

STORY KNIFE

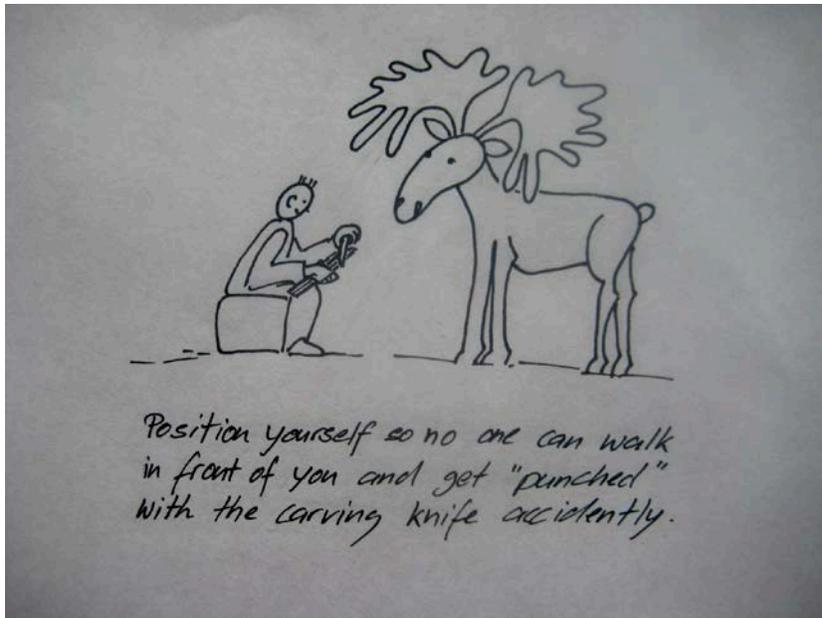
by Marianne Stoltz

(Thank you to Marty Hintz for introducing us to this Yupik tradition.)

The story knife is an old native tradition about telling stories and drawing along with a knife that is carved specifically for this occasion.

This project is a very good starter lesson for showing fundamental knife-handling skills. You will learn some basic carving techniques, and the last part of the project, the story telling, is easier than you think. Does this sound interesting?

Find a stick in the woods about 10" long, 3/4" to 1" in diameter, preferably green, and preferably without knots (that's the place where a branch was/is growing). Using your favorite pocketknife, cut a ring around and through the bark where the knife handle should stop. Now thin out that portion of the stick that will become the blade using a "punch stroke" (make a fist around your pocketknife and carve away from yourself).



The next step will be to shape the blade, using a more controlled cut, the "thumb push" (Yes you guessed right, you are pushing the blade with your thumb rather than with your entire upper body, as with the punch stroke.) You'll notice that the tip is harder to shape because of the *end grain*. Are you getting bored because you are already an expert carver? Take the challenge! Decorate the handle with as complicated, or simple a design as you want.



Happy and satisfied with your story knife?

Now plop down on the ground, brush the leaves and sticks away to smooth dirt then start drawing and telling your story. I hear you say "I can't draw." I am sure you can draw lines and dots and squiggles...that's all you need, just rudimentary symbols.

Oh, do I hear you say, "I can't tell stories." That's what I said too. Start simply just like with the carving...."There was a bunch of people - they all went into the woods to get sticks. They sat down to whittle. They were all very focused and worked really hard. When they were finished, each of them had a story knife with beautiful patterns. And they have been telling stories ever since.

PS: If you are not in the woods, but maybe in a classroom, you can use a cookie sheet. Dust it with flour and draw on that!