

SANTA CRUZ MUSEUM of natural history

FIRST PEOPLES EDUCATION KIT

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Kit Introduction

Why do we provide this kit?

This education kit is designed to familiarize your students with topics presented in the *First Peoples of Santa Cruz* field trip and to provide a depth of experience and opportunity to apply knowledge after the trip. It can also be used within your own unit on the Native people of central California. The activities within this kit will give your students a better understanding of such topics as **food preparation, the use of native plants and animals, oral tradition, and culture** using unique artifacts, hands-on exploration, engaging activities and writing prompts.

How does it work?

These activities can be used in any order to support classroom learning. You may find that some activities are not appropriate for the level of your class, but for the most part these activities can be adjusted to different age or learning groups. When possible, we have included suggestions for modification and extensional activities and writing prompts.

A Note on Terminology

The terms “**Ohlone**” or “**Ohlone culture**” are applied to artifacts, practices, and knowledge that pertain to the 50 tribes spanning from Big Sur to San Francisco. This is a modern grouping, coined by anthropologists, and members of each group do not necessarily identify as “Ohlone”. This term is useful when specific origins are unknown, or to describe widely-used cultural practices shared amongst many groups in this area.

Due to decades of missionization, direct lineage from many of these groups have been lost, along with knowledge and physical evidence of their culture. Whenever possible, we will attribute artifacts and practices to their specific origins, recognizing that Indigenous culture is by no means homogeneous.

Awawas was the language spoken by groups in the Santa Cruz area, and **Mutsun** was the language spoken by groups in the Watsonville/Gilroy area. Descendents of Awawas and Mutsun speakers taken to Missions Santa Cruz and San Juan Bautista now identify as **Amah Mutsun** and have formed a tribal band, and are working to relearn their culture and heal from historic trauma. *For more information, visit amahmustun.org.*

To view a detailed map of the tribes in this area, please visit our Virtual First Peoples Exhibit at santacruzmuseum.org.

Kit Inventory

Artifacts

- Abalone shell
- Bag of acorns
- Bag of Shells
- Bag of Stones
- Chia seeds
- Clapper stick
- Deer and/or elk skin
- Fire drill and hearth
- Moon snail shell
- Mortar and Pestle
- Rabbit pelt
- Shell necklace
- Stave game
- Stone/ Obsidian points
- Tule craft (basket, cordage, boat or doll)
- Tule samples

Images

- Laminated Native Plants and Uses booklet
- Mix and Match Game Cards

Media

- *Life of the California Coast Nations*, by Bobby Kalman
- *Rumsien Ohlone Stories*, told by Linda Yamane
- *Little Deer and the First Native American Flute*, by Al Striplen
- *When the Mission Bells Rang*, by Judith A. Scott

Item Descriptions

(descripciones de los artículos)

Abalone shell (concha de abulón): The Ohlone people used the shells for decoration or made them into badges to indicate clan (after eating the abalone of course!) They would also pass plants used for basket weaving, like grasses and tule, through the holes in the shell to remove rough patches, making the strands even for perfect baskets. (Awaswas word for abalone: *tuppenish*)

Bag of acorns (bolsa de bellotas): Acorns made up a large part of the traditional diet. They were harvested, ground up, then leached. Afterwards they made a delicious warm mush. (Awaswas word for acorn: *rappak*, Awaswas word for oak tree: *aruwe*)

Bag of Shells (bolsa de conchas): Certain shells were used as currency and other times for decoration. Olivella shells were baked in underground ovens to turn their color a matte white so that each shell was uniform and therefore a consistent currency. Shells could also be used as game pieces (see “Hand Game” in Worksheets)

Bag of Stones (bolsa de piedras): *Obsidian:* These shiny stones could be fashioned into spear/arrow points and, if polished enough, even mirrors. Formed by lava rapidly cooling, this rock is not naturally found locally; however, there is archaeological evidence of the Ohlone using obsidian locally, which indicates trade practices with other California tribes. *Chert:* a form of this rock is also known as “flint” and is found naturally along the central coast of California. It was the preferred *local* rock for creating spear/arrow points (Awaswas word for rock: *irek*)

Chia seeds (semillas de chía): Chia is a plant native to this area. The seeds of the chia plant are highly nutritious and filling. When they are soaked in water, they become jelly-like and are used to thicken soups. For fun: put a couple of chia seeds in a bowl of water and have students observe the changes that the seeds go through.

Clapper Stick: The Ohlone did not make drums like some other Native American tribes; their percussion instrument was the clapper stick. These instruments are made from the branches of elderberry trees, because the center of an elderberry branch is easily hollowed out, which helps to create the signature clapping sound. (Awaswas word for elderberry: *chishsha*)

Deer or Elk skin (piel del venado o del uapití): The Ohlone hunted deer and elk as a major source of food. In order to hunt such large animals, they needed tools like spears and arrows. Once hunted, the skin could be tanned and used as shawls, blankets, skirts, and were also used in the process of making new spear/arrow points. (Awaswas word for deer: *tooche*)

Moon snail shell (concha de caracol luna): The Ohlone people feasted on the snails that dwelled within these shells, which are part of the mollusk family. These snails can grow up to 6 inches in length and stretch themselves to up to a foot in length! Also known as the “necklace snail,” the shells of the moon snail are used decoratively throughout the world.

Mortar and Pestle (molcajete y mano): Boulders or bedrock were ground down to create a bowl shape into the stone (the mortar). The process of making a mortar starts with chiseling a deep circle into a stone, then crushing the “plug” in the center out of the way. The pestle is a long stone, usually with a gritty texture, used to grind materials in the mortar. Some materials ground with mortars and pestles by the Ohlone were acorns, chia seeds, and pigments. (Awaswas word for mortar: *urwan*, Awaswas word for pestle: *pakshan*)

Rabbit pelt (piel de conejo): Rabbits made a delicious meal for the Ohlone. Afterwards, the pelts were used as sitting mats and sometimes capes. (Awaswas word for rabbit: *werwe*)

Shell necklace (collar de conchas): Polished, beautiful shells were commonly made into necklaces and other pieces of jewelry. Olivella shells in particular were used as currency, carved into circles and baked in earth ovens to create a consistent white color and then traded for goods. Think about our money today; a dollar bill looks the same all over the country, but if some of those dollar bills were printed in a different color, the value of those unique bills might go up. This is why the Ohlone would bake them to be the same color. These shells would often be used for necklaces and sometimes decorated baskets.

Stave game (juego de palos): People passed the time by playing this fun, simple game. Life for the Ohlone people has always been about more than just survival, games and music were part of everyday life.

Obsidian or stone points (puntas de obsidiana o de piedra): Pieces of stone and obsidian were commonly sharpened into spear/arrow points.

Tule craft (basket or boat or doll) (canasta o bote o muñeca) Tule could make strong, durable boats and baskets. (Awaswas word for tule: *rookosh*)

Tule (tule): A spongy reed-like plant, when tule touches water it swells up, making boats and baskets watertight. Tule was also used to cover the willow frames of their hut-shaped homes.