Teacher's notes and answer key

Sedna – the Inuit Mistress of the Sea

Subjects: English · Religious Studies · Geography | recommended from age 13 (B1) | Video: 8:25 min

Answers B

1. The anthropologist Franz Boas on Baffin Island. The Inuit live scattered from Alaska through Arctic Canada to Greenland, and almost every community knows her by a different name (Greenland: “Old Woman of the Sea”, Netsilik: Nuliajuk, Iglulik: “the one down there”).

2. Promised: the land of the birds where no one goes hungry, a tent of the most beautiful skins, soft bearskins, a lamp always full of oil and a pot always full of meat. In reality: a miserable fish-skin shelter full of holes, stiff walrus hides and raw fish – her husband is a fulmar in human form.

3. In Adlivun, a world far beneath the sea; she rules over every sea creature that came from her body.

4. When people break the old rules (e.g. cooking caribou and seal meat in the same pot), the wrongdoing settles like filth in her hair. She has no fingers left to comb it out; tangled and furious, she keeps the animals at the bottom of the sea.

5. His spirit travels to the bottom of the sea in a trance; he combs and braids her hair, calms her and learns which rules were broken. The people confess in front of the whole community, and then she lets the animals go.

Answer C

Correct numbers from top to bottom: 4 – 7 – 1 – 6 – 2 – 8 – 3 – 5

Notes on D and E

D1: a betrayed daughter who takes what she is owed; the owner of the animals, whose favour has to be earned through respect. D2 (e.g.): almost nothing grows, people live on seals, walruses and whales; one bad season can wipe out a whole camp; the rules are a way of living carefully and respecting the balance.

E: Adlivun – a world far beneath the sea / Sedna's realm at the end of the story. Angakkuq – shaman / travels to her in a trance, combs her hair, brings the animals back. Nuliajuk – her name among the Netsilik / there an orphan girl pushed into the water during a crossing, with the same ending. Kinngait – Inuit community (once Cape Dorset) with famous print studios / Sedna is one of the most common subjects in Inuit art today.

Extra: hunters gave a killed seal a sip of fresh water; Boas describes an autumn festival in which shamans symbolically drove Sedna away with harpoons; the distant icy object “Sedna” was discovered in 2003 (one orbit takes over 10,000 years).

Content note and age

Recommended from age 13. The video tells (without bloody images) how her father throws Sedna overboard in the storm and cuts off the joints of her fingers, and how her dogs later injure the father; the tasks deliberately do not ask about these scenes. Inuit tradition is a living culture – please treat it with respect.

Sources: Franz Boas, “The Central Eskimo” (1888, Baffin Island); the Netsilik version (Nuliajuk) as recorded by Knud Rasmussen and others. Versions differ from community to community.

The narrator's voice and the illustrations in the video are AI-generated; the script follows the established tradition. You are welcome to copy and share this worksheet for classroom use.

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