

# Remembering Those Who Died.

---

## Instructions for Teachers

There are many ways we remember and honor the lives of people who have died. The ways we show respect for our loved ones are influenced by where we live, what we believe in, traditions and practices in our culture, and ceremonies we have seen and/or been a part of.

## Before the Museum Visit

Make sure students understand what *traditions, practices, culture, customs, and ceremonies* are, giving examples as necessary. Introduce some of the language associated with death: passed away, departed, deceased, burial, gravesite, etc. See if students have other terms that might be used. Find out if students are familiar with what it means to “pay their respect”. Students will find combinations of these terms at the museum and in the lesson, so it is helpful if they understand their meaning and usage. You might make a chart of these terms and definitions for future reference for students.

Also note that living in the Bay Area with its diverse blend of cultures, religions, and beliefs, it is not uncommon for us to incorporate some of the practices and ceremonies that we witness at ceremonies into our own practices. For example, if we attend a funeral and people write their special memories of the deceased to share with the family, we might decide to include this as part of a funeral that we plan in the future.

Talk about how people sometimes see differences instead of similarities when they learn about other cultures. It might be hard for students (and many adults) to imagine the Emeryville Shellmound; 60 feet tall (about the size of a six story building!) and 300 yards long (the length of three football fields!). This was a sacred burial ground for the Ohlone, built over about three thousand years—but it might be hard to imagine because it is so different from what we know and expect. Most of us think of a cemetery as a burial ground, with lawns and headstones, maybe with some crypts—so this would be different and possibly hard to understand. Also in the past some people thought shellmounds were simply trash mounds (middens). Today we know they were actually sacred burial sites where food was probably left in respect for those who were buried there and NOT as a trash dump.

The purpose of this lesson is to try to make this experience “less different”—to try to emphasize how similar their burial practices were to ours, even though at first glance it all seems so different. It would be good to talk about all of this BEFORE going to the museum, to prepare students in advance and allow time for them to work some of these details out in their minds before they examine the shellmounds.

---

## Museum Visit

Direct students to the mural, *Scenes from an Ohlone burial of 300 years ago* located in the Shellmounds section of the exhibit at the museum. Have them look closely at the pictures and panels of the mural and read the text for each part. **Students will complete the worksheet at the museum. Make sure students use only pencils for work done at the museum.**

## After the Visit

Allow time for students to share their notes and impressions from the museum. Also discuss the results from the student worksheet.

### **Additional Ideas for Discussion:**

- A.** From the beginning of time, almost every group has developed special ways to remember and honor those who have died. Some people keep altars in their homes, some groups have celebrations like Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), some people create street shrines when people die or are killed on the streets. Why are these kinds of remembrances important for the people who create them?
- B.** Usually burial places and the remains they hold are respected. The shellmounds were treated like garbage dumps, even after the burial of human remains were discovered within them. Why do you think this happened?
- C.** What can we learn about other cultures when we compare (look for similarities and differences) their customs with our own customs and beliefs?

---

## Student worksheet—Completed at the Museum

The mural in the Shellmound exhibit tells us about the burial of an important Ohlone tribal member. Look at the mural and its panels carefully.

Below is a list of some of the ways people remember and honor those who have died. Write *similar* or *different* on each space below to tell if you find them similar (almost the same) or different from the practices you see in the mural.

\_\_\_\_\_ Family and friends come from near and far to pay their respects when someone dies.

\_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes items that are considered special or important, like jewelry, religious items, clothing, etc., are buried with the body of the deceased.

\_\_\_\_\_ After the funeral or memorial a large meal is prepared to share with those who attend the service.

\_\_\_\_\_ On the anniversary (one year remembrance) of the burial family and friends return to the burial site and bring food to share, leaving some at the grave site for the deceased.

\_\_\_\_\_ In the past, pyramids (especially in Egypt and Mexico) were built to honor the lives of leaders and other important members of the group.

Sometimes when we look at other cultures we only see differences. Look at the list above and see if the Ohlone burial is mostly similar (almost the same) or mostly different from the ways other people remember their dead.

\_\_\_\_\_ Mostly similar                      \_\_\_\_\_ Mostly different

---

After seeing the exhibit at the museum, what did you find that was interesting and/or important to know about Ohlone burial practices?

Find 2 or 3 other things in the exhibit that you think are interesting and/or important about the Ohlone burials from the mural or other parts of the shellmound exhibit. Write them down on the back of this page to share when you get back to school. Explain why you think they are important and/or interesting.