



## Blessing's Bead

written by Debby Dahl Edwardson

### About the Book

**Genre:** Historical/Realistic Fiction

**Format:** Paperback  
240 pages, 5-1/2" x 8-1/4"

**ISBN:** 9781643795768

**Reading Level:** Grade 7

**Interest Level:** Grades 5-9

**Guided Reading Level:** Z

**Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:**  
4.9/6.0

**Lexile™ Measure:** 870L

\*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

**Themes:** Childhood Experiences and Memories, Conflict Resolution, Courage, Cultural Diversity, Dance, Diversity, Empathy and Compassion, Families, Fiction (Historical), Food, Forgiveness, Friendship, Grandparents, Trauma, Healing, Gratitude, History, Cold War, U.S. History, Alaska, Inuit, Pandemics, Traditions, Identity, Self Esteem and Confidence, Kindness and Caring, Mothers, Optimism and Enthusiasm, Overcoming Obstacles, Persistence, Siblings, Native American Interest

**Resources on the web:**

[leeandlow.com/books/blessing-s-bead](http://leeandlow.com/books/blessing-s-bead)

### SYNOPSIS

#### ALASKA, 1917

Nutaaq adores her older sister, Aaluk, and the happy world of their close-knit Iñupiaq village. When Aaluk goes across the sea to marry a Siberian Inuit man, she gives Nutaaq a gift from her husband's people: two precious cobalt blue beads. Through the months that follow, as a great shadow falls over the village, the beads remind Nutaaq of the people she loves, and hold out hope that she might connect with her sister again.

#### ALASKA, 1989

Blessing's life in the city is unpredictable, with a mother who's sometimes wonderful and sometimes gone. When Mom finally can't take care of her anymore, Blessing is sent to live in a remote Arctic village with a grandmother she barely remembers. In her new home, unfriendly girls whisper in a language she doesn't understand, and Blessing feels like an outsider among her own people. Until she looks in her grandmother's sewing tin--and finds a cobalt blue bead.

How might Blessing discover her place in her family and community? And will Nutaaq's hope ever be fulfilled? Tracing four generations of bonds and breakage within one Iñupiaq family, *Blessing's Bead* is a lovely and surprising novel about trauma, survival, and the healing power of culture and stories.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

## BACKGROUND

### Iñupiaq Pronunciation Guide and Glossary

For the Pronunciation Guide and Glossary, see the back of *Blessing's Bead*.

More information about the Iñupiaq language can be found at the Alaska Native Language Center (<https://uaf.edu/anlc/languages/inupiaq.php>).

### Note from the Author, adapted from the Author's Note by Debby Dahl Edwardson in *Blessing's Bead*

When I wrote about the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918, I never imagined I would live to see another pandemic, one that would kill millions of people worldwide. Now, as I revisit this story in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, I am struck by the devastation that epidemics and pandemics often bring upon groups of people, specifically Indigenous people and people of color. This was true in 1918 and in subsequent epidemics in Native Alaska, and it is still true today.

I did not realize when I wrote this book that I was also writing about historical trauma—how the effects of a catastrophic event in one generation can mark an entire culture across many generations. What happened in Nutaag's generation destroyed families and villages, tearing apart the very fabric of the culture itself. As we read further and look deeper, we see that the culture and way of life that at first seemed destroyed is still very much alive, sustained by the people in new ways.

I have lived within the Iñupiaq culture of northern Alaska for over forty years, virtually all of my adult life, so much of the material used in *Blessing's Bead* comes from my own experience and personal knowledge. When the German measles epidemic hit Utqiagvik, Alaska (formerly known as Barrow), my father-in-law, like Tupaaq in *Blessing's Bead*, was one of the boys hauling away bodies by the sled load. In Utqiagvik, the ground is frozen year-round, and in midwinter, when the measles epidemic hit, the tundra was hard as cement. It was impossible to dig so many graves so quickly, so the bodies were left far out on the tundra. My husband remembers, as a boy, seeing the piles of human skulls and bones, a reminder of the devastation that had visited his father's generation. My husband, like Blessing's grandmother Aaluk, had tuberculosis as a child.

The desire to write this book grew from an experience I had in 1986 when I was a public radio reporter covering a meeting of an international organization representing the Inuit people\* of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Russia—ICC, the Inuit Circumpolar Council, which meets every four years in one of its member countries. Because of politics, the Russian Inuit had never been allowed to host or attend this meeting, and chairs were always left empty at the table to signify their absence. In 1986, at the tail end of the Cold War, Russian Inuit were going to attend the ICC for the first time. As a reporter, I interviewed an elderly Yupik woman from Alaska's St. Lawrence Island who remembered how the Siberian Inuit used to visit her village every summer when she was a child. She told me that many of the Yupik living on St. Lawrence Island had intermarried and gone to live in Russia, but due to the "Ice Curtain"—the closed border separating Alaska from Russia—these

people had remained separated from their families for over forty years. She left me with a haunting image I've never forgotten: old women, standing on the western shore of St. Lawrence Island, gazing toward Russia with tears in their eyes, missing the relatives they would never again see. This image gave birth to *Blessing's Bead*.

Nearly twenty years later, when I finally began to write this story, I placed it in an Iñupiaq village further north. I set the story within the Iñupiaq region for largely personal reasons: I am married into the Iñupiaq culture and know it well. But my choice of setting is also historically true. Although St. Lawrence Island is Yupik and there is a large population of Siberian Yupik people in Siberia, several smaller islands to the north are Iñupiaq and no doubt had ties with the Siberians. Historians report that the last Russian Iñupiaq still able to speak the Iñupiaq language was a woman, who died in the late 1970s. Perhaps this woman came from Alaska, like Aaluk in my story.

Several final notes. First, it is to be assumed that Nutaaq in Book I is speaking in Iñupiaq. The language Blessing speaks in Book II is an English dialect known as Village English, which is derived from Iñupiaq and reflects the Iñupiaq worldview in some interesting ways. Although life in the Arctic in the old days was very hard, for example, the Iñupiaq way was not to focus on past difficulties but to look instead at the opportunities found in the present. The language, in fact, does not have a true past tense. Things which might be expressed in the past tense in English are expressed in the present tense with markers such as "already" and "never." Instead of saying, "they went," for example, one says, "they go already." Instead of saying, "he didn't eat yet," one might say "he never eat yet."

And secondly, the names used in this story are, for the most part, well-known Iñupiaq names. There is no such thing as a fictional Iñupiaq name. All Iñupiaq names remain attached to real people and come with their own families and histories. Nutaaq and Aaluk are the names of my own daughters.

Family and cultural history are, in fact, remembered through names because it is believed that when a child is given a name, part of the spirit of those who've held that name remains with the child. This belief, in fact, lies at the core of my story: Aaluk and Nutaaq, the two sisters separated by marriage, the pandemic, the Cold War, and, ultimately, death, are not separated forever. Since their names and memories continue on through their children and grandchildren, their story will continue to echo from one generation to the next in remarkable ways, if one listens closely. Stories can heal people. Stories can help people deal with and survive trauma. Through story we retain the strength of the cultural connections that make us who we are. I hope this story gives you strength and hope for the future.

– adapted from the Author's Note by Debby Dahl Edwardson in *Blessing's Bead*

\* "Inuit" in Iñupiaq means "people." Everyone in the world is Inuit in the language. In global practice, however, "Inuit" is often used to speak of the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic. "I.upiaq" in Iñupiaq means "the real people" and refers to these same Indigenous people, whom outsiders might call "Eskimo." The Yupik and the Iñupiaq are two of the many individual nations under the larger grouping of Inuit. Some people, particularly in Canada and Greenland, consider the word "Eskimo" insulting and strongly prefer "Inuit" or the names of their specific nations.

### More Information about the Iñupiaq People

The Iñupiaq people, which translates to “real people,” have been in the Barrow, Alaska region for over 4,000 years. The Iñupiaq people traded with neighboring regions and relied on hunting, primarily seals, caribou, and bowhead whales. Trade and contact with the outside world greatly changed the Iñupiaq way of life, with Missionaries arriving and introducing people to new diseases, disproportionately affecting the Iñupiaq people and marginalizing and oppressing the Iñupiaq people (<http://icestories.exploratorium.edu/dispatches/big-ideas/the-people-of-the-arctic/the-inupiaq-people-of-barrow-alaska/index.html>).

### The 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic and its Impact on Native Peoples

American Indians and Alaska Natives were gravely impacted by the 1918 Spanish Flu. In one Iñupiaq village of Brevig Mission, Alaska, 72 of the 80 residents died within five days (<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/420.html>). The Spanish Flu disproportionately affected Alaska Native communities, which suffered 82% of the deaths, and one of the pandemic's worst death rates in the world at the time (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/dena-history-pandemic.htm>) (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2020/09/28/1918-flu-native-americans-coronavirus/>).

### The Sisualik Trade Fair

The history of the Susalik Trade Fair dates back centuries. The Trade Fair took place annually until the late 1800s at Sisualik, a fishing camp and traditional settlement of the northern coastline of the Kotzebue Sound. Archeological findings shows that the trade networks have connected the Iñupiaq to distant parts of Alaska, Siberia, Europe, and Asia for over two thousand years. In the 18th century, the 15 Iñupiaq nations in Northwestern Alaska and the Seward Peninsula used the trade fair in their seasonal patterns of hunting and gathering, as well as many other nations. The fair usually took place between the months of June and August. For more information on the Sisualik Trade Fair, consult the National Park Service and their resources (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/aps-20-2-1.htm>).

### Native American Oral Storytelling

Oral storytelling is integral to Native People's traditions. Joseph Bruchac, an Abenaki author, writes in his book, *Lasting Echoes: An Oral History of Native Americans*, “American Indians have been telling their own stories for countless generations. Deep, varied oral traditions existed in pre-contact times and still exist on the North American continent. These songs and traditional stories, including epic works, could fill many volumes. They have great meaning within the individual cultures, meaning that is often not easily understood by an outsider... Native American oral traditions may include myths and legends, tribal history, personal experience, dreams and visions. These traditions show us a world where everything is alive and everything has a voice... The history of the American continent has usually been seen through European eyes. Yet there were people here long before the coming of the Europeans, and the descendants of those original native people still remain on this land.” (<https://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-15-201327-1>) (<https://www.josephbruchac.com/>)

Oral histories also vary amongst tribal nations. The Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head writes about oral history, "Oral tradition is very important to us as Wampanoag and to other Native Americans, as well, because our ancestors did not write books as we do today. So the way that our ancestors ensured the passing on of their knowledge of our history was by creating stories. The stories that they created explained many great and amazing events, and at the same time the stories contained our true history." The link below contains a lesson plan featuring an Interview with Aquinnah Wampanoag Elder Helen Manning as part of an Oral History Unit (<https://simmonslibguides.com/c.php?g=1145791&p=8364033>).

### Teaching About Native Peoples in Past and Present

Learning for Justice has several resources dedicated to culturally responsive teaching with Native history in their "With and About" toolkit that provides resources to assist educators in designing and delivering more culturally responsive instruction to and about Native peoples (<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2017/toolkit-for-with-and-about>). The Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian's curriculum, Native Knowledge 360, has lesson plans and materials for educators that provides educators and students with new perspectives on Native American history and cultures (<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/about.cshtml>). In particular, use Native Knowledge 360's evaluation tool for selecting Native American children's literature: <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/pdf/Native-American-Literature-in-Your-Classroom-Worksheet.pdf>. The Native American Heritage Programs has a page dedicated to Culturally Responsive Curriculum (<https://lenapeprograms.info/teacher-parent-resources/culturally-responsive-curriculum/>) as well as other pages, such as "10 Things You Don't Know About Native Americans" to dispel stereotypes and misconceptions about modern Native people (<https://lenapeprograms.info/teacher-parentresources/stereotypes-debunked/>).

### Addiction and Discussing Addiction with Young Readers

Addiction is a disease. Like heart disease or diabetes, addiction is a chronic health condition that runs in families. Children with a family history of addiction are more likely to develop a substance use disorder, but knowing about one's family history can be a protective factor against early and risky use. Consider sharing the facts about addiction with students and consulting the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation on how to talk about addiction with students of all ages (<https://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/articles/prevention/talk-about-addiction-with-students>). The organization Kids Health provides great information and resources on explaining what the difference between drug abuse and addiction is, the different types of addiction and what the signs of addiction are. Considering consulting this source for more information on how to discuss addiction with teens (<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/addictions.html>).

### A Note Prior to Reading

Alcoholism and physical abuse are discussed in *Blessing's Bead*. Some of these themes and topics can and may be triggering for students. Considering using plenty of resources to help prepare students for this title.

The term "Eskimo" is used in the story. It is considered a derogatory word. Please learn more here:

- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/eskimo>
- [https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/resources/inuit\\_or\\_eskimo.php](https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/resources/inuit_or_eskimo.php)
- <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/04/24/475129558/why-you-probably-shouldnt-say-eskimo>

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- Why might someone need to leave their home? What are different factors that play into people leaving their homes unexpectedly?
- What does it mean to be brave and have courage? Think about a time when you had to be brave. What did you do? How did you feel?
- What does it mean to be resilient? How do you demonstrate resilience even though something may be challenging? Why is it important to be resilient? Do you think it can be learned? How so?
- Have you ever solved a problem? What did you do? Why did you have to solve that particular problem? How did you think quickly? How were you acknowledged afterward?
- Ask students to think about their family and what family means to them. How is family important to you? How do you help them? What about siblings, if any? How do you help your siblings, and how do they help you?
- Why do you think learning about family stories is important? Have you ever asked your grandparents, aunts or uncles, or parents, or any adults in your life about what it was like for them when they were a kid? What did you learn?
- If applicable: Do you know how many Native Americans live in your town or go to your school? Do you know what tribal nations live near you?
- If applicable: What tribal nation do you belong to? What does belonging to your tribal nation mean to you? Why?



## Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

- Book title exploration: Talk about the title of the book, *Blessing's Bead*. Then ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?
- Read Debby Dahl Edwardson's biography: Read about Debby Dahl Edwardson on the back cover of the book. Encourage students to think about what could have been her inspiration for writing *Blessing's Bead*. Debby shares additional background information about herself in the author's note.
- Encourage students to stop and jot in their reading notebooks during the read-aloud when they: learn new information, see a powerful image, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or hear new words.
- Have students quickly write a feeling in their notebooks during reading. After reading, ask students

## Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- why *Blessing's Bead* is split into two different parts and time periods
- the importance of the Iñupiaq people, both past and present, and their cultural traditions
- the role of the Iñupiaq language in Book I and II and the importance of its preservation
- how Nutaaq and Blessing overcome obstacles in their lives and demonstrate perseverance and persistence
- the different family issues that Nutaaq and Blessing grapple with during the story
- the various historical events that impact both Nutaaq and Blessing
- the importance of family and how history can impact generations
- the role of siblings and the way siblings can support one another
- how and why trauma can affect people differently

Encourage students to consider why the author, Debby Dahl Edwardson, would want to share Nutaaq and Blessing's powerful stories with young readers today.

## VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word. (Many of the Spanish words can be found in the book glossary, but there are also some that are not included. Students could be encouraged to create a log of these words—they will not be listed here.)

NOTE: There is a glossary and pronunciation guide included in the book.

### Content Specific

Iñupiaq, Siberian Eskimos, reindeer skins, tundra, caribou, lemming, caribou, Shaeshalik inlet, whalers, sealskin poles, walrus skins, Siberia, Mauragaragaq, Maniilaq, boot-sole people, shaman, iglu, kiuguya, liqinii, kik, hummock, aahaaliq, Kingigin, parka, agvik, wolf-scare, sod, tundra, Kawerak, blubber, aaka, Anchorage, Tuttu, Paniqtaq, dry caribou, cigaaq smoke, palak, cobalt, kitta, quaq, ulu, qavisraq, arigaa, araa, ulu, I uksi, Naumi, Nukaaluga, antler, Quyanaq, Quyanaqpak, kammak, duck soup, nigliq soup, caribou soup, maktak, atikluk, Qupaq, northern lights, figure of speech, Quyanaq, Quyanaqpak, whaling crews, skidoo, Friendship Flight, atikuk

### Academic

holler, throb, blustering, spine, fidget, chuckle, gales, grimace, sponsors, dwindling, swells, harvested, devouring, puny, unbearable, dwindling, beachcombing, scolds, moping, unusual, snickering



## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

### Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

#### Book I: Nutaaq's Story

1. How does the story begin? Who do you think is narrating the story?
2. Who is Nutaaq?
3. Who is Aaluk? How is she related to Aaluk?
4. What is important about Iñupiaq names?
5. Where did Nutaaq and Aaluk live? Who did they trade with?
6. What is happening in the beginning of the story? What are they preparing for?
7. Where are Nutaaq and her family going? How are they welcomed?
8. How does Nutaaq describe Aaluk?
9. Who is watching Aaluk when they arrive? What does he have that Nutaaq is drawn to?
10. What kind of story does Tupaaq tell? What is it about?
11. Who is Maniilaq?
12. What do people say about the shaman? What is Maniilaq's vision?
13. Who is Aaluk smiling at? How does Nutaaq react?
14. What do Nutaaq and her family do at Sheshalik?
15. What is the significance of the blue beads?
16. Who does Nutaaq race against? What happens? What is the reward for the winner?
17. Who does Aaluk ride with when they leave Sheshalik?
18. What does Ubluk tell Nuutaq that she needs now that she is nearly a woman?
19. Why are Nuutaq and her family at Kingigin?
20. What does Nuutaq miss about her home?
21. What does Aaluk give to Nuutaq? What does she tell her?
22. What happens during the wolf scene? What is the wolf-scare?

23. What does Nagazruk tell the community? What does Uncle Saggan suggest?
24. How does Nuutaq react to the mailman's arrival? What happens after the mailman arrives?
25. Who gets sick in Nuutaq's family? What happens to Nuutaq? How does she try to help?
26. What happens to Nuutaq's papa? What about her mama?
27. What is the fourth disaster?
28. Who does Nuutaq long for during the sickness?
29. Who comes to Nuutaq's community? What do they tell everyone?
30. What happens after Tupaaq arrives?

**Book II: Blessing's Story**

31. Who is Blessing's mom's boyfriend? What is he like?
32. Who are kids-like-us?
33. Where do Isaac and Blessing go to live? Who are they going to live with?
34. What does Aaka look like? Where does she live? What does her house look like?
35. What does Blessing notice about Aaka's house when they first arrive?
36. Why was Blessing named Nutaq? What does Aaka say about Nutaq?
37. Who is Aaka's dad?
38. Why does Blessing's mom call her Palak?
39. What does Blessing discover inside the can in Aaka's living room? How does Aaka react?
40. Where does Aaka take Blessing and Isaac during their first day? What do they collect?
41. Who comes to Aaka's house? What do they do there?
42. What does Uncle prepare for lunch?
43. What does Blessing discover about Aaka after the incident with the bead?
44. Who shows Blessing how to braid her hair at Aaka's house?
45. What is an ulu? Who shows Blessing how to use an ulu? What happens?
46. Who do Isaac and Blessing meet on their way to school? What do the other students think of Isaac and Blessing? What do they say to them?
47. Who is Blessing's teacher? How does she make her feel welcome at school?
48. What happens when Blessing goes to the Eskimo Dancing practice?
49. What does Blessing think about her mom while she's in treatment?
50. Who teaches Blessing how to sew? What does she teach her? What does Blessing make?
51. What does Aaka tell Blessing about Aaluk?

52. What story does Blessing tell Isaac? Does this remind you of a story in another part of the book? What does Aaka tell Blessing about her storytelling?
53. How does Blessing react when Aaka finds out she has the bead?
54. What is Blessing's mom's Iñupiaq name? Who is she named after?
55. What does Aaka do with the bead? What does she give Blessing?
56. What happens when Blessing goes back to dancing practice? What does Aaka ask Blessing about Sylvia?
57. What does Blessing ask Aaka about Aaluk? What does Aaka tell Blessing?
58. What important historical event happens in Europe?
59. What happens during Thanksgiving? What are their traditions? What do Blessing and her family eat?
60. What is a snow shirt? What is its purpose?
61. Who does Blessing envision during her dance? What happens?
62. What does Blessing discover about Sylvia and her dad? What is Sylvia's dad like?
63. What are the differences between Village English and School English?
64. What does Blessing's mom tell her about the letter? What does Blessing ask her mom to do? What happens afterwards?
65. What does Aaka tell Blessing about why she left her mom?
66. What did the whaling crews give out to the kids?
67. What do the whaling crews need for their trip? What do they bring back?
68. What is a Friendship Flight? What happens after the Iron Curtain is lifted in Aaka's village? Who do they meet?
69. Who arrives during the Friendship Flight? What does Blessing think about this experience?
70. What Eskimo games do Blessing and the people play?
71. What happens during Sylvia and Blessing's race?
72. What does the Russian translator tell Blessing and her family about the Iñupiaq language in Russia?
73. Who is Uyagak? Who is his mother? What is he wearing?
74. What happens during the Nalukaataq, the blanket toss? What is the significance of the blanket toss?
75. Who arrives at the end?

## Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Tupaaq says, "Girls can be good hunters too...Girls are good with arrows." What is the significance of this statement?
2. What kind of expectations are there for men and women in *Blessing's Bead*? What do people tell Nutaaq about having a husband? What does she think about the gender norms in her community?
3. What is the significance of Blessing's braid? What does her mother braiding her hair mean to her? How is braiding her hair representative of what happens in their relationship?
4. Why do you think Blessing uses the term "kids-like-us" to describe what she and Isaac don't want to be like?
5. How do Blessing and Isaac differ in their responses to being away from home? How does Blessing describe their reactions?
6. How does the Iñupiaq language play a role in the story? How does language differ in Book 1 and Book 2? How is the Iñupiaq language an overarching theme in *Blessing's Bead*?
7. How does Blessing compare Anchorage versus Aaka's village? What are some of the ways that she describes how the season differ? As a reader, what do you picture in your head when you envision Anchorage and Aaka's village?
8. When Blessing and Isaac start at a new school, they are made fun of for not being as Iñupiaq as the other students. How does this make Blessing feel? How does she react to the students? How does one of the students, Sylvia, treat Blessing?
9. How is family a critical theme to *Blessing's Bead*? How does the importance of family play a role in both Book I and Book II? How is the family structure different in Book I and Book II? How does family impact both Nutaaq from Book I and Blessing from Book II?
10. How do the students at Blessing's school in Aaka's village react to her name? What does Blessing discover about Iñupiaq names? How are Iñupiaq names important? What does she learn about her identity when she lives in Aaka's village?
11. What does Aaka tell Blessing about Nutaaq and Aaluk's relationship? How do you think they felt being torn apart? What happened to their relationship? How does Aaka describe how Nutaaq felt about being apart from Aaluk? How does this relate to Nutaaq's description of their separation in Book 1?
12. What does Blessing write in her letter to her mom? How does this demonstrate how Blessing is feeling and what she's processing during this new phase in her life? How does writing a letter help Blessing think about and manage her feelings? Have you ever written a letter that's helped you feel better about something?
13. What does Blessing realize about where she wants to live? Why do you think she decided to stay in Aaka's village, as opposed to returning to Anchorage? What are the different things that made her want to be with Aaka in her village?

14. When Blessing describes that she needs to get the “good things and bad things” sorted out, what does this mean? What are the good things that she mentions? What about the bad things? Why do you think she categorizes them in this way? Have you ever sorted out good things and bad things in your life? Why or why not? If you have, how did it make you feel?
15. How does the race between Blessing and Sylvia demonstrate Blessing's character growth? How does the race begin and end? What does Blessing think about the race before and after it happens? What does she realize and think about Sylvia during the race? How does their relationship change after this?
16. How are whales and whaling important to the Iñupiaq people in Book 1 and 2? What are the ways that whales and whaling are described in Book 1? What about Book 2? What do whales symbolize? How are they important to Nutaaq, Blessing, and their families?
17. What is the significance of Uyagak's arrival and the presence of the blue beads? How do you think his presence in the story impacts Blessing, Aaka, and their family?
18. What happens after Blessing's mom's arrival at the end of the story? How does Blessing react to her mom coming to Aaka's village? What do they do together? Why do you think Blessing asks her mom about her real Iñupiaq name? How does her mom respond? Why do you think Debby Dahl Edwardson chose to end *Blessing's Bead* in this way?
19. Why do you think the author Debby Dahl Edwardson chose to tell this story in two books across four generations?
20. Why do you think author Debby Dahl Edwardson gave the book the title, “*Blessing's Bead*,” rather than a title about Nutaaq?
21. One book review (<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/debby-dahl-edwardson/blessings-bead/>) describes Blessing as both an “insider” and an “outsider.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?
22. How does this story show how trauma in one family member can affect other family members?

### Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What is one big thought you have after reading Book I, Book II, and the book as a whole? Think about how both Nutaaq and Blessing navigate and experience their family history as well as trauma throughout *Blessing's Bead*. How do they process trauma and change during the story?
2. What do you think is Debby Dahl Edwardson's message to the reader? Think about possible motivations behind Debby Dahl Edwardson's intentions for writing the book. What do you think she wanted to tell her readers?
3. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kinds of connections did you make from this book to your own life? What do Nutaaq and Blessing's experiences, thoughts, and feelings

mean to you?

4. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books or articles while you read *Blessing's Bead*? What connections did you make with the pandemic of the early twentieth century to today or the tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States in the 1980s to today? Why did you make those connections?
5. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make between this book and what you have seen in the world, such as online, on television, or in a newspaper? Why did this book make you think of that?
6. Have students write a book review after reading *Blessing's Bead*. Consult ReadWriteThink's lesson plan on how to teach students how to write book reviews (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/what-think-writing-review-876.html>). Students can also refer to other book reviews for references. What did they enjoy about *Blessing's Bead*? What would they tell a friend or another person who wants to read the book? Encourage students to think about how this story is relevant to readers today. Students can share their book reviews with small groups or the whole class.

### ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review several chapters and have students summarize what happened, first orally, and then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they learned from *Blessing's Bead* or a character they admire or learned something from.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
6. Look at a map of the region featured in the book. Have students with their own copies label



the state, capital, and major geographic areas of interest highlighted in the book. Encourage students to refer to it as they read.

## Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. "Never catch an animal before you caught it." I had won those beads in my mind before I'd actually won the race," Nutaq reflects on her race with the Siberian in Book I. What do you think she means by this? Have you ever experienced something similar to Nutaq, where you thought you were going to do something and it didn't end up happening? How did it make you feel? Did it make you think about doing that particular activity differently?
2. How does Nuutaq demonstrate persistence and resilience throughout *Blessing's Bead*? Identify a scene from the story that exemplifies how Nuutaq is resilient. What made you choose this particular passage? How did it affect you and what did you learn from Nuutaq after reading *Blessing's Bead*? Afterwards, think about Blessing and her persistence in Book II. How does she demonstrate persistence? How does her life compare to Nutaq?
3. What are the coping strategies and techniques that Nuutaq uses along her journey to a new life? How does she combat her negative thoughts and feelings to keep going? Compare Nuutaq's coping strategies with Blessing in Book II. How do they go through experiences similarly? How are they different?
4. Nuutaq says about the blue beads, "I don't want a whole string of blue beads. I want my sister." How do you think she felt during this scene? How does she cope with the change in her life with Aaluk marrying the Siberian? How does her desire for the blue beads fade when she realizes that Aaluk is moving away? Have you ever experienced someone close to you moving away or leaving for a long period of time? What was it like? How did it make you feel?
5. After the sickness arrives, Nuutaq says about her Mama and Papa's death, "My eyes feel blind in the freezing darkness of early morning, as though I have been buried alive beneath a heavy piece of ice with my eyes wide open." How does author Debby Dahl Edwardson paint a picture of Nuutaq's grief in your mind? What did you think when you read this statement? How did it help you process what Nuutaq was experiencing?
6. Describe other ways that author Debby Dahl Edwardson approaches Nuutaq's grief. What kind of words and language does she use to convey Nuutaq's sadness? Use evidence from the text to demonstrate the ways that she describes how the sickness impacts Nuutaq during the story.
7. How does Eskimo Dancing make Blessing feel in Book II? What does she discover about

Eskimo Dancing that she did not know about before? What are the ways that Eskimo Dancing help Blessing cope with the challenges that she faces during the story? How do Blessing's feelings about Eskimo Dancing change over the course of the book? Do you have a passion like Eskimo Dancing in your life? What is it? How does it make you feel?

8. Analyze the relationship between Sylvia and Blessing. How does Sylvia treat Blessing during the story? What are some of the things that she says to her? How does Sylvia make Blessing feel? What does Blessing discover about Sylvia later in the story? How does their relationship evolve over *Blessing's Bead*? Does their relationship remind you of anything you've experienced in your own life? Why or why not?
9. What happens during the scene when Aaka discovers that Blessing has the bead? How does Blessing react to Aaka finding out? How does Blessing's reaction demonstrate the challenges and difficulties that she faces during the book?
10. Blessing's mom is in and out of treatment during *Blessing's Bead*. How does this impact Blessing's character? Why do you think it's important for her mom to get treatment, even though she's away from Blessing? How does Blessing's relationship with her mom change throughout the book, and what does Blessing realize about her mom's treatment?
11. Encourage students to identify passages where characters manage and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways. In a chart with five columns, write: What was the cause of the conflict? What was the consequence of the conflict? How does the character(s) resolve the problem? What are additional ways the character(s) could have solved the problem? What advice would you give?
12. What is one part of your heritage, culture, or identity are you most proud of? Do you think your school or classroom has been a safe place to share that part of yourself? Why or why not?
13. Choose an emotion that interests you: happiness, sadness, fear, anxiety, frustration, hope, perseverance, and so on. Illustrate or act out what that emotion looks like in *Blessing's Bead*.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

### English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Have students compare and contrast Nutaq and Blessing's development over the course of *Blessing's Bead*.** Students should create a Venn diagram that has Nutaq on one side, Blessing on the other side, and the comparisons in the middle. How are their problems similar? How are they different? How are their personality traits similar? How are they different? Why is it important to analyze both Nutaq and Blessing's lives? What does their culture mean to them? What about the Iñupiaq language? How are their communities and families important to them? Based on this exercise, students should answer the following question in an essay: Do Nutaq and Blessing have similar character growth? Why or why not?
- **Examine the role of identity in *Blessing's Bead*, focusing on Blessing's character in Book II.** When Blessing arrives in Aaka's village, she has to confront other Iñupiaq people who ask her about her background and question her identity. How does this make Blessing feel? What are the ways that Blessing discovers her identity during the story? How does she connect to her past history through her Aaka as well as her mom? Have students find evidence from the text about Blessing connecting with her identity and culture and write their thoughts in an essay detailing Blessing's identity evolution.
- **Discuss the symbolism of the blue beads in *Blessing's Bead*.** Compare the presence of the blue beads in Book I versus Book II. What do the blue beads mean to Nutaq in Book I? What about Blessing in Book II? What do you think they represent? What do you think Blessing means when she states at the end of the book, "Aaka says people don't think those beads got power anymore, but people are wrong. This one bead has lots of power. Enough to bring our Russian family and our Alaskan family back together. Enough to bring my mom back home again. And me, too." How does author Debby Dahl Edwardson describe them? How do you think they are important to Nutaq, Blessing, and their families? Students can write an analytical essay with their thoughts, and share with a partner or small group.
- **Analyze Blessing's relationships with other characters in the book and divide students into their respective groups: Blessing and her mom; Blessing and Issac; Blessing and Aaka; Blessing and Uncle; Blessing and Sylvia.** Have students examine these relationships closely and think about how they help Blessing develop as a character throughout the story. Then, have students share out their findings and write an essay comparing their character's relationship with Blessing and another group's character.

- **Have students analyze the role of oral storytelling in *Blessing's Bead*.** How does storytelling play a role in both Book I and Book II? How is storytelling a part of both Nutaaq and Blessing's lives, although they live in different eras? Have students select different parts of the story that showcase the power of oral storytelling, and write a reaction essay about it. Students can use inspiration from the following quote from Blessing: "But when I tell Aaka about how stories change, she says no, stories don't change. They grow in people's hearts, just like how people grow. Stories say different things at different times, but they don't change." Students need to conduct additional information about how oral storytelling is an integral part of Native culture, and is dependent on the specific tribe. How can storytelling help process trauma, or difficult events in your life? (<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/resources/storytelling-and-oral-traditions>)
- **Examine the different literary elements that author Debby Dahl Edwardson uses throughout *Blessing's Bead*.** Have students come up with a list and select portions of the text that showcase a specific literary device (i.e. foreshadowing, flashback, metaphor, etc). Afterward, students can select one literary device and write about how that was impactful when reading *Blessing's Bead*. How do literary devices make the story engaging, and how do they contribute to the story overall? See PBS's Literary Elements and Techniques video for more information about how to teach about literary devices (<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/litel18-fig/literary-elements-and-techniques-figurative-language/>).
- **Write about the power of language in *Blessing's Bead*.** In the Author's Note, Debby Dahl Edwardson writes, "First, it is to be assumed that Nutaaq in Book I is speaking in Iñupiaq. The language Blessing speaks in Book II is an English dialect known as Village English, which is derived from Iñupiaq and reflects the Iñupiaq worldview in some interesting ways." How does language play a role in *Blessing's Bead*? Students can refer to the Author's Note and resources about the Iñupiaq language online for additional support in their work (<https://uaf.edu/anlc/languages/inupiaq.php>) (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/indigenous-languages-of-alaska-inupiaq.htm>). What's different about the Iñupiaq language from the English language? How is the Iñupiaq language important to its people?
- **As a follow-up activity, analyze the use of literary devices specifically Nutaaq is grappling with the sickness in Book I.** How does author Debby Dahl Edwardson create the environment and set the stage? How does she describe how the sickness arrives, how Nutaaq reacts, and what happens to her family and how she processes all of these events? What kinds of descriptions and figurative language does she use? Have students go back to this scene from the chapter "Mail" in Book I and look at it carefully, examining the word choice, sentence structure, and use of dialogue. Afterward, students can reflect on the way that language can create a vivid scene and imagery as you're reading. How is that important with your own reading and writing? Have students write about a time that they felt scared, using what they learned about literary devices to influence their own writing.
- **Conduct a historical fiction unit featuring other Lee & Low Native and Indigenous titles, including *Indian No More* ([leeandlow.com/books/Indian-no-more](https://leeandlow.com/books/Indian-no-more)) and *Stone River Crossing* ([leeandlow.com/books/stone-river-crossing](https://leeandlow.com/books/stone-river-crossing)).** Have students research the historical time periods in the three titles. How are the main characters similar? How are

they different? How are their families similar? How are their families different? What about their communities and different traditions in their tribes? What did students learn about the importance of both historical and contemporary Native history and issues from these texts? Students can write their findings in a graphic organizer and then write a critical essay comparing and contrasting *Blessing's Bead*, *Indian No More*, and *Stone River Crossing*.

- **Have students come up with a list of questions to ask author Debby Dahl Edwardson.** What do students want to know about the process behind writing a children's book? How did the author come up with the idea to write *Blessing's Bead*? How did she conduct her research on Nutaq, the Iñupiaq, Siberia, the history of trade, and more? Consider contacting Debby Dahl Edwardson and inviting her to your school, library, or other relevant setting, or for a virtual author visit ([http://www.alaskawritersdirectory.com/authors/edwardson\\_debby.shtml](http://www.alaskawritersdirectory.com/authors/edwardson_debby.shtml)).
- **Consider having students present to partners or small groups about their family's traditions, or foods that they enjoy within their family.** Students can also research the historical context of their foods or traditions. Have students present their information in whatever format meets their learning needs. In a second lesson, ask students to then refer back to *Blessing's Bead* and compare their personal traditions or meals to Nutaq and Blessing's families. Students can write a compare and contrast essay with their traditions and what they learned about traditions from Nutaq, Blessing, and their families.
- **Assign students different characters from *Blessing's Bead* and have them brainstorm about a guiding question: What and how can this character teach us?** Students can think about different characters to examine as a whole class and then break into smaller, specific character groups. Encourage students to think about how characters have made mistakes and also have done good things in the book, and ultimately what they learned from that character. Have students share out their findings: How is this character important to the book, and what lessons did they teach us over the course of the story? How did their actions develop the narrative, and why are they crucial to understanding the meaning of the book?
- **Have students identify a place in the story where Nutaq's and Blessing's character changes in *Blessing's Bead*.** Why do students think that was a point where Nutaq and Blessing changed? How do Nutaq and Blessing feel before the change, what causes the change, and then how does she feel and act after? Create a graphic organizer with a column on the left that says "Before," a column in the middle that says "During," and a column on the right that says "After." Have students complete two separate organizers: one for Nutaq and one for Blessing. Afterward, have students write an essay using evidence from the text to support their findings about Nutaq and Blessing's character changes.
- **After students read Debby Dahl Edwardson's Author's Note in the back of the book, have students analyze these statements, "Stories can heal people. Stories can help people deal with and survive trauma. Through story we retain the strength of the cultural connections that make us who we are."** Ask students the following guiding questions: Why do you think Debby Dahl Edwardson concluded her Author's Note with this statement? What did they learn from the Author's Note that they



hadn't known before? Why do you think Debby Dahl Edwardson wrote this book? How does this book differ from other books that they may have read about Native history before? How will *Blessing's Bead* change their thought process about selecting books, specifically historical fiction titles, moving forward? Students can share their thoughts in a critical essay and then with a partner, small group, or whole class.

- **As a follow-up activity, have students conduct an audit of the historical fiction in their classroom library.** Students can work in small groups to analyze the historical fiction in their classroom. Students can answer the following questions: in what time place does this story take place? Who is featured in this story? Whose story is being told? Whose voice is being heard? Who is being oppressed and who is the oppressor? Who is the author and what is their background? If colonization is featured in any of the books, students can answer the following questions: Where does the book take place? Who is colonizing whom? What country does the story take place in? Who is being centered in the story? Afterward, students can reflect on their findings. What voices were being centered the most? What was it like to do this activity?

### Social Studies & Geography

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3; Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9; and Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3; Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6; Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9; and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Conduct a research study Alaskan Native communities throughout history** (<https://www.pbs.org/harriman/1899/native.html>). In addition to the Iñupiaq people, what other tribes were located in Alaska during Nutaag's lifetime? To guide students research, start with "Alaska Native in Traditional Times: A Cultural Profile Project" from the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/curriculum/articles/mikegaffney/cpp/Chap6.html>). Students can answer the following questions: where was this Alaskan Native community located? What is the community like today? Consult the Smithsonian Institution Arctic Studies Center for more information and resources (<https://learninglab.si.edu/org/sasc-ak?>). Additional official tribal websites for Native Alaskan Eskimo communities include the Nome Eskimo Community (<https://www.necalaska.org/about/>), the Sitka Tribe of Alaska (<https://www.sitkatribes.org/>), and more. For additional information, you can consult the U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs' Tribes Served by the Alaska Region (<https://www.bia.gov/regional-offices/alaska/tribes-served>).
- **Research Alaskan Native communities today.** To begin research, start with The Alaska Federation of Natives website (<https://www.nativefederation.org/>) to find out about current initiatives about what the Alaska Federation of Natives works towards in the state of Alaska. Refer to the Alaska Native Language Archive's Map, "Indigenous Peoples and Languages of Alaska" (<https://www.uaf.edu/anla/collections/map/>) for more information on where Alaskan Native communities are located and what languages they speak. What causes and initiatives are these Native communities passionate about? How do they use their cultural traditions and past history in their work today?



- **Have students work in groups to examine the geographical regions of the Iñupiaq people.** What are the characteristics of the lands, both in the past and present? Why did the Iñupiaq live on these lands? Have students research more about what the Iñupiaq traded, ate, and grew. Additionally, have students study where Iñupiaq people live today and how the geography differs between past and present. Students can use the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation's website for more information about the Iñupiaq people today and their current initiatives (<https://www.asrc.com/about/>). Have students prepare a handout or presentation for the rest of the class.
- **Choose a historical topic from *Blessing's Bead* and conduct a research project on that topic. Have students select one of the historical events below to conduct a research project on:**
  - Sisualik Trade Fair (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/aps-20-2-1.htm>)
  - Pandemic of 1918 and how it impacted Native peoples in Alaska ([https://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Documents/PDFs/AK\\_1918Flu\\_DataBrief\\_092018.pdf](https://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Documents/PDFs/AK_1918Flu_DataBrief_092018.pdf)) (<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/420.html>)
  - Whaling Trade: See resources from the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission for more information (<http://www.aewc-alaska.org/media.html>). The Alaskan Government also has a page dedicated to learning more about whaling (<https://lam.alaska.gov/c.php?g=567084>).
  - Relationship between Alaskan and Russian Native Peoples (<https://www.loc.gov/rr/european/mofc/postnikov.html>)
  - Iron Curtain: for more information on when the Iron Curtain was lifted, consult Winston Churchill's speech from the National World War II Museum (<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/winston-churchills-iron-curtain-speech-march-5-1946>)
  - Ask students the following guiding questions during their research: What topic did you select? Why was this important to the Iñupiaq people and in *Blessing's Bead*? What are the core details and information that you need to know about this topic? Students can display their findings in a visual presentation of their choosing.
- **Encourage students to research the Alaskan Native trade routes in 1917 during Book 1.** "Native Trade and Change" is a document from the Chugachmiut, a Tribal Organization Serving the Chugach Native Peoples of Alaska ([https://chugachheritageak.org/pdf/trade\\_and\\_Change.pdf](https://chugachheritageak.org/pdf/trade_and_Change.pdf)) that can start students' research about how trade was critical to Native Alaskan peoples during Nutaag's life in Book 1. Have students consider the following questions: why was trade necessary? What was typically traded, and why? What was the role of the goods that were traded in Alaskan Native peoples' lives? Why did they need these goods? Students can prepare visual presentations and cite their resources in a Bibliography.
- **Research the geography of Alaska** (<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/geography/states/article/alaska>). Have students learn more about the history and geography of Alaska to further inform their knowledge of where Blessing and Nutaag lived in both Book 1 and 2. What is Anchorage like? How is it different from other parts of Alaska? The Alaska Govern-

ment's websites has an "Alaska Kids" section where they can learn more information about the geographical makeup of Alaska (<https://alaska.gov/Kids/learn/aboutgeography.htm>). Alaska Kids Organization (<http://www.alaskakids.org/index.cfm/know-alaska/Alaska-Geography>) also has more information on the different features of Alaska.

- **Language might be viewed as an element of culture.** Think about the languages noticed in your classroom and discuss how the languages help us better understand the related culture. Students can learn more about the Iñupiaq language from the Glossary and Pronunciation Guide in the back of the book as well as from online sources (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/indigenous-languages-of-alaska-inupiaq.htm>). Have students think about how language is helpful in their own lives and how it plays a critical role in *Blessing's Bead*. The Iñupiaq language is also dwindling, and estimates show that approximately 2,100 people still speak the Iñupiaq language (<https://www.alaskapublic.org/2017/11/09/keeping-the-inupiaq-language-alive-through-a-website/>). How does language connect (or hurt) people? Why? Why is it critical to keep the Iñupiaq language alive?
- **Research and investigate the Native Nations in or around your school's area.** Students can conduct research on these Nations through books and media, as well as the current tribal websites, publications, or social media pages. Ask them if the Nations always lived in their area. If not, ask them where they moved from and why. Consider reaching out to your public library or local historical society with help in the research to find native tribes today.
- **In 2014, Aaron Carapella created the first map showing the original tribal nations living in North America before European settlers arrived.** (You can find the map through the link below.) Display on a smart screen or print out as large a version as possible and have students observe the original peoples of this continent in their original location. Do they recognize any tribal names? Have students then compare the first map to the recent map of federally recognized Native Nations in the US today. What do they observe? How do these maps differ? What do these maps show about the history and the present-day perception of Native Americans? ([https://www.npr.org/assets/news/2014/06/Tribal\\_Nations\\_Map\\_NA.pdf](https://www.npr.org/assets/news/2014/06/Tribal_Nations_Map_NA.pdf)) (<https://www.bia.gov/sites/bia.gov/files/assets/bia/ots/webteam/pdf/idc1-028635.pdf>)
- **Have students identify themes in *Blessing's Bead* and connect them to present-day issues.** Provide students with a graphic organizer that has "Themes in *Blessing's Bead*" in the left-hand column and "Present-day Issue" in the right-hand column. Explain to students that they need to list themes from *Blessing's Bead* and present-day issues that relate to that theme. Once the graphic organizer is complete, have students select one theme and one present-day issue and write an essay explaining the connection between the two in more detail. Why did they pick this theme to focus on, and what are the implications in our society today? Consider modeling the theme of "gender norms" in *Blessing's Bead* and connecting it to women's equality in the workplace. Brainstorm with students how and why these two themes connect, and then have students write an essay about a different theme from their organizer.

## Arts/Performing Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Encourage each student to create an illustration or bring something into the classroom that represents her or his culture, identity, and/or heritage.** There are many different objects throughout *Blessing's Bead* that are important to Nutaq and Blessing (the blue bead, the parka, the yo-yo, the ulu, and more). Afterward, students may share their artwork with a partner, a small group, or the whole class. What did students learn about themselves during this process? Why did they choose this particular object or illustration to showcase their culture?
- **Have students research traditional parkas and how they were created in *Blessing's Bead*.** In *Blessing's Bead*, Nuutaq's aunt made her a parka with intricate sewing and fine details to mark her entrance into womanhood. Have students research and investigate this style of parka mentioned in *Blessing's Bead* and discuss its importance and significance. Alaska Magazine has an article "Alaska Native Clothing" for students to refer to during their project (<https://alaskamagazine.com/authentic-alaska/culture/alaska-native-clothing/>).
- **Conduct a research project on Eskimo Dancing.** Blessing discovers that she has a passion for Eskimo dancing during *Blessing's Bead*. Students can research articles and videos online about Eskimo Dancing, and its role in Eskimo culture. Have students watch videos, look at photographs, and read about Eskimo Dancing (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xw8MJ95zGOg>), (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0Te4sAZDHI>), (<https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mufs001-aku-i0083>) (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26295617>). How is Eskimo Dancing important to Alaskan Native people today? Where is Eskimo Dancing typically performed? What do people wear? What music do they dance to? Afterwards, students can create informational posters displaying their findings.
- **Encourage students to read the interview with cover artist, Nasugraq Rainey Hopson** (<https://blog.leeandlow.com/2022/03/28/cover-reveal-of-blessings-bead-interview-with-cover-artist-nasugraq-rainey-hopson/>). What did students learn from reading this interview? How does it make them think about the cover differently? Why is cover art important, especially for a book like *Blessing's Bead*? What other questions would you like to ask Nasugraq Rainey Hopson? What did she enjoy about creating the cover art for *Blessing's Bead*?
- **Have students examine the collections, galleries, and exhibitions at Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) Museum of Contemporary Native Arts.** The IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts is the country's only museum for exhibiting, collecting, and interpreting the most progressive work of contemporary Native artists (<https://iaia.edu/iaia-museum-of-contemporary-native-arts/museum-about/>). The University of Alaska also displays Native Alaskan artists' work on their website (<https://www.uaf.edu/museum/collections/fineart/collection/collection-highlights/alaska-native-artists/>). Have students look at different pieces of art featured on the website (or on a field trip if financially and geographically

possible) and research an artist of their choosing.

- **Have students research Native writers and illustrators today.** If available, have students consult the librarian for help with researching and/or acquiring these books. Students can also look at the Alaska Native Artist Directory (<https://www.ciri.com/shareholders/resources/artistdirectory/>) for more information. Consider having the class generate a list of questions about the author or illustrator's work that they can send to the author or illustrator to encourage collaborative dialogue. Additionally, have students read Dr. Debbie Reese's blog posts about Native authors and illustrators. (<https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/2014/05/why-i-advocate-for-books-by-native.html>)

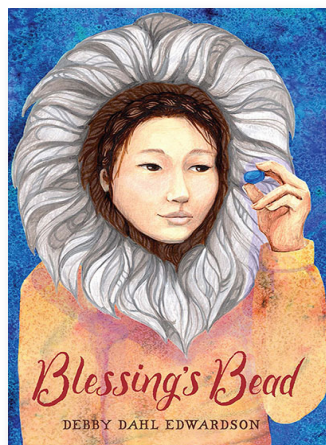
### School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Encourage students to interview family members about a favorite or impactful childhood memory.** How did that event influence the family member? How did it affect the person's life moving forward? Consider having students, if comfortable, share their findings with a partner, a small group, or whole class.
- **Similarly, ask students to speak with family members about their traditions how their traditions are special to them.** What is unique about each family's traditions? How did it influence them throughout their lives?
- **If applicable, have students and families research more about the Iñupiaq people, in history and in present today.** Additionally, students can find out additional information about how the seasons play an integral role in the lives of Iñupiaq people.




## Ordering Information


### General Order Information:

[leeandlow.com/contact/ordering](https://leeandlow.com/contact/ordering)

### Secure Online Ordering:

[leeandlow.com/books/blessing-s-bead](https://leeandlow.com/books/blessing-s-bead)

 **By Phone:** 212-779-4400 ext. 25

 **By Fax:** 212-683-1894

### By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue,  
New York, NY 10016

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Debby Dahl Edwardson** is the acclaimed author of three books for young readers: *Blessing's Bead*; *My Name Is Not Easy*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award; and the picture book *Whale Snow*. She married into and has lived for more than forty years among the Inupiat people of Alaska, of which she says, "It is not the culture I was not born into but it is the one I belong to, the one that has become home to me as a human being and as an artist." She lives in Utqiagvik, Alaska, the northernmost community on the North American continent, with her husband.

## REVIEWS

"Narrating in a heavy dialect, Blessing makes an emotional journey of self-discovery, as Edwardson weaves a fascinating portrait of a family's rich history."  
—*Publishers Weekly*

"Still, Edwardson treads an elegant line in her perspective: Blessing is both an insider—Iñupiaq—and an outsider still learning exactly what that means. It's a perspective that allows any reader in, and they'll learn much about the power of stories and names and how to use them both."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"It's a rich and nuanced enactment of a perspective and a mode of storytelling that surprises as much as it reveals."—*Washington Post*

## ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

**LEE & LOW BOOKS** is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at [leeandlow.com](https://leeandlow.com).