



BONITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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NEWS RELEASE

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Bonita Unified Fourth-Graders Explore Local Native American History Through Hands-on Learning

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – For more than 40 years, Bonita Unified School District has brought Tongva culture to life through “Hands on History: Native American Days,” an interactive field trip highlighting the artistry, traditions, and daily life of the Tongva people, who once lived throughout the region.

Fourth-grade students from across the District participated in this year’s program at the California Botanical Garden in Claremont, engaging with six learning stations led by substitute teachers and parent volunteers, experiencing traditional games, ceremonies, crafts, food gathering and preparation, and hunting practices.

“This experience is so important because of how hands-on it is,” program coordinator Joanne Batch said. “When we’re in the classroom, we read and see things in books, but here students are walking the same land where the Tongva people lived. They’re living history rather than just learning it.”

At the jewelry and petroglyph stations, students crafted items inspired by traditional tribal designs and painted symbols representing local wildlife. They also practiced basket weaving, painted their faces with designs modeled after traditional tattoos, and learned about the social and spiritual meaning behind these art forms. Nearby, students explored the role of recreation and ceremony by spinning walnut tops, and singing a crow song reflecting the storytelling and community life of the Tongva people.

Other stations focused on the Tongva’s relationship with the land and its resources. Students ground acorns into flour using stone mortars, sampled acorn patties, and tasted chia seeds, all while learning how native plants were foraged and used in daily life. At the hunting station, students tested their aim with atlatls and bows, discovering how the Tongva’s craftsmanship and respect for nature shaped their sustainable practices.

The Hands on History program was originally developed in collaboration with the La Verne and San Dimas Historical Societies and continues today thanks to BUSD teachers, parents, and retired Bonita teacher Shaunna Gygli, who helped establish the program and donated her personal collection of artifacts for event use.

MORE



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“Programs like Hands on History bring learning beyond the classroom and help our students connect with the rich cultural roots of the community we live in,” Bonita Unified Superintendent Matt Wien said. “By immersing students in authentic, place-based experiences, we nurture both curiosity and respect for the diverse histories that shape our world.”

PHOTOS:

HANDS_ON_HISTORY1: Fourth-grade students from Grace Miller Elementary explore authentic artifacts once used by the Tongva people for hunting and animal processing. Bonita Unified remains committed to providing programs that immerse students in local history while fostering respect for the land they live on and its original inhabitants.

HANDS_ON_HISTORY2: Bonita Unified fourth-grade students take aim with bows, arrows, and atlatls during simulated hunting activities. The District continues to create opportunities for students to make real-world connections to their classroom learning.

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