

Yup'ik Storyknife

The Yup'ik people are native to Southwest Alaska. Storyknives were used by young Yup'ik girls to sketch on the ground designs and pictures that helped them tell stories about their daily lives and their families.

Yup'ik, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Alaska, Storyknife (*yaaruin*), late 19th century. Walrus ivory. Bequest of John B. Elliott, Class of 1951(1998-492)



Look Closely

Circle the adjectives below that you would use to describe this storyknife.

smooth

rough

thin

thick

round

flat

dark

light

The storyknife was made from a walrus tusk. That is why it has this shape, color, and texture.

- Can you see the dark lines that the artist carved into the ivory?
- Can you find lines that look like an eye and a mouth?
- What do you think the thin lines along the top are supposed to represent? Feathers? Fur?
- What kind of animal do you think this might be?



Make Connections

Storyknives were made for young girls by their fathers, grandfathers, or uncles.

Have you ever used something to help you tell a story? A puppet or stuffed animal? Or maybe an article of clothing or a toy?

What did you use?

What story did you tell?

Use Your Imagination

Think about something that has happened in your life that would make a good story—maybe something that went wrong and the lesson you learned, something funny that happened, or even something sad. Choose a scene, object, or place from your story and draw it on the storyknife below.

