



Background Information for Inside the Outdoors Programs



NATIVE AMERICAN PEOPLE of Orange County

GABRIELEÑO and JUANEÑO INDIANS

The original inhabitants of Orange County and the surrounding areas are the **Gabrieleño (or Gabrielino) Indians** and the **Juaneño Indians**. The **Gabrieleño** were given this name by the Spanish, because they were named after the San Gabriel Mission, but they call themselves **Tongva**. The **Juaneño**, named by the Spanish after the San Juan Capistrano Mission, call themselves **Acjachemen**. The **Tongva** are of Shoshonean descent.

Historically, the **Tongva** occupied the entire Los Angeles basin and the islands of Santa Catalina, San Nicholas, San Clemente, and Santa Barbara. From Topanga Canyon to Laguna Beach, from the San Gabriel mountains to the sea, they lived throughout most of what is now Los Angeles and Orange Counties. The **Acjachemen** people occupied the coastline, valleys, and mountains which spanned from Long Beach to Oceanside, as far east as Lake Elsinore, and westward to Catalina and San Clemente Islands. With these wide ranges, archaeologists suspect that both tribes occupied Upper Newport Bay during some time in their history. The area of upper Newport Bay was an ideal location because of the mild climate and abundance of wildlife.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the **Tongva** had a highly developed and artistic culture and were widely known as thoughtful people. The **Acjachemen's** social structure was based on clans. Male and female clan chiefs ruled over the villages.

More is known about the **Tongva** than the **Acjachemen's** way of life prior to the arrival of the Europeans. However, the pre-European lifestyles of the **Acjachemen** and **Tongva** are thought to be very similar based on artifacts, research, and stories passed from one generation to the next to living members of these tribes.

SHELTER

Tongva and **Acjachemen** spent most of their lives outdoors. They used their homes (called kish or kiitcha) only for sleeping, or shelter from poor weather. Kish, which looked like upside-down baskets, were made with willow poles that were secured into the ground. Tule grass and cattail leaves were woven between these poles. An animal skin might have been used for a door, with other skins laid on the ground for sleeping mats. A smoke

hole on the top of the kish, made indoor cooking possible. When necessary, they would set fire to the kish and build a new one. These shelters show the **Tongva** and **Acjachemen** were hunters and gatherers. They travelled for food supplies or trading purposes, but they always returned to their village.

FOOD

Food was another important consideration for ancient people and finding it was relatively easy because of the rich resources available at or near Upper Newport Bay. The natural materials they found and used are called **natural resources**. Plants, including seeds, berries, and fruits made up the largest part of their diet. Women collected these in a basket resting on their backs and tied to their foreheads. A few of their favorite plants were yucca, clover, wildcress, cattail roots, sunflower seeds, chia, thistle seeds, elderberry, lemonade berry, toyon berry, and cactus fruit. Acorns, a staple of their diet, were collected from oak trees as nearby as present day Tustin. Some plants were also used for medicine.

The ocean provided the **Tongva** and **Acjachemen** fish, shellfish, abalone, and other food items. Surrounding the bay, they could hunt rabbit, squirrels, bobcats, coyotes, mountain lions, deer, and bear. They salted or smoked the meat to preserve it. They ate reptiles and insects, such as snakes and grasshoppers. They also hunted ducks, which were available in large numbers. Most of the **Tongva** and **Acjachemen's** time was spent hunting or gathering food.

MEN AND WOMEN

The roles of men and women were very strict in the **Tongva** culture. Women gathered and prepared the food. Men were involved in hunting, trading, and craft-making. The women made the utensils to eat or store food.

FOOD PREPARATION

Knowledge of plants was important to **Tongva** and **Acjachemen** women. Many plants were used for food, medicine, or shelter. Because some were poisonous, they had to know a lot about the plants and which ones they could or could not use. The women's duties included gathering shellfish and plants, and preparing them with the game the men caught. A mano (grinding stone) and metate (grinding bowl) were used to grind acorns to make acorn mush. Utensils were very important to the women. Each woman had her own set. In fact, when a woman died, her metate was buried with her.

Baskets were the main tool used to prepare food. **Tongva** and **Acjachemen** women were expert weavers. Baskets were made in all shapes and sizes. Some were so finely woven that they were watertight. Others could be three feet in diameter and used as huge storage bins. Bowls were made out of soapstone from Catalina Island. Because they were made of stone, they could place these bowls directly in the fire. Meals were also cooked using hot rocks. Rocks, heated in the fire, were placed in baskets to cook and boil water. Women also dried and salted meat, like deer, to preserve it.

HUNTING AND TRADING

Tongva and **Acjachemen** men were responsible for hunting, fishing, and making tools. Various methods were used to help them catch their game with limited resources. Deer heads were used as decoys to hunt deer and other large animals. When hunting ducks, **Tongva** and **Acjachemen** covered their head with a gourd, waited under water, and when ducks swam by, they grabbed them by their feet, and drowned them. The people also used their knowledge of plants to develop plant poisons that could kill fish. Men also designed fishing tools such as fish hooks from abalone shells or other animal bones. Any available resources were used to make scrapers, hammer stones, awls, and drills. The tools, as well as the methods to use them, were continually improved.

Evidence shows that trading took place between the **Tongva** and **Acjachemen** and other tribes. Soapstone and otter skins were obtained from Catalina. Obsidian, acorns, and large game were obtained from areas as far east as the present-day Salton Sea. **Tongva** and **Acjachemen** were successful traders because of their supply of salt, shells, shellfish, and dried fish. Plank canoes, called Ti'ats, were used to trade with the Chumash of Catalina. It was not an easy task to canoe 26 miles to Catalina! The men involved in trading gained importance in the eyes of their tribe.

CLOTHING

Since the **Tongva** and **Acjachemen** lived in a mild climate, little clothing was necessary. Men and boys wore little to no clothing, and women wore skirts made of grasses in the front and skins in the back. This enabled them to sit comfortably while preparing food. Grass sandals (if anything) were worn to protect their feet. Both men and women wore accessories for decoration and status. Tattoos and jewelry were symbols of importance for them. Some even wore sea otter vests as a symbol of importance in the tribe.

RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

The **Tongva** had a loose form of government. Generally, a male member of the tribe gained the tribe's permission to act as leader. Interestingly, women were sometimes allowed to lead. The shaman was the religious leader, often giving plants, like jimson weed, for spiritual purposes. To pass into adulthood, boys were given a drink made from jimson weed and asked to create a painting of colored sand. The shaman then interpreted the painting. When he was finished, he destroyed it as a sacred lesson. The **Tongva's** religion was known as the Chiningchinich cult. This cult included the teaching of morals. All records show that the **Tongva** were a peaceable, kind people.

MIDDENS

Tongva and **Acjachemen** buried unusable waste. A covered pile of trash left by early cultures is called a **midden**. An item left by early cultures such as tools or other objects, is called an **artifact**. Artifacts are useful in studying ancient civilizations. The study of people from ancient civilizations is called **Archaeology**.

TONGVA and ACJACHEMEN THEN AND NOW

When the Spanish missionaries arrived in California, the **Tongva** and **Acjachemen** cultures gradually began to disappear. Prior to their arrival, there had been approximately 200,000 **Tongva**. By the mid 1800's there were approximately 70,000, and by the late 1800's the population was down to 6,000. The **Acjachemen** had fewer members to begin with. Both the **Tongva** and **Acjachemen** were wiped out by diseases, murder, and destruction of the environment.

Today there are approximately 3,000 descendants of the **Acjachemen**. Many of them live in the San Juan Capistrano area, where their tribal office is also located. Several members of the tribe are involved in educating the public about their culture.

In 1994 the **Tongva** people were recognized as the indigenous people of Los Angeles by the city of San Gabriel and the state of California. The **Tongva** tribal office is located in San Gabriel, and the **Tongva** people strive to keep their culture alive.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Tongva Website: www.tongvapeople.org

Acjachemen Website: www.juaneno.com

Acjachemen Education Website: www.journeystothepast.com (NOTE: the legend told in the YouTube video is also told during your 3rd grade field trip)