

Find on an atlas or globe the Yamal Peninsula. Mark this peninsula on the map on the first page. Now watch the film *Reaching the Nenets people in the North of Russia with the Gospel* (Friedensstimme. Available in English from Mr and Mrs P Hughes, 13 Aberconway Road, Morden, Surrey SM4 5LN.[Free of charge, donation to Friedensstimme welcome])

Notes to go with the film:

Originally from further North in Siberia the Nenets now live between the Kanin and Taymyr peninsulas, around the Ob and Yenisey rivers. Some of them are settled into small farming communities but others such as those seen on the film continue hunting and reindeer herding, travelling great distances over the Yamal peninsular. Nenets have their own language. They bred the Samoyed dog to help herd their reindeer (you can see the dogs in the film). Fish is important in their diet.

The Nenets have a shamanistic and animistic religion (notice the place for sacrifice in the film) and a tribal way of life.

Under Stalin and successive Communist dictators in the twentieth century the Nenets people were forced to become “Russianised”. Russian colonists were set to the area and the children were forced to stay away from their parents and their traditional way of life at school. This inhumane system of education seems still to be in operation and is mentioned in the film. Russian oppression and exploitation of the Nenets still continues even though the Soviet system has crumbled. The strains on the Nenets language and way of life continue. However the Nenets have resisted Russianisation and many younger Nenets are attached to their way of life and language strongly. A new threat to their culture today comes from the discovery of oil and gas on the Yamal Peninsula. (Notice the Nenets living in oil pipes in the film.) It seems likely that Russians, not Nenets will reap the economic benefits from this and that the Nenets traditional way of life will be further threatened.

Discussion topic:

Look at the poem by Kipling that heads this section. Kipling wrote many grand, heroic, and humorous poems and stories but he was also an evolutionist, who (consciously or unconsciously) propagated his ideas in his work. We need to remember this to enjoy his poems. In the poem quoted here we can see that he sees the effect of the white man on the people of the Arctic as all bad. All the things he says are true. However he does not mention the great good done by missionaries. Did Kipling think that the “people of the ice” were better off with their own gods? What is wrong with this idea?¹

The Poem “Kayak” may be useful here. It is on CD6 of the *Mothers’ Companion*.

1 [Older children will be able to discuss Kipling’s ideas here. They are in fact a version of Rousseau’s “Noble Savage”: it is civilization (and of course religion in general and Biblical Christianity in particular) that ruins mankind and that when untouched by civilisation man is happy and free. Children will quickly understand that Kipling’s ideas here are sentimental: it is all very well to leave a man to gain his living with a “narwhal horn” *if* he wishes. But surely it is not humane to withhold from him the means of having an easier life (like your own) if it is within your power. The ruin of Eskimo (and Australian Aboriginal) people is usually caused by their being given the means to drink alcohol and over indulge in sugar.]