

The OOSIK



Delicately put, an oosik is the baculum, or penile bone of the male walrus.

The Eskimo people use all parts of the walrus, eating the meat, tanning the hide, and making various tools and art objects out of the bones, including the oosik. The oosik was also used as a club long ago. It is usually polished and may either be from a recently harvested walrus or be mineralized (partially fossilized) from being buried in the ground for hundreds of years. The mineralized oosiks are dark brown; the recent ones are ivory colored. And yes, it comes right from the walrus pretty much the way you saw it. My Yup'ik students in the Yup'ik Teacher Training Project, Ikayuriliit Unatet, University of Alaska, gave me the one I use in the cognitive learning strategies activities.

Pacific walrus populations are abundant, unlike the Atlantic subspecies, and lively rookeries, or calving grounds are located on rocky beaches around the Bering and Chukchi Seas. Walrus bone is particularly dense to support the massive frame of adult walrus. Mature females weigh in at 2,000 lbs. And males weigh easily 3,000 lbs. or more. A walrus is so big that his vascular system needs a little extra help with erectile function.

The use of animal bones in traditional Alaskan art is an expression of respect for the spirit of the creatures and wise use of all resources available to people living in a remote, isolated and harsh environment.

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And here is the famous “Ode to the Oosik” that I told you about:

*Strange things have been done in the Midnight Sun and the story books are full –
But the strangest tale concerns the male, magnificent walrus bull!*

*I know it’s rude, quite common and crude, perhaps it is grossly unkind;
But with first glance at least, this bewhiskered beast, is as ugly in front as behind.*

*Look once again, take a second look – then you’ll see he’s not ugly or vile –
There’s the hint of a grin, in the blubbery chin and the eyes have a sly secret
smile.*

*How can this be, this clandestine glee that exudes from the walrus like music.
He knows, there inside, beneath blubber and hide lies a splendid contrivance – the
Oosik!*

*“Oosik” you say – and quite well you may, I’ll explain if you keep it between us;
In the simplest truth, though rather uncouth, “Oosik” is, in fact, his penis!*

*Now the size alone of this walrus bone would indeed arouse envious thinking –
It is also a fact, documented and backed, there is never a softening or shrinking!*

*This, then, is why the smile is so sly, the walrus is rightfully proud.
Though the climate is frigid, the walrus is rigid, pray, why is not man so endowed?*

*Added to this, is a smile you might miss – though the bull is entitled to bow –
The one to out-smile our bull by a mile is the satisfied walrus cow!*

