

Alphabet — Aapit, Aapitniq

NUTAAN ALUTIIT AAPIT LIITAPET. – NOW WE ARE LEARNING THE ALUTIIQ ALPHABET.

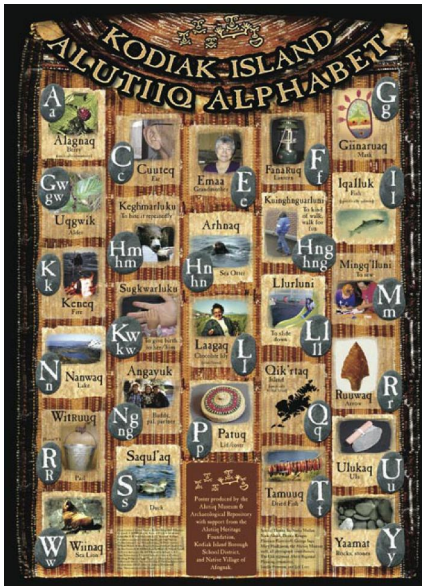


Photo: Kodiak Alutiiq Alphabet poster, produced by the Alutiiq Museum.

An alphabet is a system of characters used to represent the sounds in a language. By seeing a character, a reader can reproduce a sound without hearing it. In essence, alphabets store sounds. There are different kinds of alphabets. English speakers use the Latin alphabet, a phonemic alphabet that represents sounds with twenty-six letters written with characters from A to Z. This same alphabet has been used to represent the sounds of many other languages, including some Native American languages with no traditional written language. Apache, Cheyenne, Kwakwaka'wakw, Navajo-Diné, Seminole, Lakota, Dakota, ?ingít, Yup'ik, and Alutiiq all use the Latin alphabet as a base.

Linguists modeled the modern Alutiiq alphabet after the Yup'ik alphabet, which was developed by Moravian missionaries from a Greenlandic system. Like English, the Alutiiq alphabet uses twenty-six letters. Some of the Alutiiq letters sound the same as English ones, but others have unique sounds. The Alutiiq alphabet runs from A to Y and includes just four vowels: *a*, *i*, *u*, and *e*. There is no *o* in Alutiiq, and *y* is always a consonant. In addition to some familiar consonants, the Alutiiq alphabet includes some consonants formed by two characters: *kw*, *ng*, *gw*, or *ll*. The *ll* sound is often the most difficult for English speakers to make. To pronounce this letter, hold your tongue against the front roof of your mouth. Then force air out so that it escapes out from the sides of your tongue through your teeth.