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EDU551: Critical Analysis of a Text/Resource
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Part 1: Analysis

[Grandpa's Drum](#) is an episode of the PBS Kids television show *Molly of Denali*. It includes an 11-minute animated episode and a 2-minute live action segment called "Ask Molly." Molly and her family are Athabascan and live in the fictional village of Qyah, Alaska. The show follows Molly's adventures while teaching about Alaska Native culture and modeling how children can use informational text in their daily lives. In *Grandpa's Drum*, Molly and her friend, Tooley, find an old photograph of her grandfather playing a drum as a child. They learn that he gave up playing traditional songs when he was sent to boarding school and forced to renounce his culture. Molly and Tooley use informational texts and technology to find and deliver to Grandpa the long-lost drum. The "Ask Molly" segment answers the question, "Do kids in Alaska still sing traditional songs?" A group of Alaska Native children and elders sing, dance, talk about their cultural traditions and history, and compare old photos to current landscapes.

The strengths of *Grandpa's Drum* are many and far outweigh the weaknesses (though I tried to find some weaknesses!) Alaska Natives are omnipresent in the telling of the story — as characters in the animated episode, in the "Ask Molly" live action segment, and as producers, voice actors, and others who created the episode and series. *Molly of Denali* is created in partnership with Alaska Native Advisors, and Grandpa's experience in this episode was inspired by the true experience of Lower Tanana Athabascan tribal elder and chief Luke Titus. And not only are Alaska Natives the active heart and soul of this resource, but their culture, history, and values are represented accurately and respectfully, avoiding harmful stereotypes.

In addition to vast Alaska Native representation, several other ethnic backgrounds are included — for example, a friend who is Koyukon, Yup'ik, and Japanese and an African American family. *Molly of Denali* shows students that children of different cultural backgrounds can be similar to themselves in many ways. It presents this likely as-yet-unfamiliar culture as desirable (fun, friendly characters) and relatable (they also have family, sing songs, dance, go on adventures). Becoming aware of similarities like these promotes acceptance and celebration of differences.

This episode features the Athabascan words *shgguya* (term of endearment: grandchild), *Nenahaal'yàa* (I will see you guys again), *noneetenaaghe'aanh* (I will see you again), and *shchada'a* (my grandfather). *Grandpa's Drum* teaches Alaska Native values of maintaining traditions and language through all generations, honoring one's heritage, and learning from the past — particularly elders' experiences and stories.

The difficult topic of the forced assimilation of indigenous people is addressed candidly but appropriately for the age group (which PBS Learning Media lists as K-2). This episode teaches about it through the personal experience of a familiar and likeable character. *Grandpa's*

Drum is able to broach the subject in a way that students will understand and find impactful while being sensitive to the intensity of such subject matter for young children.

This resource teaches children the valuable skill of using informational texts in a realistic and engaging context. The learning is connected to Molly and Tooley's adventure, and makes research feel like detective work or a top-secret mission. These fun and relatable characters model using many different research methods and tools (photograph, computer, internet search, landmarks, online map, magnifying glass, smartphone/video, interviewing people) to find the answers they're looking for. Through their search, this episode teaches about the importance of close observation, patience, and asking tricky questions. As Molly and Tooley search for images of water towers in Alaska and come up with similar but not exact matches to their photo, viewers learn that there is room for error when doing online research. Viewers discover a strategy for solving this type of problem when Molly examines the photo for more details to add to her search query.

The "Ask Molly" live action segment is a primary source, featuring multiple generations of Alaska Natives who have lived and are living through experiences authentic to their culture and the episode's story. The segment displays photographs and artifacts, like canoes and drums. Its connection to the episode, including real people singing the same song featured in the animation, proves to students that what they saw was authentic, and it shows students that real Alaska Natives still practice these traditions. The episode, and especially the "Ask Molly" segment, model the social studies skill of making comparisons between the present and the past.

While showing this video might work well for students who learn best through audio-visual means, it would not be beneficial for students who prefer to learn by reading or interacting with material kinesthetically. For those learners, a lesson plan involving this video would necessitate other ways of absorbing the information. Additionally, this episode focuses mostly on electronic devices for research (although others also feature library books, physical maps, etc). This may mean that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds cannot relate or see themselves doing what Molly is doing in their own home if they don't have devices like a laptop or smartphone.

Some adults may be skeptical about the academic merit of watching a television show during class time. Students might think of it as "watching TV" and not a valuable lesson. It's possible they would not take it seriously because it's something they associate with at-home recreation. One might argue that the (few) moments of the episode that aren't related to the learning goals constitute wasted class time, or that its fun and silly elements could distract from the educational point of the resource.

Part 2: Lesson Plan

Title: Past, Present, and *Grandpa's Drum*

Grade level: 2nd grade

Materials Needed:

- [Grandpa's Drum](#), laptop, projector
- Whiteboard & marker
- Sheet of paper with a Venn diagram for each pair
- Pencils
- Maine Native American photographs and artifacts (see below for visual examples, found on the Maine Memory Network website)

Learning Target:

- I can use artifacts and photographs to compare Native American life in the past to Native American life today.

Associated Standards:

- This lesson is based on this C3 Framework standard:
 - D2.HIS.2.K-2 Compare life in the past to life today.
- *This lesson could also tie in to these Maine Learning Results for Social Studies - second grade standards:*
 - *Civics & Government 4: Students understand the traditions of Maine Native Americans and various cultures by comparing national traditions and customs.*
 - *History 3: Students understand historical aspects of the uniqueness and commonality of individuals and groups, including Maine Native Americans, by describing traditions of Maine Native Americans and various historical and recent immigrant groups and traditions common to all.*

Lesson Procedure: - 50 mins

Teacher introduces *Molly of Denali* - 5 mins

- Students sit on the rug.
- Describe the setting, characters, and other elements of the show, including Alaska Natives and Molly's Gwich'in/Koyukon/Dena'ina Athabascan family.
- Discuss various appropriate terms for Native Americans and that tribal names are preferred.
- Ask students what they know about, then define & discuss terms: "artifact," "culture," "tradition." Briefly allow students to share about their own cultures and traditions, as appropriate/time allows.
- Give brief overview of the plot of *Grandpa's Drum*.

View *Grandpa's Drum* (11m) & "Ask Molly" segment (2m) - 13 mins

- During viewing, teacher asks students to pay attention to what Molly and Tooley notice in the photograph, and similarities and differences between the past (old photo, flashback scene) and present.

Post-viewing Discussion - 5 mins

- Discuss video as a group: ask what students noticed, liked, remembered. Ask what they noticed about Alaska Native culture and traditions, and about similarities and differences between the past and present.

Activity - 20 mins

- Teacher reminds students that in the video, Molly and Tooeey examined a photograph and compared it to the current setting, and that the children in the “Ask Molly” segment did the same with photographs and through talking to their elders. Explain to students that just as there are indigenous groups where Molly lives in Alaska, Maine has four Native American tribes: the Penobscot, the Passamaquoddy, the Micmac, and the Maliseet. Tell students that these tribes have lived here for a very long time, and just like Molly’s tribe, some parts of their lives have changed and some have stayed the same.
- Remind students of what a Venn diagram is and how it works. Briefly explain and then model activity on whiteboard: Using artifacts and photos depicting Maine Native Americans and their culture and traditions, students will work in pairs to create a Venn diagram comparing Maine Native American life in the past to Maine Native American life today. (“Detective work like Molly and Tooeey did!”)
- Put students in pairs; give each pair photographs and/or artifacts, pencils, and a sheet of paper with a Venn diagram.
- Students create Venn diagrams
 - As students work, teacher circulates to observe and check in, making sure that they understand the task.

Conclusion - 7 mins

- Students come back to rug.
- Teacher asks for volunteers to share their findings as she (or students, depending on writing readiness) completes Venn diagram on whiteboard.

Assessment (formal or informal):

- Informal/Formative — Writing: Venn diagram. In pairs, students will create Venn Diagrams comparing and contrasting Maine Native American life in the past to Maine Native American life today. Students will show that they have achieved the learning target if their Venn diagram includes at least one piece of accurate and relevant information in each of the three sections of the Venn diagram.

Accommodations:

- Since there will be a fair amount of time spent sitting on the rug at the beginning of the lesson, I will offer students who I know are fidgety the option of standing in the back, sitting in a chair on the side, or sitting in an alternative chair (like a wobbly or bean bag chair).
- I will make sure that students who I know are kinesthetic learners are given at least one physical artifact to work with during the activity.
- If students are having trouble coming up with similarities and differences, I will re-play the section of the “Ask Molly” segment in which the children compare old photos to their

surroundings. Then I will discuss with the group, and possibly model again, how to compare two photos or artifacts.

- If some students are more comfortable typing than hand-writing, I will allow them to create the Venn diagram on a laptop. (This would be acceptable because the activity is not assessing their handwriting ability.) Students may use a pen or crayon to write if they prefer or if it is easier for them.



Maine Native American snowshoe, ca. 1900



Rally outside the Maine Statehouse, May 26, 2015



Micmac waltes game, ca. 1880



Sylvia Stanislaus, Lincoln, 1936