

### Inuit (Eskimo)

The Eskimos are a hardy group of Indians who live in the northern reaches of North America. The word Eskimo came from the Algonquin, a word that means "eaters of raw meat". This name was commonly used by the Europeans who came to explore the New World, although the Eskimos called themselves Inuit. The word Inuit means "real people". The Eskimos live in a cold harsh area that most people would not care to inhabit. The land, a tundra, is treeless and the ground is frozen most of the year. Some Eskimos settled along rivers and relied on fishing for their food. Others are nomadic (having no permanent home) and live by following herds of caribou. Most Eskimos, however, have lived as hunters of sea mammals. They have survived for thousands of years by hunting whales, seals, and walrus.

Nearly every part of the animal killed was used for tools, clothing, or other things. Skins of seals and polar bear were made into warm parkas (coats), pants, and boots. Bones of whale and walrus were fashioned into weapons or tools. Smaller bones were made into knives or tools such as needles to sew clothing. Meat from all the animals was, of course, eaten for food. Blubber from the whales was used to make oil for lamps, soap, or cooking margarine. Whale teeth were used to carve pictures and became a popular art form called scrimshaw. Even the animal intestines were put to use as waterproof clothing that kept the Eskimos dry. Animal tendons, or sinew, was used as thread to sew animal hides together.

The Eskimos created means of transportation that could carry them across the cold water or frozen land. A one-man boat called a kayak was made from a wooden frame covered with walrus hides. This small boat could move quietly through the water, allowing the hunter to come close to his prey without being heard. The Eskimos depended on dog-sleds during the snowy winter months. The sled was usually made of wood and was pulled by 2 to 14 huskies. Today, the snowmobile has replaced the dog-sled in most areas.

The Eskimos lived together in large settlements during the winter months. Some of the eastern Eskimos built permanent homes of stone. Many others constructed ice houses called igloos built on the ice of the Arctic Ocean. They lived in large groups and hunted seal through holes in the ice. During the summers, the village broke into smaller families who moved away from each other. The families lived in tents made of animal skins and fished or hunted seal. During the summer months they often collected bird eggs and plants that could not be found during the winter.

Eskimos lived off the land for thousands of years. In the early 1900's, changes in the world brought about changes for the Eskimos. Fishing, whaling, and sealing industries greatly reduced the number of sea mammals the Eskimos depended on for survival. Also, the search for oil and minerals brought the world into the Eskimo

communities. Today most Eskimos are very much a part of the modern world. They import food, clothing, and housing materials. Many have moved into communities similar to your own with stores, hospitals, and schools.

**1. What is the main idea of this story?**

- a. Eskimos are also Inuit.
- b. The Eskimo way of life .
- c. Where the Eskimo people came from.

**2. Where did the word Eskimo come from? What does it mean?**

---

---

**3. Where do Eskimos live?**

---

**4. Another word for "scrimshaw" is:**

- a. blubber
- b. art carved on whale teeth
- c. art made of whale bone

**5. How did the Eskimos use the animals they hunted?**

---

**6. A word that means "a one-man boat" is:**

- a. sinew
- b. scrimshaw
- c. kayak

**7. What two kinds of transportation did the Eskimos rely on?**

---

**8. Describe how the Eskimos grouped themselves in summer and winter months.**

---

---

**Think Ahead:** Why do you think the Eskimo way of life changed when the search for oil brought other people into their villages?