

Native American Life Program

**(A historical and cultural experience that supports
Grade Three content standards.)**

Foreword

Long before the first European explorers set foot in what we now know as the San Joaquin Valley, groups of Native Americans lived in the area. They hunted the varied species of game that lived in the hills and grasslands, fished the waters of the valley floor, utilized the local plant life for their daily existence, made regular trips to the mountains to gather acorns, and traded regularly with groups from other areas of the west. It is important that the culture and life skills of these first inhabitants, the Yokuts, be introduced to the students of our local schools for a better understanding of the human history of our valley.

A trip to the Kern County Museum to take part in the Native American Life Program gives classes a closer look at the daily life of the Yokuts people, their skills, pastimes, and the artifacts they left behind, as well as how artifacts are treated to preserve them for future generations. Students also participate in the hands-on activity of grinding acorns.

The visit to the museum for the Native American Life Program and the use of this guide are only the beginning. What the teacher and students do with the knowledge and insight gained will be the real measure of the student's learning and understanding. Pre and post classroom activities will provide an experience that will help make history come alive for the students and reinforce the learning that takes place.

Content Information

History and Culture

As the class enters the Native American Life exhibit area of the museum, they encounter displays that introduce them to what a village might have looked like. Dioramas and early photos line the walls, a replica of an acorn storage granary, and artifacts that would be used in Yokuts' daily life are viewed and discussed. Docents explain how artifacts were used by the Yokuts to obtain, store and process food, make clothing and other essential items such as baskets.

Locally available materials such as tules were used to make baskets that were used for gathering food, netting fish, carrying water and for cooking (without burning the basket). Each basket had its own use, and most had decorations woven into them for special reasons. Some baskets were only used for special ceremonies. Tools for hunting the game of the area are discussed, along with an explanation of the difficult task of making them and how they were specialized for certain hunting situations. Children used smaller and less refined items as toys while learning to make and use them, often as part of childhood games and contests.

With the arrival of the Europeans to the area, the lives of the Native Americans changed forever. The newcomers now owned the land, a new concept for the Yokuts, and introduced cattle, sheep, agriculture, and mining to the region. Students learn of some of the interactions that took place between the two groups.

Grinding Acorns

Students will be taken to an activity area where the entire class sits on the floor and each student has a mortar or grinding stone and pestle in front of them. Mortars and pestles were used by Native Americans to grind acorns and other food stuffs on a daily basis. Docents explain how the stones were used to make acorn flour or meal that was a staple of the California Native Americans' diet. Acorns are then passed out to each student and they learn how to crack them open, check to see if they are good, and then to grind them. Students grind their acorns into meal and the meal is collected and given to the classroom teacher along with instructions on how to prepare them for the class to sample.

Classroom Activities

The activities listed here are suggestions that relate to the information presented in the Native American Life Program. These activities support and reinforce many of the subject matter content standards for grade three. As with any teaching idea, they need to be adapted to the skills and abilities of the students in the classroom.

Pre-visit Activities

1. Have the students locate the San Joaquin Valley on a map of California. Help them identify the mountain ranges that form the southern boundaries of the valley. Discuss how mountains could form barriers around the valley. Locate the Kern River on the map.
2. Use the map scale to find the approximate dimensions of the valley. Discuss how the distances of the valley could affect the travel of people that had no forms of transportation other than walking and canoes. Have the students calculate and lay out a one mile course on the school playground and then walk that course without stopping. Compare that to the distances from the valley floor to the mountains.
3. Have the students write about a trip they have taken, what kind of geography they traveled through (rivers, mountains, deserts, etc.), how long it took, and one or two of the more memorable parts of the trip.
4. Using internet resources and searches for children's museums, chart and compare different types of collections housed and preserved by museums.

Post-visit Activities

1. Help the students discuss and organize ideas and experiences from the Native American Life program. Use these experiences to write and illustrate some of the favorite parts of the program. Edit and publish a final version to put together to form a classroom book about the trip.
2. Have each student pick an activity that a Yokuts child or adult would have done. Write the directions for doing that activity in the proper order. Share the directions with a partner or the student's group.
3. Together as a class, locate on a map of Kern County, showing physical features, where the main foods of the Native Americans would be found. Make a chart listing the foods that were hunted and gathered. Design a symbol to represent each of the foods. Reproduce these symbols and place them on the map showing where they might have been found. Calculate some of the distances from the area where some of the major

villages were (Buena Vista Lake, modern-day Bakersfield) to the food sources to see how far the Native Americans had to walk to get food supplies.

4. Have the class create a chart listing the basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, transportation, etc.) of the Yokuts people and what they used to fill that need. Each student then selects one area and writes about how their life was different than ours today. Edit and revise the writing and make a final published copy.

California Content Standards Correlation Chart

Grades 3 and 4

(All or a portion of the standards listed are supported, based on the use of Content Information, Pre-visit Activities, Docent Presentations [2 parts], Post-visit Activities, and Teacher Background Information.)

English-Language Arts	History-Social Science	Science	Mathematics
Grade 3			
Writing: 1.1, 1.4, 2.2, 2.3 Written & Oral Conventions: 1.7 Listening & Speaking: 1.1, 1.5	3.1, 3.2, 3.3	Life: 3a, 3c, 3d	Number Sense: 1.4 Measurement & Geometry: 1.1 Mathematical Reasoning: 1.1, 2.1, 2.4, 3.3
Grade 4			
Writing: 1.2, 1.7, 1.10, 2.1, 2.3 Written & Oral Conventions: 1.1, 1.2 Listening & Speaking: 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 2.2	4.1, 4.2, 4.3 (partial)	Life: 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, Earth: 5c	Number Sense: 1.4, 3.1 Mathematical Reasoning: 1.1, 1.2, 2.1

(Standards in place August 2003)

Further correlations may be obtained through modification of pre and post-visit activities to fit specific grade-level standards.

Native American Life **Teacher Background Information**

The indigenous peoples of the San Joaquin Valley have lived here for more than 8000 years. The Yokuts people have been here for at least 2000 years. The name Yokuts is taken from a native word for person or people. Though once quite large, their population has been reduced to less than 2,000 people today. This is a result of a combination of factors including disease, interaction with settlers, and conflict between the views of progress of an industrialized society and tribal thinking and way of life. During the Spanish-Mexican period of California's history, the Native Americans became the work force for the missions and ranchos, and were removed from their ancestral way of life. Disease took its toll as explorers, trappers, and settlers came to the area. When gold was discovered in the state, some of the immigrants settled in the San Joaquin Valley, displacing the Yokuts from their ancestral home.

The Yokuts were divided into self-governing tribes, each with its own dialect and territory. Yokuts speak a language classified as belonging to the Penutian language family. Tribes were divided into smaller groups called tribelets. Each tribelet had its own chief. Since there were many tribelets, there were many chiefs, known as headmen. In Kern County, the largest of the tribes was the Yowlumne Yokuts. Each tribe had some inherited positions through the father's bloodline. The position of chief was associated with the Eagle lineage and normally passed to a son or daughter. The chief set the times for ceremonies, mediated disputes, played host to visitors, and authorized food gathering and trading expeditions. Often the chief would consult with other chiefs and older men before making decisions. The chief was often wealthy from trading transactions, but was expected to use the wealth for the good of the tribe and to share it with the shaman. Each chief had a winatun who performed the duties of messenger, private secretary, and security guard, all in one. He was supposed to meet any approaching visitors or travelers to determine their business, their identity, where they were going, and then help them on their way.

Our society today believes that people can own land and buy and sell it as a commodity. The Yokuts way was that land is to be used, but not owned, bought, or sold. Nomadic and tribal ways of life have often suffered in the name of "progress" and "development". These same two forces have often brought on ecological disasters. The Native Americans depended on an intimate knowledge of the environment and their surroundings. Without western science, they developed great knowledge of their piece of the world through observation.

The Yokuts social order was identified and named by totems that represented animals. Tribes were divided into two groups called moieties. Each moiety was represented by a totem or animal. A totem animal was never killed or eaten by people of that totem. Yokuts almost always married outside of their moiety, and the children followed the father's totem while still respecting their mother's totem. The main moieties were paired against each other in friendly competition at games and festivals. One main moiety, the *Tohelyuwish* were represented by eagle, crow, raven, blue jay, killdeer, roadrunner, bear, jackrabbit, beaver, and antelope. The other moiety, the *Nutuwish*, were represented by coyote, falcon, buzzard, hawks, quail, skunk, and owl.

Religion

The Yokuts daily religious beliefs included a belief in the spirits of animals, plants, and rocks. The Yokuts people had two types of healers called *Shaman*. One healed with herbs and roots, while the other was viewed as an intermediary with the supernatural world. This was the *Shaman* whose primary job was to maintain a balance between the natural and supernatural worlds. Animals or spirits would visit the *Shaman* in a dream and transfer power to him. Often the services of the *Shaman* required intense fasting and praying. They were perceived to be more powerful if they had more successes in healing. The *Shaman* presided over most of the ceremonies of the tribe. A six-day mourning ceremony was held to honor the dead. This was one of the largest ceremonial events held by the tribes. Ceremonial spaces were walled or fenced areas made of brush without roofs. This is where ceremonies such as the “Rattlesnake” ceremony were held.

Villages

The Yokuts built their dwellings in different places in the valley and foothills. They often built temporary camps when gathering seasonal foods such as acorns. Homes were made of tules and bark using willow poles for framing. Usually there were two fire pits with one inside for warmth as needed, and another outside for cooking and rubbish disposal. Some tribes chose to live in the foothills, while others chose the valley floor. The valley floor was very different then from what we know today. The rivers spread out into many small channels forming marshy areas where tules grew, and often made islands between the channels. The Kern River water flowed south to Kern Lake, then southwest to Buena Vista Lake, and then overflowed into Tulare Lake to the north. The wetlands were inviting places for the animals that lived in the valley, or migrated through in spring and fall.

The men of the tribes did the hunting and fishing. They spent many hours making arrows and spears and throwing sticks that would help them be effective in hunting. Stone for the arrow points were traded for with tribes from areas outside the valley. Arrows were made for different purposes, such as small and large game, and birds. Young boys played games with toy bows and arrows to build the skills needed to become hunters. Nets and special baskets were used in fishing.

Women of the tribe would gather various foods including shellfish, insects, and acorns. They were also among the finest basket weavers in the state. The many fine baskets, each with its own special purpose reflected the skill of the weavers. Baskets were used for carrying and storing foods and for cooking purposes. Clay for making pots was scarce in the valley. Therefore, hot stones were placed inside the baskets with the food to warm it. Tar from seeps along the Kern River as well as the western part of the valley were used to waterproof the baskets. The women also made woven cradle-boards for infants of the tribes. Girls learned to weave and assist with food preparation as soon as they were old enough to help.

Food

The Yokuts were hunter-gatherers. This means that they did not farm or herd animals. They hunted for meat and gathered and stored acorns, grains, berries, pine nuts, and roots. The men hunted for deer, elk, pronghorn, rabbits, waterfowl, reptiles, and many varieties of fish and shellfish. The women gathered and prepared the foods. Most of the food preparation time was spent with the mainstay of their diet, the acorn. Acorns were gathered in the fall and were stored in granaries in the villages for use throughout the year. The granaries were most often made of cedar bark which naturally repels insects and therefore, helped protect their valuable food supply. The acorns were ground into meal and then leached to remove the bitter tannic acid before cooking. Some of the food the Yokuts ate were:

Meat

Fresh water clams
Fresh water mussels
Fish
Frogs
Raccoon
Otter
Squirrel
Rodents
Birds
Deer
Elk
Pronghorn
Bear
Rabbit
Badger
Turtle
Insects

Seeds and Nuts

Acorns
Chamise
Greasewood
Pine nuts
Tule grass

Berries

Currants
Elderberry
Manzanita
Raspberry
Thimbleberry
Toyon Berry

Leaves, Stems, Roots, and Grasses

Cat tail
Cow Parsnip
Miner's Lettuce
Stinging Nettle
Tule grass
Salt grass (salt)
Clover, Sour grass
Snow Plant
Thistle
Yellow Mustard

Money

The Yokuts used shell disk beads as currency. These disk beads were strung together in lengths similar to a measurement of one and one-half times the circumference of the hand and known as a *chok*, twice the circumference, known as a *hista*. Sometimes long cylinders of shells from unusually large clams were used and considered of great value.

Greetings

Before the white man came, the shaking of hands was not used as a greeting. Children were kissed by their mothers. When two people met, the usual greeting is *hileu ma tannin*, or "where are you going?"

Names

Yokuts were usually named after their ancestors or older relatives. If a person died, the name of the dead could not be spoken under any circumstances. Because of this, most Yokuts were given two names so that in case someone they were named after died, their other name could be used. However if both of the persons they were named after died, the person was given another name or called *k'amun hoyowosh*, or "no-name." Most names denoted animal names or objects such as "Buzzard" or "Pine Nut," or verbs such as "Tap, See, or Make-fire." Often the curious name "Seven" was added to one of the other names.

Dress and Customs

The Yokuts wore only such clothing as was necessary for warmth and their concept of decency. Men and women wore brief loin-covering clothing made of deerskin and grasses. Children often wore no clothing at all. Moccasins of deer and elk skins were only worn if there was a special need or for warmth. Sandals made of tules were also worn. Robes made of rabbit skins were used for warmth and for sleeping.

Hair was worn long by women and some of the men. Hair was shortened during times of mourning, when it was burned shorter with a hot glowing stick. Women had their nose septum pierced to wear ornamentation, but not the men. Some of the tribes in the state (more often to the North) used tattooing as ornamentation, and usually more of the women than the men. Lines were tattooed on the chin and other parts of the upper body.

Yokuts did not sit cross-legged as did many of the plains tribes. Rather, they squatted or sat upon their heels. Women would often sit upon one foot with the other leg stretched out when working on meals or other tasks and sat with knees drawn up with hands joined in front of them.

Ceremonial costumes were made and used by the Yokuts. Feathers, both the down and the large feathers, of eagles, magpies, and crows were fashioned into headbands and skirt-like garments. These feather garments were worn by Shamans as well as other tribal members during mourning rituals and also in rituals of rejoicing. It was common to use the same costumes for ceremonial rituals of vastly different purposes.

Houses

Southern Valley Yokuts constructed their homes in a long, communal, fashion. Each family would construct their own portion and have door access to their space. The housing had a steep pitched roof and was made of tule mats sewn together. There was a shaded porch area along one side and each house could house up to ten families, each with their own cooking and living space. When traveling or living in the foothills during the summer, the Yokuts built small dome-shaped huts covered with bark or brush.

Stories

The Yokuts relied on story telling of old legends to preserve the tribal beliefs and history. The tribe had rituals and moral laws that governed the behavior of its members. Many of these were woven into legends involving the animals found in the valley. One of these, the rattlesnake, was an important animal in the Yokuts ceremonies.

The rattlesnake was the scribe of Tihpiknits, the Keeper of the Hereafter. It was the rattlesnake's job to watch the Yokuts and to report to Tihpiknits on their behavior. Bad Yokuts were reported and were called to the Hereafter by Tihpiknits. Every year in the spring, the Yokuts held a rattlesnake dance to protect themselves from snakebites. The shaman would catch a snake and put it in a basket or bag. The shaman would lightly place the basket or bag on the heads of tribe members in hopes of protecting the people from future snakebites. At the end of the ceremony, each member of the tribe would place a foot over the snake for a moment. They would do this so that the snakes would sound a warning when encountered in the wild.

The Yowlumne World

Yokuts in the San Joaquin Valley told a story of how their world was created. Almost the same story was told in every part of the valley. This is the creation story of the Yowlumne Yokuts tribe who lived on the Kern River and south to Tejon Canyon. It features the two main competing totemic animals, Eagle and Coyote.

First there was only the sky. *Troqhil*, the white-necked Eagle lived there. He decided to make the world. First he made the world all covered with water. Then he made all of the bird and animal people who could live in the water.

After a while, *Troqhil* thought to himself, "We must have something to make land and more people." He screamed to all the water people, "Ke-e-e-e-e Ke-e-e-e-e, Come! Come!" They all came to where *Troqhil* was flying about in the sky. First came *Wahcut*, the Heron, and *Chookooko*, the Teal Duck. Then came *Hinuh*, the Mallard Duck; *Lahiah*, the Goose; *Wahk*, the Pelican; and *Tawtil*, the Turtle, and all the rest. They gathered in the water under *Troqhil*.

Then *Troqhil* told them, "We must make some land, and we have nothing here to make it. You must all dive down to the bottom of the water and get something to make land." So the old bird and animal people began diving. First *Hinuh*, the Mallard Duck, went down as far as he could. Before he came back to the surface he drowned. When he came up, *Troqhil* brought him back to life and asked him if he found anything down there.

Hinuh said, "Yes, I found something. I touched it with my feet, but I drowned and could not bring any of it back with me."

Next *Troqhil* sent *Metschookoo*, the Duck, down into the water to get something to make the world. He went to the bottom and touched something, but drowned and came back to the surface without anything. He told *Troqhil*, the Eagle, that he had touched something, but could not bring it back with him.

Troqhil then sent down *Tawtil*, the Turtle. He went down and down and finally reached the bottom. But he, too, drowned and came back to the surface without anything to make the world. *Troqhil*, the Eagle, brought *Tawtil* back to life and asked him if he had found anything. *Tawtil* said, "Yes, I touched something with my paws, but I drowned, too."

Troqhil said, "Now we have only one person left. *Chookooko* the Teal Duck, you must go down and bring something back to make the world."

Chookooko went down and down. Finally, he caught some mud in his feet and brought it back to the surface. He gave the mud to *Troqhil*, the Eagle.

Troqhil took the mud and mixed it with some *Paluh* seed that swells when it is wet. Then he threw it in every direction. It grew into land and into the old-time bird and animal people.

Kiyoo, the Coyote, was one of the first people made. Next was *Yowhlits*, the Wolf. Before morning they were all made. But the land was fresh and not strong.

When *Towahnitch*, the Morning Star, was beginning to go away, *Kiyoo* wanted to howl. *Yowhlits* told him, "You must not howl now. I am headman here. Let me howl first." But *Kiyoo* howled first, anyway. He said, "I am going to make some land and some people to suit me."

The ground began to shake. *Kiyoo* howled again, and it shook still more.

Yowhlits told *Kiyoo*, "If you howl again the land will all go down below the water and we will all drown." But *Kiyoo* howled again and all those first bird and animal people were drowned.

Then *Troqhil*, the Eagle, again sent down *Chookooko*, the Teal Duck, and he brought up some more mud. *Troqhil* mixed it with some more *Paluh* seed and again threw it in all directions. By morning there was more land and more bird and animal people. As *Towahnitch*, the Morning Star, began to fade, *Yowhlits* told *Kiyoo*, "You must not howl again, or the land will all sink again."

But *Kiyoo* wanted to howl anyway. So *Yowhlits* howled quickly three times before *Kiyoo* could howl. Then he told *Kiyoo*, "Now you can howl all you want at *Towahnitch*. The land is alright now." Now *Kiyoo* howls whenever he sees *Towahnitch* going away, but he can not make any more land and the land *Troqhil* made is so solid it will not sink.

The Legend of Chuchupate

Before strange laws and customs of the white man had come to California, there dwelt among the fathers of her tribe, a lovely young maiden called *Chuchupate*. The Great Spirit smiled upon her and gave her a deep love for all the flowers which carpeted the earth in spring, and the power to effect wonderful cures through the medicinal qualities of certain herbs.

Visitors from neighboring tribes brought gifts of plants, birds, and grasses to *Chuchupate*, and these she planted and cared for. In time of plague and famine she aided her people, and when spring came again she read to her people in the open faces of her loved flowers, the messages from the Great Spirit. *Cacomita*, the wild onion; *Calawalla*, the little rock fern; *Huipiche*, the golden poppy; *Matilija*, the queen of California wild flowers, all spoke their wonderful sermons. Her faithful ponies instinctively knew her urgent calls and faintest trails to the farthest abodes. Thus she became high in councils of the tribes, and beloved of her people.

At last winter came no more for *Chuchupate*, and she was greatly mourned by her people. Watch fires were lighted for her spirit. Without her, the tribe suffered many ills until the Great Spirit broke the cold of winter, and a little yellow flower appeared growing near their dwellings, and the Indians knew that the spirit of *Chuchupate* had returned in the flower that now bears her name. Now when a child is born, the Indian mother gathers the pollen from the little yellow flower and dusts it over the new treasure in order that the blessings of *Chuchupate* may rest upon it. Also when a young brave of the tribe who loves a fickle maiden contrives to make her eat the leaves of *Chuchupate*, the affection is reciprocated.

Chuchupate is still the guardian of the wild flowers, birds, and wildlife. When anyone in the spirit of vandalism destroys or injures them, she is said to disappear and return no more. They alone are now left to tell the story, and truly she could have no fairer reminder of her spirit.

The Chuchupate wildflower is today believed to be the Arrow-leaf Balsam-root (Balsamorhiza sagittata), a member of the sunflower family. The plant grows in large clumps to a height of about a foot and a half. Its bright yellow flowers are over three inches across, and the leaves are arrow or heart shaped. The blossom gives off a pleasant odor.

The Rattlesnake and the Ants

There once was a bad rattlesnake who abused his power and reported some good Yokuts to *Tiphiknits*. The Yokuts were called to the Hereafter, even though they were good people. Quail learned what had been done and told the story to the water skaters, who were special messengers. The water skaters told the ants and the ants stung the rattlesnake to death. This is why Yokuts baskets that are decorated with pictures of rattlesnakes also have pictures of ants to serve as a warning to the rattlesnakes not to abuse their power.

The Legend of the Rain Rock or Thunder Stone

The Thunder comes from two brothers, *Pu'-muk* and *Po'-ton* shaking the tules. Big thunder is made by *Pu'-muk* who is destructive and smashes things. Little thunder is made by *Po'-ton*. To call the rain, someone in the tribe would take the thunder stone in his hand and dip it a little way into the water. He must be careful not to dip it all the way into the water or it would cause a flood. He would whirl it around and around over his head, and throw it along the ground toward the west. The rock would make a rumble and a boom, just like thunder. Then all of the tribe would sing the Rain Song.

The Boy Who Watched the Sun

Once there was a boy who loved the sun. Every day he sat for hours and watched it move across the sky. He sang many songs about how much he loved it. Because of this, he was called the Sun Gazer. He looked at the sun so much that little by little he became blind. Even then he kept turning his face to the heat of the sun. After he could no longer see, he lost interest in life. He grew weaker day by day and was often sad. One evening he did not come back from his favorite place on a nearby hill. A party set out to find him. They found his body facing west. The last spark of life had gone from him just as the last rays of the sun faded. They buried Sun Gazer on that very spot. The next morning a tall graceful flower was nodding in the breeze on the mound. As they watched, it turned its head to follow the sun across the sky. They called it the sunflower.