

BIRDS IN CHUMASH ORAL TRADITION

An *oral* tradition is a tradition that is passed down through speaking instead of writing stories on stone or paper. The Chumash people passed down many oral stories that featured birds. The story of Condor told of a white bird that flew too close to a fire. Condor was burned and became black in color, except for the white parts under its wings. In the story about Acorn Woodpecker, Coyote wants a beautiful red colored head like the Woodpecker. Coyote gets tricked into putting a burning-hot coal on top of his head to make his head red like the woodpecker's.

In the Chumash oral tradition, birds had jobs like people. For example, Golden Eagle was the chief of all the animals, Coot was the messenger, and Pelican and Cormorant were respected fishers and canoe owners. Birds in these stories also had family members. In some stories, Falcon was the nephew of a chief.

Even though many Chumash are living in California today, many of these stories have been changed or lost. Many kinds of animals lived with and around the Chumash, but birds have many of the special roles in stories. Researchers think that the Chumash in the 1800s told stories about birds because birds were an important source of food and material in their culture.

Questions

1. Describe an oral tradition.

2. Describe four types of birds that the Chumash told stories about.

3. Explain why birds were important to the Chumash culture in the 1800s.

4. Describe one story about birds in today's cultures.

5. Write one sentence about California Condor History that you can pass on to others.
