

PRECIOUS CARGO: CALIFORNIA INDIAN CRADLE BASKETS AND CHILDBIRTH TRADITIONS

CURRICULUM GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

This curriculum guide is designed to prepare students for their visit to the museum and to enrich their experience as they view *Precious Cargo*, an exhibition that focuses on California Indian cradle baskets and childbirth traditions. Information and lessons in the curriculum are directed toward the educational goals of third and fourth grade students, although teachers may easily adapt this material to meet the interests and needs of students in other grade levels. Activities have been developed to stimulate discussion and further inquiry, with the goal of guiding young learners towards a growing appreciation for California Indian cultures, past and present.

Precious Cargo is a multi-faceted project that includes a traveling exhibition, a documentary film, a book, and classroom material. Through these various components *Precious Cargo* reveals what cradle baskets mean to California Indian families. By examining interrelated issues of birth, family, community, and health, *Precious Cargo* presents a holistic view of Native traditions related to the design and use of cradle baskets. *Precious Cargo* helps viewers understand that the creation of a cradle basket is actually one of the last acts in a complex protocol of observances and rules for careful living that precede the birth of a child.

During four years of research and fieldwork with California Indian peoples, thirty weavers were commissioned to create cradle baskets characteristic of their tribal region for inclusion in *Precious Cargo*. These individuals, and other California Indians, also contributed in other ways to the project. Their perspectives, reflected in collected narratives and in the documentary, have helped to shape the content of all components of the project.

Precious Cargo demonstrates that today California Indian peoples are still making and using cradle baskets and that this gift of love provides more than physical safety for the newborn; the cradle basket influences the child's psychological and social growth, solidifies family ties, signifies tribal membership and provides orientation for the future life of the child.

Background Information

Indigenous (in dij'e nes) adj. 1. originating in and characterizing a particular region or country.

As a starting point, educators planning to use the *Precious Cargo* curriculum might begin by exploring a few important concepts related to California's indigenous peoples. Further information concerning these topics can be found in the Recommended Reading section of this publication.

- Culture begins as people respond to their environment: California Indian cultures are as diverse as California's ecological regions and often reflect those environmental differences.
- The region we now call California is the traditional homeland of a large number of different tribal groups, each with varying traditions and languages.
- The influx of non-Natives devastated the indigenous cultures of California.

Culture begins as humans respond to their environment

People in different regions of the world find unique ways to solve human problems of survival, including how to deal with childbirth and the care of infants. California, with its amazing variety of ecological and climatic regions, provided its indigenous peoples with a vast array of resources as they developed ways of living.

Precious Cargo employs a humanities approach to the study of culture by recording and preserving some of the beliefs and practices that have developed among California Indian peoples; cradle baskets provide a glimpse into their world of ideas. At the same time, *Precious Cargo* is exploring a universal human experience - the miracle of birth. The individual cradle baskets in the exhibition, with different materials and with different shapes, reflect man's ability to solve a common problem in a variety of ways. *Precious Cargo*, however, is designed to encourage viewers to look beyond the obvious - beyond the cradle itself – and to consider unseen aspects of culture; the values, the hopes, the procedures, and the observances associated with birth.

The region we now call California is the traditional homeland to a large number of tribal groups

Native California represents an astounding diversity of language and culture. Several hundred independent communities, speaking an estimated 64 to 80 mutually unintelligible languages, made their homes within the present political boundaries of California. At the time of European contact approximately 300,000 people maintained successful ways of living in four markedly distinct culture areas – Pacific Northwest, Central California, Southern California, and Great Basin. Native California is considered to be one of the richest, most linguistically complex areas in the world.

Today, tribal affiliation remains critical to most California Indians, whether Hupa, Pomo or Cahuilla. Recognition of the importance of tribal heritage is provided, whenever possible, in the exhibition by directly tying information to a particular speaker, weaver, or tribe, since the practices held by one tribal group often do not hold true for another.

The influx of non-Natives devastated the indigenous cultures of California

The settlement of California by non-Natives greatly disrupted the lives of the indigenous peoples. By the late eighteenth century, Franciscan missionaries along the central and southern California coast were conscripting and separating members of Native families. The damage to traditional family life led to breakdowns in tribal social structure. (See: *Time of Little Choice* by Randall Miliken)

Northern California tribes were generally not as affected by the Franciscan missions. These tribes were greatly impacted, at a later time, by the arrival of Euro-Americans in the mid-nineteenth century. The mass influx of non-Native peoples following the discovery of gold in California resulted in a catastrophic loss of life among indigenous peoples from introduced diseases, starvation, and the episodes of brutality that accompanied the gold rush.

By 1900, the California Indian population had shrunk by an incredible 93% from the estimated pre-contact level. Vast amounts of human knowledge, oral literature, languages, music, pharmacology, and perspectives on life unique to this region also disappeared.

Yet despite a century and a half of upheaval, environmental degradation, and the ongoing processes of assimilation, the cradle basket has been able to adapt and remain significant in the lives of California Indians.

California Educational Standards

The *Precious Cargo* exhibition provides an opportunity for elementary students to explore aspects of California Indian cultures and traditions through the use of *both* historic and contemporary primary resources and through interaction with objects of material culture. These objects, and the narratives of those who have created and used them, provide important insights for children about the life ways of others. Through this experience children can discover that diversity enriches the lives of us all.

Curriculum developed for *Precious Cargo* parallels grade three History-Social Science Content Standards that focus on “Continuity and Change” by emphasizing the physical and cultural landscape of California. Students are encouraged to examine California’s “other map,” representing tribal regions. Ideas introduced by the exhibition concerning cradle basket use, both in the past and in the present, can help students understand human adaptability to a changing world, as well as to the enduring nature of specific cultural practices.

Grade four History-Social Science Content Standards focus on “California: A Changing State.” *Precious Cargo* content lends itself to an examination of the interaction of the Native peoples with Spanish missionaries, those of the Mexican *ranchero* periods, and with groups arriving in California as a result of the gold rush. Role- playing and the use of primary documents can deepen children’s understanding of the differing motivations driving Indian-white relations in California’s early years. The work of James Rawls (See: *Indians of California, The Changing Image*) provides valuable insights into how different societies viewed and interacted with California’s indigenous peoples.

Children can gain an awareness of differing worldviews through use of the Tribal Regions Map. In *The Natural Life of the California Indians*, by Robert F. Heizer and Albert B. Elsasser, the authors discuss how in California today prominent features of the terrain, such as rivers, often form boundary markers. Indians, in earlier times, had another way of defining borders; they used the drainages of streams, or watersheds, rather than the streams themselves to define traditional territories. This system allowed a tribal group to use both banks of the river and to have access to game and other foods at varying altitudes.

Students can better comprehend and compare the impact of both the Franciscan Mission Era and the Gold Rush Era on California Indian peoples by plotting the regions affected by the missions in the late eighteenth century and the later sites of mining activities in the Sierra Nevada mountains and along major California rivers. The Tribal Regions Map can also help students recognize that the cartographic boundaries of California, as defined by its statehood, sometimes bisected traditional tribal territories established eons earlier.

While primary documents of a historic nature are indispensable, it is critical that educators also emphasize with their students the value of contemporary resources while exploring issues related to California Indians. Stereotypical concepts continue to persist in the field of elementary education, and elsewhere, concerning California Indians and

how they live in today's society. Direct interaction among students and individuals from the Native American community can be a powerful antidote for stereotypical thinking. Many museums exhibiting *Precious Cargo* will present public programs that feature California Indian weavers. Educators might consider attending these programs, and inquiring which may be appropriate for children.

PREPARING FOR YOUR VISIT

Student Readiness

The *Precious Cargo* curriculum helps orient students to specific features of the exhibition. Students will benefit most if they have knowledge concerning the following topic areas:

- Physical geography of California
- Major ecosystems in California
- Diversity of indigenous cultures in California
- Relationship between the environment and indigenous peoples
- Traditional art forms of California's indigenous peoples

The Student Workbook and Classroom Activities

The Student Workbook

Topic Areas of *Precious Cargo*
Discovering Information in Photographs
The Other California: The Tribal Regions Map
Native Plants
The *Precious Cargo* Documentary Video

Additional Classroom Activities

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| Lesson 1. | Introductory Guessing Game |
| Lesson 2. | True or False |
| Lesson 3. | Creating a Cradle Basket |
| Lesson 4. | Investigating Primary Documents – Photographs |
| Lesson 5. | Investigating Primary Documents – Interviews |
| Lesson 6. | California Native Plants – Cradle Basket Materials |
| Lesson 7. | Heirlooms and Family Stories |
| Lesson 8. | Oral Literature |

Using the Material

Portions of the Student Workbook may best be introduced in the classroom, prior to visiting the exhibition. Some sections of the Workbook are based on information included in the actual exhibition and are designed to be completed during the actual museum visit.

Students may view the *Precious Cargo* documentary video at the museum. Teachers can purchase both the *Precious Cargo* publication and the documentary through the Marin Museum of the American Indian at (415) 897-4064.

The Tribal Regions Map

Exercises related to The Tribal Regions Map will familiarize students with the names and traditional territories of California's diverse indigenous groups and can be used to solidify comprehension regarding ecological and climatic zones in California. Prior to their museum visit teachers may choose to introduce the three fairly distinct types of cradle baskets forms: the sitting cradle, the rectangular lie-in cradle with a hood, and the "ladder back" style, with its several variant forms. Students can later form associations between the cradle types and their use in various tribal regions. Photographs and descriptive information regarding three types of cradle baskets have been included in the Appendix.

Investigating Primary Documents

Activities related to primary documents may also be initiated in the classroom. This work will prepare students for analyzing the many photographs included in the exhibition and contribute to their critical thinking and observation skills.

Excerpts from interviews with California Indian weavers can also be introduced effectively prior to the museum visit. The excerpts included in the Appendix are grouped by topic and will provide students with valuable insights into the impact of change. Students will notice that change affected even the design of cradle baskets as people adapted to new conditions in California.

California Native Plants – Cradle Basket Materials

As an introduction to the appreciation of California Indian basketry students may learn to identify a few of the plant species used to create cradle baskets. Care should be taken to present the topic of basketry as a serious art form, avoiding any treatment of the subject as a "craft project." Classroom exercises that build familiarity with four of the plant species used in cradle baskets can be expanded through investigative note taking and follow up research. While the exhibition text describes plants used in each cradle, no illustrations of the various species are shown.

In California Indian culture baskets have been an intrinsic part of life and the process of gathering materials is imbued with sacred overtones. Basket materials obtained from plants growing in various microenvironments were gathered, prepared, and twined or coiled into baskets of great artistry and consummate utility. Basket weaving is a sophisticated, complex cultural tradition requiring a long apprenticeship to achieve mastery of materials, techniques, and aesthetic design. (See: *Before the Wilderness*, Blackburn and Anderson)

Material Culture Objects

The exhibition includes everything a California Indian mother might have needed in the past when having a baby. Few of these material culture objects still survive; not all societies save objects and in many cases the objects decompose naturally.

Most tribal group represented in the exhibition disposed of their outgrown cradle baskets; each child received his own cradle and they were not generally reused. The Pomo sank outgrown cradles in deep water and the Western Mono hung them in Bull Pine trees. Pomo tradition dictated that cradles should not fall into the hands of others who might bring harm to the growing child. The Western Mono practice was based on the hope that the child would grow straight and tall, like the tree. Certain objects related to the birth of a child *were* kept, including ceremonial washing baskets.

Engaging students in the examination of material culture objects, including objects preserved by their own families, will strengthen their appreciation for the world-view of others.

Oral Literature and Myth

New parents, in traditional California Indian cultures, had to know the rules for living in balance with the world. It was critical to the health of the child for them to maintain reciprocal relationships with people, animals, food crops, and the supernatural forces that influenced all life.

The models for this behavior are often revealed in myths. In Native California, animals are used – in myth, folklore, art and ceremony – to explain the relationship between man and the natural universe. In these myths the animals, that were the forerunners of humans, can speak and they express much of the culture's philosophy.

In California Indian culture these stories often contain concepts related to cosmology and religion and are not necessarily appropriate for children. The tales that include characters such as Crow, Coyote and Lizard are much more than entertainment and they should not be presented to children as “fairy tales.” But teachers, through careful preparation, can help their students develop an appreciation for oral tradition and the role of myth in transmitting cultural information. (See: *Surviving Through the Days* by Herbert W. Luthin.)

In the *Precious Cargo* documentary, Tolowa weaver Loren Bommelyn describes the antics of Lizard and Frog and how parts of the cradle basket mitigate their influence on the infant. Students can be encouraged to listen for this information in the film and to find additional references to myth throughout the documentary and exhibition. Several publications, based on translations of Native California stories and designed for children, are included in the Recommended Reading section.

Teachers may want to explore The California Indian Storytelling Festival web site which contains information concerning festivals, programs and other issues:
[http://www.ucsc.edu/costano/storyI](http://www.ucsc.edu/costano/storyI.html) html.

Lesson 1: Introductory Guessing Game

Goal

Raise consciousness of students and stimulate investigative thinking

Background

General information concerning California's indigenous peoples

Materials

Introductory paragraphs concerning *Precious Cargo*

Lesson

Teacher reads clues (provided below) one at a time and charts responses before going on. Students explore what the "Precious Cargo" might be. Another way to do this is to distribute the list of clues to small groups to work on and then come back to the whole class and share their ideas. Provide a time limit.

What is "*Precious Cargo*"?

Clues:

1. Many of California's Native peoples, both in the past and in the present, consider a certain "cargo" to be precious.
2. This "cargo" is related to the family.
3. There is a lot of preparation needed in order to carry this cargo.
4. Many family members are involved.
5. A unique basket with special symbols is made to hold the cargo.
6. Objects are hung from the basket. These objects send wishes for good luck and success in the future.

The desired conclusion is: *The "precious cargo" is a baby born into a community of California Native peoples.*

Lesson 2: True or False Quiz

Goal

To engage students in critical thinking about California Indian peoples

Background

Students should be building a general background of information about California Indian cultures.

Material

Prepared “True or False” statements (see below in body of lesson)

Lesson

Students are divided into compatible small groups. Teacher or student reads the true or false statement. Groups make a decision together if the statement is true or false and shares their decision with the entire class. Groups might discuss how they came to their decision. Teacher should use judgment in adapting this lesson to fit the uniqueness of the individual class.

1. Before non-Native people arrived in California, the indigenous people spoke three distinct languages.
2. California’s Native people are known as the finest basket makers in the world.
3. Ritual was a major part of the life of California Indian peoples.
4. The marriage ceremony was considered the most important part of the Native people’s tradition.
5. Native people wandered around in the wilderness looking everywhere for plants they could use for basketry.
6. When a Native person gave something to someone else, nothing was expected in return.
7. A cradle basket is a special basket for holding babies so that the mother’s hands and arms are free.
8. Little girls in the Indian community had their own cradle baskets and dolls.

Lesson 3: Creating a Cradle Basket

Goal

To familiarize students with the process required for the creation of a cradle basket.

Background

In earlier times, all materials required for the creation of a cradle basket came from the natural environment. Today, some man-made materials are included along with the natural materials.

The knowledge necessary to locate, collect and prepare materials, and to create a cradle basket was usually passed on from one generation to the next.

Materials

Provided in Appendix:

Sequence text

Teacher provides:

Cardstock

Glue

Drawing materials

Lesson

1. Teacher reads from master emphasizing each sequential step in the process required to create a cradle basket. Students may dramatize or act out each step.
2. Text cards are distributed to students to read and put into sequential order. This can be done as a whole class activity or in small groups.
3. Students create illustration for each sequential step and assemble as cards.
4. As a possible follow-up, several copies of the text and illustrations are made and assembled as individual booklets.

(See: Weaving a California Tradition: A Native American Basketmaker, by Linda Yamane, Lerner Publications Company, Minneapolis, 1997.)

Lesson 4: Investigating Primary Documents – Photographs

Goal

To develop skills of critical analysis using photographs

Background

Since its invention, historic photographs have preserved information concerning the lives of California Indian peoples in earlier times and into the present. Students can learn to use historic photographs as a tool to expand their understanding of California Indian cultures, past and present.

Materials

Provided in the Student Workbook:

Set of photographs

Investigation System, duplicated for each group

Provided by the teacher:

Paper and pencils if a written response is desired

Magnifying lens

Lesson

1. Students should be organized into small groups. Explain that historians often use photographs to learn about people or things that happened in the past. Ask what kinds of things historians might look for in photographs. What might investigators in the future learn from photographs taken today?
2. Distribute the Investigation System list to each group explaining its purpose as a guide.
3. Groups may focus on the same photograph and submit responses for comparison, or each group may investigate a different photograph.
4. Students should be encouraged to develop investigative questions, leading to further research, based on clues found in the photograph.
5. A time limit can be established and a student recorder appointed to take notes of discussions, or each student can develop individual responses.
6. Investigative work should be followed by class discussion, development of diagrams, photographic display and further research.

Lesson 5: Investigating Primary Documents - Narratives

Goal

To develop skills of critical thinking and to engage students in an inquiry approach to learning.

Background

In *Precious Cargo* California Indians share important information about their culture and the significance of cradle baskets in their lives. In the interviews and oral histories Indian people describe how they carry on many of the traditions of their ancestors. Students can learn the value of interviews and oral histories as primary resources by investigating content through careful reading, followed by meaningful discussion and interpretation.

Materials

Provided in Appendix:

Excerpts from *Precious Cargo Narratives*

Provided by the teacher:

Paper and pencils if a written response is desired

Lesson

1. Organize students into small groups. Explain that researchers often use interviews and oral histories to learn about people, their traditions and cultures. Ask what kinds of information historians might be interested in collecting in the interview.
2. Groups may focus on the same excerpt for later comparison or each group might focus on a different interview.
3. Students should be encouraged to work as an investigative team, to discuss what the interviews reveal, and to identify areas that require more information.
4. Students may want to conduct interviews or short oral histories with family members as an extension of the activity.

Lesson 6: California Native Plants

Goal

Students will develop knowledge concerning four different California Native plants often used in the creation of cradle baskets; willow, sourberry, redbud and hazel.

Background

In earlier times, California Indians living in different climatic regions used the plant materials growing in their local areas to meet their daily needs. Cradle baskets created by different tribes, therefore, are made from different plants. The materials chosen to make a cradle basket were based on the qualities of strength and flexibility and over time each tribe developed its regional style. Two criteria were essential for cradle baskets regardless of tribal region: to be strong enough to keep the baby safe, yet lightweight enough to be portable.

Materials

Provided in the Appendix:

Text describing four California Native plants

Drawings of four California Native plants, included in Student Workbook

Lesson

1. In class discussions encourage students to identify the qualities necessary for the creation of successful cradle baskets.
2. Emphasize the concept of diversity in California, in terms of climatic regions, plant distribution and tribal territories.
3. Explain how California Indians have developed an expansive knowledge concerning plant species in their regions, for use in shelter, food, tools and medicine; by understanding the qualities of each plant, it can be used in many ways. Discuss how today, scientists are using information provided by California Indian peoples in the development of medicines.
4. Introduce the four plants often used in the creation of cradle baskets.
5. Create California Native Plant Cards that show a plant on one side and the descriptive text on the other. Students should become familiar with each plant and its description.
6. Develop an area in the classroom devoted to plant research. Tie plants to Tribal Regions map and cradle basket type.
7. Encourage students to develop additional information about other California Native plants, to expand the set of cards and to gather additional materials for their research area.

LESSON 7: Material Culture Objects

Goal

Students will learn to examine material culture objects and to value them as clues to culture.

Background

Everyone has a family history that is unique, personal and of value. Sometimes objects are preserved in families to mark important occasions or that represent aspects of the family's history. These objects can provide information about family life, about cultural origins and about history.

Materials

Teacher provides:

Material culture objects (preferably handcrafted) from his/her family to share

Letter to parents:

Describe the project and encourage parents to help their child select and identify an heirloom and to prepare a short family story to accompany the object.

Classroom space to display objects

Lesson

1. Teacher and students discuss the meaning of *heirloom*, *artifact*, *material culture objects*.
2. Teacher shares own material culture object, modeling what students will eventually do:

Identifying Material Culture Objects

- Approximate date the object was made: _____
- Name of the object: _____
- Name of the individual that created the object: _____
- The object's place of origin: _____
- Materials used to create the object: _____
- The object's cultural use: _____
- Owner of the object (From the Collection of) _____

3. Teacher requests students to bring a material culture object to class to share. Parents may provide historical background. If necessary, students may substitute a sketch or photograph of the object.
4. Students present their objects to the class and pertinent information is recorded.
5. A "museum" display is created in the classroom with appropriate labeling.

LESSON 8: Oral Literature and Myth

Goal

Students will gain an appreciation for oral literature and the role of myth in California Indian cultures.

Background

Native California is one of the richest, most linguistically complex areas in the world. Knowledge and history has been passed for centuries from one generation to another through the oral recital of stories, legends, poems and music. Many researchers have worked in the fields of anthropology and linguistics to study California cultures and languages and to record its oral-literary heritage. California Indians have also worked to sustain and document their own cultural and linguistic heritage.

Materials

Included in the Appendix:
Nisenan Lullaby

Lesson

1. Discuss the role of oral literature with students.
2. Teacher should memorize the Nisenan Lullaby and recite it to students.
3. Explore with students what the purpose of the lullaby might be.
4. Explore with students their knowledge of any oral literature used in their families.

Note: Teachers may find two books by Paul Owen Lewis to be valuable for use in the classroom. *Storm Boy* and *Frog Girl* are based on myth and include an important section, author's notes.

APPENDIX

INTERNET RESOURCES

American Indian Resources for Educators, California Department of Education:
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ai/>

“Teaching Young Children about Native Americans,” ERIC Digest:
<http://www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed.394744.html>

“Erasing Native American Stereotypes,” Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History:
<http://www.nmnh.si.edu/anthro/outreach/sterotype.html>

RECOMMENDED READING

Bates, Craig D. and Martha J. Lee, 1990. *Tradition and Innovation: A Basket History of the Indians of the Yosemite-Mono Lake Area*. Yosemite National Park: The Yosemite Association.

Bean, Lowell John. 1994. *The Ohlone Past and Present; Native Americans of the San Francisco Bay Region*. Menlo Park: Ballena Press.

Bernstein, Bruce. 2003. *The Language of Native American Baskets: From the Weavers' View*. National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution.

Bibby, Brian. *Precious Cargo: California Indian Cradle Baskets and Childbirth Traditions*. 2004. Marin Museum of the American Indian, Novato, CA. Berkeley: Heyday Books.

Blackburn, Thomas C., and Kat Anderson (editors). 1993. *Before the Wilderness: Environmental Management by Native Californians*. Menlo Park: Ballena Press.

Busch, Briton Cooper. 1983. *Alta California, 1840-1842: The Journal and Observations of William Dane Phelps, Master of the Ship Alert*. Glendale: The Arthur H. Clarke Company.

Coues, Elliott. 1900. *On the Trail of a Spanish Pioneer: The Diary and Itinerary of Francisco Garces in His Travels through Sonora, Arizona, and California, 1775-1776*. New York: Francis P. Harper.

Heizer, Robert F. and Elsasser, Albert B. 1980. *The Natural Life of the California Indians*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Keator, Glenn, Yamane, Linda and Lewis, Ann. 1995. *In Full View – Three Ways of Seeing California Plants*. Headlands Center for the Arts. Berkeley: Heyday Books.

Luthin, Herbert W. 2002. *Surviving Through the Days, Translations of Native California Stories and Songs*, Berkeley: University of California Press

Milliken, Randall T. *Time of Little Choice*

Margolin, Malcolm. 1989. *Life in a California Mission, The Journals of Jean Francois De La Perouse*, Berkeley: Heyday Books.

Rawls, James J. 1984. *Indians of California: The Changing Image*. Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press.

BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

Lewis, Paul Owen, 1997. *Frog Girl*, Beyond Words Publishing, Inc. Hillsboro, Oregon
_____, 1995. *Storm Boy*, Beyond Words Publishing, Inc. Hillsboro, Oregon

Dawn of the World

Fire Race

Ishi's Lizard

Thalman, Sylvia. *Coast Miwok of the Point Reyes Region*

Yamane, Linda, 1997. *Weaving a California Tradition: A Native American Basketmaker*, Minneapolis, Lerner Publications Company.

DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Hailstone, Vivien. *Through the Eyes of a Basketweaver*

Strauss, Terry. 2003. *Precious Cargo: California Indian Cradle Baskets and Childbirth Traditions*. Marin Museum of the American Indian, Novato, CA.

LESSON 2: *Answers for True or False Quiz*

1. Native California was once perhaps the most linguistically and culturally diverse region in North America with an estimated 64 to 80 mutually unintelligible languages.
2. California Indian basket weavers are world renowned for their expertise. Most traditional forms of basketry associated with the hunting and gathering lifestyle have become obsolete. Making baby baskets, however, has remained a very functional pursuit.
3. Ritual (following specific ceremonies and codes) was an extremely important part of the life of California Indian peoples. Ritual marked important events in the human life cycle including birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Many Indian people continue to observe important tribal rituals today.
4. The birth of a baby was considered more important than the marriage ceremony because the birth of a baby united families and enriched the community.
5. Native people cared for specific areas in their region where natural resources, necessary for fine basketry, were located. At certain times of the year Native peoples burned the undergrowth, pruned plants and aerated the soil. Their care insured that plants would grow straight and healthy. These practices continue today.
6. Reciprocity is an important value in California Indian cultures. If someone does something for you, then you are expected to do (or give) something in return. Reciprocity, and gratitude, applies to all things, including plants and animals that provide materials and sustenance.
7. The cradle basket was “invented” so that mothers could go about their chores and the baby could be safely with them. In earlier times most of these chores were out of doors, and with no babysitters, infants were always with their mothers.
8. Little girls in Native communities carried simple dolls in small cradles that were often made for them by their relatives. This play helped prepare girls for their future roles as mothers.

LESSON 3: Sequencing steps: Making a Cradle Basket

1. California Indian children watch and listen as elders proceed through all the steps required to create a cradle basket for a newborn child.
2. Native people go to a special place in nature that has been used by their tribal members for hundreds of years. Here they coppice, or prune, the plants, aerate the plant's roots by loosing the soil and sometimes burn overgrown brush.
3. At a specific time of the year, when plants are just right for their intended use, the plant materials are gathered. Respect is shown to the plants from which the materials are taken. The people offer thanks to the plants, and leave enough for the plant to continue to grow.
4. Plant materials, usually sticks and shoots, are carefully prepared. Some sticks, like willow, are peeled, "cured", sorted and wrapped with torn calico cloth into straight bundles. Other materials, such as redbud, may be wound into little coils for future use. They are saved for the time when the cradle basket will be created.
5. When a new baby is about to be born the weaver, often the baby's grandmother, begins making the basket from her stored plant materials. Sometimes, the plant materials are soaked in water to restore their flexibility.
6. In some tribes, the basket maker weaves special symbols into the cradle, especially on the hood. After the baby is born and its gender is known, zigzags or diamonds are woven into a cradle intended for a girl. Straight lines, like arrows, are woven into cradles for boys. Other important objects are also attached to the cradle, such as tiny baskets for girls to help them become fine weavers. A tiny bow might be hung from a boy's basket to help him become a skilled hunter.
7. The new baby is swaddled in blankets and laced snugly in its new cradle. The mother may hold the cradle in her arms or use the tump line, attached to the cradle basket, to suspend the cradle from her forehead or from her shoulders. The mother is then free to do her work and safely care for her baby. The cradle basket can also be secured to a tree to keep the baby safe as the mother gathers food out of doors.

LESSON 4: INVESTIGATING PRIMARY DOCUMENTS - PHOTOGRAPHS

INVESTIGATIVE SYSTEM:

1. What do you see happening in the photograph?
2. Look more closely at the photograph and describe the people. Look at their:
 - a. facial expressions
 - b. poses
 - c. gestures
 - d. clothing
3. Describe what the people are doing.
4. What objects do you see?
5. Where was the photograph taken?
6. When was the photograph taken?
7. What is the place like?

Notes:

Carly Tex: This young girl has learned from her family how to weave small cradle baskets. She goes with her family and friends to gather materials. She prepares her own materials for weaving. One of the cradles she has made is included in *Precious Cargo*. Carly lives in a modern home with her family and attends elementary school where she is a good student.

Two Washoe women with babies in cradles: These two mothers are each carrying their babies in cradle baskets. The designs on the hoods indicate that one is a boy baby and the other is a girl baby. One mother has the tump line on her forehead and the other is suspended from her shoulders. Mothers today usually do not use the tump line, but hold the cradle, instead. The mothers are wearing dresses made from calico, a fabric that was introduced during the gold rush. The mothers are standing at a fence, an object also introduced by white settlers.

Mono baby in tree: While it may seem strange at first, the baby is actually in a very safe place. The mother may be gathering foods such as roots, seeds, or nuts. The baby is out of the reach snakes or crawling insects and can watch as the mother performs her work.

Phoebe Maddux & Child: This mother is sitting on the bank of a stream and working on her basketry. The baby is comfortably and safely secured in its cradle

and leaning against its mother's legs. The mother can rock the baby by moving her legs and her hands are still free to weave. The mother wears a traditional basketry hat and is dressed in clothing made from natural materials, including hides, shells and grasses.

LESSON 5: INVESTIGATING PRIMARY DOCUMENTS – NARRATIVES

Excerpts from *Precious Cargo*

Boarding School

Rosalie Bethel and Vivien Risling Hailstone (Karuk/Yurok) represent one of first generations of Native children in California to attend federal boarding schools administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, or by non-Indian religious organizations.

Rosalie Bethel spoke of her experience attending the Northfork Indian mission school as a child:

Well, when I was a child, when we went to school, we were punished for speaking our language. And as I grew older I found out the reason why. They felt as though an Indian could not handle two cultures, and they wanted us to forget our culture and go the new man's way. And that was good thinking, to my way of thinking, but they didn't have to punish us for speaking our language, because when we go home we're going to, you know, we never forget. But then a lot of our younger children, they start getting ashamed of their culture. They felt as though, "My gosh, nobody accepts us." Then they turned the man's way. Some of them then didn't put them in baby baskets any more.

Vivien Hailstone attended the federal boarding school at Hoopa, in northwestern California, as a young child.

The biggest trauma of my life was going to boarding school, because they took us away from our parents. We couldn't go home. Because if we

went home, we'd be speaking our language, or singing our songs. And I'd hear little kids crying at night. They're not supposed to, so they'd cover their faces. It was such a sad time. And to get the Indian out of you, they made us march. We marched and we marched. We marched for hours at a time.

Once my brother-in-law was singing a drum song, him and another guy, they were drumming behind the dormitory, and they got caught. And he was strapped. If you said an Indian word they would wash your mouth out with soap. It was so bad, and I never knew why. Why was it so bad? I didn't know what we did.

Doll Cradles

Throughout California young girls played with model-size cradle baskets, practicing for their future role as mothers. Many weavers recalled their childhood experiences with the little cradles:

I had a doll basket. My *hoochi* - that's my father's mother – made one for me. When we stayed at the mission school in Northfork we used to get dolls for Christmas. I would bring it home and put it in my doll basket and play like I had a baby.

- Ruby Pomona (Western Mono)

Gramma made me a baby basket when I was about ten years old. I put my first teddy bear in it.

- Ennis Peck (Maidu)

My great-grandma would make dolls for us, and we'd make our own dolls. We'd take a piece of buckskin and make a head out of it...tie it. And then we had corn...we'd play with corncobs and make little dolls. The hair would be real hair, and we'd put little clothes on it.

- Vivien Hailstone (Karuk/Yurok)

Everybody had one (model cradle). We didn't have an (commercial) dolls to put in there. We had to have stick dolls or rag dolls. Pretty dolls, we never knew anything about them. Me and my sister made our own dolls out of rag. We'd make a round thing for a head, and roll it up for the arms and legs, and put some clothes on them. That was our doll. We had only one doll, my sister and I, in our lifetime.

- Laverna Jenkins (Atsuge)

I have my little doll basket yet that I had when I was little. I had a beautiful doll that was sent to me from Germany. We used to play with our little cradles when I was at the Northfork mission boarding school.

- Francys Sherman (Western Mono)

Basketry Materials

Gathering basketry material on a yearly basis is critical to their quality. Weavers “manage” specific areas in order to maintain the qualities most desirable for excellent basketry. Western Mono weavers collect sourberry in mid-winter, when all the leaves are off.

You have to know where your bushes are and go down to the same bushes, and get them. You have to cut it every year to get your straight sticks – or burn the area, then you’ll get more. But if you let it go, then it’s no good. It’ll start branching out. It’s just not any good.

Francys Sherman (Western Mono)

Loren Bommelyn (Tolowa) learned how to gather basketry materials from his mother. He is known for the quality of materials and skilled construction.

We get hazel sticks in the spring, when the bark is peeling. There’s only about a two week window, that’s it. If you get them too early they’re not peeling, and you have to scrape your sticks. And I don’t like scraped sticks, because you scrape off the shiny part, and I don’t like that, personally.

I grade my sticks, always. *Num-nil-la* means to go through them and make them even...there’s about five sizes, generally. So you pick out all your sticks that are going up (warps) and then you pick your weavers (weft sticks) out, and you look for the ratio of the weavers to the sticks.

I like to let them dry for months before I use them. I dry them in the sun, every day, bleach them in the sun, and roll them around. I pick them up at night and then put them back out in the daytime.

When we were taught to make baskets, and talked to old people, they would say, “Whatever you make, never say to yourself, ‘Ahh...that’s good enough.’ Always do the best you can. And when you make something, it’s for a purpose, so make it strong as you can. Never make anything flimsy or weak.” That was just their basic instruction. And what’s kind of interesting is, those teachings become your judges. you’re thinking of all those eyes watching you. How would they see that? Those judges become a very important part of your life, because they watch you all the time.

Lesson 6. California Native Plans – Cradle Basket Materials

Willow

Salix sessilifolia

Willow is found in moist or wet ground throughout the West, from sea level to above the timberline. Willow is common along rivers and is considered by many Native people to be the best material for certain forms of basketry. Willow shoots can be split into fine strands or left intact to form thick foundation rods. Willow is often gathered in the fall after the leaves have dropped from its branches.

The Pomo and Coast Miwok traditionally used thick willow saplings for the framework of tule-covered shelters. Bark, peeled from the willow branches, was used to tie sections of the frame together.

Willow has long been considered among California tribes as a medicine. A chemical found in willow, salicylic acid, is a pain reliever now commonly used in aspirin.

(Insert drawing)

Sourberry

Rhus trilobata

Skunkbush Sumac (Common name)

Sourberry shoots are gathered, peeled and cured by Western Mono weavers for use in the construction of cradle baskets. Traditionally, the back of the Western Mono cradle basket is formed with two layers of sourberry rods arranged in opposing angles to provide greater strength.

The berries of the sourberry plant are edible and can be dried. Some tribes have used the berries in a dried, powdered form for medicinal purposes, especially to treat skin problems such as rashes and sores.

(Insert drawing)

Redbud

Cersis occidentalis

Judas Tree (Common name)

Pea Family

Redbud grows on dry slopes and in foothill canyons. The plant produces magenta-colored flowers that emerge along the stems in short clusters.

Redbud is an important plant material among many tribes in California for use in cradles and other forms of basketry. Weavers of the Kashaya Pomo tribe gather redbud in the Clear Lake area during the fall.

Brownish-red designs on baskets are often formed from the introduction of redbud strands during the weaving process. Split winter redbud shoots are used as a design element in the traditional cradle baskets of the Western Mono and Maidu peoples.

Weavers coppice, or prune, redbud plants each year, in order to encourage the growth of long, straight shoots that are most desirable for basketry.

(Insert drawing)

Hazel

Corylus cornuta
Birch Family

Hazel trees thrive along streams in cool canyons or on moist slopes. California Indian peoples, including the Tolowa, the Karuk and the Yurok, have traditionally used hazel as a primary source of materials in the construction of their cradle baskets. Long, slender sticks of hazel are ideally gathered in the spring when the bark is easiest to peel.

Hazel was also used by the Kashaya Pomo in the construction of large, twined burden baskets necessary for the collection of acorns. Sturdy fish and eel traps were made from unpeeled hazel.

Coastanoan people used hazel to strengthen the rims of their baskets and also fashioned arrow shafts from the plant's straight branches.

The nut of the hazel is edible and was traditionally collected from late summer to early fall to be eaten fresh or dried for later use.

(Insert drawing)

Form and Function/ Tribal Regions Map

(Insert photographs of three styles of cradle baskets: Sitting, Rectangular with hood, ladder with labels.)

Lesson 8. Oral Literature

Palala bo

Boye bo

Hanpai bo

Pulba bo

(cottontail road

jackrabbit road

quail road

dove road)

A lullaby recalled by Betty Murray Castro (Nisenan)