

Pre-Visit  
Lesson Plan



# California Indian Basketry



Autry National Center

## **Introduction**

Native Americans of California, with more than 60 distinct tribes, have a rich tradition of creating baskets for use in their daily lives. The types of baskets and the diversity of their uses seem almost endless. Baskets are used for everything from carrying water to winnowing acorns to preparing an evening's meal.

This lesson will give students the opportunity to learn more about the baskets of California and the Native Americans who have created them for thousands of years. Students will also learn how to weave their own baskets.

## **Objectives**

Students will:

- Understand the role that baskets play in the everyday life of California Indians
- Investigate the characteristics that distinguish various types of baskets
- Weave their own baskets

## **Learners**

This lesson is designed for students in the fourth grade; however, it can be adapted for additional grades. The main theme of the lesson is anchored in History–Social Science with an emphasis on Visual and Performing Arts.

## **Materials**

- *Make a Round Reed Basket* worksheet
- *What Is This Basket Used For?* worksheet
- *California Indian Tribal Groups* map
- 1 coil of 5/64" round reed, cut into 16" pieces (warp, spokes)
- 2 coils of 1/16" round reed, cut into 36" pieces (weft, weavers)
- 2 five-gallon buckets of warm water

## **Content Standards**

### **History-Social Science**

**3.2** — Students describe the American Indian nations in their local region long ago and in the recent past.

- Describe national identities, religious beliefs, customs, and various folklore traditions.
- Discuss the ways in which physical geography, including climate, influenced how the local Indian nations adapted to their natural environment (e.g., how they obtained food, clothing, tools).

**4.1** — Students demonstrate an understanding of the physical and human geographic features that define places and regions in California.

- Identify the locations of the Pacific Ocean, rivers, valleys, and mountain passes and explain their effects on the growth of towns.
- Use maps, charts, and pictures to describe how communities in California vary in land use, vegetation, wildlife, climate, population density, architecture, services, and transportation.

**4.2** — Students describe the social, political, cultural, and economic life and interactions among people of California from the pre-Columbian societies to the Spanish mission and Mexican rancho periods.

- Discuss the major nations of California Indians, including their geographic distribution, economic activities, legends, and religious beliefs, and describe how they depended on, adapted to, and modified the physical environment by cultivation of land and use of sea resources.

**5.1** — Students describe the major pre-Columbian settlements, including the cliff dwellers and pueblo people of the desert Southwest, the American Indians of the Pacific Northwest, the nomadic nations of the Great Plains, and the woodland peoples east of the Mississippi River.

- Describe how geography and climate influenced the way various nations lived and adjusted to the natural environment, including locations of villages, the distinct structures that they built, and how they obtained food, clothing, tools, and utensils.

## Visual and Performing Arts

### 2.0 — Creative Expression

#### *Skills, Processes, Materials, and Tools*

2.4 — Use fibers or other materials to create a simple weaving.

### 3.0 — Historical and Cultural Context

#### *Diversity of the Visual Arts*

3.2 — Identify and discuss the content of works of art in the past and present, focusing on the different cultures that have contributed to California's history and art heritage.

## Procedure

Before beginning this lesson, prepare all the materials and place the round reed into buckets of water to start the softening process. Because weaving baskets takes time and patience, you may want to attempt weaving a basket yourself before trying to teach it to your students. Also, before you begin weaving with your students, it will be helpful to discuss the fundamentals of weaving.

Begin discussing weaving with your students by asking them the following questions:

- *Do you use baskets in your daily life? If yes, for what?*
- *What do we use today instead of baskets?*
- *Have you ever woven anything before?*
- *Did you know that most of our clothing is woven?* If you look at your shirt under a magnifying glass, you will see many threads crossing over and under each other. Weaving is a pattern made by going over one string and under the next. This process is repeated over and over until the weaving is complete.

Now discuss Native Californians and their basketry by asking the following questions:

- *How do you think Native Californians used baskets?*
- *What materials did they use to make their baskets?*
- *Where did they get their materials?*
- *How long do you think it takes to make one basket?*
- *Do you think they made baskets in different shapes and sizes? Why would they do that?*
- *Do you think they carried water in their baskets? How?*
- California baskets can be found in a variety of shapes. California Indians used shallow trays for sifting; small, wide baskets for storing various objects; large, deep baskets for gathering and cooking food; and small, round baskets that served as caps or hats. Large, elongated baskets were used for gathering and storing food, and baskets with a small opening on top were used for giving gifts.

Pass out the *What Is This Basket Used For?* worksheet. Have students match the California basket to its function. (Answers: 1 = C, 2 = A, 3 = D, 4 = B)

- When your students have finished the worksheet, review the worksheet as a group and review the use of the baskets. Mention the fact that many of the baskets were woven tightly enough to hold water. Ask students to explain why they think a certain basket was used for a specific purpose.
- Basket 1 is a basket hat. It is used to protect the head from the sun and from the strap of a burden basket, called a tumpline, which is placed across the forehead. Some basket hats are made just for decorative purposes.
- Basket 2 is a cooking basket. Its large mouth, or opening, allows food to be easily poured in, stirred, and taken out of the basket. The large opening also makes it easy to drop hot rocks in the basket. The hot rocks heat the food inside, bringing it to a boil.
- Basket 3 is used for giving gifts. Its mouth is much smaller than basket #2, which makes it harder for small items, such as shell money, to fall out. This basket is very fancy and even has feathers woven into the body.
- Basket 4 is a burden basket. It is used to collect acorns and other food, or to hold any type of item. A long strap called a tumpline is usually tied to opposite sides of the rim and then placed over the forehead. This way you do not need to use your arms to carry the basket, which leaves them open to collect your food.

Place a copy of the *California Indian Tribal Groups* map on the overhead projector.

- *What do the names on the map refer to?*
- *Where is the Desert region? The Central region? The Northern Region? The Southern Coastal region?*
- Ask your students to discuss how living in a particular region would affect the type of baskets needed and/or used. *Would the materials used to make baskets be different depending on which region a group lived in? Explain.*

## **Basket Activity**

Now your students are ready to weave baskets. See the *Make a Round Reed* worksheet for a visual explanation of the process.

- Pull out the buckets with the basket-making materials.
- *Why would you want to place your materials in water before trying to weave?*
- In front of the class, pull out 12 spokes (16") and one weaver (36") round reed.
- Begin by creating a basket start in front of the class. (You can do this by following the first three illustrations below.) Creating the basket start is the hardest part of weaving a basket. Take your time and assist your students whenever needed.
- Once your students have their baskets started, reiterate the simple pattern of weaving. (Over and under, and over and under.)
- Use the weaving illustrations to complete the baskets. (It may be helpful to place these onto an overhead projector as your students' weave.)

## **Evaluation**

Through this process of hands-on learning, your students should gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the daily lives of California Indians. By working with the map of Native California and the basket worksheet, they have begun the process of identifying some of the many different groups of Indians living in California and learning about some of their traditions.

The best way to evaluate this lesson is through further lessons dealing with Native Americans. How did a hands-on lesson strengthen or weaken your students' interest in social studies?

## **Adaptations**

**K-3** — Consider creating basket starts for the entire class. Beginning the basket is the hardest and most confusing part of the weaving process. By providing them with the basket start, you eliminate confusion while still allowing students to learn and experience the process of weaving.

**K-3** — Weave a construction-paper mat. For each student, cut two 11 x 17" pieces of construction paper into 1" strips. Have them weave the strips together into a mat. Glue the ends to hold in place. This will help them understand the pattern of weaving: over one strip and under the next, over one strip and under the next.

## **Credits & References**

Indian tribes of California

[www.mip.berkeley.edu/cilc/bibs/toc.html](http://www.mip.berkeley.edu/cilc/bibs/toc.html)

Indian tribes of California map

[www4.hmc.edu:8001/humanities/indian/ca/intro.htm](http://www4.hmc.edu:8001/humanities/indian/ca/intro.htm)

The View from Native California - Tad Beckman

[www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/5views/5views1.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/5views/5views1.htm)

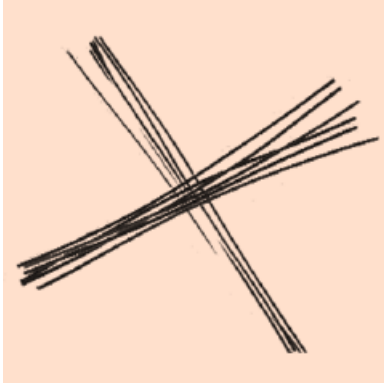
A History of American Indians in California

Basketry

[www4.hmc.edu:8001/humanities/indian/basketry/hmcbasketry.html](http://www4.hmc.edu:8001/humanities/indian/basketry/hmcbasketry.html)

[www.ciba.org](http://www.ciba.org)

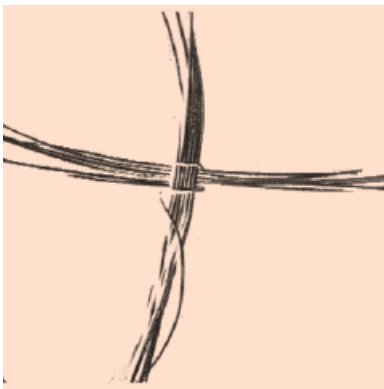
# Make a Round Reed Basket



## Step 1

Arrange two groups of six “weaver” spokes as shown, with the horizontal group on top of the vertical group.

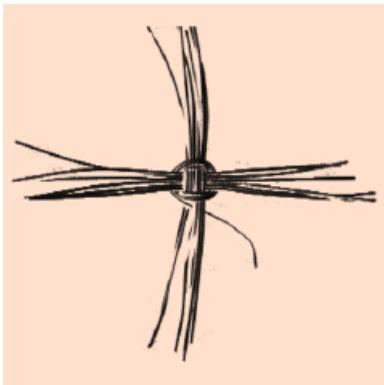
The spokes must be placed as flat as possible.



## Step 2

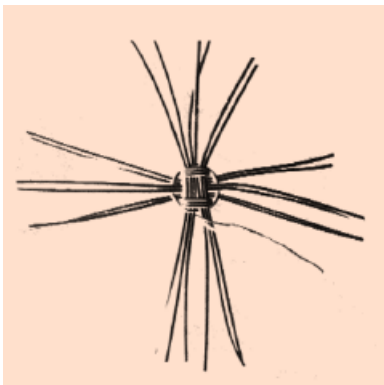
Place a long, flexible weaver at upper left, behind the horizontal group.

Wrap it over the top group of spokes, under the bottom group, and continue clockwise, binding the two groups into a single piece.



## Step 3

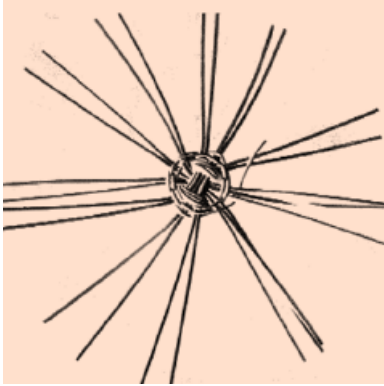
Begin weaving by bringing the weaver over three and under three spokes in the first group. Keep the weaving tight so the spokes don't bunch up!



## Step 4

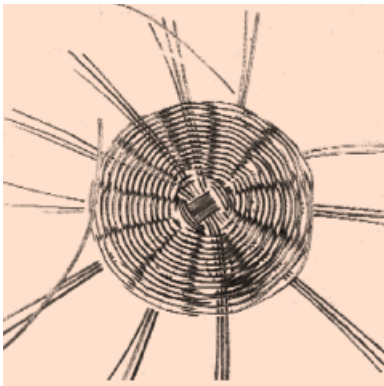
Bring the weaver over two, under two, and over two spokes in the next section. As you continue clockwise, keep this pattern of twos. Only two sections will have three spokes; all others will have two spokes. While weaving, pull the groups of spokes apart, creating an asterisk shape. This will make the weaving easier as the basket takes shape.

# Make a Round Reed Basket



## Step 5

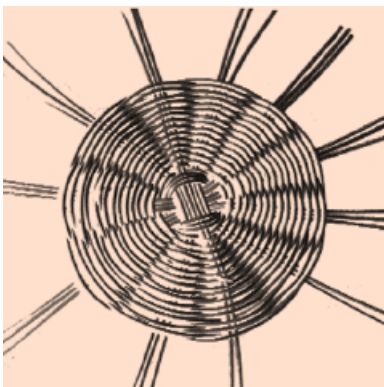
To keep the rows close together, pull the weaver down across the center after each stroke. This will help to keep the weaving tight.



## Step 6

When the weaver runs out, pinch a new weaver 3/8" from its end and insert the bent part into the woven rows near the edge of the basket.

Continue weaving the same pattern.



## Step 7

End your weaving when about 1" of the spokes remain. (If you get too close to the end, it may unravel!). Tuck in the end of your weaver and place a dab of glue on each of the spokes where the weaver ended. This will keep the weaver from unraveling when the spokes are trimmed to shape. The basket can be shaped into a bowl or left flat by applying the appropriate pressure on the weaving.



# What Is This Basket Used For?

Draw a line from the basket to its modern equivalent.



1



A



2



B



3



C



4



D



**California Indian Library Collections**

From:  
<http://www.mip.berkeley.edu/cilc/bibs/toc.html>