

# MYTH of LAWLESSNESS

## Lesson Plan for "The Alaska Myth" Podcast, Episode 3

**Grade Level:** Adapt for 9th - 12th grades

**Subject:** Social Studies / Alaska Studies / History

**Topic:** Territorial legal systems & racial violence

### Objectives and Goals

Students will:

- Explore the history of Alaska's justice system during the Gold Rush era
- Consider the impacts of settler violence and of the myth of lawlessness

### Materials

- [The Alaska Myth podcast, episode 3](#)
- Notes sheet, attached
- Discussion questions, attached

### Assessments

1. Listen to student comments during classroom dialogue to assess understanding & provide immediate feedback
2. Students write a poem in response to the lesson. Invite the class to brainstorm words out loud for each of the following prompts. Write student answers on the board.

Students write one stanza for each prompt, using their notes sheet and the class brainstorm if they like.

1. Describe the "lawless" Klondike (the settler myth). How does it look, sound, smell, feel?
2. Describe indigenous laws. How do they look, sound, smell, feel?
3. Describe Settler "justice." How does it look, sound, smell, feel?
4. For this violence and the myth used to justify it, what are the impacts on the people who lived in Alaska back then or the long term impacts on Alaskans. How does this look, sound, smell, feel?

### Activities (30-90 minutes)

Opener: Students quick-write a response to this question: Why do we have laws? After writing, students share their responses with a partner. Invite a few to share key insights with the class. If needed, supplement their answers: safety, order, equal rights, to communicate behavior expectations.

Main lesson: For students with 6-9th grade reading levels, review these vocabulary terms before playing: scoundrel, sanction, bombardment, clandestine, vengeance, haphazard, indiscriminate, racialized, riot, pretensions, noble, de-facto, precarious.

Introduce podcast: This clip focuses on a myth that many settlers believed during the gold rush era, that Alaska was a lawless place. We'll hear about examples of Tlingit law that prove that this myth was false. And we'll hear about how the settlers used the myth of lawlessness to justify racist violence.

Trigger warning: the content in the podcast includes violence and death, including suicide or Alaska Native people. Be sensitive to your students before playing this for them and make sure they are prepared.

Listen to podcast episode 3. 11:20 - 32:08 (end of episode)

Students take notes on the attached note sheet. After, have students share what stood out to them most from the podcast in groups of 3-4 .

Choose 1-2 questions from the attached discussion prompts. Students discuss in their groups. After, each group shares one ah-ha moment from their discussion.

# Notes : record images, words, ideas, sounds, feelings

Lawlessness

Tlingit Law

Settler "justice"

Impacts/ reflections

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## Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to say a place is lawless? Who benefited and who was harmed by the myth of lawlessness?
2. Was Alaska a lawless place when the gold rush settlers arrived? Give examples to support your answer.
3. Settlers used the myth of lawlessness to justify mob violence against anyone they deemed a criminal.
4. What are some examples of racism from this time period?
5. The examples of Tlingit law show consequences that support the victim and try to make up for the harm. The examples of American law and the settler vigilantes' consequences focus more on punishing the person accused of the crime. Which do you think would be more effective? What might that tell us about each society?