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Cahuilla Indian Fact Sheet

Native American Facts For Kids was written for young people learning about the Cahuilla Indian tribe for school or home-schooling reports. We encourage students and teachers to visit our [Cahuilla Indian](#) homepage for more in-depth information about the tribe, but here are our answers to the questions we are most often asked by children, with Cahuilla pictures and links we believe are suitable for all ages.

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Native American Facts For Kids

●●● Cahuilla Tribe ●●●

● ***How do you pronounce the word "Cahuilla"? What does it mean?***

Cahuilla is pronounced kah-wee-ah. This was the Spanish name for the tribe, and its origins aren't completely clear. It may have been a Spanish corruption of the Cahuilla word for "chief," *qawiya*. Although the Spanish used this name negatively to mean "heathens," the Cahuilla people use it positively today.

● ***Where do the Cahuillas live?***

The Cahuilla are a [California tribe](#), located in the center of Southern California. Most Cahuilla people still live in this area today.

● ***How is the Cahuilla Indian nation organized?***

Like many California Indians, the Cahuillas were placed in reservations together with other Mission Indians from different tribes. A **reservation** is land that belongs to an Indian tribe and is under their control. However, since most Cahuilla people share reservations with people from other tribes, they have to share that control as well. Each Mission Indian reservation has its own government, laws, police, and services, just like a small country.

In the past, Cahuilla people did not have a centralized government. Each clan had its own leader, and when a village or band wanted to solve broader problems, the clan leaders needed to meet and come to an agreement, because none of the clans had authority over each other. Today, Cahuilla tribes are led by council members elected by all the people on the reservation (both Cahuilla and non-Cahuilla.)

● ***What language do the Cahuillas speak?***

Cahuilla people all speak English today, but there are some people, especially elders, who also speak some of their native **Cahuilla language**. If you'd like to know an easy Cahuilla word, *míyaxwe* (pronounced similar to "mee-yakh-weh") is a friendly greeting.

● ***What was Cahuilla culture like in the past? What is it like now?***

Here's a link to the homepage of the [Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians](#). On their site you can find information about the Cahuilla people in the past and today.

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● ***How do Cahuilla Indian children live, and what did they do in the past?***

They do the same things all children do--play with each other, go to school and help around the house. Many Cahuilla children like to go hunting and fishing with their fathers. In the past, Indian kids had more chores and less time to play in their daily lives, just like colonial children. But they did have [dolls](#), toys, and games to play. Cahuilla kids enjoyed footraces. A Cahuilla mother traditionally carried a young child in a [native cradleboard](#) on her back--a custom which many American parents have [adopted](#) now.

● ***What were Cahuilla men and women's roles?***

Cahuilla men were hunters and fishermen, and sometimes went to war to defend their families. Cahuilla women did most of the child care, cooking, and cleaning, and also made most of the clothing and household tools. Both genders took part in storytelling, artwork and music, and traditional medicine.

● ***What were Cahuilla homes like in the past?***

Most Cahuilla people lived in brush houses called **kish**. Kish are small round or cone-shaped houses made of a wooden frame covered with reeds and brush. These are very simple houses and Cahuilla people really only used them to sleep in. When they were resting, socializing, or working on crafts, Cahuilla people sat outside-- it was rarely cold or rainy in the climate where they lived. Here are some pictures of [brush houses](#).

Cahuilla people do not live in these old-fashioned dwellings today, any more than other Americans live in log cabins. Cahuilla families live in modern houses and apartment buildings, just like you.

● ***What was Cahuilla clothing like? Did the Cahuillas wear feather headdresses and face paint?***

Originally, Cahuilla people didn't wear much clothing-- men wore only [American Indian breechcloths](#), and women wore knee-length skirts. Shirts were not necessary in Cahuilla culture, but the Cahuillas sometimes wore rabbit-skin robes at night when the weather became cooler. Unlike most Native American tribes, the Cahuillas rarely wore moccasins. They either went barefoot or wore sandals. Here are some photos and links about [Indian dress](#) in general.

The Cahuillas did not wear [Plains Indian war bonnets](#) like the Sioux. Cahuilla women wore basket hats, and men went bare-headed. Traditionally, Cahuilla men and women both wore their hair long. The Cahuillas wore [tribal tattoos](#) that showed their clan affiliations, and they also painted their faces for special occasions. They used different patterns for war paint, religious ceremonies, and festive decoration.

Today, Cahuilla people wear modern clothes like jeans instead of breechcloths... and they only wear traditional regalia on special occasions like a wedding or a dance.

● ***What was Cahuilla transportation like in the days before cars? Did they paddle canoes?***

No--the Cahuilla Indians weren't coastal people, and rarely traveled by river. Usually they just walked. There were no horses in North America until colonists brought them over from Europe. Once Europeans brought horses to America, the Cahuillas could travel more quickly than before.

● ***What was Cahuilla food like in the days before supermarkets?***

The Cahuillas were hunter-gatherers, and moved from place to place frequently as they gathered food for their families. Cahuilla men hunted deer, rabbits, and small game, and went fishing in the rivers. Cahuilla women gathered acorns, nuts, beans, and fruits. They baked bread from specially prepared acorn flour, or sometimes from corn they got in trade from the Mojaves. Here is a website with more information about [American Indian food](#).

● ***What were Cahuilla weapons and tools like in the past?***

Cahuilla hunters used bows and arrows and snares. Fishermen usually used nets. The Cahuillas did not often go to war, but when they did, warriors fired their arrows or used clubs. Here is a website with [pictures of Native Indian weapons](#).

● ***What other Native Americans did the Cahuilla tribe interact with?***

The Cahuillas often traded with neighboring tribes, such as the [Mojave](#), [Luiseno](#), and [Gabrielino](#) tribes. They were especially close friends with the Gabrielinos. These two tribes often intermarried and invited each other to festivals.

● ***What are Cahuilla arts and crafts like?***

Cahuilla artists are known for their [native basketry](#) and [beaded jewelry](#). Here is an article about [Cahuilla basketry](#).

● ***What kinds of stories do the Cahuillas tell?***

There are lots of traditional Cahuilla legends and fairy tales. Storytelling is very important to the Cahuilla Indian culture. Here is one story about a [sacred blue lizard](#). Here's a website where you can read more about [Cahuilla mythology](#).

● ***What about Cahuilla religion?***

Religions are too complicated and culturally sensitive to describe appropriately in only a few simple sentences, and we strongly want to avoid misleading anybody. You can visit this site to learn more about [Cahuilla beliefs](#), or this site about [American Indian beliefs](#) in general.

● ***Can you recommend a good book for me to read?***

[The Heart Is Fire](#) is an interesting book of interviews with Cahuilla elders, with many photographs of Cahuilla life and artifacts. Or [Menill the Moon Maiden](#) is a picture book about a Cahuilla legend that would be good for younger kids. If you'd like to learn more about Cahuilla culture and history, one great source for kids is [Cahuilla Native Americans](#). You can also browse through our reading list of recommended [Native books](#) in general.

● ***How do I cite your website in my bibliography?***

You will need to ask your teacher for the format he or she wants you to use. The authors' names are Laura Redish and Orrin Lewis and the title of our site is Native Languages of the Americas. We are a nonprofit educational organization working to preserve and protect Native American languages and culture. You can learn more about our organization [here](#). Our website was first created in 1998 and last updated in 2015.

Thanks for your interest in the Cahuilla Indian people and their language!

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[Cahuilla Culture and History Directory](#)

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[Cahuilla Words](#)

Cahuilla Indian vocabulary lists.

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