

# ISHI: A STORY OF DIGNITY, HOPE AND COURAGE

EXHIBIT TEACHING CURRICULA



*Photo Courtesy of the University of California Regents and the Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology*

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## **Ishi: A Story of Dignity, Hope and Courage**

### **Classroom Companion**

This exhibition and companion curricula was created by The California Indian Museum and Cultural Center (CIMCC). CIMCC has developed these resources to increase the public's awareness of Ishi's story and present native perspectives on the significance of his life and its impact on California Indian history.

Additional resources and video lesson plans can be found by visiting [www.cimcc.org](http://www.cimcc.org). For More information contact 707.579.3004 or email [ci-mandcc@aol.com](mailto:ci-mandcc@aol.com)

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## Introduction



Ishi was a Yahi Indian who was born around 1860. His tribal band was part of a larger group of California natives called the Yana people. By 1872 much of the Yahi population was wiped out by disease and massacre. Ishi and a few members of his family lived in hiding for a long period of time. Ishi arrived out of the foothills of Northern California into the town of Oroville in 1911. Non Indians mistakenly characterized as a “wild” and “primitive” Indian, the “last of a Stone Age tribe”.

Scientists eager to study him, brought him to the University of California, Museum of Anthropology in San Francisco. He lived at the museum for five years, sharing cultural and historical information with scientists and the public. Ishi passed away in 1916 after having contracted tuberculosis while in San Francisco. Before his death Ishi expressed his desire that his body not be used for scientific study. Despite his wishes and close friendship with Anthropologist Alfred Kroeber and other University staff, his remains were studied. His brain was removed in the interests of science. It disappeared for 83 years where it sat on a shelf in jar at the Smithsonian Institute. In the summer of 2000 Ishi’s remains were reunited and returned to his aboriginal homeland near Mount Lassen, CA. He was finally laid to rest.

Ishi is presented in many books and documentaries as the “last Yahi.” Today there are several tribes that can trace ancestry to Ishi. Ishi’s story teaches about the experiences of California Indians during his time. They like Ishi were not “wild” or “primitive” but were important figures of survival, hope, dignity and human strength.



## A Changing World

Ishi lived during a dangerous period for California Indians. He had to adapt to what was going on around him. After gold was discovered in California, many settlers came into the **homelands** of the **Yahi** and **Yana** peoples. The settlers sought out land and fortune. They exposed the native people already living in these areas to deadly diseases. Additionally, many settlers were hostile to native Californians as they considered them an obstacle to what they called "progress," or their desire to obtain land and resources. The government passed laws allowing settlers to **enslave** and kill Indian people. As a result many Indians fled to areas where they could hide from the settlers. They sometimes took food and supplies from the mining camps to help them survive while in hiding.

*Photos courtesy of the California State Library. Photo one of Sutter's Mill, site of gold discovery in 1848, home to the Nisenan people. Photo two of hydraulic mining, a technique used for gold discovery but harmful to the environment*



### The Yahi People

The Yahi and Yana people's native homelands are in an area known today as Butte County. Before settlers arrived there were at least 3,000 Yana, and perhaps many more. There are four groups within the Yana, including the Yahi, and the northern, central, and southern Yana.



### Grizzly Bear's Hiding Place

Ishi and his relatives also lived in hiding. He lived with about 30 Yahi near Deer Creek on a canyon ledge that was once home to grizzly bears.

*Photo one (early California settlers/gold miners) courtesy of the California State Library. Photo two (map of California, showing Butte county) courtesy of [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_of\\_California\\_highlighting\\_Butte\\_County.svg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_California_highlighting_Butte_County.svg). Photo three (picture of Yana couple) courtesy of Regents of the University of California, and the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology. Photo four (grizzly bear) courtesy of [http://www.cityofsacramento.org/council/bulletinboard/view\\_items.cfm?MenuID=5189&CategoryID=1](http://www.cityofsacramento.org/council/bulletinboard/view_items.cfm?MenuID=5189&CategoryID=1)*



## A Look At Ishi's Lifetime

- 1860 Ishi was most likely born during this decade
- 1865 Ishi and about thirty other Yahi survive a **massacre**. They live at "Grizzly Bear's Hiding Place" for the next forty years.
- 1900 The California Indian population reaches an all time low of about 16,500. Before explorers and settlers came to California, natives numbered over 300,000.
- 1911 Ishi's mother passes away. Ishi comes into the town of Oroville. He is placed in jail and two months later is moved to the Lowie Museum of Anthropology in San Francisco.
- 1916 Ishi dies of a disease called **tuberculosis**. He was approximately 54 years old.

*Photos courtesy of the California State Library. Photo one painting depicting settlers coming to California. Photo two of San Francisco around the time Ishi arrived.*



## Ishi Leaves His Hometown

News spread from the town of Oroville claiming that a “wild” Indian had been captured. Two **anthropologists** from the University of California named Alfred Kroeber and Thomas Waterman became very interested in Ishi. They made arrangements to visit Oroville and take Ishi back with them to live in the University’s new museum located in San Francisco. They brought a Yana man with them by the name of Sam Batwi. He spoke a language similar to Ishi’s. The anthropologists intended to study Ishi and learn information about him, including his language and tool making skills. Ishi worked while at the museum. He was a janitor and earned \$25.00 per month. Thousands of visitors came to the museum to see Ishi make arrow heads, fish hooks fire drills and other items.



*Photo one (town of Oroville) courtesy of the California State Library, Photo two (Sam Batwi, Alfred Kroeber and Ishi) and photo three (Lowie Museum) courtesy of the Regents of the University of California and the Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology.*

## What is Civilization?

The word "**civilization**" is defined as an advanced state of human society, in which a high level of culture, science, industry and government has been reached.



Many newspapers reported that Ishi was "**wild**," "**uncivilized**," and "**primitive**." The anthropologists were eager to show Ishi places and things in San Francisco that they believed to be important western civilization. Ishi was often not impressed because his view of civilization and **values** were very different.

Ishi was not "wild," "primitive," or "uncivilized." His people practiced science, medicine, governance and trade, however much of their expertise when unrecognized by white society. The parts of civilization that they believed to be important were not the same. While in San Francisco Ishi visited air shows, the theater and community events. Most of the time he was more interested in the crowds of people than the performance or event itself. He enjoyed spending time visiting patients at the nearby hospital or riding cable cars, activities involving human **interaction**.



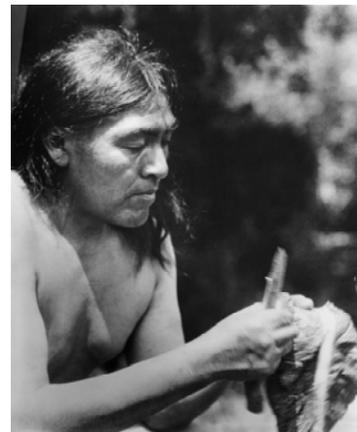
Photos courtesy of the University of **California** Regents and the Phoebe Hearst Museum of

## Return to Deer Creek

Although Ishi resisted, the anthropologists convinced him to take a trip with them to Deer Creek. Ishi had many **emotions** about the visit. He was fearful of returning to the area where he had endured so much violence and was also sad to revisit the places where he lived once lived with his family.

When they arrived the anthropologists asked Ishi to disrobe and demonstrate some traditional Yahi skills. They documented the event with photographs shown below. A bow was brought from the museum and Ishi was instructed to hunt a deer. His attempts failed as the bow was worn and didn't shoot straight.

These photos are often used to show people traditional Yahi **culture**. More often than not they reinforce **stereotypes** about native people as relics of the past. Like Ishi, native people adapted and changed as their communities and the **circumstances** around them changed. Ishi was not comfortable with the anthropologists attempts to turn back time.



Photos courtesy of the University of California Regents and the Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology

## Living By Cultural Values

Values are ideas, customs, practices, that you and your community feel are important. Ishi lived his life according to many values. He learned these values from his Yahi family and community. Some of these values are described below. Describe three values that are important to you and tell us how you practice those values in your life.

*Explore the "values panels" in the exhibit to see more examples how Ishi demonstrated these qualities throughout his life.*

**Courage** - This value is defined by the quality of mind or spirit that allows a person to face difficult circumstances, danger or pain. Ishi demonstrated courage in many ways. He faced many difficult events, massacres, the loss of his family members, being moved from his homeland to San Francisco just to name a few.

**Generosity** - This value is defined by the quality of giving to others. Ishi practiced reciprocity, he shared many things with the anthropologists and others he met while living in San Francisco. He shared knowledge about his traditional skills, he shared time teaching others about his culture and he shared items he made with visitors that came to the museum.

**Respect** - This value is defined by a persons ability to not interfere with the rights/beliefs of others or to show consideration for the rights/beliefs of others. Ishi respected the cultural beliefs of his tribe. When sharing information with the anthropologists he kept much of his cultural and spiritual beliefs private.

**Dignity** - This value is defined by a person who exhibits self respect, or shows an elevated quality of character. While living in San Francisco Ishi interpreted the world around him according to a Yahi worldview. He looked at San Francisco society in terms of what would be useful to a Yahi person. For example he was once taken to an air-show in San Francisco and asked what he thought of the planes, his response was that "hawks fly better."

**Describe three values that are important to you and how you practice them in your life.**

Value #1 \_\_\_\_\_

How do you practice this value \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Value #2 \_\_\_\_\_

How do you practice this value \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Value #3 \_\_\_\_\_

How do you practice this value \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Vocabulary Words

**Anthropologist**– A scientist who studies human cultures past and present.

**Circumstances** – A fact or event accompanying another, either incidentally or as an essential condition or determining factor.

**Courage** – The attitude of facing and dealing with anything recognized as dangerous, difficult, or painful, instead of withdrawing from it; quality of being fearless or brave.

**Culture** – The ideas customs, skills, arts, etc. of a people or group, that are transferred, communicated, or passed along, as in or to succeeding generations.

**Dignity** – The quality of being worthy of esteem or honor; worthiness.

**Enslave** – To make an individual the property of another; to place in a state of bondage.

**Emotions** – A strong feeling; excitement; to do with the arousal of feelings.

**Generosity** – The quality of being generous; willingness to give or share; unselfish.

**Homeland** – The country in which one was born or makes one's home.

**Interaction** – Reciprocal action, effect, influence.

**Massacre** – The indiscriminate, merciless killings of a number of human beings.

**Primitive** – Of or existing in the beginning or the earliest times of ages; ancient; original.

**Respect** – To feel or show honor or esteem for; hold in high regard.

**Stereotypes** – An unvarying form or pattern; a fixed or conventional notion or conception, as of a person, group. Idea, etc. Held by a number of people and allowing for no individuality or critical judgment.

**Tribe** – A group of people with common social and/or cultural characteristics living near each other.

**Tuberculosis** – An infectious disease caused by the tubercles in various tissues of the body.

**Uncivilized** – Not civilized; barbarous; unenlightened; far from civilized.

**Values** – The social principles, goals. Or standards held or accepted by an individual, class, society, etc.

**Wild** – Living or growing in its original state and not normally domesticated or cultivated.

## Video Lessons

Edited segments of the Ishi's Legacy exhibit film can be found at [www.cimcc.org](http://www.cimcc.org). Please visit the website to view the films segments before completing each of the following lesson plans.

### Video Lesson #1 Leadership

*Captain Jacks War: A historical Overview of the Violence of Ishi's Time*

Watch the video clip about Captain Jack's leadership qualities. For many tribal communities it was common for leaders to emerge through earning the respect of their community members. They ruled through gaining mutual respect rather than through force or coercion.

- 1) How did Captain Jack earn the respect of his tribe and those around him?
- 2) List three qualities you think it is important for a leader to demonstrate?

### Video Lesson #2 Romanticizing the Past

*In Two Worlds: The Impacts of Colonization on the Life of Ishi and Other California Indians*

Watch the video clip about how Ishi was described as a "wild" or "primitive" Indian. These terms were often used to label Native Americans as "uncivilized." However, we know Ishi was quite opposite to this description.

- 1) List five other terms that better describe Ishi.
- 2) Why does Pomo elder, Nelson Hopper (depicted in this film) feel that Europeans used the term wild to describe Indian people?
- 3) After visiting the exhibit, pretend you are a newspaper reporter writing in 1911. Write a paragraph describing Ishi's arrival in Oroville without using the terms "wild," "primitive," or "last of his tribe."

### **Video Lesson #3      Friend Not Just an Informant**

*Phoenix Rising: Ishi's Experiences in San Francisco*

Watch the video clip on the importance of sharing information. Look up the term "reciprocity."

- 1) Why do the individuals in the film feel that it is important to share information?
- 2) If you were in Ishi's position and were asked to share information with scientists about your people, family, values and beliefs, what information would you keep private?
- 3) Ishi was generous in sharing his time, knowledge, information and possessions. How do you think his belief in "reciprocity" affected his relationships with the scientists and individuals he met in San Francisco?

### **Video Lesson #4      Sanctity**

*Between Science and Sentiment: Ishi's Treatment in Death*

Watch the video clip regarding the issue of how Ishi died and his desires at the time of his death.

Look at the timeline on the Ishi exhibit website and The Destruction of California Indians website:

<http://www.learncalifornia.org/doc.asp?id=1617>

- 1) Explain four other historical factors besides tuberculosis and disease that lead to the rapid decline of the California Indian population during Ishi's lifetime.

Look up the definition of the term "sacred."

- 2) Why was it important to Ishi that his remains not be used for the purposes of scientific study?
- 3) Pomo elder, Nelson Hopper (depicted in this video), said that to Ishi death was sacred? What do you think he meant by this statement?

## Video Lesson #5 Ishi was not the “last” Yahi

*Homecoming: The Repatriation of Ishi's Remains*

Watch the video clip regarding the stereotype of Ishi being the “last” Yahi. Look up the definition of “stereotype” and read the following article on Stereotyping of Native Americans

[http://www.unr.edu/nnap/nt/l-8\\_9.htm](http://www.unr.edu/nnap/nt/l-8_9.htm)

- 1) How is the word stereotype defined? What are some of the stereotypes often applied to Native Americans?
- 2) Why is the characterization of Ishi as the “last” Yahi harmful to tribal groups who claim him as their ancestor today?

Review the Timeline of California Indian History on the Ishi exhibit website.

- 3) What historical events may have contributed to Ishi being mistakenly characterized as the “last” of his tribe



Photo courtesy of the University of **California** Regents and the Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology

## Review Questions

1. Why were the late 1800's a dangerous time period for California Indian people?
2. Where are the homelands of Yana people located?
3. Why did the anthropologists at the University of California become so interested in Ishi?
4. What kind of information did Ishi share with the anthropologists and the visitors at the museum?
5. What kinds of activities did Ishi enjoy while living in San Francisco?
6. Why was Ishi hesitant to return to Deer Creek with the anthropologists.
7. What is generosity and how did Ishi demonstrate it during his time in San Francisco?
8. What kind of inaccuracies or misinformation is often claimed about Ishi?
9. Why did Ishi not want his body to be used for the purposes of scientific study after his death?

## Additional Resources

### Websites

Redding Rancheria

<http://www.redding-rancheria.com/>

The Story Of Ishi: A Chronology by Nancy Rockafellar

<http://history.library.ucsf.edu/ishi.html>

Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology

<http://hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu/>

[http://hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu/exhibitions/ncc/4\\_2\\_2.html](http://hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu/exhibitions/ncc/4_2_2.html)

Phoebe Hearst Teaching Kit

[http://hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu/outreach/pdfs/ishi\\_teaching\\_kit.pdf](http://hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu/outreach/pdfs/ishi_teaching_kit.pdf)

Butte County Historical Society

<http://www.buttecountyhistoricalsociety.org/whatsnew.html>

Smithsonian National Museum of History - Repatriation

<http://anthropology.si.edu/repatriation/projects/ishi.html>



## Additional Resources

### Articles

Ishi apparently wasn't the last Yahi, according to new evidence from UC Berkeley research archaeologist by article by Gretchen Kell

<http://berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/96legacy/releases.96/14310.html>

Media Portrayal and Anthropologists' Treatment of Ishi, the Last Yahi article by Chris Watson,

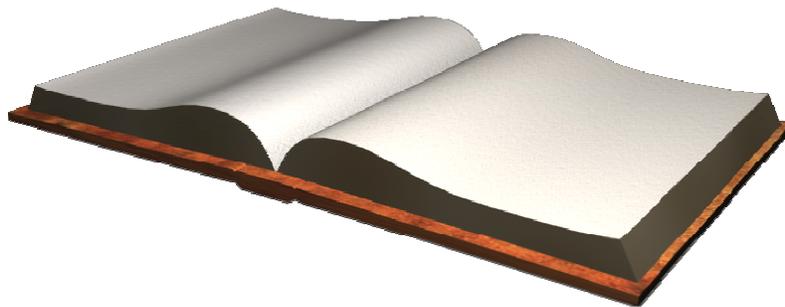
<http://www.thebicyclingguitarist.net/ishi/>

The Search For Ishi's Brain: Orin Starn article by Tom Patterson

<http://www.dukemagazine.duke.edu/alumni/dm23/ishi.html>

The Case of the Missing Brain: Now That It's Found, Where Does It Belong? article by Ellen Kuwana

<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/ishi.html>





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