

Using Items to Learn About the Past.

Instructions for Teachers Before the Museum Visit

We can learn about the life of the Ohlone earlier in California history by examining objects that are left behind. Make sure that students understand that not everything survives the challenges of time. Lighter items like feathers, cloth, animal skins, baskets, etc. would disintegrate after being buried in the damp soil and muddy conditions of the Bay Area.

In Ohlone culture when people died their belongings were usually burned or buried with them, so we do not have many of the objects that they used. Most of the objects that we do have were made of shells, stone, or bone; some objects in the museum are recreations for us to see; and a few items were saved from earlier usage.

Students will see items made of materials they may not be familiar with. Take some time to introduce:

- **Obsidian:** a hard, dark colored (usually black) natural glass formed by the cooling of lava from volcanic action.
- **Chert:** a dark colored quartz rock that resembles flint.
- **Abalone shells:** the colorful shells of the abalone (a mollusk).
- **Animal bones:** bones from various animal parts; vertebrate (spine); scapula (shoulder blade); rib, etc.
- **Basalt rocks:** a black or dark gray rock containing some iron.
- **Sandstone:** rock consisting of grains of sand cemented together by clay or silica (a glass-like mineral). When the stones contain large amounts of quartz they are used as grinding stones, building stones, and furnace linings.
- **Quartz:** a common crystalline mineral that is often transparent and is a form of silica.

If you can find photos to illustrate some of these items (from the Internet or other sources) it would be helpful to make students more familiar with them.

Students will see some items of **regalia** (objects used for ceremonial purposes within a group) at the museum. Explain that these items were not for everyday use but for special occasions.

If you have access to a **mortar and pestle**, it would be good to introduce it to students who might not be familiar with its usage (and also what it looks like).

This lesson asks students to look at some items that Ohlone used and to decide what it tells us about their lives. You might help students with this exercise by having students think about items most of them use: cell phones, markers, crayons, backpacks, and notebooks (or others you choose). Ask them to think about:

- Where and how the items were made (made in factories)
- What they are made of (plastic, metal, cloth, chemicals, paper, batteries, etc.)
- How we get the items (We buy them from stores)
- How we use them (variety of uses)
- How we dispose of them (throw them away or recycle/reuse them)

If someone from another time or place was to look at items we use today, what might they think about our lives? Would they know how all of them were used? Do the items we use tell people something about the way we live?

Museum Visit

Give students copies of the worksheets to use as they go through the exhibit. They should find answers by looking at the items in the cases and at pictures in the Shellmound exhibit.

Make sure students use only pencils for work done at the museum.

You might want to take your class through the Before the Other People Came section of the history gallery while at the museum to add to their appreciation for California Indian cultures.

After the Visit

Allow time for students to share and discuss what they discovered at the museum. Ask students to summarize/list some of the things they learned about the early life of the Ohlone. Go over the answers on the worksheets students got from the exhibit. Students can work as a whole class or in small groups.

Here are some answers, for your information: Student answers won't necessarily be as complete, but in the course of discussion they will get all of the information. Avoid assigning grades except for basic effort and enthusiasm.

A. The chief, elders, or other important members would have worn the cape; The cape is made from feathers from geese, turkeys, and peacocks. Similar/different—answers may vary. Reasons for feathers might include they were colorful/decorative; Ohlone used almost everything from animals they ate (turkeys, geese, peacock feathers probably found on ground); birds were thought to have special powers because they could fly.

B. Answers might vary.

C. Projectile points would have been important for hunting and preparing meat, scrapers would be used for animal hides and basket making; Bone tools: whistles to make music, tools to sew and make baskets, scrapers for animal hides and baskets, pendants for necklaces and to add to clothing; Beads and pendants: beads were made from fish vertebrates, abalone shells, animal bones; Stones: used to make mortar and pestles to grind acorns, seeds berries, and meat. Some were used as net weights (fishing) and others may have been “charmstones” for burials, also used as percussion heads (drummers).

D. *All* of the items they saw were made from natural things and were made by the people who used them...(accept any other reasonable answers).

Possible Follow-up Activities:

- Students can draw pictures of Ohlone life incorporating some of the objects they saw at the museum. You might also do a class mural with the same theme.
- Students can make comparisons of items they saw in the museum with items we use today. They could fold a piece of paper in half and label one side “Ohlone Items” and the other “Items we use today”. They may want to include drawings or find pictures from other sources. This activity could also be set up as a poster for the class, with students adding their contributions.

Student worksheet—Completed at the Museum

Look at the items displayed in the cases and also at the paintings on the walls in the exhibit. Think about what they tell us about the people who made and used them.

A. In the Regalia case:

Who might have worn the *Golden Eagle Cape*? _____

What was it made of? _____

Is it similar (almost the same) or different from a cape people wear today? Explain:

Why do you think feathers were chosen to decorate these special items?

B. Learning About the People:

Here you see a basket tray and an abalone and clam shell necklace. Choose *one* and explain how it was used and what you think it tells us about Ohlone life.

C. Replicas of Emeryville Artifacts:

Items like these were found in the shellmounds. They were buried along with human remains (similar to the way important items were put within pyramids).

Look at the obsidian and chert items. Why were they important for Ohlone life?

Bone tools. Tell some of the ways these tools were used by the Ohlone.

Beads and pendants. What are these items made from? _____

Look at the basalt and sandstone rocks. What were stones (rocks) used for?

D. Tell something that you can say about *all* of the items you have been looking at.

E. Look at the rest of the items on display in the museum exhibit. In the space below write down some of the things you find interesting and/or important to share with other students in your class. You might also look at other parts of the exhibit to find interesting things.