



Yokuts Village Acorn Preparation Grade 3

Place: Use tarp as grinding area near village site (Be careful to prepare new acorns away from the bedrock mortars in the village site!)

Objective: Students will:

- a.) Describe how the Yokuts people gathered and processed acorns for a food source.
(Singing a song while gathering, sorting out the bad ones, cracking and grinding acorn)
- b.) Identify the natural resources used by Yokuts people for food, tools, homes, etc.
- c.) Describe how Yokuts people used fire, pruning, and cultivation to manage their land and food resources.

History-Social Science Standard Grade 3:

3.2 Students describe the American Indian nations in their local region long ago and in the recent past.

3.3 Students draw from historical and community resources to organize the sequence of local historic events and describe how each period of settlement left its mark on the land.

Materials:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 baskets and dried acorns | <input type="checkbox"/> Pine nuts and pine cone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Acorn pounding sequence visuals | <input type="checkbox"/> Artifacts (pot shards, obsidian & chert flakes, rabbit bone) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pounding rock and board per student | <input type="checkbox"/> Abalone shells |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historical photos of acorn preparation | <input type="checkbox"/> Photos & Quotes about practices |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tape player & Yokuts songs tape | |

Theme: Yaudanchi Yokuts people hunted, harvested or traded everything they used!

Introduction: [Show students bedrock mortars]

A long time ago, before there were roads, before barns and modern houses, before electricity, a group of people lived here in this very place! This place housed a thriving village of people. Who are those people? The Yokuts people! These grasslands, forests, streams & mountains provided everything the Yokuts people needed. They knew how to find almost everything they needed from the land.

If there was something they needed that they could not make for themselves, they traded with other Indian groups to get the desired things. The Yokuts people were famous for their high-quality baskets. They would use them to trade for:

- abalone shells- used for jewelry and to decorate clothes
- other sea shells- used for beads and used for money (like coins)

- asphaltum- a black goeey substance related to oil that the Yokuts used for glue
- obsidian a shiny black volcanic rock that the Yokuts made into arrowheads, spear points, knives and more tools
- Pottery- look at the examples of Brownware made by the Mono Lake Indians
- What else can you think of that the Yokuts had to trade for?

The fall season was a very busy one for the Yokuts people- it's acorn-gathering time. The Yokuts people used acorn as a staple food- they ate acorn bread and acorn mush year-round. Here are the steps involved in processing acorn:

- 1.) Gathering: Yokuts children helped to gather acorns every fall. When gathering acorns, it is important to get the best ones, so they carefully looked for the "Filbert Weevil" or moth larva holes and avoid those acorns because they are rotten. Gather only the good acorns. Women and children sang while gathering.
[Play Yokuts tape]
- 2.) Sorting out the rotten ones: The adult Filbert Weevil lays eggs in the acorn while it is still on the tree. The larva hatch and begin eating the nutmeat and producing FRASS (insect droppings). Encourage the students to crack open acorns with the small holes to look for larva. The Yokuts did not use acorns with larva in them. In fact, they burned under oak trees in fall to kill the pupating weevils and encourage a healthier acorn crop.
- 3.) Cracking and Shelling: Children your age also helped with the cracking and shelling of the acorns to release the nutmeats. Hold the acorn with the pointy end down on a rock. Then, use a hammer stone to lightly tap the flat top. The shell should crack lengthwise down the acorn. Hitting too hard will mash it. Use your fingers to peel off the acorn's shell. The shell is not edible! It must be thrown away (over your shoulder). Only the tasty nutmeats will be for eating. Check to make sure your acorn is not moldy or rotten. Make sure there is not insect frass (droppings) inside- those are not good and must be thrown out (over your shoulder).
When you have good nutmeats, be sure to peel off the red colored skin (if there is one) because those skins are bitter! When you have clean nutmeats, place them into the mortar bowl.
- 4.) Pounding: Every woman had her own pounding rock- there is a mortar (bowl) and pestle (hammer stone). Place the nutmeats in one of the 2 mortars and pound the acorn into a fine meal. (Contrast fine and coarse acorn meal). Pound carefully, pestle against acorn, so you don't hear the sound of rock against rock (pestle hitting the mortar bowl). If you do hit rock on rock, the other ladies would laugh and point at you and say "Your husband will be eating rock" to tease you!
- 5.) Leaching: Acorn tastes bitter because it contains tannic acid. After the acorn is pounded into fine flour, it was rinsed with water again and again to rinse away the

bitter acid. This is called "leaching". Originally, leaching was performed in a basin dug into the sand and then lined with grape leaves. We can use this cloth to hold the acorn as we leach it.

6.) Cooking: Yokuts people prepare it for eating by forming biscuit-like cakes and placing them on a rock to dry in the sun or by adding water to the meal and cooking it in a basket with hot rocks from the fire. [show photos]

"As for the varied depths of mortar holes, these seem to have depended on what was pounded in them and local preference. Seeds, berries, mineral paints, and other things were pounded or crushed in their own mortars. Among the Western Mono, mortar depth depended on type of use: mortars used to start pounding acorn are shallowest; seed pounding mortars are the deepest; and acorn finishing mortars are in between." -Ortiz, Bev; It Will Live Forever; c1991 by Bev Ortiz

Yaudanchi Yokuts Managed their Land and Resources

Even though we call prehistoric Californians "Hunter-Gatherers", in actuality they did not merely hunt and gather from the land. They were active stewards and caretakers of the land. The people strived to nurture and tend the natural world while harvesting plants and hunting animals in a way that allowed for the plants and animals to continue thriving. Usually, they behaved in a respectful and sustainable manner.

Sustainable Use of Resources

- In gathering plants, bulbs and seeds, the Yokuts people were careful to take what they needed and leave roots, little bulbs, and some seeds behind.
- People used fire to promote the growth of some species of grass so they could harvest and eat the seeds and women used fire as a tool to help reduce the number of pests infesting the oak trees and ruining acorn crops.
- Yokuts people prune and coppice (severe pruning) to help the shrubs grow straight, useable shoots for arrow shafts and baskets.

Over Use of Resources

In some cases there is evidence that Native Californians over-harvested some resources, such as seals for seal meat along the central coast. Seals gather in large groups or "colonies" and this made it possible for the Native Californians to successfully hunt a great number of seals to the point of nearly wiping out the seal population.