

Beware the Qualupalik

Imagine a mermaid. But instead of a beautiful half-human half-fish, imagine a mermaid with bumpy scales and green, slimy skin that smells like sulfur. Imagine a mermaid with fins sticking out of its head, back, and chest. One that has webbed hand and long talons, perfect for hunting. These aren't the mermaids of fairy tales. They are the Qualupalik, the scary sea-people of Inuit legends.

Tales of the Qualupalik originated in what is now Northern Alaska and Canada. They are depicted as ugly and menacing sea-people who live deep in the icy waters near the Inuit settlements. If you are not already scared by the descriptions of how the Qualupalik look, perhaps you will be frightened by what they do. They are said to carry amautiit, which are parkas worn by Inuit women to carry their babies. The Qualupalik carry amautiit so that they can snatch Inuit children and drag them below the ice.

The fate of the kidnapped children is not a happy one. Some legends say that the sea-people eat the children. Others say that they take them to a cave and put them under a sleeping spell. They then feed on the energy of the small humans so that they can stay immortal. In some versions of the story, they use the children to take care of their long, flowing hair.

Inuit parents have long warned their children about the dangers of the Qualupalik. They tell their children not to go too close to the shore or they will be stolen by the creatures. They warn them not to venture near the ice without an adult. They tell them to listen for humming, which is a sign that the Qualupalik are near.

The Qualupalik are tricky. Not only are they said to hum to lure the children closer to the edge of the shore, but they also knock under the ice. These knocks draw the children close to weak spots in the ice where the Qualupalik can surface and snatch them.

These stories are certain to cause nightmares for Inuit children. But perhaps they serve another purpose? You might be able to guess the purpose of the legend. But one thing is for sure – you don't want to meet the Qualupalik!



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Which of the following does NOT describe the Qualupalik?
 - a. Bumpy scales
 - b. Webbed hands and long talons
 - c. Green, slimy skin that smells like sulfur
 - d. **Black eyes**

2. How do the Qualupalik lure children to the edge of the shore?
 - a. **By humming and knocking**
 - b. By humming and singing
 - c. By knocking and singing
 - d. By singing and dancing

3. Which of the following is NOT a theory about what the Qualupalik do with the children that they take?
 - a. They eat them
 - b. They put them under a sleeping spell
 - c. **They use them to find weak spots in the ice**
 - d. They use them to take care of their hair

4. What do you think is the purpose of the Qualupalik legend?
 - a. To make children afraid of fish
 - b. **To keep children from going too close to the water**
 - c. To teach children about mermaids
 - d. To give children nightmares

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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