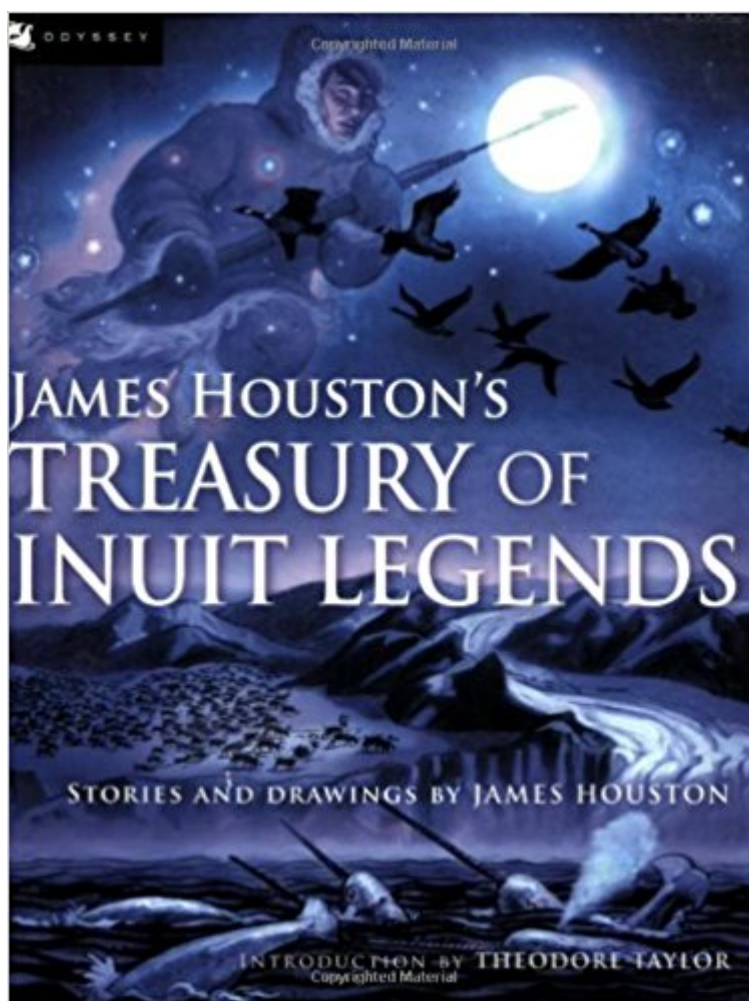


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# James Houston's Treasury Of Inuit Legends (Odyssey Classics (Odyssey Classics))



## Synopsis

James Houston helped introduce Inuit culture to the world with his remarkable art and stories. Here are four of his exciting Inuit folk tales--"The White Archer", "Akavak," "Tikta'liktak" and "Wolf Run"--collected in one beautiful volume. "The White Archer" and "Tikta'liktak" were both named an Eskimo Legend CLA Book of the Year for Children in the 1960s. James Houston made his first journey to the Canadian Arctic in 1948 in search of a new land to paint. He lived with Inuit and Indian people in the Arctic for 12 years and grew to understand them and their way of life.

"Houston's knowledge of the Inuit people and their culture is astounding. And his description of the Arctic is both powerful and sometimes frightening--a cold, lonely world that can do strange things to men's minds." --Toronto Star Ages 8 and up

## Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 10 years

Grade Level: 2 - 5

## Customer Reviews

JAMES A. HOUSTON (1921-2005) is the award-winning author and illustrator of many books that portray the striking landscape of the Arctic and its strong independent people. He also produced and directed documentary films and was a master designer for New York City's Steuben Glass Company.

À À TIKTALIKTAKÀ À Tikta'liktak drove his long, sharp chisel into a crack and pulled himself up to

the top of the jagged ice. From this height, he looked east and west along the rough barrier ice forced against the coastline as far as he could see. He looked back along his trail of footprints across the snow-covered shore to his father's igloo, now almost hidden by the three hills that protected it from the howling winds that rushed over their island. Tiktaliktak's people were sea hunters, singers, carvers, builders of sleek kayaks, masters of swift dog teams, whale hunters, listeners at the breathing places in the ice. Because his father had always been a clever hunter, Tiktaliktak had grown up knowing only good times in the house of his family. There had always been great sea beasts for feasting, fat red trout, snow geese, and sometimes meat from the swift herds of caribou that roved beyond the mountains on the inland plain. There had also been singing and laughter in the house of his father, and hunters from distant camps had come to visit, bringing with them their whole families. But at the end of this winter, the animals had fled from the plain. The birds had not yet returned from the south, and the fish remained locked beneath the frozen lakes. The wind had blown in the wrong direction during the moons of February and March, holding masses of loose ice against the shores so that no man could travel or hunt on the sea. It was a time for starving. Tiktaliktak thought of his family lying in the dark snowhouse without food for themselves or seal oil for their lamps. Hunger stirred within him. He knew he must find a way to help them. The young Inuk climbed carefully down from his high place on the ice through the great pieces that surrounded him like sharp white teeth. The sea ice that lay before him had been broken many times. It had opened and closed and frozen again until he did not know where to place his feet for fear of falling through. In some places, the ice was much thicker than the height of a man; in other spots, it was thinner than his little finger. A light layer of new snow covered everything, hiding the danger from his eyes. Before each step, Tiktaliktak felt the ice in front of him with the chisel on the end of his harpoon. Many times the sharp point broke through the thin surface and water flooded over the snow at his feet. He was forced to try one way and then another before finding ice strong enough to hold his weight. He moved forward cautiously, so that it took a long time to travel even a short distance. Tiktaliktak was lean and strong for his age, with a handsome tanned face, wide cheekbones, and a fine hawklike nose. Like all the people of his race, he possessed quick dark eyes with the lids drawn narrow for protection against long winters on the treeless plain, where they hunted in the wind and sun and snow. He wore narrow-slitted sun goggles. His square white teeth flashed when he smiled, and his jaw muscles, strong from eating meat, showed clearly. His hair hung straight and black almost to his shoulders. It glistened in the cold morning sunlight like the bright new wings of an Arctic butterfly, and the butterfly was Tiktaliktak's namesake. Tiktaliktak wished most of all to be a good hunter. He could

already throw a harpoon with great skill and drive an arrow straight to its mark. He thrilled at the songs and chanting and the great whirling and drumming of the hunters as they performed the autumn and midwinter dances before the hunt. But the magic of the dancers, and all their hunts, had failed them this year. As he moved slowly forward testing the ice, Tiktaliktak saw before him the trail made by a huge white bear. Each of its paws had left a mark in the snow as large as if a man had sat down. Looking closely, Tiktaliktak could see that the tracks were fresh and new, for the print of each pad was still sharp and clear. The bear must have been hungry, too, for its track led away from the land, which meant it had been forced to make the long crossing in search of new hunting grounds. Tiktaliktak hoped that the bear had not seen him, for he did not wish to fight on this thin ice. Farther along, he could see where the bear's immense weight had broken through the ice, but this meant nothing to the huge beast with its thick waterproof fur. It had crawled out of the freezing water and continued on its way. Tiktaliktak traveled until late afternoon. Ahead of him lay the dark stretch of sea water beyond the ice. Half hidden in the winter fog above the water flew thousands of seabirds in thick black flocks. They gave the young hunter new strength, for he knew that there must also be seals in the dark water, and the birds and seals would provide food and oil for the lamps of his people. Small icebergs caught and frozen fast towered above his head, offering him shelter in their weird shadowy blue caves. In the haze beyond them, water and ice and sky seemed to blend into one. The pale orange sun was surrounded by a great circle of light. In this circle appeared four false suns and beyond them four more. These reflections, called sun dogs, were seldom seen, and Tiktaliktak knew they were a warning of storms to come. His people believed them to be the team of dogs pulling the sun on its endless journey through the sky. When Tiktaliktak reached the edge of the sea ice, he saw many flocks of birds upon the water. Excitedly, he began to plan the hunt. He would hide downwind of the birds, behind a large piece of upturned ice near the water's edge. The rafts of birds would drift near enough for his arrows to reach them, and when hit, the birds would float in to him. Nearer and nearer drifted the birds, in countless screaming numbers. Tiktaliktak's arrows flew straight, and the birds they hit floated in as he had hoped, all save one small seabird that floated past the point where he was hiding and was blown by the wind to the far edge of the ice. When his last arrow was gone, Tiktaliktak stood up. A few birds took off in panic, and then the others followed in great flights. They flew down the coast beyond his sight. Tiktaliktak picked the soft warm feathered birds out of the water, and after recovering his arrows, he piled them on the ice and started out after the small bird that had drifted beyond him. With much difficulty, he finally reached it with his harpoon and pulled it to the edge of the ice. When he turned to retrace his steps to the pile of birds, a huge crack had

opened in the ice, barring his path. It was too wide to jump. Tiktaliktak realized with horror that he could not return. He was drifting out to sea on a large pan of ice, carried by the rising wind and tide. It was growing colder and soon would be dark. Tiktaliktak squatted on the ice and ate the small seabird, thinking of the precious pile of food only a short distance away. He would never see it again, nor perhaps his home. He felt somewhat better after eating the bird and with his short knife tried to pry loose some ice to build a small snowhouse. But all he could manage was to stand some flat pieces upright, leaning them together like a tent. The cracks between the ice he filled with snow to complete a rough protection against the night wind. Curled up in this tiny shelter, he dared not sleep for fear of freezing. All through the night, the small ice island moved with the tide. It sighed and groaned, and he wondered if it would break apart and cast him into the freezing sea. When dawn came, he walked around his tiny frozen island, waving his arms to warm himself. He wondered about his family and what they must be thinking. The open water around his moving ice floe sent moisture into the freezing air. It rose as a dark fog against the pale light of morning and fell back into the leaden sea, covering his ice floe with countless frost crystals that turned it into a silent, shimmering magic place.

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This book is a set of stories set in the Arctic, long before snow mobiles, rifles, or any modern technology that has changed the lives of people living in a stone age culture. Simply and beautifully written, this book would be suitable for an older child or teenager, but also fascinating for adults interested in Eskimo life. Each of the stories describes a character overcoming serious challenges, often the threat of starvation. I found each one engaging and evocative, so much so that sometimes I stopped reading for a while, because I couldn't stand the feeling of intense cold that the author keeps the reader feeling! As a dog trainer, I was especially interested in the descriptions of sled dogs and how they were handled - hardly the way we treat our domestic dogs today. But I imagine very real! I also read Houston's *The White Dawn*, a more serious, adult-level book, and loved it. I highly recommend this Treasury to anyone interested in native life in the Arctic. I highly recommend

this book to anyone interested in life in the Arctic.

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James Houston lived with the Inuit for 14 years. These legends are among those he collected. I enjoyed reading them very much. I remember reading many collections of legends as a child that, truth be told, were pretty dull. However, these have a lot of action and real narrative arcs that would keep any reader engaged. I especially liked the tale "The White Archer," which reminded me of the *The Searchers*, if that movie weren't racist and misogynist and instead carried a message of cultural toleration and understanding. (I suspect that someone will write a comment saying *The Searchers* isn't that bad, but I don't care. I can't stand that movie.) Anyway, the point is that this book is good and I think kids and adults both would find it an excellent read.

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