

Major Differences between Western and Indigenous Cultures

by Libby Roderick

	WESTERN CULTURES	ALASKA NATIVE CULTURES
BASIC QUESTION	How to succeed	How to be a real human being
FOUNDATION	2,500 years of Western academic/scientific tradition	10,000 years of survival in a harsh and challenging ecosystem
DEFINING TRAITS	Assertive Individualistic Fast, machine-based base Written Competitive Productivity/efficiency Ask questions Quick response Goal-oriented	Don't stand out Group concerns first Slow, earth-based pace Visual/oral Cooperative Relationships Listen and observe Pause/reflect Process-oriented
CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE	Western cultures tend to treat knowledge like a rational, discrete artifact, a portable commodity that can be moved from one place to another. Western knowledge-makers seek to develop systems and theories that can apply to all places and all communities. The knowledge is horizontal, and it runs far and wide.	Indigenous cultures tend to treat knowledge as a deep awareness of the world around them and their place within that world. Indigenous knowledge derives from long-term, intimate knowledge and experience of a particular place and a particular community. It is vertical, and it runs deep.
TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE	Western knowledge is transferred through written texts or between individuals who are largely strangers to one another, connecting people through ideas.	Indigenous knowledge is transferred verbally, experientially, kinesthetically and/or visually between close-knit individuals sharing the same community and place
EDUCATION PRACTICES	Western educational systems are based largely on written communication. They prioritize reading, writing, and the rapid exchange of vast quantities of information drawn from research, writing, and creative activity around the globe and throughout history.	Indigenous teaching and learning practices are relational. They prioritize observation, awareness, intelligent action, and the passing on of cultural values and practices from Elders and other community members. All learning occurs within a matrix of relationships between people, place, the natural world, and past and future generations.
ECONOMIES	Depend on the mass production of goods and information	Depend on small-scale hunting, fishing, and harvesting in interdependent relationship with other people and the land