

## Chumash Uses

The Chumash Uses tour is designed to teach your students about the many fascinating and ingenious ways that Native Americans were able to use plants in order to survive. Living off the land required knowing the terrain, locations of desirable plants and hunting grounds, seasonal fluctuations, and how to obtain the basic necessities of life – food, clothing, and shelter.

This tour features several hands-on interpretive stations as well as many opportunities for students to discover plants and concepts about Chumash uses of native plants.

Key concepts covered in this tour:

1. Native plants, animals, or people occurring naturally in California prior to European contact. The descendants of these plants, animals, and people may be present today.
2. People, plants, and animals live in different communities and are adapted to different habitats. They all rely on each other to survive.
3. All living things need food and a place to live. People also have clothing and cultural needs.
4. Unlike plants, people and other animals are able to move from place to place. People can travel or trade for items not in their immediate vicinity.

Some aspects of these concepts will be discussed for each plant community visited. The docents will help students explore the available resources for food, shelter, clothing, and cultural activities, which are reliant on native plants and animals.

### Station Summary

**Coastal Redwood Forest:** The Chumash people did not live in Coastal Redwood Forests, but they still relied on the tall trees for their *tomols* (canoes). Northern California storms would send the large trunks out to sea where they would be brought south by ocean currents. Unlike other tribes, which used the trees to create dugout canoes, the Chumash built their *tomols* from redwood planks sealed with asphaltene and pine pitch. Deer and other animals that live in the

redwoods also thrived in Chumash territory. The Chumash would use skins and plants to camouflage their appearance and odor in order to have more successful hunts. Students will examine both the *tomols* and hunting methods of the Chumash people.

**Oak Woodland:** The 20 species of oaks in California occupy a broad range of habitats, but are especially common in oak woodland and chaparral communities. Acorns, collected from a variety of oak species, served as the most important staple food in Native American diets for many tribes. The Chumash had an ingenious way of pounding and then processing the acorns to remove their bitter flavoring and create a nutritious meal that was consumed year round. Children will have a chance to grind acorns and examine the tools used for the entire acorn preparation process.

**Marsh and Grasslands:** Similar to many California Native people, the Chumash used the stems of tule, a dominant plant in many freshwater marshes, to create *aps* (houses), mats, boats, baskets, and clothing. Prior to European colonization, marshes were abundant across California. Those that remain are important habitats for many native species. Certain plants in these areas also provided entertainment such as musical instruments that assisted in Chumash cultural needs. Nearby grasslands produced an abundance of seeds that were used as food by both Native Americans and many animals.

**Desert:** Deserts may seem bare and harsh to us, but Native Americans thrived in these areas. They used chia seeds to reduce hunger on long treks, while plants like the yucca were used for their long fibers to twist into rope.

**Games:** The Chumash were not all work and no play, they had a variety of games that enriched and prepared children for adult life in the tribe. Sticks were bent and tied with skin to create small hoops that children used as targets to practice hunting. Walnuts were halved and filled with asphaltene and abalone shells for games of chance. Students will explore these and other games.

