

Winter Traditions and Celebrations: Past and Present

There are many traditions and celebrations that occur during our long winter months here in Alaska. This information provides a great opportunity to introduce Alaska Native cultures into your classroom in one way or another.

Upper Tanana Winter Festival By Jill Ekstrom and Patricia Partnow

Despite the hard work required just to survive in the interior environment, there were times when work was halted and fun was the order of the day. One of the most important times for the Upper Tanana was the Winter Festival, which took place during much of the month of December.

This was the time when all the fall fish, berries, and meat had been gathered, prepared, and stored, and people had ample supplies for the time being. Hunting was not as good as previously, and these two factors, coupled with the desire to rekindle social relationships, made the Winter Festival a time to be looked forward to.

The festival was a gathering of all the band members, numbering from 20 to 100 people. Its purpose was to visit and have fun. Riddles, storytelling, games, and contests were the order of the day. Different men hosted parties throughout the month, but all these parties were part of the festival itself.