

The Kids from Nowhere: The Story Behind the Arctic Educational Miracle



George Guthridge is perhaps the only person ever to have coached junior high and high school students to national championships in academics *and* to have won a world award as a novelist. He certainly is the only person ever to have done so while living on a blizzard-swept island in the Bering Sea.

Often called “Alaska’s Jaime [*Stand and Deliver*] Escalante,” he has five times been nationally honored for his work with Alaska Native youth. His newest book, *The Kids from Nowhere: The Story Behind the Arctic Educational Miracle*, chronicles the quest of his students from the tiny village of Gambell on remote St. Lawrence Island – students previous teachers had labeled as “uneducable” – to prove that Eskimos can compete academically.

Despite speaking English as a second language and despite having little world knowledge, they entered what at the time was considered the most difficult academic competition in the country. They had to compete against students from schools and programs for the gifted on subjects, such as nuclear waste disposal and genetic engineering, that the Eskimo students had never heard of before. They studied while hauling water, while hunting whales, and overcame tragedy, prejudice, and other difficulties that stagger the imagination. They became the only teams of Native Americans ever to win a national championship in academics. And they did it – *twice*.

Since then, using his methods, George’s rural Alaska students have graduated from West Point, MIT, Harvard, Stanford, Syracuse, Dartmouth, Yale Law School, Berkeley Law School, and the University of Washington Medical School, to name just a few places, and from every college and trade school in Alaska. His students also have won state, national, and international competitions in fiction writing and in essay writing.

Besides being an educator, George is an accomplished author. A former technical writer and science magazine editor-in-chief, he has published five novels and over 70 short stories, and has three times been a finalist for science fiction and fantasy’s Nebula and Hugo Awards. In 1998 he and coauthor Janet Berliner won the Bram Stoker Award, the “Oscar” of horror writing, for *Children of the Dusk*, a historical novel based on Hitler’s (real) attempt to send Europe’s Jews to Madagascar. Critics hailed it as a “masterpiece” and compared it to *Lord of the Flies* and to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. The novel is now part of *The Madagascar Manifesto* trilogy.

He has taught full-time for 34 years, including eight in Alaska villages. He currently is Professor of English at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Bristol Bay, in Dillingham, Alaska, and travels widely, giving inservice instruction to educators and business people. He spent last year as a Fulbright Scholar, training educators in the Caribbean. He has just finished *GWS: Critical Writing Skills*, an 80-hour DVD and workbook series about his revolutionary approaches to writing and grammar instruction, and is currently working on a political thriller set in South America.

The Kids from Nowhere, which reads like a novel, was one of three national finalists for the Benjamin Franklin Award for the Year’s Best Education Book. In collaboration with Greg Mortenson, of *Three Cups of Tea* fame, George is donating the royalties from it toward building a school in the earthquake-devastated region of the western Himalayas, in the name of “the Kids from Nowhere” (as the Eskimo students proudly called themselves), in an effort to use education to help fight al-Qaeda recruiters in that region.

George’s talks will make you laugh, they will make you cry, they will make you want to stand up and cheer.

