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## Pomo Tribal History

“Wih doakbax ganu thaethel’ im” -  
 Tell me a story from a long time ago.

Like many other American Indian tribes, the Pomo traditionally believe they have occupied Northern California since creation. Some ancestors tell the stories of “Coyote,” a creator spirit who used feathers, fire and water to create the First People. There are scientists that say all American Indians migrated to America thousands of years ago from Asia during ice ages. Despite what may have happened, it is important to recognize that stories from the past shaped and continue to shape the special relationship tribes have with their homeland.

Prior to the arrival of European explorers and missionaries, the Pomo Indians lived north of San Francisco to the Mendocino coast. This beautiful area had plentiful amounts of fish, clams, abalone, and seaweed to eat. The Pomo Indians were not made up of one, but several different groups each speaking their own language. Today, there are seven diverse Pomo language dialects. Some communities no longer have fluent speakers of their language, however many Native and non-Native scholars and tribal members are effectively working together to preserve their language, including members from this show!

With the arrival of Francis Drake in 1579 the lives of many California Indians changed drastically. The Spaniards developed missions all along the California coast and forced Roman Catholicism upon the Native people. Along with the destruction of their homes, Indians were devastated by new diseases such as Smallpox and Pneumonia.

From 1849-1863 California Indians encountered more disastrous experiences. The “Gold Rush” of 1849 brought thousands of adventurers from around the world with hopes of striking it rich. Not only did they invade Indian lands but they lead hostile attacks. From 1850-1863 Indians were denied state citizenship, voting rights, and the right to testify in court. This meant the native population had no legal rights whatsoever. They were abused, kidnapped, and murdered at will. This time period was called, “A War of Extermination,” by Governor John McDougall. This was a sad era for California Indians.

## Culture/Legacy

“Waibax ganu much ganulim” –  
 Speak our language.

Pomo Indians are world-famous for their baskets. Most of their baskets were produced by women from the tribe, though men made some for hunting and sale. Since Pomo Indians survived on the food they gathered, the great majority of baskets were used for storing seeds and other dried foods. Some baskets were so tightly woven that they could hold water. This made it possible for storing, grinding, mixing and serving meals all in one basket.

The baskets came in all colors, shapes and sizes. It is not uncommon to find baskets decorated with duck, robin or blue jay feathers. In fact, the most valuable baskets were adorned with special clamshell beads and feathers for purposes, like a wedding gift. You can even find baskets as tiny as two inches in diameter- smaller than a paper clip!

Pomo men were very good at collecting wild foods, fishing, and hunting. They would work together to corral elk, antelope, deer, and salmon. A good hunter could hit a fish with one thrust of his harpoon. Although killing was a part of Pomo survival they always followed strict religious rituals. Thanks and prayers were offered to both animals and the creator for the nourishment that was provided to the people. Animals were always asked for forgiveness.

During seasons with warm weather, the Pomo men did not wear much clothing. While hunting or during ceremonies, they wore breechcloths made from tule, buckskin or rabbit fur. Sometimes, they wore leggings and moccasins also made from tule. Pomo women always wore skirts from their waists to their ankles and decorated themselves with beautiful regalia such as necklaces, head sashes, and earrings.

The Pomo built homes fit for single or multi-families using natural resources. Some houses could hold as many as 30 people. They drove willow poles into the ground as stakes, then bent and tied them together to make a dome or pyramid frame. Smaller poles were thatched together to make the roof and walls waterproof. In addition to homes, every small village had its own sweat house. These were built over pits where the Pomo would pour water over hot rocks to make steam. This was used for purification and relaxation. Lastly, larger villages had grand roundhouses. The Pomo held meetings, performed songs, dances and ceremonies in roundhouses.

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## Distinct Pomo Regions North of San Francisco





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## Contemporary Life

“Cḥịṇ lelạ tḥạ waḥ liḷp̣ịlịbayaxa” – How far are we going to go?

The Navajo Code Talkers were not the only natives to serve in WWII; hundreds of Pomo men enlisted, while many Pomo women left their reservations to work in California war industries. After the war, Indians struggled to gain tribal sovereignty, or the power to make their own decisions, over their government and land. As reservations were firmly established, tribes were granted more rights by the federal government.

With the establishment of gaming casinos in recent years, many Pomo tribes have benefitted from a steady income that provides for their tribal members and communities. Educational achievement was poor until recently. Cruel boarding schools and segregated classrooms left bitter memories for Pomo parents, and they felt their children would not understand the untrue or hurtful things they might read or hear about their people in a classroom. Thankfully, school books are more accurate, and many teachers now value Indian students, families, and culture.

In addition, Pomo youth groups enjoy practicing traditional dances and creating beautiful artwork like their ancestors. Pomo people are proud of their heritage and continue to work to preserve their traditional languages, foods, and ceremonies.

Today, Pomo people are doctors, lawyers, and CEO's. We are moms and dads, sisters and brothers, husbands and wives. We are your neighbors, classmates, and friends. We are an important part of the community, but most importantly – We are Pomo, and we are proud! Yah wyi!

“We are your neighbors, classmates, and friends. We are an important part of the community, but most importantly – We are Pomo, and we are proud! Yah wyi!”



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