



Our history - from our point of view.

# OUR PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE



Written by

Ethan Banegas  
Michael Connolly Miskwish  
Lorraine Orosco  
Stanley Rodriguez

Illustrated by

John G. Swogger



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Project Coordinator and supplementary  
research by Jen Shannon, National Museum  
of the American Indian/University of  
Colorado Boulder

Educator Liaison Jewyl Alderson,  
San Diego County Office of Education



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Welcome to this two-part comic, which tells the story of the Kumeyaay people in two different ways.

In "Beyond Gaming", you can read how our traditional game, Peon, embodies the Kumeyaay worldview. And in "Our Past, Present, and Future", you can read about ten important moments and movements in the history of our people since Contact with Europeans.

Each of these two ways tells the same story, but slightly differently. Sometimes, having the same story told twice is the best way to learn about something that's complicated.

We want these two stories to help everyone learn more about our people, our story and how we view the world.

This special edition of this comic has been produced for community distribution at Barona and Sycuan in November 2024. Through the coming winter, our Educator Liaison and her team will be producing lesson plans and other educational resources. In 2025, this comic will be distributed throughout the San Diego school district and be available free online at the Kumeyaay Visual Storytelling Website to help teach Kumeyaay history from the Kumeyaay perspective.

In the meantime, if you'd like to know more about what we talk about in this comic, there are some books and online references on the facing page that you might find useful.

# REFERENCES AND READING

Kumeyaay Visual Storytelling Website,  
<https://kumeyaayvsp.weebly.com/>

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State of California. 2020. "Truth and Healing Council," Governor's Tribal Advisor Office. Available at <https://tribalaffairs.ca.gov/cthc/> (accessed 11/2/2024).

The chart on page 19 is from data provided by the National Indian Gaming Commission on display since 2014 in the *Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States and American Indian Nations* exhibition at the National Museum of the American Indian.



# 1. WE HAVE BEEN HERE SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL

Who are we?  
You might get a different answer depending on who you ask.

The Kumeyaay are the native indigenous people of **here**: San Diego County south of the San Luis Rey River, East to the Salton Sea and south to the mission at Santo Tomas in Baja California, Mexico.

Some of our people prefer to identify by the northern language **Iipay** or the southern language **Tiipay**.

Many of us use the inclusive term **Kumeyaay** (or the Spanish spelling **Kumiai**) to identify our people. Some have adopted the Spanish name **Diegueño** or the generalized term **Mission Indian** that was applied across tribal boundaries by early American officials.

So, even what we call ourselves is testimony to how much the coming of Europeans disrupted us as a people.

Regardless which name is used, we are united in our national sense of a common culture that has thrived for centuries in one of the most diverse environments of any Indian Nation in the United States.

Our creation stories tell us that the Kumeyaay are from here: these lands are not just our home, they are *us*.

We cared for our lands through a sophisticated form of environmental management.

Fire was used to burn away chaparral to encourage the growth of food and medicine plants and attract game animals.

Astronomy was an important tool to plan when to harvest plants or organize burns.

It also helped in the timing of important ceremonies, many of which featured unique song cycles.

In the days after the creation and before contact with Europeans, we lived in sh'mulq (clan) territories with summer and winter villages.

Territories were shared according to complex family ties and alliances. Use of resources in various territories depended on consent and permission - the European concept of individual property ownership of land was alien to us.

Willow for baskets, houses and ramadas, and clay for pottery were important resources for everyone.

Resources were harvested according to rules handed down through the generations. Sha-wee (acorn meal) was an important part of the Kumeyaay diet. Archaeological sites show early villages prized access to water and acorns.

Today, we seek to manage our traditional lands through thirteen Kumeyaay reservations.

Each reservation's band may have its own constitution, government and rules for membership. Each band is thus like a separate nation, and can have its own relationship with the Federal Government of the United States.

The sovereignty of the reservations is legally complex and has led to many misunderstandings between tribal, state and federal governments.

Despite all that we have endured, we Kumeyaay still live on our traditional lands in San Diego and Baja California. Efforts to educate band members and nonmembers about cultural traditions and language help strengthen our ancient ties to our lands, and ceremonies and social gatherings make a place for our traditions in a very different world. The Kumeyaay have been able to adapt to the changes of the last six centuries and continue to ensure that our culture will remain alive.



## 2. WE ARE WRITING OUR OWN HISTORY

Why does it matter who writes our history?

According to most history books, the Kumeyaay story only begins in 1542, when the Spanish explorer Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo makes "First Contact".

The truth is that the Kumeyaay knew about the Spanish presence in North America long before this "First Contact".

Trail runners quickly brought messages from the southwest about people who had seen Coronado's land expedition in 1540. So they were not completely surprised when Cabrillo landed in San Diego Bay in 1542.

Not much is known about how this early contact affected the Kumeyaay, but - based on the experiences of other Native communities in the Americas - it is probable that either the Cabrillo expedition itself or the Spanish Galleon trade route it opened, brought the first of the unknown diseases that proved so deadly.

Nineteenth and twentieth century historians sometimes maintained that disease was the main thing that killed us after "First Contact".

This was not the real story, however: the impact of disease is made so much worse when it happens at the same time as other things. Destruction of food sources, of traditional medicines, the dislocation and social disruption, stress and fear of violence meant these diseases affected us more.

These combined effects would repeatedly impact the Kumeyaay over 130 years until the population reached its low point in 1900, losing over 90% of the pre-contact population.

The myth of an "essentially benign" First Contact was perpetuated in order to promote the interests and perspectives of the new European settlers. Particularly after 1890, railroad companies, city chambers of commerce, wealthy politicians and the Catholic Church increasingly removed the Kumeyaay from history books in favor of a settler mythology based around Mission records.

The oral histories and testimony of California Native peoples and the Kumeyaay were ignored and suppressed.

I remember in school when we read an article where the author said 'California Indians are culturally extinct'. I thought: I am sitting right here!

But as tribes developed their own resources in the 1990s, particularly through the use of casino revenues, they wanted to more accurately document their history.

In 2015 the Catholic Church canonized Father Junipero Serra, the Franciscan Friar who founded many of the missions in California in the 1700s - but who, in the eyes of many Native Americans "directed and approved of the torture and enslavement of Natives".

The backlash that followed demonstrated that California residents were interested in a truer and more complete narrative of their history.

Now is the time for us Kumeyaay to tell the real story of "First Contact" and all that came afterwards from a more modern and less biased point of view - one that acknowledges the Kumeyaay experience of colonization and challenges outdated settler myths.



# 3. WE RESISTED INVASION

There's another reason why it's important who tells history:

It matters because of whose perspective you are getting.

For us, telling history from our perspective means challenging and changing the language and point of view you might find in most other books and sources.

The mission at San Diego de Alcalá had been constructed on the orders of Father Junípero Serra using Kumeyaay forced labor.

These missions were established to pave the way for military control of the region. These workers were punished harshly, and their families starved, abused and mistreated.

On November 5th, 1775, several hundred Kumeyaay warriors surrounded the mission, burning the wooden buildings to the ground and killing three Spanish settlers, including the mission's head priest Father Luís Jayme.

This attack has been described in histories written by settlers as a "revolt". This word implies that the Kumeyaay were in the wrong - rising up against their lawful masters. The Kumeyaay are described as "marauders" and "thieves", not as enemy combatants.

You can see how this language - "revolt", "marauders", "thieves" - creates a very particular impression: one that supports a history in which settlers are justified and lawful, and Kumeyaay are not.

But let's look at these events again, only this time from the Kumeyaay perspective. The Spanish settlers had committed crimes against us and our land: they had cut down the oak trees we used for food, grazed their animals on grasslands and destroyed our harvests, fished the bay without permission.

The priests chose the location at San Diego del Alcalá to provide them with greater access to the Kumeyaay people. But this access brought disease and decimated Native plants and other resources.

To our **kuseyaay**, the Kumeyaay religious leaders, this would have been evidence that something was badly wrong with the world: that the Spanish were witches. We know from our Creator that disease is an indicator of something being out of balance.

The Kumeyaay knew that something had to be done: they had to act against these illegal actions that threatened the people, the land and their way of life.

Their strategy was to gather as much intelligence as possible about the mission.

They rallied the leaders of surrounding settlements and devised a plan: to kill the enemy leader and burn the mission to the ground, using fire to cleanse the wrongs that were being done.

From the perspective of the Kumeyaay, the killing of Father Jayme - the only missionary who spoke Kumeyaay - and the burning of the mission was a carefully-planned strategic military operation conducted by the community against an enemy who had brought great wrong to their land. It was the start of an ongoing campaign of military resistance by the Kumeyaay that lasted for seventy-five years.

Key Engagements 1775-1842





# 4. WE WERE ENSLAVED

Throughout the 1800s, the Kumeyaay were devastated by epidemics of disease that killed almost 90% of the population.

Lack of access to food, fuel and housing contributed to this death toll also.

When California became a state in 1850, state officials implemented policies they believed would finally eliminate what they saw as the threat posed by indigenous peoples.

These policies can certainly be called "genocide". However, they were not the same throughout the state.

Our experience here in the south is very different from the experience of tribes in the north.

In the north, there were bounties offered for the killing of Native people. Many were murdered as a result.

In 1850, state legislators passed the "Act for the Government and Protection of Indians".

This law allowed settlers to remove Native peoples from any land settlers owned, and to request through a judge the taking of Native children as servants and laborers.

Natives evicted from their homes and then identified as vagrants could be purchased by settlers through the courts, by posting a bond.

By 1860, the law said that girls could be held until they were 35, boys until they were 40.

The Mexican government, appalled at these state-sanctioned crimes, threatened to cross the border with armed troops to prevent atrocities (despite the fact that the Mexican authorities did not treat Native peoples in their own country much better). These threats of intervention may have helped protect the southern mountain tribes.

This law was not repealed until 1866, and there is no doubt that it was intended as an instrument of genocide: the government and people of California were determined to get rid of the Native inhabitants of the State by whatever means necessary.

"That a war of extermination will continue to be waged... until the Indian race becomes extinct, must be expected".

In 2019, California Governor Gavin Newsome apologized for what the state had done to Native peoples:

California Governor Peter Burnett, 1852

"We can never undo the wrongs inflicted on the peoples who have lived on this land that we now call California since time immemorial, but we can work together to build bridges, tell the truth about our past and begin to heal deep wounds."

California Governor Gavin Newsome, 2019

Representative James Ramos

A Truth and Healing Council established at the same time seeks to clarify the historical record of the relationship between the State of California and its Native inhabitants in the spirit of truth and healing. But such reconciliation requires that both sides be treated as equals, and that historic wrongs are righted before truth can be established and healing begin.



# 5. WE KEPT OUR CULTURE

When invasion and extermination failed, settlers in California tried to deliberately strip our people of their identity, community, beliefs and way of life.

After the invasion, the priests in the Missions made us adopt European farming practices...

They tried to make us abandon our traditional ways and adopt the ways of others. They tried this by using force and other, more subtle techniques.

... alienating us from our traditional foods and our traditional knowledge of the land, plants and animals.

They tried to break up our communities by moving us around and mixing us up in different territories.

They forbade us from using our own language and from wearing our traditional dress.

They used Christianity to undermine our traditional religion, and punished us for performing ceremonies and singing songs.

It was Spanish policy to change the way we behaved, and the way we thought, and so control us and make us "useful" to the settlers.

Priests like Father Serra and Father Jayme knew what they were doing.

After the Missions, came the Boarding Schools. This was a different tactic, but with the same intention. Children were removed from their families, and punished if they spoke their Native language or practiced their spiritual beliefs.

It was a deliberate attempt to stop the transmission of knowledge across generations. These children were to be sent home, re-educated - "brainwashed" - into living like settlers.

The Missions and the Boarding Schools had a devastating effect on Kumeyaay culture and people. Language and ceremonies went to sleep, and people were made to be afraid of their own traditions.

But in a way, these attempts backfired. Those boarding schools became places where young people began to realize what was being done to them - and they found ways to resist, adapt and continue.

After these attempts to change us, we would never be the same again. The loss of our culture did not end with the closing of the boarding schools. But despite all this, we are still here. Enough of our culture survived to give us reasons to stand up, to fight back, to make our voices heard, and to try and rebuild what was taken from us.



# 6. WE BROUGHT BACK SONGS AND CEREMONIES

So many people in our communities have worked together to ensure our cultural knowledge is passed from generation to generation.

There are many ways to do this: we have looked to our elders, we have visited archives, we have recorded our songs and we have talked to our children.

In the past, birdsongs were sung at funerals. But now we sing them at social gatherings, too.

Sometimes we need to change things in order to keep them.

Today it's often not possible for us to learn and sing songs in exactly the same way as our parents and grandparents might have done it.

But making sure we pass these songs and ceremonies on to our children and grandchildren ensures that they will never be forgotten, and that the cultural renaissance begun fifty years ago will continue.

We have many song cycles. One of them, bird songs, for example. By the late 1970s, only a few people knew about them.

They had been passed down from singer to singer in a tradition that went back thousands of years...

But even though colonialism had critically endangered these traditions, some strands persisted...

George Hyde was one of the last bird singers.

Anthony Pico, of the Viejas Band of Kumeyaay, and great-great-grandson of one of our famous kuseyaay, Chief Cinon Duro Mataweer, was friends with George and knew about the birdsongs.

He convinced George to visit a recording studio in Santee and let Anthony record him singing the birdsongs on cassette tape.

Anthony and his friends, Ron Christman and Leroy Elliot started to teach themselves complete song cycles from those tapes.

Now, we have close to one hundred bird singers in our community.

We think of the 1970s to the 1990s as being a time of renaissance.

It was during this time that we were strong enough and confident enough to start to repair the damage done to us and our culture by decades of darkness and death.

But we were no longer the same people we were before we were invaded, so the songs and ceremonies we brought back had to be adapted to who we are now.

Recovering these song cycles has been done by us in many ways. Some songs we found on old wax cylinder recordings in the archives.

Others were recovered from other tribes: Salt songs were given back to us by the Paiutes, who said they had originally learned them from the Kumeyaay.

This kind of action is needed to bring these songs and ceremonies back to our people. Most people don't know that it was not until 1978 that we could legally practice our own religious traditions, and not until 1993 that this right was tested and confirmed in the courts.

While many learned from those original tapes, recorded back in the 1970s, the line of tradition has been renewed. Today, other singers - like John and Ral Christman, Paul Cuero Jr., Fred Largo, and Blue Eagle Vigil - have learned the traditional way.

It's not just songs that need returning. In 1997 various bands came together to create the Kumeyaay Cultural Repatriation Committee, which brings the remains of our ancestors and ceremonial items back to us from museums.



# 7. WE STAND UP FOR OUR RIGHTS

We have a long tradition of standing up for our rights and standing in solidarity with other tribal communities.

Why?  
Because we have always needed to fight to protect and preserve our land, our culture and our people.

We knew then that we would have to take the fight for our rights into our own hands...

...and we have been proudly doing just that for the past 170 years!

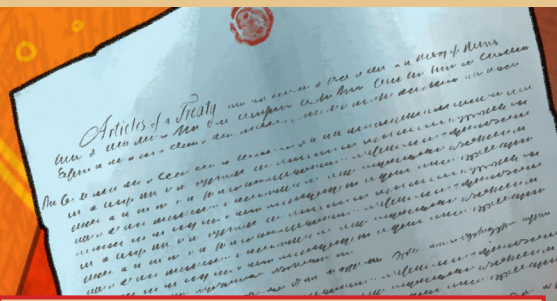
In 1875, Kumeyaay leaders went with Luiseño leader Oligario Calac to Washington DC, to meet with President Ulysses S. Grant to protest the lack of protection for our lands. The Treaty of San Ysabel was not ratified, but Grant created the Kumeyaay reservations with an Executive Order.

In 1919, a grassroots group called the "Mission Indian Federation" was formed to promote Native self-determination.

In 1969, Larry Banegas, who was a lifelong advocate for human rights, represented the Kumeyaay Nation during the Occupation of Alcatraz, when 39 Native American protesters took over the abandoned prison on the island of Alcatraz to highlight ongoing broken treaties by the US Federal Government. This was a dramatic moment in the Native American Civil Rights, or "Red Power" movement.



In 1852 we signed a treaty with the US Government - the Treaty of San Ysabel - but it was never ratified. We were betrayed by political forces in the US Senate that left us without legal protection for what remained of our lands.



In 1973, Stanley Maxey, a Kumeyaay student, was arrested by the FBI taking food and medicine to the Native Americans occupying Wounded Knee on the Oglala Lakota reservation, again over treaty breaches by the US Federal Government.



In 2015, we protested the canonization of Father Junípero Serra so that the world would know the truth: that he was an architect of a cultural and physical genocide of our people.

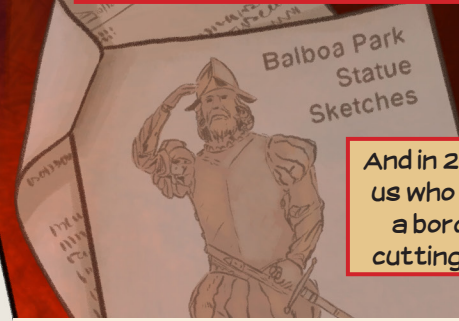


In 2010, we protested against the building of a replica ship used by the "First Contact" Spanish Conquistador, Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo.

In 2017 and 2018, Kumeyaay community members traveled to Standing Rock Sioux reservation, to protest at the DAPL pipeline, because water is sacred to us all, no matter whose lands it is on.



In 2018 we protested the installation of a statue celebrating the brutal conquistador Vasco Núñez de Balboa in Balboa Park, where there had once been Kumeyaay villages.



And in 2021, Stan Rodriguez went with a group of us who protested at the US government building a border wall across the Kumeyaay homeland, cutting us off from our tribal relatives in Mexico.



These protests have gained us so much: the Indian Civil Rights Act (1968), the Indian Self-Determination Act (1975), the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (1978), and Assembly Bill AJR 60 (2002), which gives Kumeyaay rights in crossing the US-Mexico border. More than anything else, though, standing up for our rights has given us a sense of shared responsibility for our own future, and the knowledge that we make change happen.



# 8. WE SUPPORT OUR WAY OF LIFE AND OUR PEOPLE

After centuries of displacement and colonization, economic development through gaming is one way we are sustaining and supporting our cultural future.

Some Kumeyaay have advanced sovereignty by using gaming revenue and the political capital that comes with it.

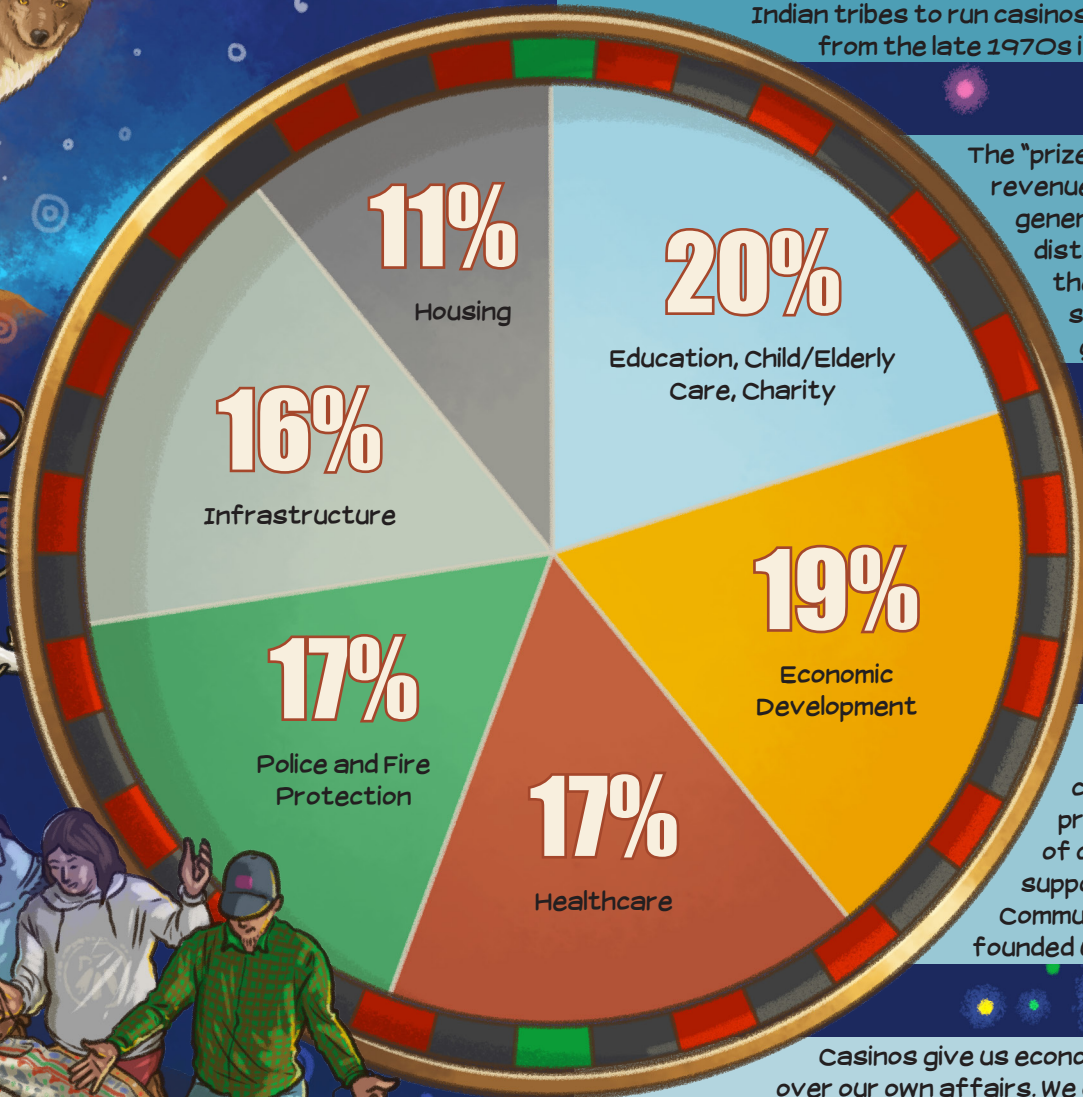
Games of chance have always been part of the Indigenous way of life in North America.

Originally, for us, **Peon** was our way of gaming. Peon combined luck and skill and brought the whole community together.

Villages would gather to watch their teams compete - sometimes for hours on end - and support them with songs. Peon was an opportunity for villages to engage in good-natured rivalry.

The winning team was awarded a prize and, of course, bragging rights!

Peon was even used to settle disputes without resorting to violence.



Today, casinos are the descendants of that tradition of gaming. Legally, the process of establishing the right of Indian tribes to run casinos took nine years, from the late 1970s into the 1980s.

The "prize" for us is the revenue that our casinos generate. This revenue is distributed throughout the tribe, and also shared with non-gaming tribes.

Beyond gaming, we have developed and exercised this economic sovereignty in many ways over the years.

We use these revenues to provide community social programs with millions of dollars of financial support. Kumeyaay Community College was also founded using gaming revenue.

Casinos give us economic control over our own affairs. We can direct the revenues of gaming to cultural and social programs that reflect **our** values...

... not the values of the state or federal governments.

The casinos have created a source of tribal funding that can transform our social services. With it, we are able to support housing, education, health, and cultural and educational programs. And while not every tribe or band benefits equally from gaming, casino revenues have provided us with the economic means to collectively advance and support self-determination: the right to conduct our own affairs.





# 9. WE TEACH OUR PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

We are very proud of our Community College.

This is a place which is dedicated to ensuring that our culture and heritage is passed on to future generations, a place where the community can learn our history and our language.

Students come to the college to understand the Kumeyaay historical perspective, to appreciate and seek solutions to the challenges that face us today, and gain an understanding of what it means to be Kumeyaay in the world today.

The college was established in 2004 by the Sycuan band of the Kumeyaay Nation, using gaming revenues.

It took over from an earlier college, which was one of six tribal colleges founded in 1971 after the protests at Alcatraz. Kumeyaay and others who protested there established these colleges to relearn history from our own perspective.

Today, the community college offers classes on anthropology, ethnobiology, Kumeyaay history, arts and culture and Kumeyaay language. The college also supports many projects which assert our connections to our homelands through stewardship of the land and the environment.

These are just some of the projects that the Community College has been a part of. All of them have helped us learn - and teach! - what it means to be Kumeyaay to students of all ages.

Through the Kumeyaay Heritage Preservation Committee, the Community College is part of a coalition of local organizations working to preserve and re-wild the wetlands of the Mission Bay area.

The project aims to restore unique wetlands in our traditional homelands, the northeast corner of the bay, creating habitat for local species, mitigating the impacts of climate change, and increasing public access to the area...

... ensuring that these wetlands remain healthy and vibrant for future generations.

The Kumeyaay Placenames project, has mapped historical Kumeyaay place names around San Diego, recovered and translated from old Mission archives.

The College helped create the Kumeyaay Park in Old Town, where visitors to the State Park can learn about our traditional use of the lands that were our original home, and the plants and animals we shared it with.

We have worked with the San Diego Museum of Us to create a cultural sensitivity program...

... and we have promoted Kumeyaay women scholars who are revitalizing and teaching women's perspectives on being Kumeyaay and traditional cultural practices.

All this work helps ensure that our community has a place to learn about our past, our present and our future, and that we see ourselves and our heritage throughout San Diego. Want to be part of it? Enroll now!

haawka!  
hello!

mayith mrrarr mua?  
what are you doing?

m'am maj?  
where are you going?

umalh uniw'ñay  
we're reading a book

wa xkuayawam aj  
I'm going to school

ñath añej?  
can I come with you?

ku'em nájaka  
sure, let's go together

Class activity  
next week:

Translate history  
comic!



# 10. WE CONTINUE TO GATHER

Gatherings are important to us, and have been for as long as we've lived in these lands.

They can be ceremonial occasions or social time..

They keep us connected to our traditions...

... and to each other.

It's where Kumeyaay of all ages come together to embrace our heritage, to learn from each other, and to connect with our ancestors and future generations.

Only this can heal our people.

Past and present together make a strong, resilient future.

- and it is the reason why we need to bring back our ceremonies, our gatherings, and our games.

This is a powerful message -

## TO CELEBRATE WHO WE ARE...





I remember my teachers, Preston Arrow-weed and Leroy Elliot, told me how the **kwaypaay**, the leader, of a Kumeyaa village was not the chief, but the servant of the people. They told me a story:

A kwaypaay was just about to eat his dinner when a family from the village approaches him in dire straits.

Without hesitation, he offers his 'ewaa, his house, his bed and his dinner to feed the family in need. He falls asleep outside, hungry.

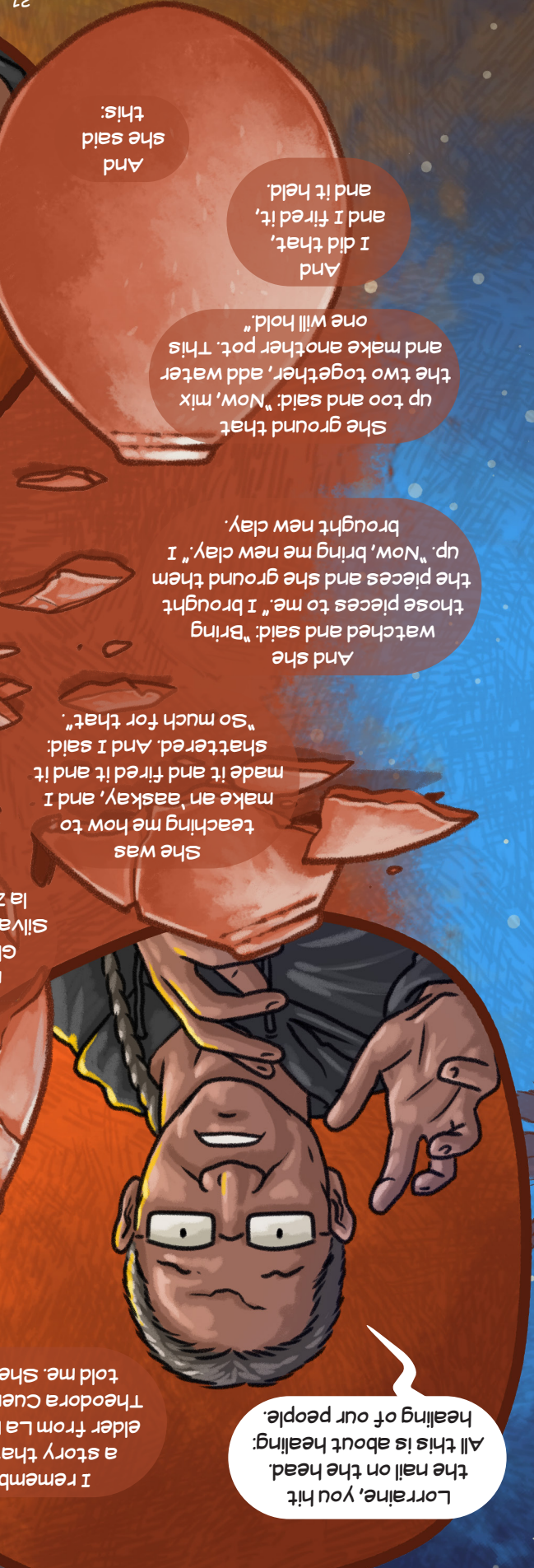
And as is so often the case in these stories, Coyote teaches us what not to do.

So, Coyote is a cautionary tale about greed and power, right? He asks us: what are we going to do with our land, what are we going to do with our culture? Whose needs are we going to put first - ours, or our community's?

Look how much bringing back our **meta'yuum**, our gatherings have given to our people. This event, playing Peon, the food, the families together - when we participate in these events, we are contributing to the healing of our people, and this makes us stronger.

It deepens our connection to each other, to those who have lived on this land before us, to all that we have in common.

This is so important, because we have been through so much hurt.



Lorraine, you hit the nail on the head. All this is about healing:

I remember a story that one elder from La Huerta, Theodore Cuero, once told me. She said:

Our people were like a big 'aaskay, a pot, before colonization.

When the Spanish, Mexicans, and Americans came, they shattered that pot and each community was left with only a piece.

And my mother-in-law, Gloria Castaneda Silva, from San Jose de la Zorra, taught me this lesson:

She was teaching me how to make an 'aaskay, and I made it and fired it and it shattered. And I said: "So much for that".

And she watched and said: "Bring those pieces to me." I brought the pieces and she ground them up. "Now, bring me new clay." I brought new clay.

She ground that up too and said: "Now, mix the two together, add water and make another pot. This one will hold."

And I did that, and I fired it, and it held.

And she said this:

"What you have with the broken pieces is the past, and what you have with the new clay is the present. When you combine them, it makes a strong future."



If we remember this connection to our land that nobody else has, and we teach our next generation to honor and build on that, we will continue to be a powerful people:

Our Creation Story talks about this land. This is our Holy Land, our Jerusalem.

If sovereignty means anything to us, it should mean that despite everything that an occupying power has done to us we still have our own self-identity, our own language, culture, songs and independence.

If you define sovereignty this way, then it's really just about "what we are allowed to do", and that has diminished drastically over the past two hundred years.

In college, I learned that the Supreme Court defined tribal sovereignty as making tribes "domestic dependent nations".

Our words are part of our way of thinking, just like their words are about their way of thinking.

Just like your shirt shows: we have only a small fraction of what we once had.

But when we hold onto what we have left, we honor and remember ancestors that lived here for thousands and thousands of years.

Exactly.

It's the land that makes us who we are. What makes us Kumeyaay is here.

There were no Kumeyaay who came across the Bering Straits, no Kumeyaay who came down the Pacific Coast, no Kumeyaay in Polynesia or whatever...

We are Kumeyaay because we are here, we were created by the land right here.

We are powerful because we have endured.

And we've never abandoned here. Over thousands of years we built up knowledge of how to live and thrive here. We are one of the longest ongoing cultures or people living in one specific area.

And it's rewarding to see science catching up with our way of thinking.

Our worldview.

Exactly. Taking our knowledge of ourselves and our ways of living seriously.

Our culture has been very consistent, adapting slowly to change as the land has changed. So whether you look at scientific theories about specific sites, or migration routes or whatever, you still see Kumeyaay here, on this land.



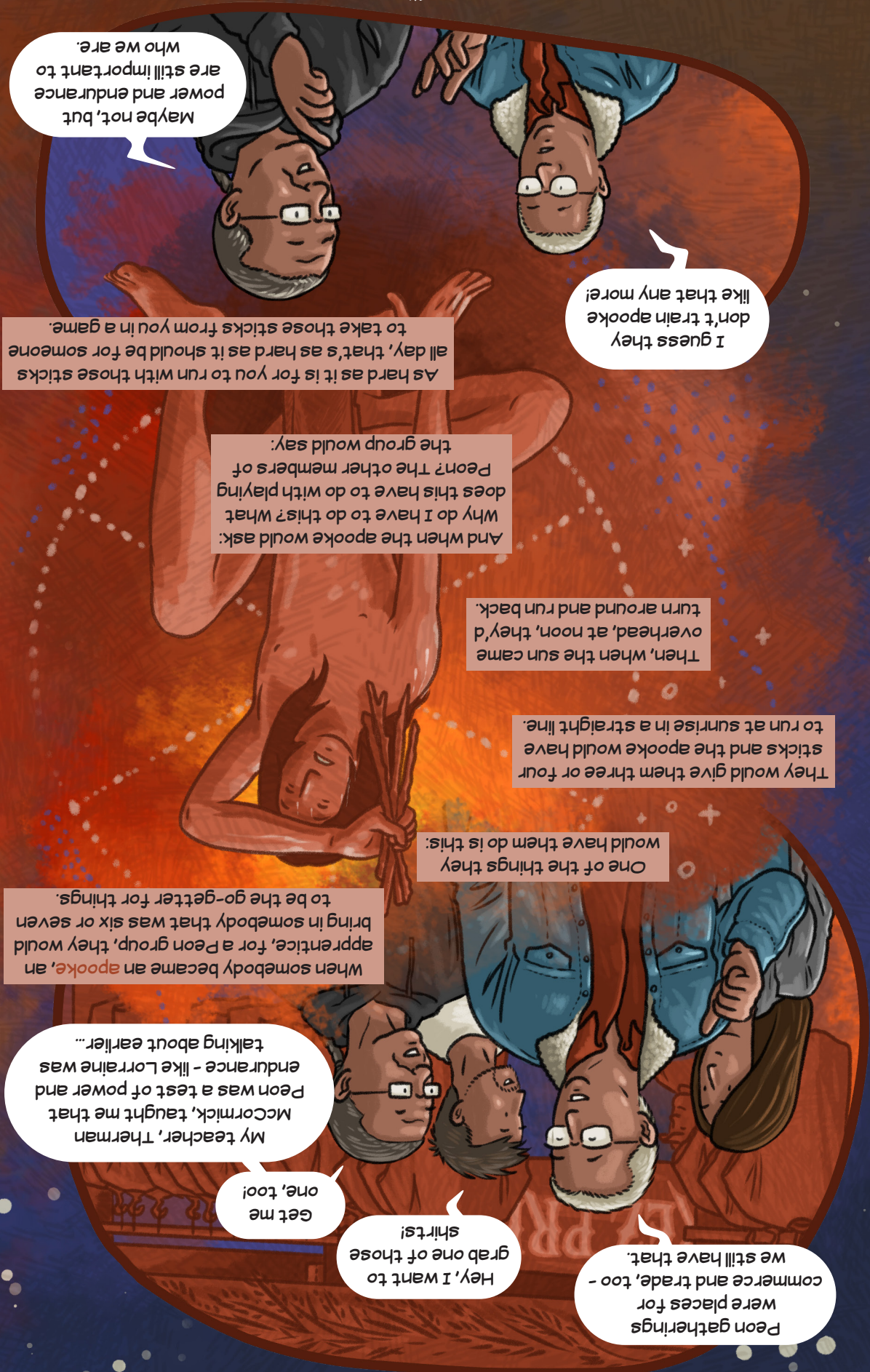




Hey, everyone - the bird song is starting.

It's such a privilege to be able to hear this - I'm so glad we were able to bring the songs back.





Peon gatherings were places for commerce and trade, too - we still have that.

Hey, I want to grab one of those shirts!

Get me one, too!

My teacher, Therman McCormick, taught me that Peon was a test of power and endurance - like Lorraine was talking about earlier...

When somebody became an **apooke**, an apprentice, for a Peon group, they would bring in somebody that was six or seven to be the go-getter for things.

One of the things they would have them do is this:

They would give them three or four sticks and the apooke would have to run at sunrise in a straight line.

Then, when the sun came overhead, at noon, they'd turn around and run back.

And when the apooke would ask: why do I have to do this? what does this have to do with playing Peon? The other members of the group would say:

As hard as it is for you to run with those sticks all day, that's as hard as it should be for someone to take those sticks from you in a game.

I guess they don't train apooke like that any more!

Maybe not, but power and endurance are still important to who we are.



So, are cultural things like Peon about sovereignty, then?

As Kumeyaay people, we have a connection to the land that goes beyond the laws of people, beyond the laws of settlers, beyond the laws of State and Federal Legislatures or the Supreme Court.

"Sovereignty" needs to be redefined when talking about ourselves to include our relation to the land as **tllpay'ematt**, or earth people.

We have a covenant with the Creator. You can't take away our connection to the land. We are part of the land. This connection is **mat**, the land. What it means to be human.

Over the centuries, so much has been taken from us - not just land - but we're still here, like Lorraine said. We should be using our own language to describe our relationship to the earth, not the language of those who tried to take that relationship away from us.

When we use our own words, we make it clear that we're talking from our own perspective, our own worldview. That way, others have to deal with us on our own terms, using our worldview and our words.

I don't think "sovereignty", in the legal sense, is how we traditionally think of our connection to the land. The Kumeyaay have always had a very different way of describing that.





And that's why you had all the background singing, because everybody was supporting those players. If your team won, everybody in the community won. But if your team lost, it could be a hardship for everyone.

So there was a lot riding on the game. Some people would bring tarantulas for good luck, or quartz crystals. They would even bring bad luck charms to hex the other team.



My uncle Boxie did not like how Peon evolved. He thought Peon had lost its fidelity when prize money was being funded from the outside. I'm not sure he would approve of the way the prize money for this tournament is from casino revenue.

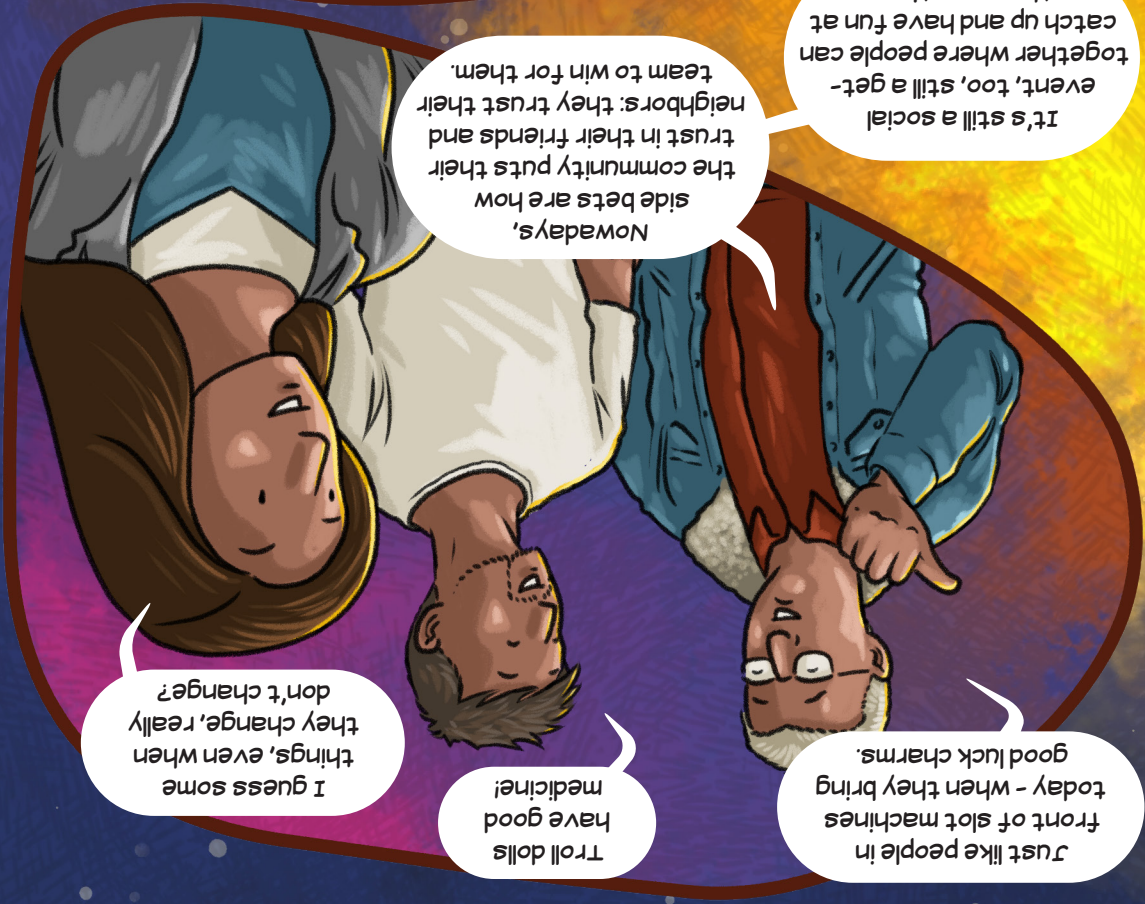
I can see that. Back around the early 1900s - let's say Campo and Mesa Grande were going to play. They wouldn't play for less than \$600 a side. That was a lot of money - equivalent to \$20,000 today! But the difference was: this was money which the whole community had pulled together. So, when the team played, they weren't just playing for themselves, it was for the whole community.



It seems to me like that original intention we were talking about is still there.

Yes. To bring people together, to celebrate who we are and what is uniquely ours -

- and maybe to win something!



Just like people in front of slot machines today - when they bring good luck charms.

Troll dolls have good medicine!

I guess some things, even when they change, really don't change?

Nowadays, side bets are how the community puts their trust in their friends and neighbors: they trust their team to win for them.

It's still a social event, too, still a get-together where people can catch up and have fun at the same time.





I remember the first time I played was more than 20 years ago at Morongo.

It was me, my sister and a friend. I remember that you had to go until the game was finished - it's a game of endurance!

I remember come up over the sun watching the horizon and being so tired!

If you're all thinking the same way, paying attention to the same thing, you can trick just about anyone.

That's why the support of your community is so important. You're all in this together, trying to match your wits against another tribe, or another village.

Is it true that it wasn't until 1969 that women were allowed to play?

I guess that's right. Traditionally, some parts of our culture were only for men. But I've played, and many of my friends have played.

When traditions change, is it a problem? I mean, do we end up sacrificing something - or gaining something when we change how we do cultural things?

Well, bottom line for me when it comes to changing and adapting our culture is you have to ask: are you staying true to the original intention when you make changes?

Like: different stories, same message.

Exactly.

The fact that our culture is adapting and changing, to me, is such a good thing. When we are adapting and changing to modern times what is most important is your state of mind more than the ritual.

Are your heart and mind in the right place?

If people participate in a cultural event or ceremony with a bad heart and a bad mind, it can never become a good thing.





Once he  
escaped from the other  
animals, Coyote ran  
eastwards.

Blood from the  
Creator's heart dripped  
onto the land and turned dirt  
into red clay deposits - the clay  
we use to make pottery.

When he was  
safe, Coyote ate  
the heart.

Of course, he was  
so greedy, he ate it too  
quickly and threw it up -  
and then ate it again!

Hey, look: the  
games are about  
to start.

Um...

Yesterday was the  
men's Peon tournament and  
today is the women's and  
children's tournament.

First prize is  
\$3,000!

Dang - I  
need to learn  
how to play!

Ask someone  
about it while  
you're here!

Yes, you should  
definitely learn  
when you get the  
opportunity!

Ha! They got  
you!

You've got to pay  
attention if you're  
playing Peon. If you  
don't -

Sure - Peon  
isn't just about  
luck or chance...

It's about bluffing  
and being able to read your  
opponent. Which way are they  
going to go? What tactics are  
they going to use against you?  
Can you outsmart them?  
Out-trick them?

You  
can?

Look at the  
two teams! You can  
tell already who's  
going to win!



It's not just about winning, it's about being part of that energy, that strength.

Because remember: in the creation story, only Coyote was strong enough to grab the heart of the Creator.



Coyote was standing underneath a tree when the rattlesnake bit him.

Coyote died, but the Creator brought him back to life.

Coyote asked the owl, "What is it like to have the power of life and death?"

And Owl said, "To know that, you must eat the body of the Creator."

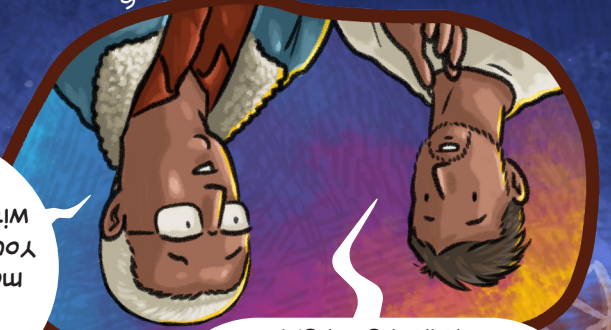
And when the Creator Tsuchapi died, the other animals sent Coyote to Coyote Mountain in the east to bring fire for the cremation ceremony.

But this was a trick.

While Coyote was at the mountain, waiting for the sun to come up, he turned to the west and saw the smoke and realized he had been deceived.

He hurried down the valley to the pyre but all that was left of the Creator was his heart.

Sorry to interrupt, but this story sounds different from the version I was told by two elders from Viejas. Is one more accurate than the other?



It's pretty common to hear different versions of the same story: it's the same message, just told in different ways. You have to learn to hear the message within the story, and not worry about whether one version is more "accurate" or not.

And it's the most important thing: message that is the

Absolutely.

From my aunt's taco stand! She makes the best tacos and the best fry bread!



When Coyote reached the pyre, all the other animals formed a circle around the Creator's heart to prevent Coyote from getting near it.

"Stay away or we will kill you," the other animals told him.

"I want to see my father, I want to see my Creator!" Coyote cried.

Every time he rushed the circle, the other animals pushed him away. But Coyote saw a gap in the circle where the two smallest animals were -

- and he jumped over them!

He grabbed the Creator's heart and escaped, kicking ash and soot onto Hataay, Crow, which turned him black.

Who is Taaquuk?

Breathing in the soot, Hataay lost his voice - which was a shame because Crow had such a beautiful voice: it used to be almost as beautiful as Taaquuk's voice.

Taaquuk was the name of the bird who gave us our Bird Songs - a part of our culture which we worked hard to bring back, and which we'll see here today.





I invited you all today to pick your brains about **Peon**.

I was born and raised celebrating Pow Wow culture and practiced Pow Wow dancing with the Barona Little Hawks when I was young. How is Peon important to our traditions?

Pow Wow was big on some Kumeyaay reservations in the '80s and '90s.

It was something that spread across the USA from the plains regions as Native people relocated for school, work or military service.

But Peon is part of **Kumeyaay** traditions and even extends to many of our neighboring tribes.

I'm glad we're talking about this today. I remember a time in school when we read an article that said: California Indians are "culturally extinct". I thought: I am sitting right here!

Many people in San Diego never knew we were here - or if they did, only because of the casinos. But I can see that our culture is alive and well in our community.

... and Peon is an important part of that culture!

This is why I want to learn more about Peon from you.

The reason why Coyote is in the story is because Lumarr - Peon - is a game of trickery, and Coyote has a lot of that power. For players of Peon, it's about who has the power to learn the trickery - the spiritual energy - of Coyote.

... and the man said: "If you want this woman, you're going to have to fight over her."

Hattepaa, Coyote, came to one of the brothers and said:

There was a woman whose hand both these boys wanted in marriage...

... who wanted two boys to kill each other because he did not like them.

But Lumarr was more than just a game. It was a way for our people to settle disputes. Up around Rincon Reservation it is said that there was a location where people would settle disputes: Lumarr would be one of the ways to do that.

Peon is a hispanic word. People wonder why we call something Kumeyaay by a Spanish name. It's because the Kumeyaay had to use Spanish as an inter-tribal language after our own Native languages were suppressed.

The original name for Peon is **Lumarr**, which is used for games, but really means "to win".

It's also mentioned in our creation stories: the story of the two brothers and Coyote.

So there was a man...

"Do you want to marry that woman?"

And the brother answered:

"Yes!"

So Coyote pulled out one of his ankle bones and said:

"Here, hide this bone and I will be quiet so your brother will not be able to find it. But when it is your brother's turn to hide the bone, I will bark so only you can hear. That way you will trick him, and you will win the woman's hand."



# Beyond Gaming

Written by  
 Ethan Banegas  
 Michael Connolly Miskwish,  
 Lorraine Orosco  
 and  
 Stanley Rodriguez  
 Illustrated by John G. Swogger

Project Coordinator and supplementary  
 research by Jen Shannon, National  
 Museum of the American Indian/  
 University of Colorado Boulder  
 Educator Liaison Jewyl Alderson,  
 San Diego County Office of Education



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Visual storytelling has been part of the Kumeyaay tradition since time  
 immemorial. Petroglyphs are found in caves and on large boulders throughout  
 San Diego County and Baja Mexico that depict geometric patterns, diverse  
 ancient symbols, significant constellations, and our ancestor's world view.  
 Some scholars speculate a pictograph of a ship in East County San Diego is the  
 oldest graphic representation of a recorded event in U.S. history.



This tradition of visual storytelling continues with this graphic novel, to convey  
 the origin story of gaming and demonstrate how gaming has evolved over time.  
 Through three waves of incursions--Spanish, Mexican, and American--we have  
 adapted our traditions to survive. We adjusted our culture, religion, language,  
 and even how we play games to continue our way of life amidst great adversity  
 from the effects of colonization.

Gaming has always been part of Kumeyaay traditions.

From the beginning, we had a game  
 of chance and skill called Uumarr,  
 endowed by the Creator and taught  
 through our Creation Stories.

Uumarr, meaning "to gamble" or  
 "to win" in the Kumeyaay language,  
 is widely known today as Peon,  
 meaning "pawn" in Spanish.

Like most games, it is an  
 important part of Uumarr to win.  
 However, there is *much* more to  
 Uumarr than just winning.

Uumarr is a game of sacred ritual  
 and allegory connected to Kumeyaay  
 philosophy, with Hattepaa, Coyote, at  
 the heart of the story.

**Haawka.**  
 Where's the  
 mark?

**Haawka!**  
 Thank you for  
 coming today.

Will one of my  
 aunt's Indian  
 Tacos do?

Deal!

**Haawka!**

Yumi I'll take  
 one too!

Only the  
 besti!

Though this particular story illustrates our uniqueness as a distinct tribal people,  
 the teachings are universal. These moral lessons extend to all humanity--

# --Beyond Gaming



Peon, Coyote and how we understand our own history.

# BEYOND GAMING

KUMEYAAV  
COMICS



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