

Literature Circle Guide to  
ALONE IN THE ICE WORLD by MaryAnn Easley

**Book Summary**

Allison Atwood is en route from her dad's house in California to Alaska -- where her mom has chosen to make her new life -- when her small plane goes down, stranding her in the icy wild. A kind Eskimo trapper named Ikayauq rescues her and brings her to his village. Allison is desperate to leave these unfamiliar surroundings and find her mom. She convinces a local boy, Matu, to take her in the right direction. When he stops halfway to their destination at another small village, Allison becomes a part of the community despite herself and learns about the complicated fabric that makes up this culture. She gives the gift of sign language to a local girl who cannot speak. By the time her mother finds her, Allison has changed from the girl she once was.

**Author Information**

MaryAnn Easley is the award-winning author of several young adult novels. Her book, *Alone in the Ice World*, is a Junior Library Guild Selection. She is a certified master teacher and winner of the prestigious Teacher of the Year award. She teaches creative writing to middle school and university students and has taught for over 25 years.

**Suggested Answers to Literature Circle Questions**

1. What does Allison share with Paniyapluk that brings them closer together?

**(P. 61, 70-72)**

**Allison shows Paniyapluk her jewelry and makeup and gives the little girl a piece of soap in the shape of a rose. Allison teaches her the special dance she made up to go along with her favorite song and Paniyapluk learns some sign language as a result of Allison teaching Oolik.**

2. Allison says Ikayauq's sled looks "old-fashioned." What surprises her about it?

**(P. 25)**

**The sled is made out of wood and bone or antler and wrapped with leather strings. Allison is surprised by how sturdy the sled is and that it can hold a lot of weight. It goes very fast when the dogs pull it. The sled perfectly suits Ikayauq's needs.**

3. When fire breaks out in the store, Allison notes there are no emergency vehicles to call. There isn't even running water. She helps bring water from the river. What surprises her about how everyone reacted to the blaze?

**(P. 102)**

**"No one pushed or shoved or shouted orders. Everyone knew what had to be done." Allison becomes part of the human chain passing water up from the river to the burning store. Although the store could not be saved, the community focused on a goal and worked together to face the problem rather than becoming upset or turning somewhere else for help.**

4. What different ideas do Allison and Johnny Skye have about what Allison should bring with her on the plane?

**(P. 8-10)**

**Allison brought fashionable boots, accessories like a feather boa, and her collection of horse statues with her to Alaska. She says these items are “a part of home” and contain “bits and pieces” of her. Johnny Skye is more practical minded. He gives her a warmer coat and boots, but he forces her to leave most of her possessions behind. He needs the room on his plane to fly out supplies like rice and flour.**

5. Allison writes three letters to her parents while she is away: one to her dad and two to her mom. Compare the way she sounds in each letter. What does the change show about how Allison herself is changing?

**(P. 52, 96)**

**The first letter, to her mom, shows anger for her mother getting her into a mess. The second, to her dad, hides her fear behind sarcastic good cheer. The third, to her mom, shows vulnerability and insight. She shows she’s both scared and lonely, but she also shows she has developed her own self-awareness.**

6. Explain the story behind why Paniyapluk thinks Allison is an ice worm.

**(P. 60)**

**Paniyapluk explains to Allison that she has heard white people come from the ice worm, which is a worm in a glacier. The worm is white, like Allison’s skin. The story explains something unknown, like why Allison is paler than the others, in a way that diminishes the unfamiliar and thus makes it less scary.**

7. Draw a picture of Sikik’s village as you see it. Now draw or list any additions you would suggest to provide more opportunity within the village for people like Oolik or Aqsuk. What good things would come from what you have added? Based on what you have read, could any new issues arise from the introductions you have made?

**Encourage students to complete this task in two distinct steps. Some suggestions for additions might include a local school so young people like Oolik would have the opportunity to learn and advance or a hospital or workplace in order to provide treatment and/or purpose for someone like Aqsuk. Discuss the complicated impact education and modern conveniences like soda and snowmobiles have had on the community and what pluses – and minuses – additions might bring.**

8. Allison is horrified that Sikik gives away her newborn baby to Oolik’s mother, but the community sees it as a time to celebrate. Discuss and make a list of acceptable practices in your culture that might seem strange -- even alarming -- to someone unfamiliar with your way of life.

**(PP. 91-93)**

**Cultural norms are not universal. Have students brainstorm things people do everyday that might seem outlandish from an outside perspective. Some examples might be: wearing uncomfortable clothes or footwear because it’s in style, using deodorant and antiperspirant to mask or eliminate odor or perspiration, and shaving or using hot wax to take hair off faces and bodies.**

9. What evidence can you find that Allison's ideas about Alaska and the Eskimo people change over time?

**(P. 121)**

**Allison starts out feeling startled by how little the Eskimo people have in the way of material possessions. As she spends time in their world, she comes to see that – while flawed, as any community is – the people largely have what they need in life. By the end of her journey, her views have changed so much that she tells her mother that Ikayauq doesn't need anything more.**

10. Matu thinks California is a scary place. Evaluate the accuracy of his information and opinion. How is his information similar to or different from how Allison's opinion of Alaska is first developed?

**(P. 38)**

**Matu saw a kung fu movie at school and that shaped his entire opinion of California. He has a limited view. This is similar to Allison's initial reactions to Alaska. She uses her limited frame of reference to cast judgment on the people and things she sees around her. Only after she has observed and been a part of the Alaskan community does she have the tools to make a more accurate assessment of what she sees around her. It is possible that Matu's impression of California might also shift under similar circumstances.**

11. When Matu and Allison are stuck in the snowstorm for several days, Allison says she is "bored to tears." Matu seems completely satisfied with having to wait for the weather to improve. What could Allison have done to be less bored during that time? Ask your students, what would they do in her circumstances?

**(P. 53)**

**At this point in the story, Allison is still rooted in self-centered, rushed attitudes of the "lower 48." Matu lives in the present and deals with what comes, but Allison has expectations of what should be happening and she is very uncomfortable when nature steps in the way.**

12. After Oolik learns to sign, the villagers come to accept her more. Why do you think the villagers originally thought Oolik was no good? Suggest other ways people could have learned to get along with Oolik better.

**(P. 94)**

**Oolik is different, so she is shunned within the community. She cannot speak, so she is considered stupid. She looks different, so she is considered ugly. Perhaps Oolik could have been invited to draw pictures or play a game, like catch. Oolik might have shared a meal or been invited to sit with the women while they sewed.**

13. Allison feels sorry for Ikayauq because he is poor. Matu laughs and says, “Ikayauq rich.” Choose which viewpoint you agree with and explain why.

(P. 41)

**Ikayauq does not live with much material wealth and yet, he has all he needs: shelter, food, family and friends, and a purpose. Allison sees only the meager surroundings, but to Matu, who has lived all his life in this environment, nothing is lacking. Invite students to draw comparisons with their own lives.**

14. Igri/John says “Education destroyed my roots and my language. Now I don’t belong anywhere. Not in this culture. Not in any other.” Would it be better for John if he had not gone to school? Explain the pros and cons of modern-day education within this culture.

(P. 86)

**This is a complex issue and students should be welcome to express a divided view. One way education has helped is Igri/John knows more English, so he is better able to communicate with Allison. Also, moving away from the old ways saved Oolik’s life as she would have been set to die on an ice floe, if not for more modern thinking. At the same time, modernization has led to increased alcoholism, perhaps partly in response to the confusion and split priorities of living in a traditional culture in modern times.**

15. Allison tells her mother she wants to stay with her in Alaska, *especially* after all Allison’s been through. Explain why she feels this way. Why is she not more determined than ever to go back to California?

(P. 126)

**Allison changes and develops as a person throughout the book. At first, she has only her own self-interest in mind. She has a limited perspective on the world. Through her difficult experience, she learns about herself and the world around her. She learns she is able to cope on her own. She’s stronger than she thought. She also learns that the world is a big place, but one common bond from culture to culture is love.**

*Note: These literature circle questions are keyed to Bloom’s Taxonomy: Knowledge: 1-3; Comprehension: 4-6; Application: 7-8; Analysis: 9-10; Synthesis: 11-12; Evaluation: 13-15.*