

LITERATURE GUIDE

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“Summit with Sedna, the Mother of Sea Beasts”
by Alootook Ipellie

Literature guide created by
Madeleine Reddon

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Read, Listen, Tell: Indigenous Stories from Turtle Island (pp. 208-213)

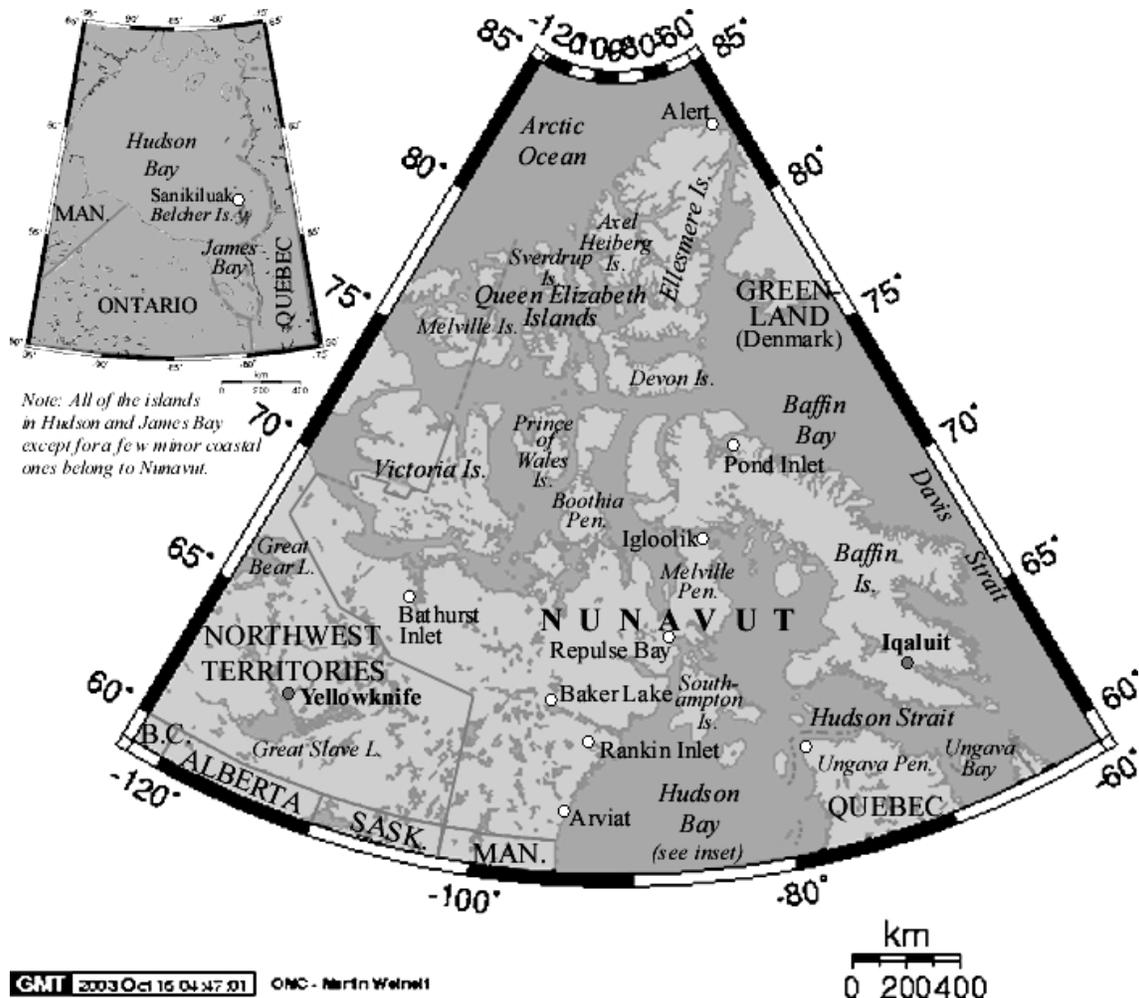
STORY SUMMARY

"Summit with Sedna" is one of twenty short stories included in Alootook Ipellie's 1993 collection *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares*. This story is about Sedna the sea monster, a traditional and contemporary figure in Inuit stories, who is unable to experience sexual pleasure because of a past sexual assault incident involving her father. The story is narrated by a shaman who is charged by his community with healing Sedna in order to restore balance to land. To do so, the shaman calls on all spirit beings and all the shaman of the north together to help heal her. Ipellie's distinct style represents scenes of explicit sexuality and spirituality with humour and playfulness.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alootook Ipellie (1951-2007) was an Inuit author, translator, editor, and artist. He was born in Nuvuquq, a small hunting camp, to a "seminomadic family" on Baffin Island (Amagoalik 41). When he was four, his family moved to Iqaluit, the largest city in Nunavut and, when he was five, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Separated from his family and shipped to Hamilton by boat, the *C.D. Howe*, Ipellie spent a year in a sanatorium recovering before returning home (McMahon-Coleman 99). During his stay, Ipellie "was expected to learn—and use—English as his primary mode of communication" (99). When Ipellie returned home, his mother was also diagnosed with tuberculosis and had to spend several years away from him, beginning a pattern of family separation (100). Upon his return to Iqaluit, Ipellie began school. He describes his early schooling as extremely difficult because of the hostility of the school to Inuit students. As a teenager, Ipellie moved to Ottawa to complete high school, where he lived for most of his life.

Ipellie was a prolific artist and writer. In 1972, Ipellie started working as a translator, journalist, and illustrator for *Inuit Monthly*, the monthly publication for Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, an Inuit political organization. *Inuit Monthly* featured Ipellie's first serial comic strip, *Ice Box*, from 1974 to 1982 (Prouty 31). Ipellie later became the editor. Throughout the 1970s, Ipellie illustrated and wrote for other periodicals in both English and Inuktitut: *North*, *Inukshuk*, and *Nunatsiaq News*. In the 1990s, *Nunatsiaq News* featured a second serial comic from Ipellie, *Nuna and Vut*, which offered a satiric take on the developmental and transitional period of the Arctic prior to the creation of Nunavut in 1999. Ipellie's first experimental novel, *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares* (Theytus 1993), was the first published collection of short stories by an Inuit writer. In addition to his prolific work as an illustrator, cartoonist, and writer, Ipellie's pen-and-ink drawings were shown in major Canadian, Norwegian, and Greenlandic exhibitions.



Credit: Montrealais at the English-language Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons. (For an organic view of Indigenous traditional territories in this area, please visit native-land.ca)

Historical and Cultural Contexts for Reading

Key Concepts

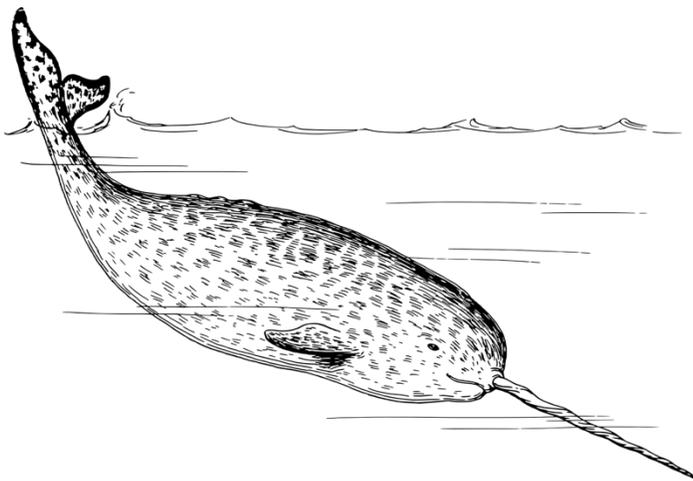
- the colonization of the North
- the spiritual and physical health of the community
- residential schools and the censorship of Inuit expression
- Inuit nationalism and the transformation of Inuit culture

Alootook Ipellie’s “Summit with Sedna” weaves together a dense text of nested histories. The purpose of this guide is to provide essential historical, social, and cultural background material to facilitate politically, historically, and culturally informed interpretations of Ipellie’s story. Providing readers with some background to guide their reading processes is necessary especially when misinformation about First Peoples is rampant due to pejorative representations of Indigenous people in media and public discourse and because many curricula still do not cover basic Indigenous history. This background information can be included in a lecture or it can help

inform an approach to guiding discussion. Readers may also want to do further research into some of these important contexts. Sources for further reading are included at the end of this document.

"Summit with Sedna" is a story that exposes the historical roots and present realities of colonial and capitalist exploitation in the North. This story also contains a very troubling scene of sexual violence and sexual assault. In order to read the moments of sexual violence in this story, readers need to understand the culturally-specific contexts informing Ipellie's work. Specifically, readers need to be introduced to the historical, social, and cultural contexts informing settler and Inuit relations in the Arctic, which provide the basis for his critiques of capitalist exploitation and colonial violence. While it is difficult to know where to start in providing such context, readers should know that Ipellie's version of this traditional story draws on Inuit epistemologies and cultural references, including references to the early periods of trade between Inuit and settlers and the early periods of colonial settlement.

Basque whalers began arriving in the homelands of the Inuit and making contact with their communities as early as 1560, but the whaling industry did not peak until the mid 18th century when American, British, and Scottish whalers began hunting and trading with the Inuit for baleen



(Tagalik n.pag.). Like many other Indigenous communities, the Inuit adapted their hunting practices in order to participate in a new global economy (Barr; Dumas; Harley Eber; Goldring; Lim). Inuit hunters were often used as cheap labour source for hunting expeditions (Lim 21). In return, the Inuit received trade items such as guns, ammunition, and boats (Lim 21). Around 1840, traders, missionaries, and the RCMP began arriving as the whalers slowly left the North (Sanger 202; Shackleton 5; Tagalik n.pag.).

In the 1900s, the Inuit began participating in the commercial fur trade selling fox furs (McLean 56). In return for their labour and hunting prowess, Indigenous communities acquired clothing, tools, and other supplies. However, both of these new economies created a fragile interdependence between settler and Indigenous communities. The economy overtaxed the animal life in the area and, when the fox fur trade collapsed in the 1930s, the Inuit experienced extreme economic precarity in addition to the disturbance and depletion of their local food sources (Lim 26). Caribou, a staple food of their diet, became scarce and would remain so for several decades (Tester 24). The hunger felt by Northern communities is powerfully evoked in Ipellie's "Summit with Sedna," recalling this period when the Inuit were experiencing the toll of unfettered colonial and capitalist exploitation.

During the 1930s, the Inuit were also suffering from an epidemic of tuberculosis. Alongside trade goods, settlers brought new diseases (measles, influenza, poliomyelitis, and tuberculosis), which significantly damaged communities who had never been exposed to these viruses (Daschuk). Tuberculosis, especially, affected the Inuit. Due to the fur trade, many Inuit families had

transitioned to wooden houses and often lived in one-room dwelling spaces (Tester 26). The proximity meant that it was easy for the disease to travel from person to person. Medical supplies were in short supply in the North; often RCMP officers, missionaries, and settlers would receive these services before the Inuit. Though many government officials reported on the high incidence of tuberculosis amongst the Inuit, the federal government dragged its feet in responding to the crisis, leaving the problem to the mission hospitals until after 1945, when they began shipping Inuit people by boat, usually the coast guard ship the *C.D. Howe*, and then flown to segregated health facilities (Sandiford Grygier 98-99; Tester 33). Indian hospitals were disorienting for the Inuit. Care workers only spoke English or French and there were few interpreters, which meant that it was difficult for care workers to communicate with their patients who were often at pains to understand why their care involved being separated from their children or why they needed to stay in bed (often restrained) for weeks on end (Sandiford Grygier 104-105).

During the 1950s, a stagnant economy, the high cost of importing goods to the North, and an ongoing tuberculosis epidemic, whose treatment required precarious long distance travel, created significant social difficulties for the Inuit. The federal government slowly doled out financial aid but, often, federal supports only made conditions worse. For instance, the mission-run boarding schools in the Northwest Territories closed as federally-funded day schools, also known as “hostel schools,” began appearing (Tester 27; TRC 24). These schools were a part of a residential school legacy (TRC 116): traditional languages were prohibited and children spent more time praying or doing menial chores than learning (TRC 32). Abuse and sexual predation were rampant (TRC 33). From 1941 to 1978, the Inuit also had to wear government I.D. tags because they often did not have surnames and their traditional names were “too complicated” for federal employees to say (Sandiford Grygier 49; Vowel 58). The Inuit had to use these I.D. tags to receive family allowances but the registration system was dehumanizing and degrading (Tester 28). Often, federal employees withheld family allowances and welfare payments in order to force them to send their children to the schools. It was during this period that Ipellie began attending school (28).



As Frank Tester remarks, during the 1950s—a time when colonized countries around the world were beginning to undergo a process of decolonization—the Inuit experienced an intensification of colonization (20). Elder Donald Uluadluak “links the loss of Inuit culture and rapid change” to the introduction of the residential school system (qtd. Tester 20). Amy Prouty, a scholar in Inuit studies, states that during these times the Inuit underwent “aggressively assimilationist social policies, forced relocations, the slaughter of sled dogs, residential and day schools that tore children from their families, the disruption of seasonal practices, the banning of Inuktitut, and generational ripples of trauma from physical and sexual abuse” (32). Missionaries “forbade bawdy stories and shamanistic practices” (32), censoring and punishing Inuit cultural expression. Suffice to say, the Inuit faced extreme hostility and indifference from settler society and increased internal instability due to community fragmentation, poverty, and ill-health during this time. In spite of these

hardships, the Inuit began organizing politically to resist further oppression, sending multiple petitions to the federal government to contest predatory land and mineral prospectors.

In the next several decades, multiple Inuit leaders and activists emerged out of this hardship and they created organizations to advocate for land claims and Aboriginal rights (Tester 36-39). These organizations created social housing, advocated for welfare reform, and fought against illegal encroachments into their territory. One of these organizations, the Tunngavik Federation of Nunavut, began working with the federal government on a land claims agreement after the patriation of Canada in 1982. The TFN was a political group that sought to represent Inuit interests at the federal and provincial levels. In 1990, an agreement-in-principle was reached and, in 1992, TFN members and federal negotiators signed the "Nunavut Land Claims Agreement," which led to the creation of Nunavut in 1999.

Ipellie’s writing can be read within the context of a resurgent Inuit nationalism and renewed political organizing. In the 1970s, Ipellie began publishing in periodicals while living in Ottawa: *North, Inuit Monthly* (later *Inuit Today*), *Inukshuk*, and *Nunatsiaq News*. These magazines emerged directly from the cultural resurgence occurring alongside the political organizing around land claims and rights protection. He would go on to become a prolific writer and visual artist with illustrations, cartoons, poetry, and non-fiction in an eclectic spread of literary journals, newspapers, magazines and books. His work sought to address these struggles by providing an Inuit perspective that understood traditional Inuit culture as a life-affirming tool for navigating the present.

Arctic Dreams and Nightmares addresses not only a specifically Inuit audience but also a broader network of Indigenous communities in thinking through global political shifts. The Woman of the Sea story is a “pan-Arctic” narrative, shared by many tribes in the North “extending from East Greenland to Siberia” (Kennedy 211). With reference to colonial Alaska (United States), Greenland (Denmark), and Chukotka (Russia), Sedna could be read as a pan-Indigenous, pan-Arctic text that seeks to expose and mitigate the violence of global imperialism by creating solidarities between Indigenous communities with shared political goals.

Historical Interpretation: Getting Discussion Started

Published in 1993, *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares* was written in the midst of a collective Inuit effort to protect their land and culture. I encourage readers to read “Summit with Sedna” through the lens of sovereignty, land protection, and cultural revival (1960s-1980s). Such a lens puts into context the story’s references to the shaman’s “spirit journey”, his “shamanic powers”, Sedna’s “sexuality”, and her role as “sea beast” keeper (Ipellie 210). Without an awareness of Ipellie’s engagement to Inuit cultural and political revitalization and decolonization, readers risk misinterpreting these symbols, or unconsciously relying on cultural stereotypes to decode the text.

Ipellie’s “minimalist” style creates a compressed fabric of linked histories in “Summit with Sedna.” With reference to the history I outlined above, consider the possible interpretive approaches to the shamans’ “famine” and “hunger.” While this hunger can be read more literally as the desire for the return and health of helper beings (animals who provide food and are spiritual kin), it may also represent other desires—for example, greater access to education, a restoration of spiritual and

physical health, a repairing of kinship and family relations, or self-determined sexual and cultural expression (210).

Similarly, the “summit” with Sedna that the narrator prepares can be read as an analogy for community organizing around Inuit land and rights protection (210). The shaman’s plan involves “all the shamans of the Arctic Kingdom” coming together with their “respective spirit helpers” to become a “giant malevolent creature, a hundred times larger than a normal human being” (211). This “new creative would possess spiritual powers equivalent to a hundred spirit souls” (211). Like the Inuit activists that participated as part of the Tunngavik Federation of Nunavut (TFN), the shamans come together to return health to the land, its helper beings, and its people by solving Sedna’s sexual disorder (211). In other words, readers can read this creature as a direct analogy for the political organizations that sprung up to challenge the Canadian government’s continued complicity in colonial and capitalist exploitation in the North. However, I also encourage readers to talk about the sacred dimensions of this “coming together” too. Ipellie’s text does not distinguish between “living,” “dead,” or “ancestral” shamans/spirit beings. This ambiguity in the story means that readers can read the text as a literal interpretation of history *and* as a figurative interpretation of cultural resurgence—drawing on ancestral knowledge to heal the Inuit and the land.

It would be difficult to read the more difficult aspects of the story involving Sedna’s sexuality and her rape without these critical historical and cultural contexts. Certainly, this story deals with sexual violence in very explicit ways. Without more background, Ipellie’s critique of internalized colonialism and misogyny risks being misread as a reaffirmation of male power, sexual fantasy, and domination.

Near the end of the story, the shaman manifests a Frankenstein monster, made from all the spirit-beings of the sea, which scares Sedna. This monster is an analogy for the effects of colonialism on Indigenous communities. The loss of land, family, and culture has wounded the relationship between men and women as well as children and their families; the civilizing mission is a “mad science” that turned some Indigenous men into “monsters.” When she sees this monster, Sedna screams, passes out from fear, and begins dreaming. In her dreams, she sees “her male equivalent, Andes, a God of the Sea” with whom she has a “sexual encounter” that gives Sedna her first orgasm (212). This vision offers another kind of masculinity and another kind of union between the sexes. In this dream, Sedna sees an alternative male figure to colonialism’s monster, a Sea-God who is her “equal” (212). Sedna’s dream is a prophecy, imagining the restoration of Indigenous kinship where power is shared between the sexes rather than expressed unilaterally by a selfish and dominating “patriarch.”

By re-casting the 1800s to 1950s as a period of “hunger” that is resolved by healing Sedna, Ipellie frames this earlier time as a challenge that the Inuit met (rather than passively endured) by relying on their traditions and perseverance as a community. In doing so, Ipellie offers a series of vital of metaphors for the Inuit of the present. His humor also plays an important part in re-casting their pain as a spiritual teaching. In the next section of this guide, I will expand more on how Sedna’s orgasm can be read as an expression of Indigenous sovereignty by providing more context on Inuit epistemologies.

Inuit Cultural Contexts

Key Concepts:

- Information on other versions of this story
- Parenting, family, and the principles of maligarjuat
- Mourning, community, and the land
- Gender, sexuality, women’s knowledge, and cultural expression

Some aspects of the story, particularly its sexual politics, may seem troubling or problematic to readers. However, with a better understanding of the cultural contexts that surround this important Creation story, as well as an awareness of different versions of the story, you can become more attuned to how to interpret the significance of Sedna’s story.

“Summit with Sedna” is a re-telling of an oral story from Inuit cosmology. Sedna is a powerful spirit being who lives at the bottom of the ocean. This Woman of the Sea has many names: “The Ghastly Woman or Infernal Goddess, Ayqilliyoo or Protectress of the Sea Animals, Arnarkuagsak or Old Woman, Sid-ne or Spirit Below, Sidney, Nerrivik or the Food Dish, Nuliajuk or Kavna (She Down There), Takanaluk Arnaluk or Mother of the Sea Beast, and Seda” (Kennedy 211). In other versions of this story, including the version by Alexina Kublu, “Unigumasuittuq / She Who Never Wants to Get Married,” in *Read, Listen, Tell* (198-208), Sedna is a woman who is thrown overboard from a boat. While trying to save her own life by clinging to the side of the boat, Sedna has her fingers cut off by someone in the boat. In some versions of the stories, it is her father who cuts off his daughter’s fingers or hand and, sometimes, her eye is also punctured in the assault. The prominence of the hands/eyes in Ipellie’s drawing recalls these details. As Sedna falls to the bottom of the ocean, she becomes a powerful spirit being who guards the sea creates and decides when to release the sea creatures for the Inuit to hunt for food. Her role as “keeper” of the sea beasts is essential to the story.



Marriage and sexuality also play an important role in other versions of the story. In a version told by the Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada (PIWC):

Sedna was a beautiful Inuit girl who was pressured into marriage by her father. Unknown to Sedna, her new husband was actually a raven who fed her fish and kept her in a nest on an island far away from her family. Her father, who missed Sedna terribly, went in his kayak to rescue her but the raven, with his special powers, called up a storm. The father panicked and pushed Sedna into the cold water. As she clung to the kayak, her frozen fingers and hands were broken off and fell into the sea where they became seals, whales, and other sea mammals Sedna could no longer struggle and sank into the water where she became a goddess of the sea. Her frustration and anger continue to be expressed through the creation of storms and high seas. Inuit hunters have treated Sedna with respect for centuries to ensure she will allow Inuit to harvest her bounty. (4)

In some versions, including Alexina Kublu’s version in *Read, Listen, Tell*, Sedna has children with her “dog” husband. In other versions she has a “bird” husband and her children are the

"quallunaat" (people who are not considered Inuit; often settlers or white people) or the "Iqqiliit" ("Indians") (Keavy 142).

In the PIWC story, the failure to maintain harmony within the family is a central theme. Culturally, this theme relates to teachings around the *maligarjuat* (translated literally as "big things must be followed") (Kasterak 3). *Maligarjuat* are a set of guiding principles for ethical living that the Inuit follow. There are four key *maligarjuat* principles:

1. work for the "common good" instead of "personal interest or gain"
2. seek to live in respectful relationships with "every person and thing one encounters"
3. maintain harmony and balance
4. plan and prepare "for the future" (3)

These principles are "Inuit laws" but, unlike Euro-Canadian laws, breaking them is not a punishable crime. Breaking these principles come only at a personal cost because traditional teachings provide individuals with ways of surviving in a harsh environment by building healthy and generous relationships with others. In the PIWC story, the failure to resolve family issues, such as not listening to a parent and/or parenting a child too harshly, disrupts the harmony and balance of the family, causing Sedna's transformation into a spirit being (death/new life) and her father's grief.

The story offers lessons about how unresolved pain and mourning within a family affect relationships outside of it. Sedna's desire for the shamans to make amends and her job of "keeping the sea beasts" are directly related to the violence her family/community inflicts on her. In Ipellie's version, readers can apply the principles of the *maligarjuat* to talk about Sedna's "sexual bankruptcy" (Ipellie 210) and the plan the shamans come up with to restore her "virgin joy" (212). How does the shaman's plan reflect the *maligarjuat* protocols? How do these protocols seek to restore harmony and balance to the land/sea as well as the community?

Sexuality and sexual abuse are also present in other contemporary versions of this story as Inuit writers try to address contemporary issues regarding violence against women and the legacy of residential schooling. Within Inuit culture, women are important members of the community who are knowledge keepers for "genealogical or kinship knowledge, or mythic, cosmological knowledge" (Sandiford 24). Their ability to "mediate between the physical and metaphysical world, between nature and the supernatural, between the living society and the spiritual society, made them centrally important and beloved and needed" (Sandiford 24). Women can carry this sacred knowledge because they have the power to bring life into this world. Residential schooling profoundly disrupted women's ability to pass on knowledge and to provide guidance for others. The mistreatment of women requires protocols to be re-instated to return to balance.

Sedna, then, is also a figure that represents women's knowledge: language, traditional teaching and sacred stories, and familial and cosmological inheritances. In Ipellie's story, Sedna's repressed or blocked sexuality is tied to blockages in cultural knowledge and expression. Her "senseless soul" has lost more than just the ability to experience physical pleasure (Ipellie 212). She has lost her ability to "create" (or procreate). The orgasmic expulsion of the sea beasts at the end of this story can be read as an analogy for her spiritual and creative re-birth (212).

Readers can discuss the act of writing for Indigenous people as a form of reclamation that mirrors the events in the story. How does Ipellie’s short story try to address/repair the relationship between women, expression, and pleasure? How does Ipellie write this story with the *maligarjuat* in mind? Or how does Ipellie’s writing mirror the ceremony the shamans perform for Sedna? What stylistic choices does Ipellie make to tell this story? What do you think is the significance of the joy and humour in the story for Indigenous writers?

Guided Discussion Questions

“Summit with Sedna” offers a dense set of metaphors to talk about various Inuit histories. I prefer to start class with guided discussion questions in groups before moving into a bigger discussion with whole class. The questions below were created with this in mind. I recommend using a selection rather than all the questions.

These questions work best if the students are put into small groups to work through the questions before presenting their thoughts to the class. After they have thought through the questions, ask them to report back to the class on what they discussed as a group. From there, further questions can be posed or deeper passage analysis undertaken.

1. Describe this story. How would you describe the plot? What are the essential scenes? Where are the most important passages? Why?
2. Describe some of the stylistic choices Ipellie makes to tell this story: who tells the story, how does this person tell it, and what images, symbols, and metaphors does this storyteller use? Why do you think Ipellie makes these choices? Justify your reasoning.
3. Discuss the narrator. What power does this shaman have that the other shamans lack? What idea or approach does the shaman use to resolve Sedna’s “sexual impotency”?
4. Discuss the title of the story. What does the word “summit” imply?
5. Who are these shamans and what do they do for their community? What actions do they take to serve their community?
6. What role do the sea beasts play in this story?
7. In the context of the Inuit’s experience of colonization and the transformation of their cultural life, what do the shaman “hunger” for? Conversely, what does Sedna’s sexuality represent for the shamans? How does the unleashing of Sedna’s sexuality fulfill or satisfy their desires?
8. Often, Ipellie uses “economic” language to describe Sedna’s sexuality and its relationship to food/sustenance: “Sedna, feeling miserable and sexually bankrupt. . .” (210). This idea of “sexual bankruptcy” suggests that the value of Sedna’s sexual life has disappeared. An economy can represent the “wealth and resources” of a community. On the basis of this story, what do think the Inuit consider to be their “wealth and resources” besides food and nutrition? How is Sedna’s sexuality related to their “wealth and resources”? Focus on her “sexual ecstasy” to unpack this question (212).
9. What do you think this story is about? Offer a preliminary reading.

10. In the image that accompanies this story, Sedna looks at "you" (the viewer of the image/the reader of the story) and screams. In relation to the plot, Sedna's perspective in this image puts the reader/viewer in the place of the Frankenstein creature. If the reader/viewer is "Frankenstein" or plays the role of "the monster," what is the text saying about the reader? In the context of this story, what role does the "shamanic" writer Ipellie cast the reader in and why?
11. Compare and contrast Ipellie's version with Alexina Kublu's version, "Uinigumasuittuq / She Who Never Wants to Get Married," included in *Read, Listen, Tell* (198-208). What are the similarities and differences between the two versions? How do the historical and cultural contexts offered in this guide help you interpret Kublu's version? By the same token, how do the historical contexts around Kublu's father's telling help you interpret Ipellie's version? What details in Kublu's version require further research?

Focus Passages for Writing Prompts/Discussion

A good way to start class is to ask the students to do free writing or reflective exercises in response to the passages below. Give the students 10-15 minutes to respond to one prompt. When you reconvene as a class, you can ask the students what they wrote about. In some cases, I have offered commentary on the significance of these passages.

1. In this passage, the narrator talks about the ceremony needed to cure Sedna's sexual problem:

My plan called for all shamans of the Arctic Kingdom to get together for a combined spirit journey to the bottom of the sea. Each shaman was asked to invite their respective spirit helpers which would be collectively moulded to create a giant malevolent creature, a hundred times larger than a normal human being. This new creature would possess spiritual powers equivalent to a hundred souls. (211)

- a. Discuss some of the associations you have with the words above.
 - b. How does this ceremony address the problem?
 - c. What symbols does it use to counteract Sedna's pain? Why are these symbols/rituals important?
2. In this passage, Ipellie talks about the shame and the fear the shamans feel when they are unable to do their duty:

My peers didn't really have any choice but to feel obliged to fulfil her requests, fearing their failure to convince Sedna to release the sea beasts might brand them incapable in the eyes of their people. Being seen as a weak shaman would not only diminish their economic well-being but most certainly wipe out their hard-earned prestige among their fellow Inuit. As hard as they tried to use their sexual experience, they had all failed the ultimate test. (210)

- a. Why do the shamans feel such shame and fear? How is this related to the history of colonialism?

- b. How is the narrator’s approach different from these other shamans?
 - c. Why is it important that amends be made to Sedna “as a community”?
3. Discuss the monster “behind Sedna” and her response:

What she saw behind her was a giant of a monster, more fearsome than any creature she had ever encountered at the bottom of the sea. Frankenstein stood up and towered over the tiny body of Sedna. Sedna shrieked the hell out of her lungs. (212)

- a. Why is the monster “behind” Sedna? What does this represent?
- b. Why does Ipellie draw attention to Sedna’s “shrieks” and her “lungs”?
- c. Why is the monster called Frankenstein?

Comparative Reading and Discussion Activity

Frankenstein is the unnamed creature in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein. In popular culture, he is known by his creator’s last name even though, in the original story, he remains nameless. In the novel, Frankenstein’s experiment tries to steal the power of life from God but he only succeeds in creating an “abomination.”

In contrast, in Ipellie’s story, the monster is not a representation of an abomination against nature. Ipellie’s “Frankenstein” is “moulded” or created from the coming together of many “spirit helpers” (212). These spirit helpers are non-human kin. The shaman can only call on these beings for help if they have upheld their responsibilities to them. Therefore, this “monster” represents the combined efforts of all the shamans’ respect towards nature.



Consider the following questions for class discussion:

1. Why does Ipellie use the word “Frankenstein” or “monster” to describe this “creature” (212)?
2. How does Ipellie re-interpret the story of Frankenstein? You may want to talk about how something might appear “monstrous” but might be a force for good. This is an important part of Shelley’s version too. The scientist’s inability to see his creation’s humanity (his ability to read and write poetry) causes the “monster” to retaliate by killing the scientist’s love.

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