

Shellmounds.

Instructions for Teachers

The shellmounds of the Bay Area have great significance to the local Native American communities living here. As students explore the *Shellmounds* portion of the exhibition they will see that shellmound sites have been used for different purposes at different times, and that the exhibit is making an argument that these sites have not been treated with respect by people in the past and even today.

This activity is designed to engage students in thinking about what we choose to preserve and why. The goal is to get students thinking about the criteria for what is important to preserve and to compare their individual ideas first with their classmates and then to consider those opinions while viewing the exhibit at the Museum.

Background information

- Shellmounds contain a mix of shells, bones, soil, ash, rocks, tools, regalia (ornamental clothing/items used in ceremonials), and human remains from burials.
- It is believed today that these shellmounds were sacred burial sites for important people within the group.
- The Emeryville Shellmound was built over thousands of years, it reached over 60 feet in height and was longer than three football fields.
- In the past some people thought the shellmounds were garbage dumps (middens) and today most of the mounds have been destroyed and/or covered over.

Before the Museum Visit

Have students fill out the worksheet by selecting three sites for preservation and write down their explanation of why they choose those sites. Put students into small groups and have them agree on three sites and the reasons for choosing them. Share these ideas with the class. The goal in this part of the lesson is to make explicit the criteria and values students use in choosing sites for preservation. For example, if a group chooses to preserve the church, they may explain they value religion and want to see it preserved.

Museum Visit

Lead students to the “Shellmounds” portion of the exhibition and have them closely examine the displays to determine the purpose of the shellmounds, how they were used or treated over time and what kinds of activity are people taking today to bring about public awareness.

After the Visit

After discussing what the students saw and experienced in the exhibition, have them write a paragraph on the preservation of the shellmounds. Why weren't they preserved? What does that tell us about the values of people who settled in this area? What do they think should be done today, if anything, to acknowledge the loss of the shellmounds?

Student worksheet

Imagine you are living in the Bay Area almost 300 years from now and your job is to preserve historical sites. There are many buildings and places that still exist, but you only have enough resources to save three of them. Choose the three that you would save and explain why.

Sites	Why you choose to preserve it. Why is it important to save?
A church	
The Oakland Coliseum	
A memorial honoring soldiers who died during wartime	
A shopping mall	
The main public library	
The local art museum	
A cemetery	
An amusement park	
A movie theater	
The first school built in the city	
A park	
A home of the first family that lived in the city	
A market that people used for buying food	