

Textual Analysis and Discussion: Alaska Native Women Organize for Justice

Objective:

You will be able to...

- Determine central ideas of news stories recounting sexual assault survivors' pursuit of justice and analyze those ideas' development over the course of the texts
- Cite evidence to support analyses of reporting covering issues affecting Native women in Alaska
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the reporting including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings

Warm-up:

Sunday, March 8, 2020 was International Women's Day, and the theme for 2020 is "I am Generation Equality: Realizing Women's Rights." Refer to the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights to get started in thinking about what rights are supposed to be guaranteed to all people.

With this in mind, fill out the following table:

1. What are some rights that certain women around the world still do not enjoy?	
2. Think about what you see in the media or encounter in your daily life—what are some ways that people are mobilizing for women's rights today?	
3. One example of a way that people are mobilizing for women's rights is the #MeToo movement, which began in 2017. What do you know about this movement? What are its aims?	

4. What do stories associated with this movement tend to have in common?	
5. What women's rights are people working toward through this movement?	

Background:

Content warning: This lesson discusses and analyzes texts centered on sexual assault. It features the voices and stories of survivors.

This lesson will guide you in a close analysis of two articles from “Nowhere to Turn,” a Pulitzer Center-supported reporting project that explores the stories of Alaska Native women and girls. The stories focus on Alaska’s Bering Strait region, where the city of Nome serves as a regional hub for dozens of smaller villages. It is also a region where women and girls suffer high rates of sexual violence. Over half of Nome’s residents are Alaska Native, largely of Inupiaq and Yup’ik heritage, and its police department has been accused of “indifference and incompetence” when faced with widespread allegations of sexual assault disproportionately affecting the Native community.

In the first article, you’ll follow survivor Clarice “Bun” Hardy as she recounts her quest for justice to no avail. In the second article, students explore how survivors have come together with their community to force local officials to realize their right to justice.

Introducing the Reporting:

Resource 1: “For Years, Nome Sexual Assault Reports Go Unanswered”

Read Victoria McKenzie’s story from the *National Native News*.

After reading, write down your answers to the following questions **on a separate sheet of paper**.

1. What imagery or details does McKenzie use to convey that Hardy feels more at home in Shaktoolik?
2. Why doesn't Hardy feel safe in Nome?
3. Hardy states that she feels "betrayed." What do you think she means?
4. How does the article show that each of the following groups has betrayed Hardy?
 - a. The criminal justice system?
 - b. Hardy's work colleagues?
 - c. Her union?
 - d. Her close friends?

Resource 2: "We Are All We Have': Nome Sexual Assault Victims Find Their Collective Strength"

Read Victoria McKenzie's story from the *National Native News*.

After reading, write down your answers to the following questions **on a separate sheet of paper**.

1. What pattern did Ellanna and the other women discover when they began sharing their experiences?
2. According to Pungowiyi, why is it that "sexual assault cases are more likely to reach a dead end if the victim was Native"?
3. Why did the advocacy group decide to go public with their work?
4. What were the main differences between the resolution calling for a review of police department conduct drafted by the advocacy group and the one drafted by the city?
5. What changes to the police department have been made since the advocacy group began their work?

Reflection:

Write down your answers to the following questions on the same sheet of paper that you used for your responses to the questions above.

1. Susie, an Alaska Native woman who is a survivor of sexual assault, did not want her last name published in this reporting project. What are the advantages of anonymity for Susie? What are the disadvantages?
2. The first time Ellanna is quoted in the project, she says "I'm not just a...troublemaker."
 - a. What are the connotations of the word "troublemaker"?
 - b. Do you think that her actions and advocacy make her a troublemaker? Why or why not?
3. The city council hearing the women's grievances is "all-male, non-Native."

- a. Nome's population is roughly half Native. What historical factors does the reporting suggest might explain why the Native population is under-represented in local government?
- b. What effects might the city council's composition have on the advocacy group's work, and why?
4. Why might the lack of Native people and women on the city council make the advocacy group's work more difficult to accomplish?
5. The article ends with a quote from Ellanna: "We're all we have."
 - a. What does she mean by this?
 - b. What role did community bonds play in the women's advocacy?
6. In what ways has the advocacy group been successful? What is still left to accomplish?
7. How are the stories of women like Ellanna and Hardy similar to other stories you've heard of associated with the #MeToo movement? How are they different?

Extension Activity:

Option 1: Local investigation

This lesson explored how communities can come together and organize for women's rights long denied by authority figures. Research how people are organizing for their rights in your community. Or, if you prefer, choose a women's rights issue and research how women and their allies in a context of your choice are fighting to combat that issue.

As you're researching, consider the following:

- What right is in question?
- Who are some of the people or groups working to advance this right, and what are they doing?
- What comparisons can you draw between the activism around the right you researched and what you learned about the women's advocacy group in Nome?
- Having done your research, write a paper, make a presentation to your classmates, or write a letter to a local representative encouraging them to take action to help realize this right.

Option 2: Poetry writing

Use this reporting to create original poetry as a way to connect current events to your local and personal context and make your voice heard. The Pulitzer Center hosts an annual student poetry contest, Fighting Words, and offers cash prizes and publication of the winning poems on our website.

Writing a Fighting Words poem involves highlighting phrases in the reporting that jump out as important, interesting or beautiful—and that capture the feeling of the story—to create a cento or found poem.

Email your poem to education@pulitzercenter.org to enter the contest, which offers winners cash prizes and publication on our website!