Reading Practice

Family life was centered on communities or villages comprised of cedar plank houses, sweathouses, other buildings, and communal grounds. The inhabitants of several villages in a given area were often affiliated based on common ancestry, spiritual places, and shared political interests.

For example, Grandmother Rock, the large blueschist monolith at the mouth of the Coquille River, was a sacred place among the people of the lower Coquille estuary who collectively referred to themselves as the Nasomah. Villages near and far were united through kinship; the genealogies of the contemporary Coquille Indian Tribe include many examples of women who were born on the Coquille River but who lived with their husbands on Coos Bay or vice versa.

Using a complex web of canoe routes and overland trails, the people would often travel throughout Coos Bay/Coquille River region and beyond. Families reinforced kinship and social ties while visiting or hosting friends and neighbors in a wide range of seasonal and commemorative ceremonies that included feasting, trading, dancing, and storytelling. Shinny (a game played somewhat like field hockey), gambling, and other occasions also brought together people from different communities and villages.

Fishing, plant and shellfish harvesting, and hunting were often a part of such gatherings, particularly in the spring and fall when salmon, eel, sea mammals, and acorns and other nuts were most abundant. At other times of the year, families might visit and tend to upland prairies ideal for tasks such as harvesting berries and camas and collecting basketry material.