Clearing the Air
Sacred Use Not Abuse



A traditional tobacco booklet written for Native American youth

Northern California Indian Development Council Inc.
Del Norte Indian Education Center DNIEC

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Del Norte
Indian Education
Center

"Then, when they pray, they open them up (their tobacco baskets); they throw the tobacco around."

"They throw the ground-up tobacco about when making medicine... they feed the mountains and the world."

Phoebe Maddux–Karuk



Contents

Sacred Tobacco Use 4
History of Traditional Tobacco Use 5
KEEP IT SACRED: Sacred Use, Not Abuse 6
Traditional Use of Tobacco 7
What Native Elders Have to Say About Traditional Tobacco 8-9
Non-Traditional Use of Tobacco 10
The Risk: What We Know 11
Del Norte County Tobacco Facts 12
The Truth About Vaping 13
Nicotine Pouches 14
Can You Guess What This Recipe Is For? 15
The Target 16
Ever Wonder What It Feels Like to Suffer From a Tobacco-Related Disease? ... 17
Now Compare That Experience to This 18
Keep It Traditional Word Scramble 19
Tobacco Use Prevention Pledge 20
Draw Your Own Anti-Tobacco Abuse Ad 21
Tobacco: Sacred Use, Not Abuse 22

Sacred Tobacco Defined

SACRED sa •cred ('sākrəd) adj.

1. Dedicated to or set apart for worship.
2. Worthy of religious veneration.
3. Made or declared holy.
4. Dedicated or devoted exclusively to a single use, purpose, or person.
5. Worthy of respect; venerable.
6. Of or relating to religious objects, rites, or practices.

Tribal Elders are dedicated to keeping tobacco sacred. Tobacco is offered to the Creator of the earth, for our land, our fish, our acorns, our life.

The creator gives us many gifts. These gifts must be respected and used in their proper way. Tobacco is a gift to be used in a sacred way with respect.

Tobacco is still used as a spiritual offering. When seeking advice from an elder, for example, it is customary to offer the elder tobacco. Payment to Medicine people can be in the form of traditional tobacco. In gathering wild plants for ceremonial use, it is customary to leave a small offering of tobacco for the spirits of the plants. In preparing the fire for the sweat lodge, tobacco offerings are given to the fire. Ceremonially, tobacco is still an important part of Native American spirituality. It is best to use traditionally grown tobacco if available rather than commercial tobacco.



Woven bag used to carry harvested tobacco (Karuk Tribe)

History of Traditional Tobacco



Most Indigenous nations have traditional stories of how tobacco was introduced to their communities:

- Many stories emphasized the sacredness of the plant and its powers to both heal if used properly and to harm us if used improperly!
- Some say that the original tobacco was discovered about 18,000 years ago
- Used for both healings and blessings
- Used as a smudge
- Used to ward off pests
- As a gift when welcoming guests to the community
- Gifted to those requested to pray/share their wisdom
- Used in creation stories
- Other stories involve the trickster Coyote
- Used in prayer, purification and cleansing, along with Sage, Cedar, and Sweetgrass (Corn pollen in Southwest)
- The tobacco that spread to Europe and the rest of the world, Nicotiana tabacum, originated in South America and was noted for its richer taste and higher potency (i.e., the ability to produce hallucinations and supernatural visions
- Traditional tobacco is not only the Nicotiana plant, but also includes kinnick-kinnick and mountain tobacco.
- Many tribes use other plants in their kinnick-kinnick mixture to alter the taste—some Northwest tribes use huckleberry bark to enhance the flavor.

Medicinal Uses:

- Asthma
- Childbirth pain
- Toothaches
- Earaches
- Insect bites
- Coughs
- Open wounds
- Snake-bites
- Headaches
- GI disorders
- Rheumatism

Source: *http://www.npaihb.org/images/resources_docs/Resource Guidebook.pdf*

TOBACCO: Sacred Use, Not Abuse

Current commercial use of tobacco is not only a great health risk to our society, but also poses a threat to our traditional uses of tobacco. At the Del Norte American Indian Education Center and the Northern California Indian Development Council, we strongly believe that providing awareness of cultural knowledge of traditional use of Sacred Tobacco will help to curb the abuse of harmful and toxic commercial tobacco products by our youth.

Since vaping is currently an epidemic among youth and is the most common form of tobacco use, DNIEC's Tobacco Use Prevention Education program focuses on educating youth about the dangers of vaping.

Our Words for Sacred Tobacco

Karuk	Araeheeraha
Yurok	O: Lhohkum
Hupa	Xojim
Wiyot	Kuwil Kwoswak
Tolowa	Seetyu



"Smoke Traditional Salmon, Not your Lungs" (Yurok Tribe)

Traditional Use of Tobacco

Risk of Cancer:

- Very low; none if not inhaled.

Type of Use:

- Tobacco offerings to the earth, the drum, a river, or a fire. Offerings are often placed/ scattered by hand and are not often smoked.
- Smoking a Sacred Pipe. (Not all pipes contain tobacco when smoked. In fact, some tribes do not use tobacco at all. Some tribal peoples will use a blend of tobacco with other herbs in their pipes.)
- Offered to a Healer, Elder, or other person as a sign of respect.

Benefits:

- Discipline.
- Respect for the Creator and all creation.
- Understanding of one's culture.
- Spiritual development.

Special Notes:

- There are many traditional ways to use tobacco. It is smoked in some traditional ceremonies. However, it is generally used less than once a month. There is very little risk of cancer when used this way.



Traditional style pipe of Native Peoples of N.W. California

What Native Elders Have to Say About Traditional Tobacco

"Native teachings are about a Way of Life"

Tobacco is the first plant that the Creator gave to Native people. It is the main activator of all the plant spirits. Three other plants, sage, cedar, and sweetgrass, follow tobacco, and together they are referred to as the four sacred medicines.

The four sacred medicines are used in everyday life and in ceremonies. All of them can be used to smudge with, through sage, cedar and sweetgrass also have many other uses.

It is said that tobacco sits in the eastern door, sweetgrass in the southern door, sage in the west, and cedar in the north. Elders say that the spirits like the aroma produced when we burn tobacco and the other sacred medicines.

Tobacco
Traditional people say that tobacco is always first. It is used as an offering for everything and in every ceremony. "Always through tobacco," the saying goes.

Traditional tobacco was given to us so that we can communicate with the spirit world. It opens up the door to allow that communication to take place. When we make an offering of tobacco, we communicate our thoughts and feeling through the tobacco as we pray for ourselves, our family, our relatives and others

Tobacco has a special relationship to other plants: it is said to be the main activator of all the plant spirits. It is like the key to the ignition of a car. When you use it, good things begin to happen. Tobacco is always offered before picking medicines. When you offer tobacco to a plant and explain why you are there, that plant will let all the plants in the area know why you are coming to pick them. It's also important to note that you should not pull the medicines out by the roots, but to harvest them by cutting the tops of plants mentioned unless it is the root you will use. This preserves the plants for future generations.

When you seek the help and advice of an Elder, Healer or Medicine Person, and give your offering of tobacco, they know that a request may be made as tobacco is so sacred.

We express our gratitude for the help the spirits give us through our offering of tobacco. It is put down as an offer-ing of thanks to the First Family, the natural world, after a fast. Traditional people make an offering of tobacco each day when the sun comes up.

Traditional tobacco is still grown in some communities. For example, the Mohawk people use a traditional tobacco that they grow themselves and that is very sacred to them.

Sage
Sage is used to prepare people for ceremonies and teachings. Because it is more medicinal and stronger that sweetgrass, it tends to be used more often in ceremonies.

Sage is used for releasing what is troubling the mind and for removing negative energy. It is also used for cleansing homes and sacred items. It also has other medicinal uses. Some tribes say there is male sage and a female sage. The female sage is used by women.

Cedar
Like sage and sweetgrass, cedar used to purify the home. It also has many restorative medicinal uses. Cedar baths are healing. When cedar is put in the fire with tobacco, it crackles. When it does this, it is said to be calling the attention of the spirits to the offering that is being made. Cedar is often used in fasting and sweat lodge ceremonies as a form of protection: cedar branches cover the floor of the seat lodge and a circle of cedar surrounds the fasters lodge.

Sweetgrass
Sweetgrassis said by some to be the sacred hair of Mother Earth. Its sweet aroma reminds people of the gentleness, love and kindness she has for the people. When sweetgrass is used in a healing circle It has a calming effect. Like sage and cedar, sweetgrass is used for smudging and purification.

Non-Traditional Use of Tobacco

Risk of Cancer:

- Very high if you use chew, snuff, vape, or smoke cigarettes.

Type of Use:

- Chewing tobacco in any form. • Using snuff in any form.
- Smoking cigarettes, pipes or cigars. Smoking bidis. (Bidi= Asian cigarette wrapped in a Tendu leaf, "The poor man's cigarette")

Benefits:

- No benefits to the user, but the big tobacco companies make billions of dollars a year off other people's addictions.

Special Notes:

- Some people chew or smoke because they believe that it helps them relax, control their weight, and concentrate better. Other people do it to be cool, for an image, or to keep from being bored. Peer pressure results in many new smokers.
- Chewing tobacco gives your mouth an unpleasant odor and bad breath. Chewing leads to gum disease, tooth decay, addiction to tobacco, and cancers of the mouth and throat.



The Risks: What We Know

Commercial tobacco products are dangerous. With a toxic mix of over 7,000 chemical compounds, 250 have been identified as poisonous, and 64 listed as known carcinogens, or cancer-causing agents.

Second Hand smoke has been linked to half of the cases annually of Bronchitis, and Pneumonia each year, and it is estimated by the EPA that 200,000 to one million kids will have their asthma conditions worsened by secondhand smoke every year.

There is now new evidence that third hand smoke is a newly emerged risk, in which toxic particles and particulate matter from smoke settles on surfaces, along with residue from gases in the smoke. This is a particular concern for small children who crawl on their hands and knees touching surfaces, their toys and frequently placing objects and hands into their mouths.



Del Norte County Tobacco Facts

- Higher Tobacco Use: Nearly 1 in 3 adults (29%) usesome formof nicotine,including cigarettes and vaping
- Youth At Risk: 11th graders and students in non- traditional schools (e.g.. continuation schools) have higher rates of tobacco use than state averages.
    - ***6% for cigarette use; 12 % for vaping in Del Norte County***
    - ***2% state average for youth cigarette use***
    - ***5.6 % state average for high school vaping***
- Health Impacts: Del Norte County has higher mortality rates from tobacco-related diseases like lung cancer and chronic respiratory disease compared to state averages.
- Reasons for Use: Adults aged 18-34 report using nicotine primarily for stress relief and social reasons, while older adults cite habit/addiction.

•Environmental Concerns: Tobacco waste including cigarette butts and vape pods, contributes to pollution and toxic chemical exposure.

Why This Matters

•Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable disease and death in Del Norte County.

•Efforts to reduce tobacco use can improve health outcomes and environmental conditions for residents.

Health Disparities Linked to Tobacco Use

•Premature Death: Del Norte County has higher premature death rates than the state average, particularly among American Indian/Alaska Natives (AIAN) residents.

•Respiratory Diseases: The county experiences higher rates of lung cancer and chronic lower respiratory diseases, both strongly linked to smoking.

•Mental Health & Substance Use: Tobacco use is often associated with higher rates of mental health struggles, and nearly one-third of adults report using some form of nicotine.

•Economic & Social Barriers: Tobacco use is more common among residents facing poverty,housing instability, and healthcare access challenges, which are prevalent in Del Norte.

Call to Action:

•Expand access to cessation programs in at-risk communities.
•Educate youth on long-term health risks to tobacco.
•Support policy changes that reduce tobacco marketing in vulnerable areas.
•Encourage smoke-free housing initiatives to create a more tobacco-free Del Norte, visit TobaccoFreeDelNorte.org

Source:

California Center for Rural Policy, Cal Poly, Humboldt. (2024) Del Norte Community Health Assessment (September 2024)

Vaping: Myths vs Facts

According to the UCSF Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education, a recent study on e-cigarette usage suggests...

Secondhand vapor could be a potentially toxic source of indoor air pollution, although the level of toxins are much lower in comparison with conventional cigarette emissions. However, e-cigarette studies show a delivery of a significant amount of known toxic chemicals via vapor inhalation as well as a concentrated very potent dose of nicotine.

Some of these chemicals include, but are not limited to...

Formaldehyde: A colorless, highly toxic, and flammable gas at room temperature. It is used in the production of fertilizer, paper, plywood, and some resins. It is also used as a food preservative and in household products, such as antiseptics, medicines, and cosmetics. Exposure to formaldehyde can irritate the skin, throat, lungs, and eyes. Repeated exposure to formaldehyde can possibly lead to cancer.

Propylene Glycol:

A viscoso, colorless liquid, which is nearly odorless but possesses a faintly sweet taste. It is used in sweeteners, food coloring, polymers, and antifreeze. Although the Food and Drug Administration generally recognizes it as safe to eat in small doses, it has not been proven safe to inhale. In fact, studies show that propylene glycol is linked to inflamed lungs when inhaled over time. “Researchers have found that using e-cigarettes with the e-liquid refills containing propylene glycol and vegetable glycerin may lead to inflammation of the lungs over time.”

Acetaldehyde: An aldehyde that is highly reactive and toxic. It causes damage to the cellular and genomic levels.

Regardless of the commercial tobacco product the end result is dangerous levels of exposure to toxic carcinogens known to cause, heart disease, and various forms of cancers.

¨Centers for Disease Control and Preven-tion, 2019. https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topicsformaldehyde/default.html

¨Wikipedia, 2020.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propylene_glycol

¨Medical Life Sciences News. 2019. https://www.news-medical.net/news/20191018/Vaping-propylene-glycol-and-vegetable-glycerine-may-lead-to-lung-inflammation.apx

¨ScienceDirect, 2020 https://www.sci-encedirect.com/



Nicotine Pouches :

- Nicotine pouches are small pouches containing nicotine, flavoring, and other substances
- Although it doesn't contain tobacco, it contains the addictive substance found in tobacco products.
- Some may think it is a safer alternative to chewing tobacco, but it comes with a lot of risks and side effects of withdrawal
- Some people take it to feel a buzz and some say it helps them to stay alert.
- Marketed similarly to vapes
- First came out in 2014, but within the last couple of years, the use has increased
- Mostly used by youth under age 21.
- Only 3% of users are adults.



Source: Sloan, E. (2024, January 30). *Is Zyn bad for you? Experts break down the risks of oral nicotine pouches*.SELF.https://www.self.com

Can You Guess What This Recipe Is For?

- 3 grams nail polish remover
- 4 grams of vinegar
- 3 grams ammonia
- 4 grams of arsenic
- 4 grams butane
- ½ of a re-chargeable battery
- An hour's-worth of exhaust fumes from your car
- 2 grams wood alcohol
- 4 grams formaldehyde
- 4 grams barbecue lighter fluid
- 4 grams hydrogen cyanide (poison used for the gas chamber)
- 2 grams swamp gas
- 4 grams rocket fluid
- 4 crushed mothballs
- 3.4 grams of nicotine (a pesticide)
- A dash of gasoline additive
- ½ gram of candle wax
- ½ gram of industrial solvent
- 4 chips of sewage pipe
- Finely ground black top (tar) to taste
- Add a dash of the following metals:
- Aluminum, zinc, magnesium, mercury, gold, silver,
- Titanium, lead, copper

Add all the above ingredients and 4 lbs. of dried tobacco roll up, and you have about a pack of commercial tobacco cigarettes.

TOBACCO COMPANIES TARGET



The tobacco industry uses deceptive advertising to target youth. Their ads feature vibrant, healthy actors to create a false association between smoking/vaping and vitality.

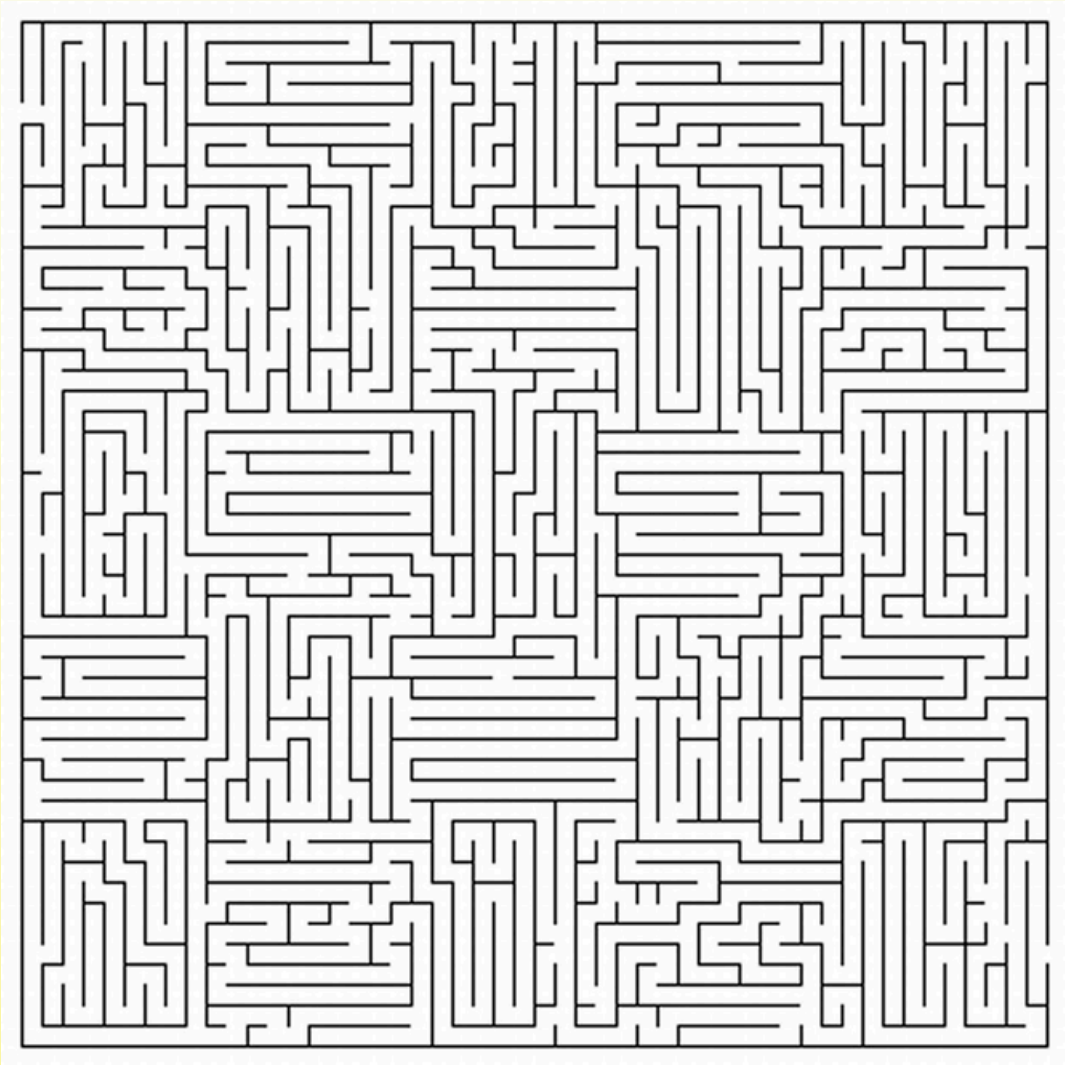
The reality is starkly different. Tobacco use leads to severe chronic illnesses, such as lung disease, heart disease, and various cancers. While many young people believe they are immune to these health risks, the long-term consequences are devastating and life-altering.

Smokers often admit they thought they were the exception until they weren't.

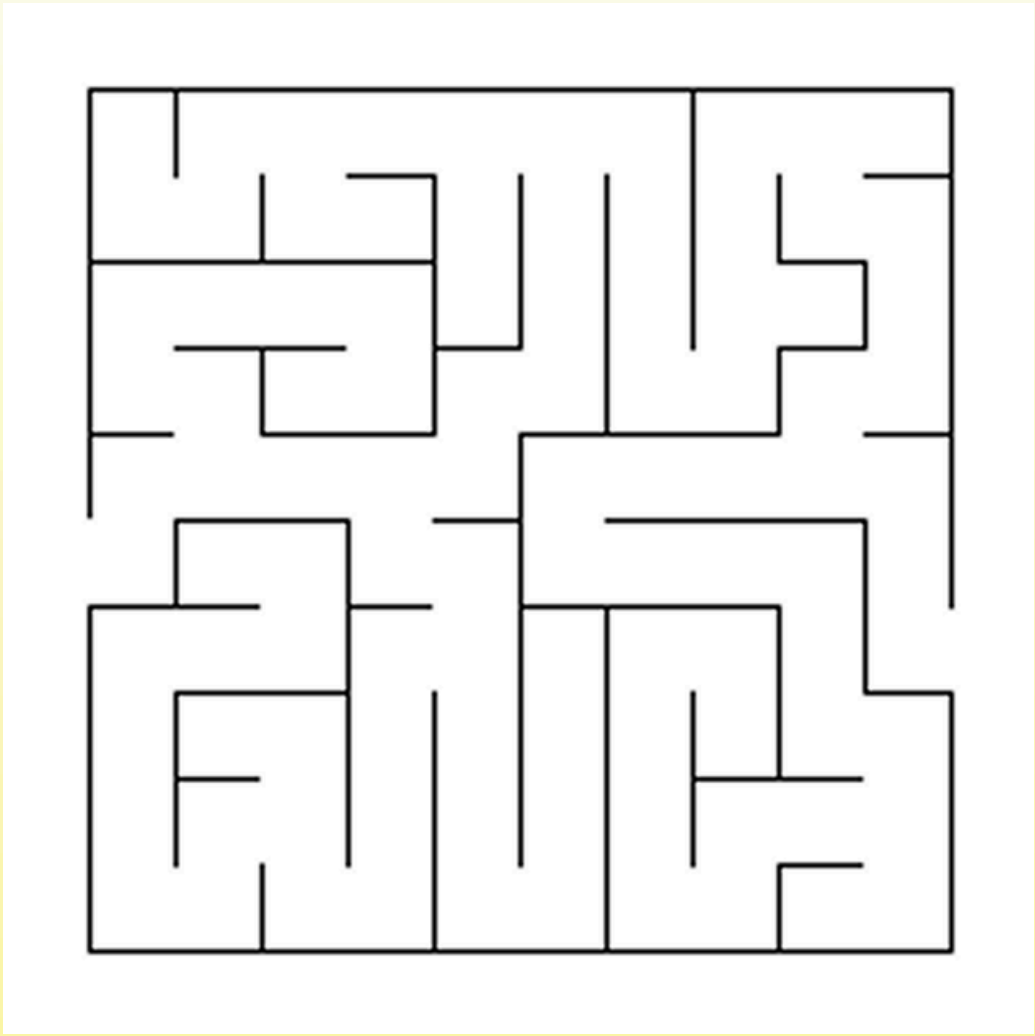
The tobacco industry is like Coyote, the Trickster.

Your paragraph text

Ever wondered what it feels like
to suffer from a nicotine addiction?



Now compare that experience to this.



Keep It Traditional

Unscramble the following traditional words, then match the numbered letters to spell out the secret message.

CYRMONENE ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ (4)

HYELAHT ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ (13)

TUIVELATC ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ (7)

CIMDIENE ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ (3)

TEECSRP ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ (1)

RARTOEC ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ (2)

LOTAOW ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

AMSONL ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ (8)

SINFIGH ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ (16)

REPYRA ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ (5)

ESRADC ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ (6)

CETAIV ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ (17)

GFTI ___ ___ ___ ___ (12)

MUDR ___ ___ ___ ___ (15)

PAUH ___ ___ ___ ___

FILE ___ ___ ___ ___

AGLO ___ ___ ___ ___ (11)

RANCO ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ (10)

TOYWI ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

RETBI ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ (14)

EELDR ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ (9)

KORUY ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

RAKKU ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

DECNA ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   ___ ___ ___,   ___ ___ ___   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___.

1 2 3 4 5 6   7 8 9   10 11 12   13 14 15 16 17

Tobacco Use Prevention Pledge

I _____ pledge to protect myself, my family, and my friends from the dangerous effects of commercial tobacco use by promising to never use vape, smoke, cigars, and/or snuff.

Signature _____ Date_____







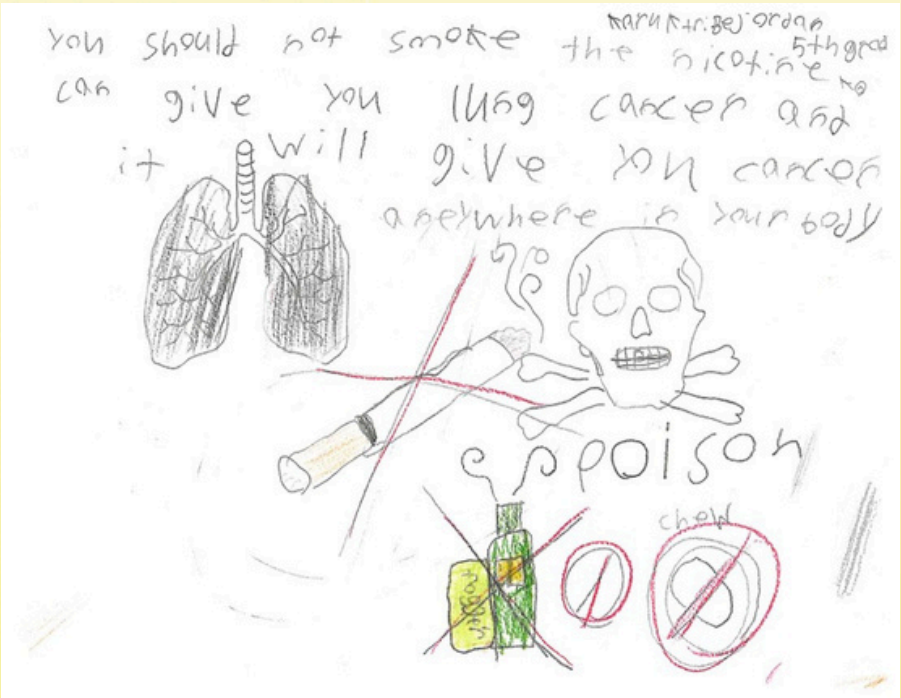
TUPE Posters

The students and staff of NCIDC's Del Norte Indian Education Center After-School Program wanted to share the winners of this year's TUPE Poster Contest!



Artist (Left): Johnnie Provolt
Grade 3
Pulikla Tribe of Yurok People

Artist (Right): Jordan Davis
Grade 5
Karuk



Tobacco: Sacred Use, Not Abuse

NCIDC is proud to display a series of student-created Public Service Announcements on the impact of commercial tobacco in the American Indian community. Students from Del Norte County conceived, scripted, directed, filmed, and edited these short messages. The message communicated by these students is that traditional tobacco is a sacred gift for many tribes, while commercial tobacco poses a major health risk to American Indian people.

In Del Norte County, tobacco use is exceptionally high, with nearly 1 in 3 adults (29%) using some form of nicotine, including cigarettes and vaping. In Humboldt County, nearly 22% of students use commercial tobacco and 7% chew on a regular basis—rates that far exceed the state average.

The efforts of these students promote a vital health message while reinforcing American Indian culture. Presenting this information has given ordinarily shy individuals a powerful voice, enabling them to make meaningful peer-to-peer connections.



http://www.youtube.com/@ncidcindianeducationprogra2706

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