

Learning Laguna Field Activity: Tule Bitterns

Goal: To experience working with the wetland plant: tule. To appreciate the many indigenous uses of this common and abundant plant. To reflect on the human uses of tule, currently and historically.

Set-Up:

- Place mats on the green tarps in the center, place a fresh cut tule on the mats, students should face the tule or cattail patch if possible.
- Place basket of scissors, chopsticks and yarn where you can reach them.
- Place box with the tule boat, twine, little basket and picture books behind where you sit and cover them so the students can't see them until you are ready.
- If you choose, greet the group of students with the Coast Miwok phrase **ꞵoppu mikkon towih?** Which is a greeting that translates to "Are you well?" The students could reply **katowih** which means "I am well."

Introduction/Discussion: You may not get through all these points – depending on what the students already know. Adjust as necessary. For two groups, allow about 6-10 minutes for discussion, 15 minutes for making the bittern and 5 minutes for closure. For one group 5/12/3. This sequencing flows well but you do not need to say everything...

- **"Imagine** what it was like here... around the **Laguna... long ago...** before electricity, before school buses, before fences, and cars." Ask students to add to the list of things that were **not** here then. (grocery stores, hospitals, TV, computers, etc) (Note: You may now want to show the wetland photos that are side-by-side in the binder)
- **"Now,** think about what people (just like animals) need to survive." Ask: What are those things? (food, water, shelter)
- "For thousands of years, the **Pomo and Coast Miwok** people lived right here, quite successfully." Ask: "How do you think they did that?" (After students answer, point out that we now buy most of what we need but in the past, things like tools and shelter had to be made and food had to be caught. **People had to be very innovative.**)
- "The Laguna was a very **rich environment** with lots of resources." Ask students to name the resources. (Water, fish, mammals, birds, plants, etc.)
- "The wetland environment supports many different plants that are extremely useful and versatile. Native Americans tended and harvested those plants that were useful to them. One of those plants is **TULE.**"

- “Tule is strong when dried, like this rope (pass around the rope). You can make mats and even houses (show picture) with tule. What other things might be made with tule?” Pass other items (except boat) describing their functions.
- Pass around the cut tule. “Is it heavy or light? Do you think it would **float or sink** in water?” “The tule floats very high in the water. Native Americans made boats and they were able to fish in the wetlands in shallow water very well.” (Show picture of the present day boat on S.F. Bay and pass around boat.)
- “Here are some pictures to help you imagine life long ago in the Laguna.” (Show the pictures in the binder of the Laguna.) (Delete this step if you showed pictures at the opening.)
- “Pomo and Coast Miwok people are still here and while many things have changed over time they still sometimes harvest tule, sedge, and willow from the Laguna for basketry and other traditional skills and activities. “The tribes keep their cultural traditions alive today through their language, dances, basket weaving, and even boat building.”
- People all over the world noticed a long time ago that tule was abundant and began using it in many ways. Most items that were woven traditionally took many, many hours of preparation and work. The tule is first cut and dried then re-soaked before being used and there were many specific guidelines and traditions around the making of each item. We want to give you an opportunity to experience weaving with a natural fiber too. So...

Today we are going weave this bittern bird using tule. These were originally toys made for children in the Pomo culture. Today you are **making** a toy for yourself. A toy that you don't have to buy... a toy... that children have played with for thousands of years.

Making the Tule Bittern

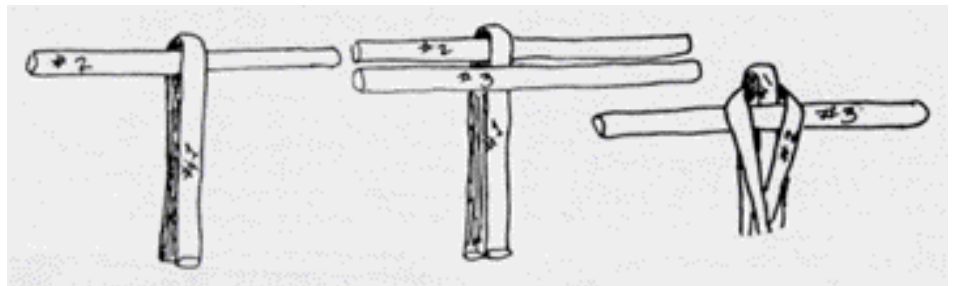
"These were woven by adults for the children."

from "Material Aspects of Pomo Culture" by S. A. Barrett, 1952



1. Pass out two 16", and four to seven 8" tules, and flatten them.
2. Center a short tule (#2) over the middle of a long tule (#1), then fold the long one in half.
3. Center a 2nd short tule (#3) over the folded #1, just below #2.
4. Fold both halves of #2 over #3.

5. Continue with #4, as with #3, folding #3 over #4, then #4 over #5, #5 over #6, #6 over #7 until all the short tules are used.



6. When the last short tule is ready to fold down, place one end of the 2nd long piece over the doll, then fold down both sides of the short tule, locking it in place. Then take the second 16" piece and use to wrap around and the bottom, then tie, very tightly. (First splitting the 16" piece in half lengthwise will make it easier to tie.) Trim the ends, if desired

