

# GROWING NATIVE

## ALASKA: PEOPLE OF THE NORTH

### VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



Host Chris Eyre (Cheyenne/Arapaho), Marina Anderson (Haida/Tlingit), and Jim Anderson (Haida/Tlingit) seal hunting.

#### IN THEIR WORDS

"The most successful artists are the ones that are hunters in their communities because they know how to get those materials themselves. And so, it's a very important part of it and part of the connection."

-Da-ka-xeen Mehner,  
Tlingit/N'ishga



Film location: Alaska, United States

#### PROGRAM SYNOPSIS

*Growing Native* is a four-part series focusing on reclaiming traditional knowledge and food ways to address critical issues of health and wellness, the environment and human rights. *Growing Native* focuses on Tribes, stories and events from four geographic regions, including Alaska, Oklahoma, Northwest and Great Lakes. Across the country, Native people are regaining health and strength through the recovery and revitalization of traditional knowledge systems of land, language, traditional arts and health.

All across Alaska, Native cultures have depended on the abundant natural resources found there to support their families, cultures and way of life. Now these resources are growing scarce, and the people who have relied on them for centuries have to find new ways to adapt. *Growing Native* visits some of the many communities engaged in this familiar struggle - the struggle to maintain their traditions and way of life, while continuing to prosper in a constantly changing world. Host Chris Eyre meets Alaska Natives who thrive and survive in this complex environment.



Dr. Theresa Areygaq John of University of Alaska in Fairbanks and Host Chris Eyre (Cheyenne/Arapaho) walking through the library.

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#### PRODUCER STATEMENT

As executive director for Vision Maker Media, I have the honor of visiting with many Tribal Nations across the country. I get to see first-hand the amazing work reservation-based organizations are doing to promote their traditions to younger generations.

At the same time, I see my relatives struggle. Many Native people have high rates of poverty, obesity, diabetes, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide. I watch young people struggle with identity—they see very few brown faces in the media—and even fewer that are Native American. I see the frustration of people who live in a food desert.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines food deserts as parts of the country void of fresh fruit, vegetables

and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas. This is largely due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers' markets and healthy food providers on or near the reservations.

We created Growing Native to reclaim our narrative sovereignty and showcase the stories of powerful Tribal leaders who are on the forefront of returning to their traditional healthy diets and activities. Visit people who harvest wild rice, camas and herd bison. Learn how language revitalization is strengthening Tribal ties to their place on the planet. See how arts and culture play a role in the Tribal economy, as well as cultural preservation. And learn how to make a few healthy ancient indigenous dishes.

Our goal is to increase awareness of each region's ecosystem, encourage stewardship of the land and reclaim the traditions that supported ancient indigenous cultures for hundreds of years. We believe these messages will resonate with all inhabitants of these places — regardless of race or ethnicity.



Shirley Sneve, Executive Director of Vision Maker Media.



L to R: David Riffey, Marsh Chamberlain, Marshall Andersen, Blue Tarpalechee (Muskogee/Creek), Host Chris Eyre (Cheyenne/Arapaho) and Kavelina Torres (Yup'ik/Inupiaq/Athabaskan).

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#### BY THE NUMBERS

- 1.** The name Alaska is derived from the Aleut word "Aleyska," meaning "great land."
- 2.** Alaska is the largest state in the United States, but it has only 730,000 residents.
- 3.** Alaska has 235 Native Villages with 11 distinct cultural groups that speak 20 different languages.
- 4.** The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium is the largest Tribal health organization in the United States. In 1998, the organization took over from the Indian Health Services to provide care for the Alaska Native people.
- 5.** When the Russians first entered Alaska in 1740, there were approximately 100,000 Natives including Inuit, Athabaskan, Yupik, Unangan, and Tlingit.
- 6.** On March 30, 1867, U.S. Secretary of State William Seward met with a Baron Edouard de Stoeckl of Russia and signed the Treaty of Cession that ceded Alaska to the United States for \$7.2 million dollars.
- 7.** Under the U.S. Code of Indian Offenses created by the Office of Indian Affairs in 1884, officials were allowed to ban Native ceremonies and religious practices. This coupled with pressure from missionaries caused a tremendous loss of both languages and cultural practices in Alaska Native villages.
- 8.** The right to practice traditional customs was restored by the American Indian Religious Freedom Act which passed in 1978.



Sandy Tahbone (Inupiak) and Marjorie Tahbone (Inupiak) at one a favorite Native gathering spots.



Jim Anderson (Haida/Tlingit), Marina Anderson (Haida/Tlingit) and Host Chris Eyre (Cheyenne/ Arapaho) with film crew.

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#### EXPLORING THE FACTS

- 1.** In 1971 Native students at the University of Fairbanks, Alaska started an annual Native festival as a way to bring their traditional village cultures on to the campus. The event continues to grow and thrive today through student efforts. What are some of the benefits students might gain both individually and as members of diverse cultures by bringing everybody together in this way?
- 2.** Marina Anderson (Tlingit/Haida) was told she did not look “native enough” to be featured in a magazine article on Tlingit culture. Explore and discuss your own thoughts and beliefs about cultural identity and what is required to “belong.” Is it the percentage of Native blood, physical appearance, or participation in traditional practices?
- 3.** Over-fishing has caused severe shortages of an important staple food, not just for Alaska Natives but around the world. Explore the ways that humans must balance their own needs with the health of the natural world. What other factors are posing a threat to the health of our natural food sources?
- 4.** Marina’s family is fond of the saying “when the tide is out, the table is set.” What does this statement mean to you? Examine and discuss how this statement relates to the land on which you live.
- 5.** For some people “subsistence living” suggests an impoverished way of life, scraping together what is needed in order to survive. Revisit several of the scenes in the film and describe and define the way many Native Alaskans view the term “subsistence living.” How is it different?
- 6.** Da-ka-xeen Mehner says “The most successful artists are the ones that are hunters in their communities because they know how to get those materials themselves.” Explore the ways that art is often a natural expression of where you live and the culture that surrounds you.



Host Chris Eyre (Cheyenne/Arapaho) with Marjorie Tahbone (Inupiak) outside her family's home.

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#### IDEAS FOR ACTION

- 1.** Totem poles have long been a part of Alaska Native and other northwest Coastal tribes. Research the history and symbolism of the totem pole and how it relates to Alaska Native cultures.
- 2.** Explore the many images portrayed on totem poles and select 3-5 images to learn more about. You may want to transfer these images to paper, research the symbolism and meaning, and identify how the images differ from one area to another.
- 3.** The Exxon Valdez Oil spill of 1989 in Prince William Sound was one of the largest human-caused environmental disasters in history. Create a timeline of events leading up to and in the first days following the spill. How did the oil spill affect the animal life and the lives of the people? Then create a second timeline documenting and highlighting the clean-up effort leading up to the present day. What has happened to the animal life and Native Alaskan people since the spill?
- 4.** Alaska is home to 235 Native villages, each one recognized as a sovereign nation. To better understand the structure and diversity of these many villages, research how the Alaska Native Corporations began and how they operate and guide the lives of the villagers today. Compare and contrast this structure with reservations in the lower 48 states.
- 5.** Eating “local” has become a strong movement across many cultures. Design and create a “plan” for creating a Store Outside Your Door program in your area. What foods would it include? How would these foods be gathered and distributed? Include descriptions of the benefits of local foods versus processed foods available in the grocery stores.
- 6.** Elders within every culture are important in passing on languages, traditions, ceremonies, etc. Identify 2-4 elders featured in this film and document why their participation in summer camps and learning programs is so essential to the vitality of the culture.





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#### RESOURCES

##### **Vision Maker Media**

<https://www.visionmakermedia.org/films/growing-native-alaska-people-north>

<https://fna.community.uaf.edu/>

<http://alaska.gov/kids/learn/nativeculture.htm>

##### **Alaskan Native Language Center**

<https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/>

<http://www.alaskanativelanguages.org/>

##### **Alaskan Native Heritage Center**

<http://www.alaskanative.net/>

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/why-russia-gave-alaska-americas-gateway-arctic-180962714/>

<https://response.restoration.noaa.gov/oil-and-chemical-spills/significant-incidents/exxon-valdez-oil-spill>

<https://anthc.org/what-we-do/traditional-foods-and-nutrition/store-outside-your-door/>

**Alaskan Native Tribal Health Consortium:** <https://anthc.org/who-we-are/history/>



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This Viewer Discussion Guide was developed by Jamie Lee, an author and former instructor at the Oglala Lakota College, where she taught for five years. Lee has a master's in human development and has been a communications trainer and an educator for the past 30 years. Her stories and articles have appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *Winds of Change Magazine* and several other anthologies. She has published three non-fiction books, a novel and a collection of writings from Oglala Lakota College students. Her first novel, *Washaka: The Bear Dreamer*, was a PEN USA finalist in 2007. Lee has written more than 70 documentary programs, including Public Radio's landmark 52-part Native music series, *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*.

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For more information, please visit [www.visionmakermedia.org](http://www.visionmakermedia.org).

Educational resources for this film are available at <https://www.visionmakermedia.org/films/growing-native-alaska-people-north>

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