alaska** * The Battles of 1802 and 1804 in Sitka and the Russian colony of New Archangel * **The Alaska Purchase** | **PEOPLE, PLACES, ENVIRONMENT** | **CONSUMPTION, PRODUCTION, DISTTRIBUTION** | **INDIVIDUAL, CITIZENSHIP, GOVERNANCE, POWER** | **CONTINUITY AND CHANGE** |
| **The student demonstrates an understanding of the interaction between people and their physical environment by:**  Studying maps of Alaska to locate specific locations like Baranof Island and Sitka (G. A1)  **Learning about the specific geographical features that made this area of Alaska so desirable for settlement both by Alaskan Natives and Russian settlers (G. B1, B7**)  Discovering why many places in Southeast and Southcentral Alaska bear Russian names (G. B2)  **Discussing quotes from historical journals outlining the value of Sea Otter Fur (H. C2,C3)**  Learning about what adaptations of marine mammal fur made it particularly valuable to fur hunters worldwide (LS4.C, LS4.D, LS3.A, LS3.B) | **The student demonstrates an understanding of the discovery, impact, and role of natural resources by:**  Learning about the traditional subsistence use of natural resources by Alaskan natives, and their overuse by Russian and other European fur hunters (G. E1-5)(G. F1-3)  **Studying how the Sable fur trade lead to Russian expansion through Siberia to the Pacific Ocean (G. D1-5)(G. E1-5)**  Discovering the history of the British and French fur trade in North America, specifically regarding Beaver fur and its use in European fashion (G. D1-5)(G. E1-5)  **Learning about the effects of overhunting or overuse on natural habitats and environments (e.g. keystone species, habitats) (LS4.A, LS2.C, LS4.D, ESS2.E, ESS3.C)** | **The student demonstrates an understanding of the historical rights and responsibilities of Alaskans by:**  Analyzing drawings and photographs of Alaskan native peoples, villages, and hunting practices to discover traditional hunting, artistic, technological, and cultural practices (H. C2-3)(A. D1,D2)(CS. B1)  **Discussing the historical subsistence use of resources by Alaskan native people, and why such a lifestyle is still alive in the state today (ESS3.A, ESS3.C)** | **The student demonstrates an understanding of the chronology of Alaska history by:**  Learning about the Settlement of Southeastern/Southcentral Alaska and the Aleutian Islands by Alaskan Native people. (H. B1ab)(CS. B1)  **Learning about the arrival of Russian settlers in the Aleutian Islands and their further spread into Alaska searching for Sea Otters (G. D1-5)(G. F1-3)**  Learning about the conflicts between the Tlingit and representatives of the Russian American company here in Sitka in 1802 and 1804 (H. A7, B1d, B2)  **Discovering Sitka’s role in the Russian settlement of Alaska, culminating in the Alaska purchase in 1867 (H. B2)** |