

California History

A MESSAGE FROM THE DE SAISSET MUSEUM

Today, the place we call Santa Clara Valley is filled with energy and activity as people of all cultures and languages go about their daily lives. Long ago, when the Ohlone inhabited this place, the landscape would have differed dramatically. There were no roads or skyscrapers, street lamps or schools; instead the area was teeming with wildlife, rolling hills, streams, and marshes. Yet despite the changed landscape and the different way of living, the constant buzz of activity would not have been dissimilar from what we experience today. The Ohlone would have been engaged with the variety of activities that allowed them to thrive—hunting, fishing, gathering, and cooking. And like us, they would have made time for chatting with neighbors and playing games with friends.

Though the influence and traditions of the Ohlone are not always obvious to us, their culture endures today. People across the Bay Area and beyond are working to re-vitalize, preserve, and pass on the practices of their Native ancestors.

This guide contains instruction and information about some elements of traditional Native California culture. In its pages you will learn how to create your own tule boat—a small scale version of the vessels the Native Ohlone used to fish and travel. You will also have the opportunity to create three games—Acorn Tops, Kadai, and Oak Gall Action Figures—that the children of California tribes would have played frequently. Though the Native versions of these activities were made using natural materials, they remind us of games we play today when we roll the dice, spin the dreidel, or build a Mr. Potato Head.

It is our hope that this curriculum guide, which is sponsored in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts, will provide hours of fun and learning. And, most importantly, we hope it will help make connections between the Santa Clara Valley we know today and the Valley of the Oaks that the Ohlone once called home.

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Tule Boats

MINIATURE TULE BOATS



THIS CONSTRUCTION METHOD WAS DEvised FOR SIMPLICITY, ENABLING EVEN VERY YOUNG CHILDREN TO BUILD A BOAT WITH SUCCESS, IN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME, AND WITH A MINIMUM OF ADULT HELP. BECAUSE THE BUNDLES ARE NOT SEWN TOGETHER THOUGH, THIS CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUE WILL NOT WORK WELL IF TRYING TO MAKE A LARGE MODEL BOAT. YOU WILL NEED: TULEs THAT HAVE BEEN DRIED FOR A WEEK OR MORE THEN SOAKED IN WATER FOR AN HOUR OR LONGER, RAFFIA, SCISSORS.

1. Cut tules into 8-10 inch lengths, assembling 5-10 of these into one small bundle by wrapping firmly and tying with raffia or string as illustrated. (The number of tules per bundle will vary depending on the size of the tules being used and how large you choose to make your boat.)



2. Repeat step 1 to create a second small bundle of the same length and diameter. These two small bundles will be the gunwales (sides) of the boat. It is important that these two bundles be as equal in size as possible, so that the finished boat won't tilt ("list") to the heavier side!

3. Assemble a third bundle of approximately twice the diameter of the small ones. Wrap and tie as described above. This will become the bottom of the boat.

4. Hold the two small bundles in place atop and to either side of the boat bottom and lash at each end by wrapping firmly and tying securely with the long raffia ends. (Of course, if you don't have enough raffia left for wrapping, use a new piece.)



5. Trim off excess raffia. Adjust shaping of boat as desired until tules have dried.
6. With scissors, trim tules at each end, at an upward angle if you like, to finish.
7. Test your tule boat in water!

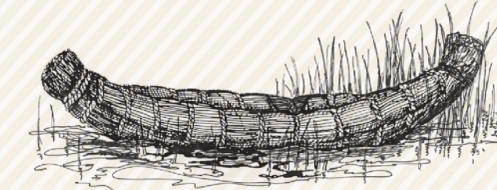
ETHNOBOTANY

SCIRPUS ACUTUS (ROUND)

SCIRPUS CALIFORNICUS (TRIANGULAR)

SPANISH: TULE REDONDO

RUMSIEN: ROKS (PRONOUNCED ROHKS)



Tules are tall, single-stemmed plants that grow in wet, marshy areas—the same fresh or brackish water habitat in which we find cattails. Each stem is filled with thousands of air pockets, giving the tule its light-weight strength, flexibility, and bouyancy. They can be bundled and bound into canoes propelled by double-bladed paddles, or used as thatching for our traditional conical tule house, called a "ruk" (pronounced "ROOK").

The roots are edible and the spongy interior also makes tules the perfect material for cushiony mats. Both tules and cattails can be twisted into rope or cordage.

Tule boat text and illustrations by Linda Yamane, Rumsien Ohlone, Basketweaver, Singer, and Storyteller



Photo courtesy of Chuck Barry



Photo courtesy of Linda Yamane

Traditional Native Games

ACORN TOPS



Photo courtesy of Norm Kidder

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS THE FIRST CHILDREN OF CALIFORNIA PLAYED GAMES MADE FROM NATURAL OBJECTS. THE ACORN, IN ADDITION TO OFFERING A SEED THAT CAN BE PROCESSED INTO NUTRITIOUS CAKES AND MUSH, PROVIDES THE PERFECT SHAPE FOR A GREAT TOY—THE TOP. GOOD FOR INDIVIDUAL PLAY OR EXCITING CONTESTS AMONG GROUPS, THIS ELEGANT SPINNING TOY GAVE HOURS OF FUN THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES. IT STANDS THE TEST OF TIME, PROVIDING HOURS OF PLEASURE EVEN TODAY.

First, select the fattest, most symmetrical acorn (Black Oak or Tan Oak are best) and drill a 1/8th inch diameter hole in the top (after removing the cap). Insert a stick into the hole, leaving about two inches sticking out. Test the top. If it is wobbly, try shortening the stick (leave at least one inch). To spin, place both hands on the stick, bringing one hand back while the other moves forward. If the stick is too short, hold it between the thumb and middle finger, then snap your fingers to set it in motion.

Play the acorn game with two or more players by beginning to spin your tops at the same instant. The last acorn to remain in upright motion after all others have fallen wins the game! Remember to handle your acorn top gently, it will crack if thrown or dropped onto a hard surface.