

# Why Inuit Shouldn't Ask Why

submitted by Monica Shouldice

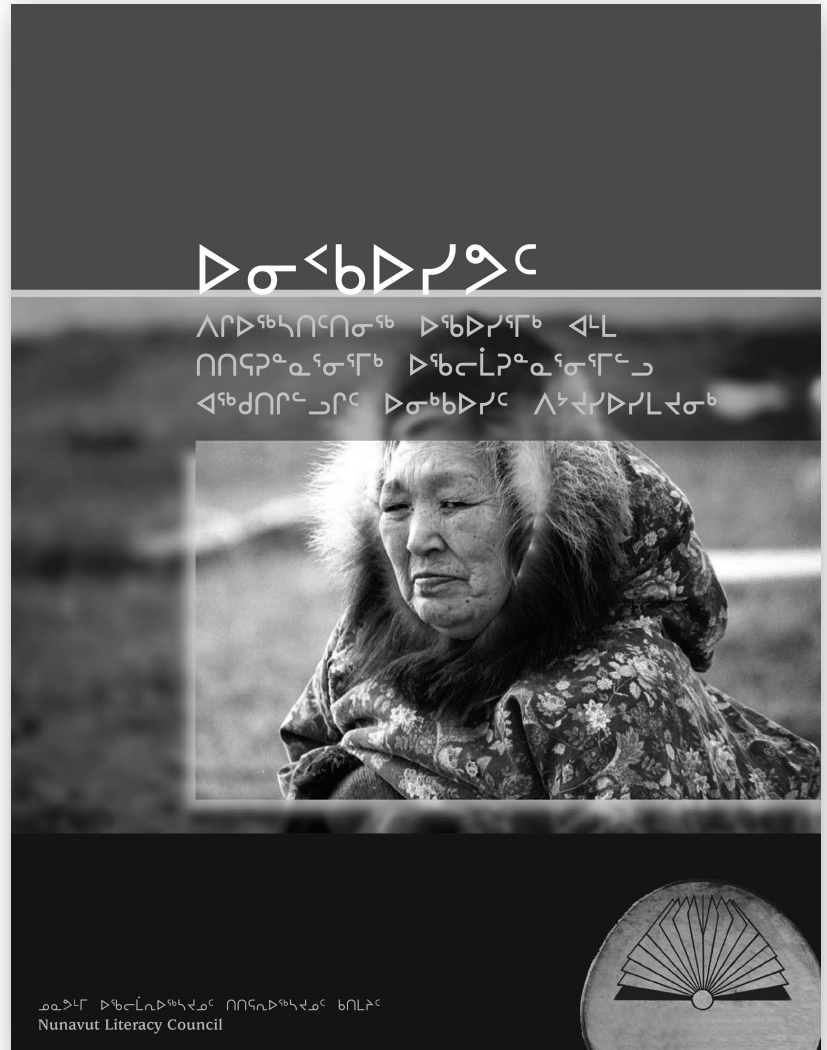
■ In the world there are many different cultures and many ways of doing things. A unique example is that Inuit children were told never to ask "Why". Instead they were told to observe, listen and learn. Inuit laws are similar all over the Inuit lands. The way we raise our children, how we treat each other as husband and wife, how we treat our relatives are very similar up to today.

When something is made to its perfection it is hard to make any improvements. It does not matter if it is a sled or an article of clothing or how we prepare food. When we cannot make it any better, it will be put into an Inuit unwritten law that it should always be made that way; although it may not be a crime to change it because we are free to experiment with things.

An example is when an Inuk woman makes a pair of niururiak (a pair of sealskin boots with hair) there has to be a strip of hairless sealskin, called singirniq, sewn between the leg and the foot. Questions about why it has to be sewn that way have never been asked. Not too long ago a lady from Sanikiluaq was going to make a pair of kamiks and started wondering why she had to put that strip. Because of her curiosity she put on the strip piece without taking the hair off. When she started wearing the kamiks outside in the snow, she realized that when the snow melted on the strip it loosened the stitches along the seams. She then realized that the Inuit unwritten law should not be broken. So she shaved the hair off the strip.

Inuit have struggled in their lives for so many generations. They had to think seriously about what would be the best for their fellow Inuit, things that would not need any improvements. Perhaps there were people who were curious and would try and change the rules like the lady from Sanikiluaq. But perhaps they would always go back to the original rules.

It's just like when scientists do something. They stop when they know that it cannot get better. For instance medicine. They can't just make it and sell it



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to us to make money. The medicine has to be approved before they can start selling it to the people. Same with the Inuit. Years ago Inuit made something until they would approve it. After that they wouldn't ask any questions because it could not get better. ■

**MONICA SHOULDICE**, Inuktitut Resource Coordinator at the Nunavut Literacy Council, submitted this as a wildcard for the national framework project. It is included in the book, *Focused on Practice*. To read the other Nunavut wildcard online go to [www.literacyjournal.ca](http://www.literacyjournal.ca), click on Crazy Wisdom, choose Wild Cards, then Nunavut.