

Tatqiaq Learns About Rabies



The Adventures of Tatqiaq

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Drawing of Arctic fox, page 19, by Anita Penashue.

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The Adventures of Tatqiaq

ARCTIC OCEAN

Sachs Harbour

Beaufort Sea

Amundsen Gulf

Tuktoyaktuk

Aklavik

Inuvik

Paulatuk

NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES

Fort
McPherson

Tsiigehtchic

Colville Lake

Fort Good Hope

2



Banks
Island



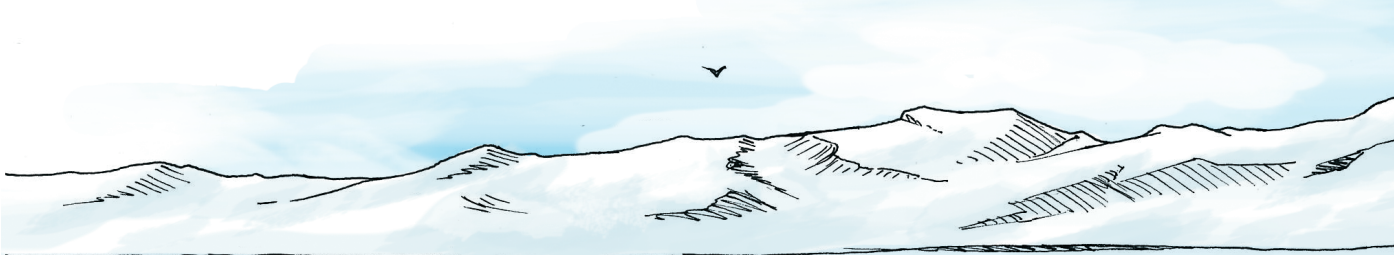
Victoria
Island

Ulukhaktok • **The Story of Tatqiaq**

Prince Albert Sound

This is the story of a little girl named Tatqiaq. She lives in the Northwest Territories with her mom, dad and grandmother. Her mom is from Sachs Harbour and her dad is from Inuvik. She spends time in both communities. She enjoys all the things little boys and girls do, especially going out on the land. This story is one of Tatqiaq's many adventures.

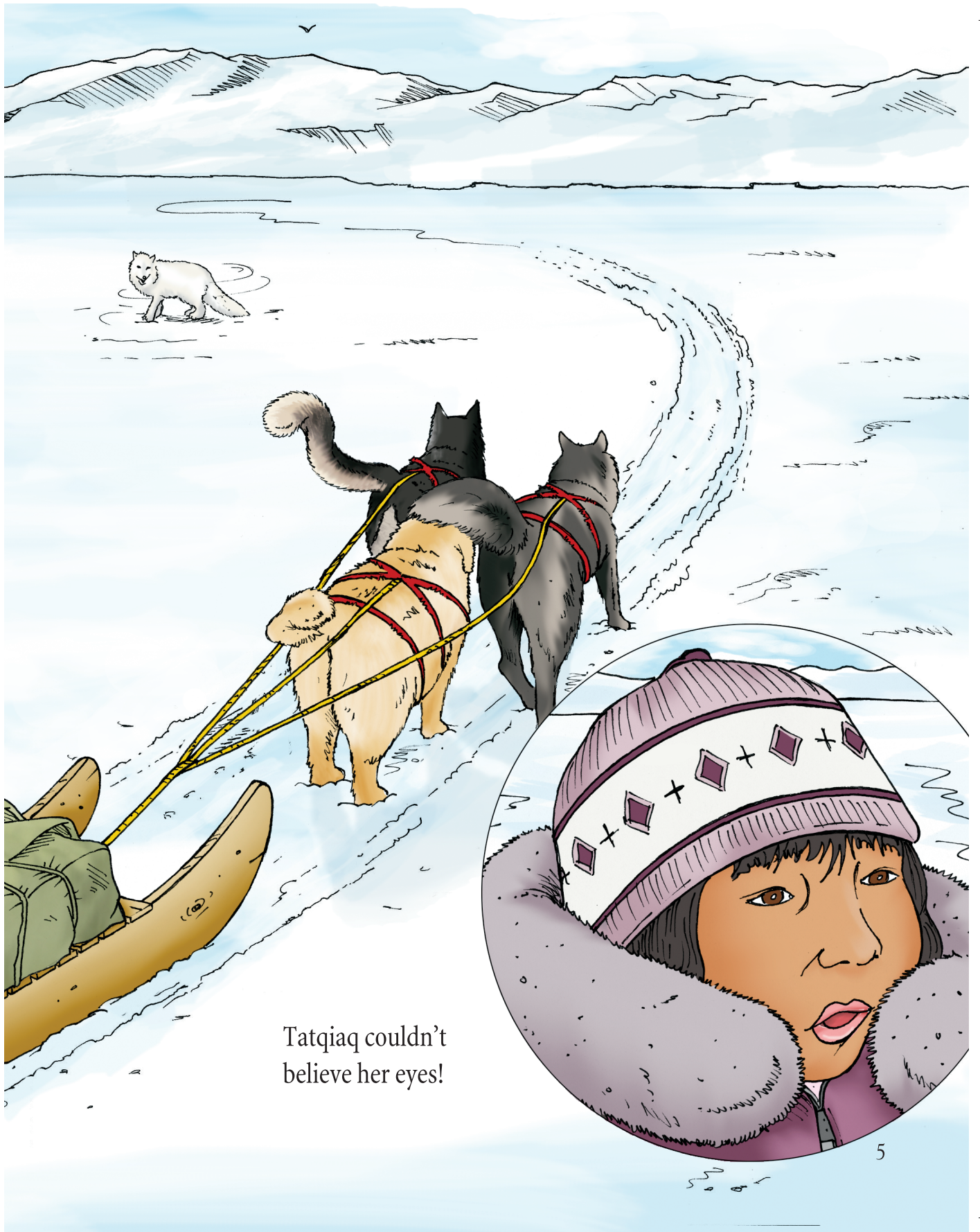
NUNAVUT



Tatqiaq's eyes were closed as she enjoyed the heat from the sun. Tatqiaq's family was travelling over the ice to their cabin at Fish Lake. It was going to be a long ride, but Tatqiaq didn't mind as it was a nice day.

Tatqiaq was daydreaming when she heard her father yell "Whoa!" and the dogs stopped.

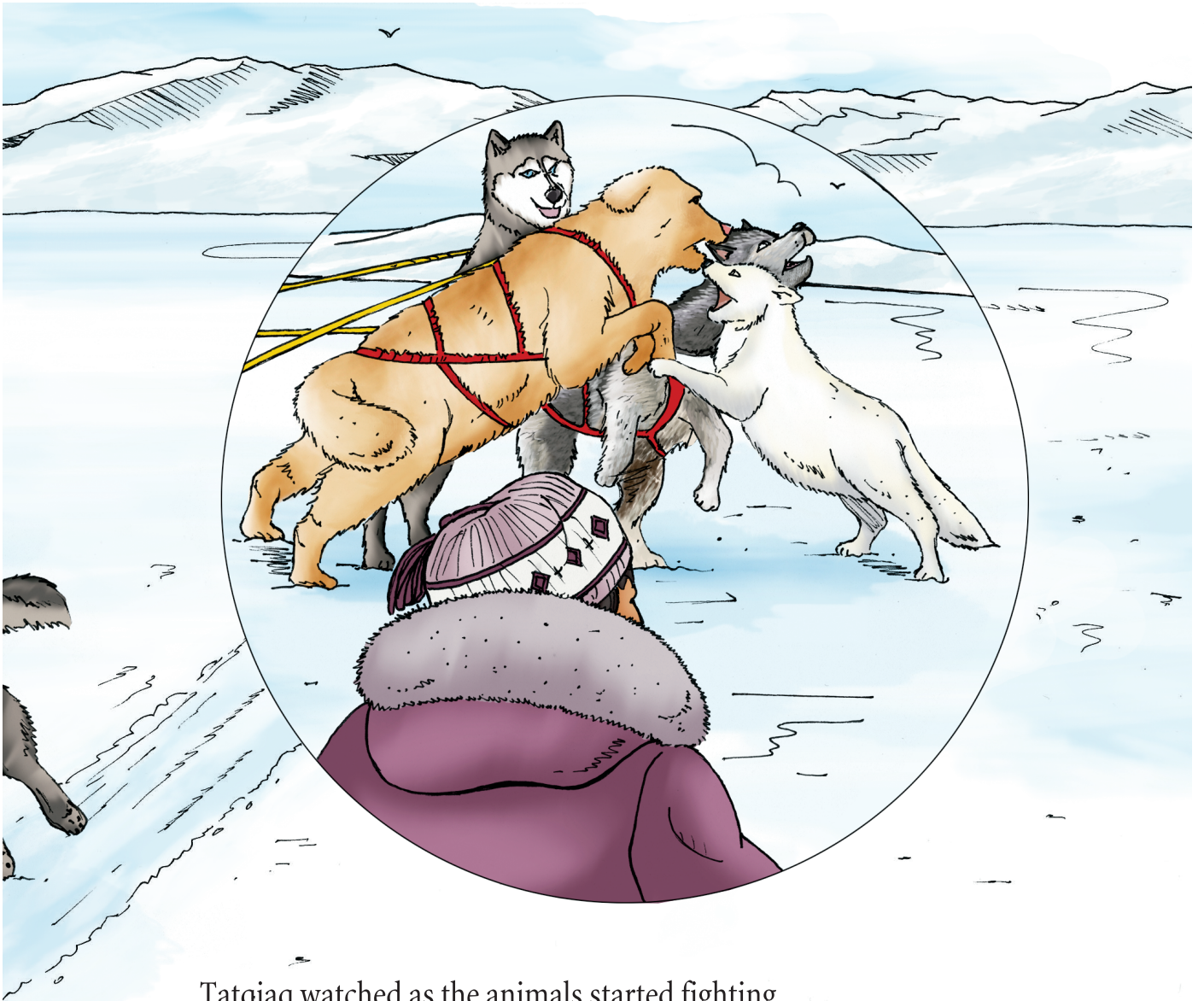




Tatqiaq couldn't believe her eyes!

An Arctic fox was running in circles on the ice and biting its own tail. The dogs ran towards the fox, sending Tatqiaq tumbling off the qamatik.





Tatqiaq watched as the animals started fighting.

“Dad, do something!” cried Tatqiaq. “The dogs are getting hurt!”

Seeing how scared his daughter was and knowing foxes can be dangerous, Tatqiaq’s father got his shotgun to fire off a warning shot. As the shot rang out, the fox ran off into the hills.



“Are the dogs hurt?” cried Tatqiaq as she and her mother caught up to her father.

“Tatqiaq, don’t get too close to the dogs. We need to get them back to Sachs Harbour and speak with the nurse,” said her mother. “Foxes can have diseases like rabies and if the dogs were bitten, they could get infected too.”

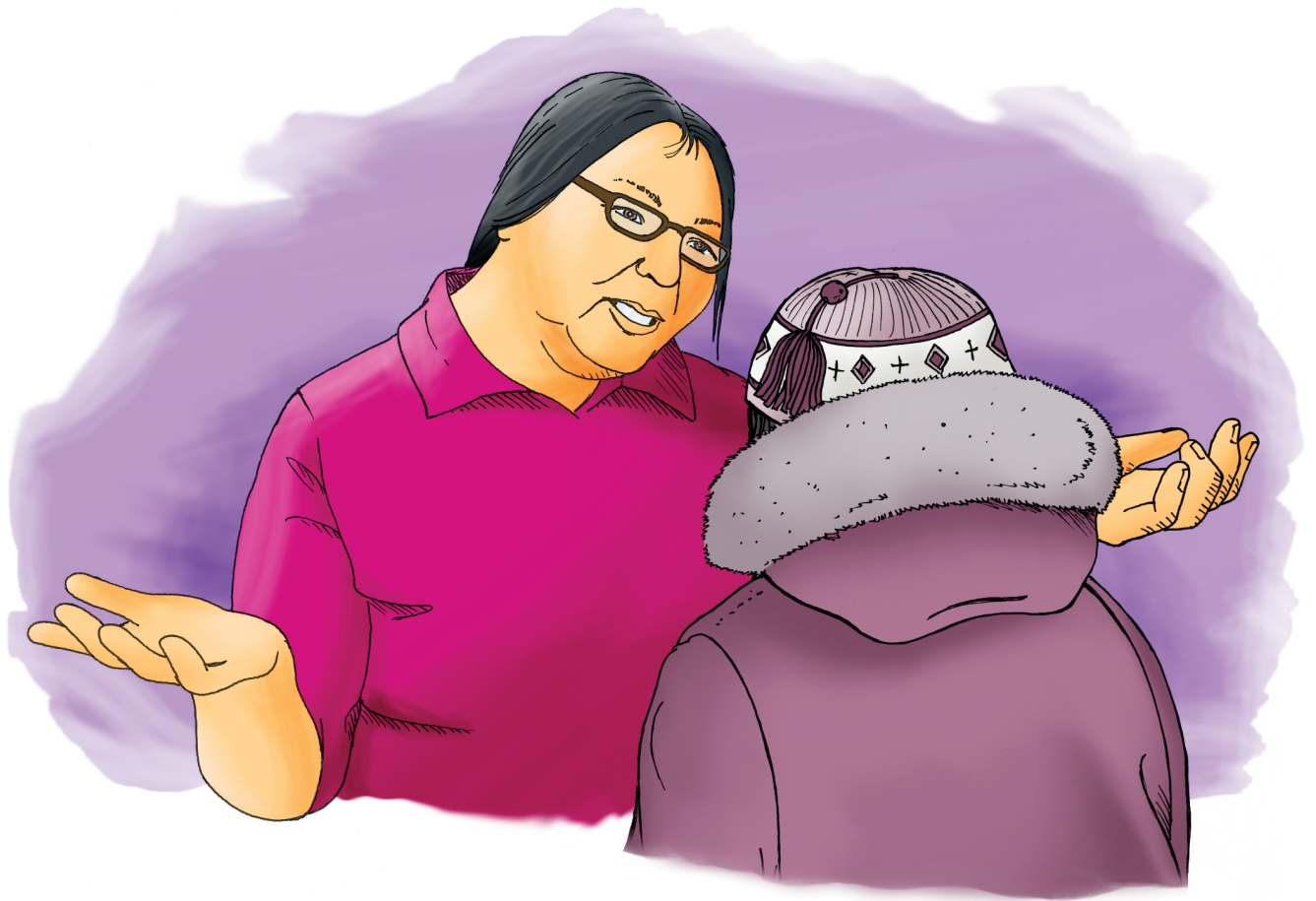
When they got home and safely tied the dogs up, Tatqiaq and her family went to visit Marie, the community nurse.



“Tatqiaq, did you touch the fox or the dogs?” asked Marie. “No, the fox ran off and my parents wouldn’t let me touch the dogs in case the fox had rabies and infected them,” answered Tatqiaq.

“You’re a good girl for listening, Tatqiaq. Your parents are right. Rabies has been found in many wildlife species in the Northwest Territories. If that fox was acting strangely, it may be infected.”

“What is rabies, Marie?” Tatqiaq asked.



“Rabies is a disease that affects wild animals like foxes and wolves, and sometimes even bats. It makes them act strangely and eventually kills them. If a dog or a person is bitten by a rabid animal, they can get rabies too.”

“Tatqiaq, before you were born,” said her father, “some dogs in Sachs Harbour got into a fight with a rabid fox and one of the dogs got rabies and died. The dog was acting strangely before it died. It wasn’t friendly anymore and was biting at everything it could, even rocks and my axe blade.”

Marie said, “Yes, rabies often shows up when there are a lot of foxes on the land. The foxes come into our communities looking for food and bring the disease with them.”

“Will my dogs die?” Tatqiaq asked.

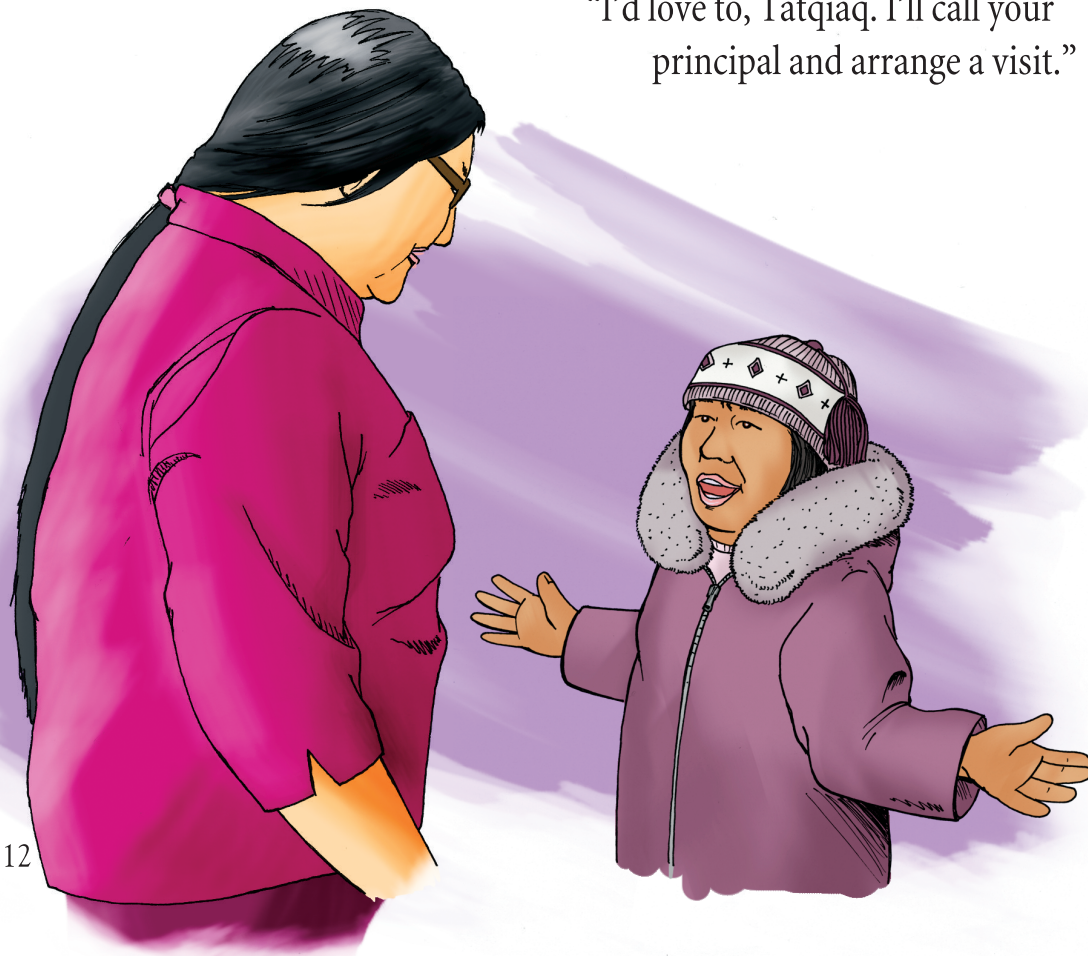
“Tatqiaq, do you remember when the veterinarian gave needles to all of your dogs?” asked her father. “That was called a vaccination. It protects the dogs from getting rabies, so they should be safe.” To be sure, the nurse gave the dogs another vaccination and told the family to watch the dogs for any signs of the disease.

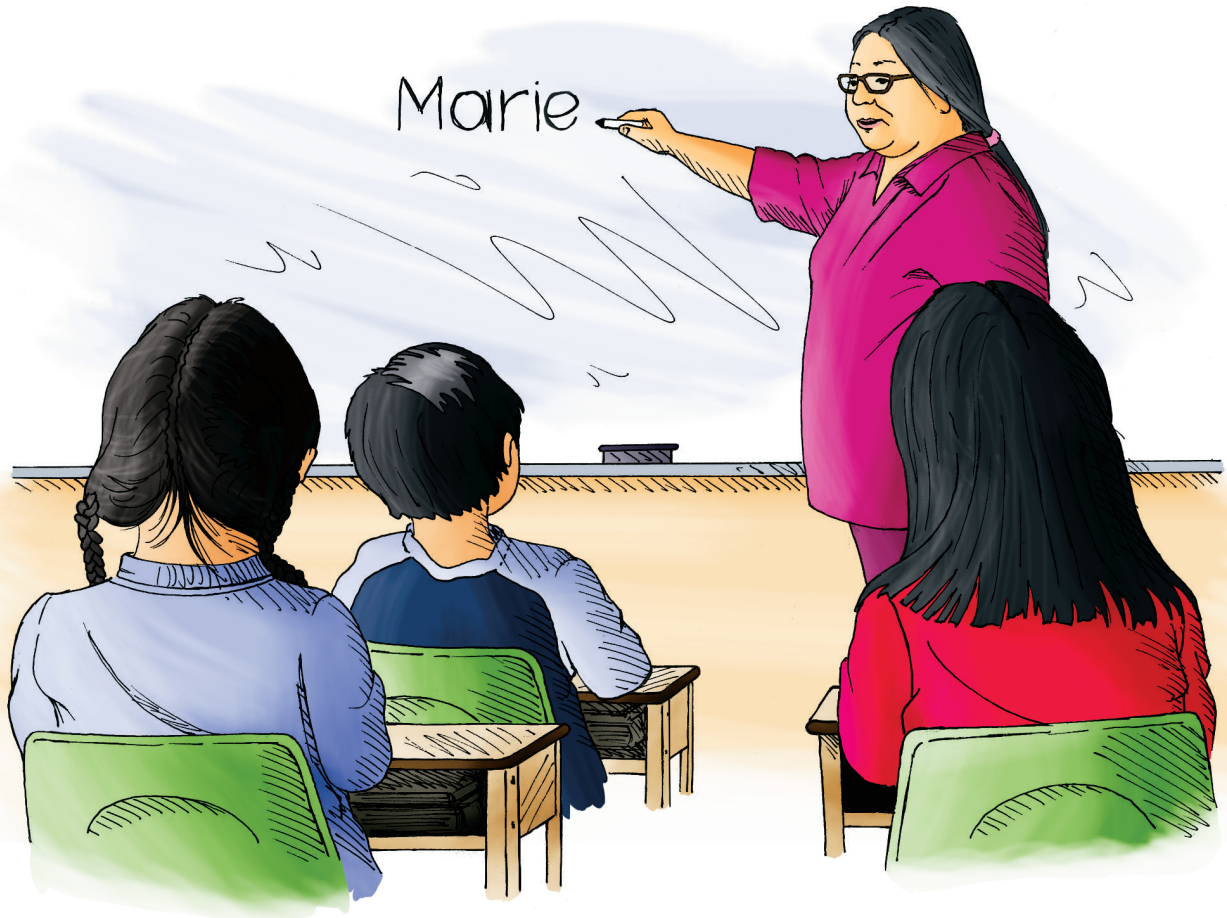


“I want people to know that there may be animals infected with rabies that are coming close to Sachs Harbour. I’m concerned for the safety of our dogs and our community so I asked the radio station to tell people to be careful and watch for any signs of their animals acting strangely,” added Marie. “It’s important for people to watch out for their animals and make sure they’re safe.”

“Marie, do you think you could come into our classroom at school and talk about rabies?” asked Tatqiaq. “I think everyone at school should know what to look for and that they need to be careful.”

“I’d love to, Tatqiaq. I’ll call your principal and arrange a visit.”





The next day, Marie visited the school. Tatqiaq's classmates had a lot of questions about rabies. Some even had stories to share about their own animals.

One boy, Nashuk, had been listening to Marie speak, but hadn't said anything yet. Tatqiaq noticed that he had a sad look on his face. Nashuk raised his hand.

"Yes, Nashuk," said his teacher.



“My dog just died yesterday. He had stopped eating and was hiding away from us. He was drooling a lot too; do you think he had rabies?”

“Nashuk,” said Marie. “Did your dog ever meet a fox?”

“There was a fox around our house a few weeks ago and my dog was barking a lot, but I don't know if they got in a fight.”

“Was your dog vaccinated against rabies?” asked Marie.

“No,” said Nashuk, sinking further down into his seat.

“Nashuk, don’t be upset. I can still have the dog tested for rabies and we’ll know for sure if that’s how he died. I’ll go see your parents after school and speak with them.”

Nashuk felt better knowing that he had talked to an adult about his dog. He wanted to rush home and talk to his parents too.

“Class, before I leave, I’d like it if your teacher could have you write or draw about what you’ve learned today. We can put your pictures up around the school and around Sachs Harbour to educate other community members,” said Marie.



Later that afternoon, Tatqiaq walked home with Nashuk. When they got to his house, Marie was already there. She had told Nashuk's family that the dog probably died from rabies and would have to be tested. She also said that she needed to talk to their neighbours to see if other dogs had been fighting with the fox or with Nashuk's dog.

"Were any of you bitten or licked by your dog before he died?" Marie asked.

"I was," said Nashuk. "The dog bit me when I tried to pet him one day."

"Nashuk you never told us this!" cried his mother.

"Don't worry, Nashuk should be fine," said Marie. "I'll wash the bite and give him needles to stop him from getting the disease. As long as we catch the infection early enough, we can stop it from spreading."



On her way home, Tatqiaq saw dogs running around the community the way she did every day. She stayed as far away from the dogs as she could, just in case they had rabies too. Tatqiaq was thankful that her dogs had been vaccinated and that they survived the fight with the fox.





It turned out that Nashuk's dog did have rabies, as did three more dogs in Sachs Harbour that year. Tatqiaq looked at the picture she had drawn after Marie's visit. Since that day on the ice she had learned a lot about rabies. She knew she had to be careful around wild animals because they could spread the disease to pets and people. She learned that getting your dog vaccinated by the veterinarian would protect it from the disease. She also learned it was important to wash where you have been bitten, to tell the nurse, an Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) officer or another adult about the bite, and to tell them if you see a person or another animal that is feeling sick or acting strangely.



Tatqiaq was happy with her new knowledge and was glad her friends at school had learned about rabies too. As she sat down at her desk, she thought “I hope I don't see another animal with rabies for a long, long time.”

This resource may be used to support numerous curricular outcomes including but not limited to: Grade 1- 3 Safety and First Aid Health Studies; Grade 1 Animal Safety Health Studies; JK-K Healthy Living; Grades 1, 2 and 6 Science Life Systems.

Relationships

- apply the decision-making process to daily activities

Injury Prevention and Safety

- demonstrate safety practices related to outdoor activities such as camping and hiking
- identify some emergency situations which may occur in the community
- discuss basic hunter safety and wilderness survival

Consumer Health

- identify some professional and volunteer health groups and agencies in your community

Information For Adults

Rabies is a fatal, viral disease of mammals. The most common animals responsible for the spread of this disease in the NWT are Arctic foxes, red foxes, wolves, dogs and bats. Other mammals, such as moose, caribou, bears, lynx, and domestic cats, can also get the disease but are less commonly seen.

Rabies is spread by contact with an infected animal and in the case of humans, will result in the death of the person if they do not promptly receive appropriate medical care. If a potentially rabid animal bites a person, they should firstly wash the wound with disinfectant then go and see their local nurse.

When the Arctic fox population is high, the disease can be more easily spread. In addition, when the fox population is high, their food source (e.g. snowshoe hare) decreases. This pushes foxes more towards communities in search of food, increasing the chances of encounters with people and dogs.

When an animal becomes infected with the rabies virus, it can take anywhere from two weeks to six months for it to show signs of the disease. Once signs start, the animal will be dead within ten days. As the rabies virus infects the animal's brain (encephalitis), the predominant signs are of a significant change in behaviour, either becoming very passive or very aggressive. In addition, paralysis of various parts of the body may be evident (a leg, tongue hanging out). Excessive drooling may also be seen. Vaccinating domestic animals against rabies provides protection to these animals and provides a disease barrier between wild animals and people.

