

Grades: Intermediate

## **The Farm at Fairplex The Cahuilla: Rope Making and Corn Grinding**

### **Before your visit:**

- Brainstorm who are Native Americans? Discuss the Native American tribes of California. What tribes are in Southern and Central California? (San Manuel, Cahuilla, Chumash, Hupa, Mohave)
- Share information about the Cahuilla Native American tribe:
  1. The Cahuilla Native Americans were and are located now in the inland desert area of Riverside County.
  2. In 1770 approximately 2,500 Cahuilla Native Americans lived in this tribe.
  3. The Cahuilla territory includes the Salton Sea, below sea level, and the San Bernardino Mountains, at 11,000 feet elevation, and the supply of water was a problem. Tribal villages were located in canyons near sources of water.
  4. There were two groups of Cahuilla, the Wildcats and the Coyotes, and they might be living in the same village.
  5. The Cahuilla built several kinds of houses including rectangular shaped ones with open fronts and poles in a line covered with brush, arrow weed, and palm leaves. Dome-shaped houses covered with brush and packed earth were also built by the Cahuilla. Their homes had shade roofs to protect them from the sun.
  6. The Cahuilla ate quail, ducks, snakes, tortoises, grasshoppers, and crickets. The Cahuilla depended on desert plants for food because animals were not abundant in the desert area. They ate fruit, bean pods, and blossoms from the mesquite bushes. Fruit from agave, yucca, and cacti were also a source of food. They ate seeds from juniper and pine trees (pinon pines). Acorns were gathered and ground into flour.
  7. Bows and arrows, spears, and stone mortars with pestles were tools used by the Cahuilla.
  8. Cahuilla men hunted and traded with other tribes. They also made rope and string from yucca plants and tall grasses.
  9. Cahuilla women made coil baskets, rope, and string.
  10. The Cahuilla children gathered yucca plants and acorns.
- Show the students pictures of various stone mortars and pestles. The Native Americans called them metate. Several pictures can be found online or on Pinterest. The Cahuilla would grind corn and acorns using stone mortars and pestles or metate.
- If possible, purchase a stone mortar and pestle and have the students try to use them. This will demonstrate how difficult it was for the Cahuilla.
- Research on the computer how the Native Americans used Yucca leaves and other plants to make rope. Several instruction websites can be found online or on Pinterest on how to make rope or cordage.

### **During your visit:**

- Walk through *The Farm at Fairplex* exhibit and specifically look at the corn grinding and straw bale making part of the exhibit. Try making your own cornmeal to see how difficult it would be to make a pan of cornbread, especially at the time of the Cahuilla. Discover how much easier it is now to grind corn thanks to modern and mechanized agricultural machines.
- Find the rope making portion of the *The Farm at Fairplex* exhibit. Try making your own rope using the jute twine. Imagine how difficult it would have been for the Cahuilla Naïve Americans to make rope using plants such as the Agave or Yucca.

- Discuss the ways that the Cahuilla Native Americans and early settlers of California would have used rope and grinding stones to survive and make their life easier.

### **After your visit:**

- Discuss the steps to grinding corn or making rope. Would you have survived had you been alive?
- Write step-by-step instructions on how to turn Agave or Yucca leaves into rope. Have a partner follow your steps to see if the instructions are clear or if they need to be modified for understanding.
- Make a rope plant hanger using Agave or Yucca leaves. Imagine the hard work that the Native Americans completed just to make a ten foot piece of rope. Display the plant hangers in your classroom.
- Shuck some corn off of several ears of corn and grind the corn into cornmeal. How many ears of corn will it take to make cornbread for your entire class? Find a recipe to turn the cornmeal into cornbread and convert the recipe portions to make enough to share with your classmates.

### **Books About the Cahuilla, Corn Grinding and Native American Rope Making:**

The Cahuilla Indians by Harry James

The Cahuilla Indians of Southern California by Lowell Bean and Harry Lawton

Cahuilla (Native Americans) by Barbara A. Gray-Kanatiosh

Metates and Manos: The Basic Corn Grinding Tools of the Southwest by Frank W. Eddy

The Splicing Handbook, Third Edition: Techniques for Modern and Traditional Ropes by Barbara Merry

Temalpakh: Cahuilla Indian Knowledge and Usage of Plants by Lowell John Bean and Katherine Siva Saubel

Totally Corn Cookbook by Helene Siegel and Karen Gillingham

Tribes of Native America: Cahuilla by Marla Felkins Ryan and Linda Schmittroth