

P E R A L T A

HACIENDA HISTORICAL PARK

Corn Husk Dolls

The lesson here is two-fold. First, that children recycled scraps into toys. The second concerns a child's life on the rancho.

Tell the students to ask their parents for cloth scraps or yarn, small ribbons, strings, or thread. Using only found materials (don't buy anything new!), help the students recycle scraps and leftovers into serapes, sashes, aprons, ties, hair/head scarves, blouses, etc. for the corn dolls.

While they are working on their corn figures, lead them into a discussion of what they think their life might have been like on a rancho. You could start by asking them if they think rancho children made toys from scraps like they are doing. Use the following list of children's chores on California's Hispanic frontier. They probably did more than is on this list. This is a short list of things we know about or are pretty sure were tasks done by children.

- Gardening in the kitchen garden daily and working on the field crops at harvest time.
- Tending small livestock: chickens, pigs, goats, sheep (men tended horses and cattle).
- Washing clothes: women and girls' work.

- Tend the fire: collect light firewood, lay and start fires with flint and steel, watch the fire and keep it going.
- Sweep the floors and porch: sprinkle water on clay floors and sweep gently (mostly the girls).

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- Stuffing and beating the beds: Many people slept on thick straw mats, but others slept on large cloth bags stuffed with straw. When the straw got old it was taken out and burned. When the mattresses were tightly re-stuffed they had to be beaten back into shape. This was probably a boy's job.
- Haul water: At first from the creek, later from a well.
- Babysitting: All older children were expected to watch out for the little ones.

Remember to ask them if they do any chores. Ask them if they do any of the same chores that Californio children did.

This list can also be used to prompt their photo writing assignments.