

Summary: Mountain and Valley Peoples

Central Valley Life

People who settled in the Central Valley and the Sierra Nevada developed different cultures. Like people on the coast, they depended on the resources around them. The Yokut lived in the Valley and in the foothills of the mountains. Also in the foothills were the Miwok and the Maidu. Each culture group included a number of nations that shared a language and set of beliefs.

The Central Valley had many oak trees, so Valley people ate many foods made with acorns. Gathering acorns every year was a common tradition. Some Yokuts built towns near the marshy wetlands of the southern Valley. They wove reeds and grasses to make houses. With reed boats they fished for trout. Yokuts in the northern Valley trapped river salmon with nets.

Mountain people covered their heavier, cone-shaped homes with tree bark. The bark kept out the wind and kept in the heat from fires. They ate acorns and fish and hunted large animals like deer, elk and bear.

California Indian Religions

Each Indian culture had traditions that guided the way people lived. For example, Miwoks could own oak trees, while the Shasta owned fishing spots on rivers.

Each cultural group had special ceremonies that honored certain events. Shamans, or religious leaders, often led ceremonies. The Maidu held ceremonies to honor the god World Maker. They also had a ceremony to honor the grizzly bear and the coming of spring. Dancing was often part of the ceremony. The Miwok, Maidu, and Yokut all had stories about powerful beings. In one story, Coyote, an animal, created the first people.

Children learned their culture and religion from parents and grandparents. Through ceremonies, songs, legends, and art, they learned their traditions. Some still keep their culture alive by practicing traditions. The Maidu still dance to celebrate spring and the grizzly bear. Some Miwoks make traditional baskets and play traditional Indian games. But today, California Indians are teachers, builders, and government officials.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

culture *noun*, the way a group of people lives, including such things as its beliefs, language, and food

tradition *noun*, a way of life handed down over many years

ceremony *noun*, a formal act to honor an event or belief

After You Read

REVIEW In what ways did people use resources in the valleys and mountains?

Highlight the sentences that explain how people in each region used resources to give themselves food and shelter.

REVIEW For what purposes did California Indians hold ceremonies?

Draw a box around the paragraph that answers this question.