

Literature Circles: 5th Grade Book: *Alone in the Ice World*

a. Literature circles document

b. Prior/Background Knowledge

- Dog sledding — Read the picture book story *Balto*.
- Environment
 - Climate — Watch a DVD of Inuit people and animals
 - Days with almost no daylight in the Arctic circle — Science minilesson: Using a globe, review why the days grow so short in higher latitudes in the winter.
- Inuit way of life before Europeans appeared vs. today — Connect to the story of Europeans' interactions with American Indians, which 4th graders should know something about. Bring (borrow) an artifact such as a cleaned animal skin/fur for students to touch as we discuss how people live/lived without industrialization.

c. Vocabulary

- Cavalier — careless; not taking someone or something seriously
- Consciousness raising — making people more aware of a social issue
- Fragmented — separated into many pieces
- Misshapen — deformed; badly shaped
- Operational — working properly
- Rigid — stiff, not bending
- Gangly — tall and thin and having long slender limbs
- Naluagmi — white Americans
- Tundra — permanently frozen soil north of the tree line in the Arctic
- Iñupiat — Eskimo people of northern Alaska

This list consists of mostly tier 2 words that help readers understand Allison's parents and the daily working of the Iñupiat village where she was stranded. The last three words are tier 3 words that appear repeatedly in the book. When these words appear in context, some of them are accompanied by enough clues that readers will discern the meaning. Readers might gloss over the foreign words and see how far they can get without knowing those words explicitly, so I would focus on those words early. Knowing those foreign words also equips students so they can discuss the book easier and more intelligently.

Activity: Have the students fill out an anticipation guide that includes the ten words. This functions as a pretest. Divide the class into ten groups. Have each group create a word map for one of the vocabulary words. Then have each group present their map and also dramatize something from it. At some later point, give the students a posttest of some kind to see if they have internalized those words.

Minilesson: Do a think-aloud to model using context clues with an unfamiliar passage. Make sure the passage includes the different types of context clues (e.g., definition, example-illustration). Have students create their own sentences employing one context clues strategy in each sentence. Post strategies on the wall and refer to the poster.

d. Determining Importance

- 1) On pages 68–80, we meet Oolik, a stubborn girl with a lame leg, a disfigured face and hearing loss. On page 68, Allison shares her impressions of Oolik. Allison accepts Oolik and teaches her a form of sign language.
- 2) Pages 68–69: “From one side, she looked perfectly normal. From the other, she didn’t. Looking at her head-on, face-to-face, was like looking at two people at once. Her face was distorted, as if one side had melted. I tried to focus on the normal brown eye and smooth cheek, but my eyes kept returning to the other side of her face, to the watery eye and sagging cheek. Her useless leg stuck out behind and seemed to prop her up. She wore a filthy parka, and her stringy hair hung into the collar. My throat was so dry it was difficult to swallow. I knew she was lame. I didn’t know she was so horribly ugly.” Page 71: “They put her on the ice when she was born, but the preacher made them take her back.” Page 80: “She told me kids had set fire to her clothes and pushed her down icy sloped. Boys had tried to drown her in the river.”
- 3) This section gives a clear picture of Oolik. Allison offers a lot of detail. How would you describe Oolik to a stranger? How would you describe not just her appearance but the whole person? How much of Allison’s detail would you include? How would you describe Oolik in only 1 sentence?

e. Drawing Inferences

- 1) On pages 48 and 49, Allison and Matu discuss some Iñupiat legends and customs. They also discuss California. Allison is shocked at Matu’s perception of her home state.
- 2) “Matu *still* lived in the Dark Ages as far as I was concerned. He’d never even eaten a pizza or ridden a surfboard or gone to Disneyland. He had a blank look on his face when I told him about some of my favorite rock groups. ‘California a terrible place,’ he said. He started to shake as if just thinking about California gave him the creeps. ‘California’s the best place in the United States,’ I said. ‘I see California movie at school,’ he said. ‘Lots of killing.’ ‘That’s only the movies. People don’t go around doing that in Dana Point.’”
- 3) Think of a place you have never visited, but that you have learned about in a movie. How can you know if the movie is giving you correct information? Why does Matu dislike California? What movie do you think he watched in school? What movie might explain his attitude about California? What might give Matu the creeps about California? Matu says Ikayauq is rich, not poor. What ideas about California would reinforce or conflict with his opinion?

f. Predicting

- 1) On pages 12 and 13, Allison is flying with a bush pilot to a remote part of Alaska to visit her mother. The weather barely allows for safe flying. Page 13 ends with the pilot saying, “Uh-oh!”
- 2) Bottom of page 13: “It was like descending in a fast elevator. The ground swelled below. The engine groaned. Any second I thought he’d pull us out of the dive. Johnny Skye tried to bring up the nose, but the plane dropped even lower.”
- 3) As readers, we have been giving lots of conflicting clues and possibilities. (We know Allison is riding with a highly skilled bush pilot. We also know that he is a bit cocky. The weather is good enough to fly but is getting worse. Allison panics easily in this new situation, yet her parents would not send her on a truly dangerous trip.) When the plane drops and the pilot says “uh-oh,” readers could draw on many clues to make a number of different predictions; there is not one obvious “next step” in the story.
- 4) The pilot wasn’t worried before, but he is worried now. Is he just trying to scare Allison? When has he teased Allison before? How is this situation different or the same? The plane is dropping. If the pilot doesn’t do something, what will happen to the plane? If the plane crashes, will both of them survive?

g. Visualizing

- 1) On pages 99 and 100, Oolik wakens Allison to inform everyone that the store is on fire. They pull on warm clothes and exit the hut to find the store in bright orange flames. They scramble to try to put out the fire.
- 2) “Even from Sikik’s hut, we could see the blaze, bright and orange. People ran from all directions, carrying buckets and yelling. The sounds echoed in the icy blackness. *Crackle! Sizzle!* There was the

pop of tin and aluminum, the explosion of ammunition. . . Buckets were passed from one to another, water slopping over the rims and spilling to the ground. People standing closest to the blaze threw the water. Someone handed me a bucket filled with ice-cold river water, and I passed it along. We moved quickly, as quickly as we could, and no one pushed or shoved or shouted orders. Everyone knew what had to be done. It was hopeless. The fire was too big, and it took too long to get water out of the small holes in the ice. Sikik, Oolik, and some of the women shoveled snow onto the flames, but it was no use.”

- 3) This section is easy to visualize because the author provides so many details of sights and sounds. Along with all the details, students have almost certainly seen fire before (and fire can be hypnotizing), so they can easily mix details from the book with their own experience to create a mental image.
- 4) Close your eyes and create a picture of the fire scene. First, watch the people from a distance as they make a hole in the ice and fill and pass buckets of water toward the fire. Then, take out the distance. Imagine you are Allison, and someone is handing the bucket to you. What do you see in your hands? How does the fire look from where you are? What happens when the bucket of water hits the fire? How much do the shovels or snow control the fire?

h. Plot Diagram—See attached. Allison’s plane crashes far from any village, and she feels alienated from her divorced parents anyway. Roadblocks: Iñupiat take in Allison, but their customs and language upset Allison (cold, no phone, unfamiliar food and smells). Allison moves further toward her mother, but stays in another village for a while. High point: Aqsuk expelled from village. Allison is accepted into the village. Denouement: Allison and her mother are reunited.

Plot element: Roadblocks to solving the problem. I would ask students to name several roadblocks that stand between Allison and her mother: Iñupiat take in Allison, but their customs and language upset Allison (cold, no phone, unfamiliar food and smells); Allison moves further toward her mother, but stays in another village for a while. I would ask students whether these complications are within a character, between characters, or between a character and nature or society. We would how the roadblocks are bringing Allison closer to a solution, and whether the solution is transforming as a result of Allison’s personal transformation.

i. Setting — Remote part of Alaska. If Allison had been stranded somewhere easily accessed by cars, her mother would have found her much sooner, and she would not have had the time to observe, understand, and love the Iñupiat. Being deprived of her conveniences and comforts for an extended time exposed her to a completely different way of life, new problems, and social rules. She struggled to find meaning, and she saw the Iñupiat also struggle for the meaning of their lives.

j. Point of View — First person. We hear Allison’s thoughts and fears. We read her childhood memories at strategic places in the story. Because we know her thoughts, we see her changing from a desperate, unhappy, judgmental teenager to someone who cares for and respects the ways of the Iñupiat people, and even looks critically at her own culture. If we were not privy to her thoughts, we would have a harder time perceiving this transformation. We would have to observe more of her actions and speech to connect the dots.

k. Theme — “Home is more of a feeling than a place” (p. 121). Discuss what students would need to survive if spending the winter in Alaska. Show some survival gear. Next talk about what they would take with them to represent home. How could they bring their home with them? Show a few meaningful objects from my life. Then discuss the intangibles that define “home.” Have students write a “packing list” of their intangibles and the meaning and comfort provided by those things.

l. Extending the Book — See handout



Alone in the Ice World

Progress Quilt

Due date: _____

Allison learns that when outsiders try to help the Inupiat people, they sometimes make things worse. John/Igri says, “Education destroyed my roots and my language. Now I don’t belong anywhere. Not in this culture. Not in any other.” What some people consider “progress” sometimes brings negative consequences too.

Your assignment: Part 1: Description – Identify one modern advancement (1 sentence). Explain at least one positive way it helps society (1–2 sentences). Explain at least one negative side effect or unintended consequence (1–2 sentences). Think of one way to offset the negative effect (1 sentence). Part 2: Quilt Square – Represent your ideas in the form of a quilt square. Use color, illustrations, and legible lettering.

When all students have finished their quilt squares, they will be joined into one big “progress quilt.”

Example:

<p>Computers save time</p>	<p>Computers</p>	<p>People get less exercise.</p>
	<p>? Computers should shut down every 20 minutes so you can take a walk</p>	

Modern Advancement Ideas:

Spell check, cars, medicine, cheap food, electricity, movies, cell phones, buy clothes at store, braces, surveillance cameras, photocopy machine, plastic water bottles

Rubric

Category	4	3	2	1
Writing	Ideas are expressed clearly in complete sentences.	Ideas are mostly expressed in complete sentences.	Ideas are mostly clear enough to understand, but seem sloppy.	Ideas are not expressed clearly and are not in complete sentences.
Mechanics (grammar, spelling, punctuation)	Description and quilt contain 0–1 errors.	Description and quilt contain 2–4 errors that do not interfere with comprehension.	Description and quilt contain 5–7 errors that interfere with comprehension.	Description and quilt contain many errors that severely hamper comprehension.
Artistic Quality	Quilt is visually inviting and interesting due to color, effective illustrations and organization, attractive lettering.	Quilt is neat and legible. It uses some color or illustrations. Ideas are organized and easy to find.	Quilt appearance is adequate but dull or confusing. Quilt uses color but no illustrations, or illustrations but no color. Quilt is not well organized.	Quilt is hard to read and understand because of poor handwriting or lack of illustrations. Quilt content is unorganized.
Quality of Ideas	Description and quilt square include 1 well chosen advancement, 1–2 positive and 1–2 negative consequences that are relevant and provable, and 1 reasonable way to offset the negative.	Description and quilt square include 1 advancement, related consequences, and 1 way that may offset the negative, although the solution may not be effective or reasonable.	Description and quilt square may or may not include 1 advancement and related consequences. The proposed idea does little to offset the negative.	Description and quilt square may or may not include an advancement. Consequences may not relate to the advancement. If present, the proposed idea does not offset the negative.