
Sample Lesson 27: Develop or Preserve? The Shellmound Sacred Site Struggle

Theme: Social Movements and Equity

Disciplinary Area: Native American Studies

Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: 2, 3

Standards Alignment:

CA HSS Analysis Skills (9–12): Chronological and Spatial Thinking 4; Historical Research, Evidence, and Point of View 1, 2, 4; Historical Interpretation 1, 5

CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: RH.9–10.1, 4, 6, 9; WHST.9–10.1, 4, 5, 6, 7

CA ELD Standards: ELD.PI.9–10. 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 11

LESSON PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW:

This lesson exposes students to a highly contentious and ongoing debate around Native American sacred sites. Students will be introduced to the history of the Ohlone people, the significance of shellmounds, and ongoing protests that have been organized to protect sacred sites. Students will engage sources that support the preservation of these sites and those that are in favor of development. Finally, students will develop a persuasive essay where they are able to offer their own opinion on the issue supported by primary and secondary source research.

Key Terms and Concepts: marginalization, sacred sites, shellmounds, preservation, repatriation

Lesson Objectives (Students will be able to ...):

- Learn about the significance of shellmounds and sacred sites for Native Americans, specifically for the Ohlone people
- Analyze how redevelopment and gentrification further settler colonial practices and violate the sovereignty of Indigenous lands and sacred sites

Essential Questions:

1. Should Indigenous lands and sacred sites be saved and protected? If so, what are the challenges in doing so?
2. Who should determine what happens to Indigenous lands and sacred sites?
3. What should be done to reclaim and restore sacred lands?

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4. What laws protect modern cemeteries and why aren't ancient cemeteries given the same protections? What happens to the burials?

Lesson Steps/Activities:

Lesson Note: This lesson focuses on the San Francisco Bay Area, but can be adapted to highlight a number of sacred sites that are currently or have been a space of contention. For example, a similar lesson on the Puvungna burial site located at California State University, Long Beach or the Standing Rock movement would also introduce students to contemporary debates and struggles regarding the use of sacred lands.

Day 1

1. Begin with a community-building activity (5–10 minutes). A sample list of community-building activities is provided in chapter 5.
2. Engage the class by asking how many students have shopped or visited the movie theater at the Emeryville Bay Street mall. While students briefly discuss their experiences at Bay Street mall, project a current image of the mall next to a 1924 image of the Emeryville Shellmound.
3. Explain to students that the second image depicts what parts of Berkeley and Emeryville looked like prior to development, specifically noting that the Bay Street mall was constructed atop one of the largest shellmound sites in the area. Mention that shellmounds often served as burial grounds and sacred sites where Ohlone people would meet for rituals and traditions thousands of years before the formation of the United States. Point out that there were once over 400 shellmounds all around the San Francisco Bay Area, making the region part of the Ohlone people's sacred geography.
4. As a class, read aloud the local news article "Emeryville: Filmmaker tells story of forgotten Indian burial ground disrupted by quest for retail." After reading the article, screen two short videos, "A New Vision for the West Berkeley Shellmound" and "The Shellmound: Berkeley's Native Monument." Prior to screening the videos, remind students to be attentive and take notes.
5. After screening the videos, ask students to define the following terms in their own words: shellmound, monument, sacred geography, burial grounds, development, and repatriation, using context clues from the sources they recently read and watched. After taking five minutes to define the terms on their own, have students talk through each term aloud.

Day 2

1. After reviewing the previous day's discussion, divide the class into four groups and ask students to respond to the following questions:
 - a. What is the significance of shellmounds and land in the Berkeley/Emeryville area to the Ohlone people?
 - b. Why are the West Berkeley and Bay Street sites highly sought after by non-Native American groups?
 - c. How does the struggle for shellmounds intersect with environmental issues in the region?
 - d. Do you think places where shellmounds are or once stood should be preserved?
 - e. Are there any sacred or historical sites that members in your community and/or family revere? If so, please share with the group.
2. After allowing the groups to discuss the five reflection questions for 15 to 20 minutes, provide a few minutes for the class to come together and debrief what was discussed in groups.

Day 3

1. Continue the theme on the third day of class by introducing a new assignment. Have students conduct research on both sides of the Berkeley/Emeryville Shellmound struggle (the position of the Ohlone people and those in support of further developing the area) and write a persuasive essay in response to the essential question based on the evidence they have gathered, class discussions, and their own observations and insights. The persuasive essay should be assigned as homework; however, students should be provided ample time in class over the next three days to conduct research, draft an outline and thesis statement, and have their work peer reviewed.
2. For additional guidance, collaborate with an English language arts teacher to create a grading rubric for the persuasive essay (or ask to use an existing rubric), compile a brief list of recommended sources, and let students know that their essays must include the following:
 - a. Your persuasive essay must be five paragraphs (an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion), be typed in 12 point Times New Roman font, and include a bibliography listing at least four sources (scholarly and credible) in MLA format.

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- b. Your persuasive essay must have a well-conceived thesis statement that includes your three major talking points/arguments.
 - c. Each of your talking points/arguments must be supported with evidence.
 - d. Your essay should be well organized and include rhetorical devices.
 3. After a week, students should submit their persuasive essays in class. Provide each student with a 3x5 index card on which they are tasked with writing down their three talking points/arguments. After everyone has finished filling out an index card, have students form groups of three to five students. Group members should take turns sharing their talking points. When all students have shared, they should collectively decide what their three or four strongest points are, create a thesis statement based on those points, and select one group representative to share the points with the class. Group members should help their representative write a short (two to three-minute) explanation that includes a thesis statement and their key points.

Making Connections to the *History–Social Science Framework*

Chapter 16 of the framework discusses a number of civil rights movements that were created in response to political, economic, and social discrimination. Teachers can build upon the example of the struggle to preserve the shellmound sites and have students compare that to some of the other movements referenced in the framework, such as the 1969–1971 occupation of Alcatraz or the American Indian Movement 1972–73 standoff at Wounded Knee in South Dakota. This lesson can also be connected to the Social Movements and Student Civic Engagement lesson.

Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection:

- Students will conduct research on Native American sacred lands. They will analyze the positions of both the Ohlone people and developers in the ongoing movement around sacred sites.
- Students will write a five-paragraph essay detailing the significance of these sites as well as the social, cultural, and environmental impact of development on and near sacred sites. They will present their research findings and arguments to the class.

Materials and Resources:

- West Berkeley Shellmound website includes articles, history, and visuals
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link308>
- *Beyond Recognition* documentary explores the struggle to preserve Native American and Ohlone culture and homeland in the ever-shifting Bay Area
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link309>
- Sogorea Te' Land Trust Lisjan (Ohlone) History and Territory discusses current work in the Bay Area <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link310>
- "A New Vision for the West Berkeley Shellmound"
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link311>
- "The Shellmound: Berkeley's Native Monument"
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link312>
- "Emeryville: Filmmaker tells story of forgotten Indian burial ground disrupted by quest for retail" <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link313>
- Sacred Land Film Project <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link314>
- Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology "San Francisco Bay Shellmounds"
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link315>
- "There Were Once More Than 425 Shellmounds in the Bay Area. Where Did They Go?" (article and audio interview)
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link316>
- N.C. Nelson, "Shellmounds of the San Francisco Bay Region"
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link317>
- "Shellmound" is a documentary produced by Andrés Cediél at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism about the Emeryville Shellmound and mall
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link318>
- Indian People Organizing for Change
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link319>
- *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
- *California Through Native Eyes: Reclaiming History*, by William J. Bauer Jr.
- Films: *Beyond Recognition* and *In the White Man's Image*
- *A Cross of Thorns*, by Elias Castillo
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link320>
- *An American Genocide*, by Benjamin Madley