**Project Based Learning Alternatives: Please, No Mission Models!**

Many Native American parents and educators have argued that having students build scale models of missions has little to no educational value. It is also, a harmful exercise to require of California Native students given that many of them have ancestors that are connected to these institutions. In protest, many California Indian students and their families have staged “revolts” in their mission model projects.

More often than not, creating the structure of a mission does not teach kids about the people in the mission or how they were treated. Students would benefit more from hearing and exploring the oral stories of mission life passed down from tribes or doing a report on how mission policies destroyed tribes and their resources. Here are some suggested project based learning activities that can provide students with a better understanding of what happened to the California native people who populated these missions.

**Disease, Death and Devastation**

The Spanish attempted to force Indians to assimilate into Spanish culture and engage in forced labor in the missions. As a result, most missions have memorials dedicated to the California Indians that did not survive this era. There were many factors that contributed to the loss of lives. Sanctioned violence, weakened immunities, change in diet/nutrition, change in child rearing practices, organized resistance efforts and other factors made the mission period a dangerous time for California Indians.

Select a mission and create a map that illustrates dangers, historic events, disease, nutrition, daily routines/practices, impacts/accessibility to surrounding cultural resources and other factors that presented dangers to California Indians at this time. What practices established by the Spanish impacted the native ecosystem, what diseases decimated native populations, what dangers were present for Native people within and outside of the mission? Illustrate these visually on your map or poster board and provide captions explaining your conclusions.

**Building a Sustainable Secularization Plan**

You are working to ensure Native Americans are granted rights as control of California is transferred from Mexico to Spain in 1821. The Mexican government is making a series of laws to secularize or close the missions. Research the facts of what happened when the missions were secularized in 1834. What was supposed to happen to the mission lands and the native people who remained there? How did the facts differ from the secularization plan. Why is this period referred to as the “sacking of the missions?” What options did native people have during secularization? Revise the secularization laws to prevent the “sacking of the missions” and protect the rights of native people. How could Mexican officials and soldiers have been held accountable during this period? Present your fact finding and secularization plan to the class.

**Defending Our Homelands (Presentation Project)**

1. Create a team and assign each member of research topic. For this assignment you will focus on the strategies used by Spanish Soldiers and Padres in establishing California missions. How ere geographic locations selected and what purpose did they serve, what were the responses of the native peoples where the missions were established, what happened to them over time, what natural resources were important to the lives, cultures and traditions of the native populations surrounding the missions, how did the mission impacts these resources and practices. What contemporary issues are important to these tribes today.

2. Create a presentation of your research. Collect historical and contemporary photos of tribal communities that illustrate the native people who lived at the mission. Create a presentation that tells the story of the mission, how and why it was established, the impact it had on the surrounding native communities and the natural resources the pre-existed the mission. Highlight events that illustrated resistance by these tribal communities, and efforts they made to protect their peoples, lands and cultures. Highlight a California Native historical or contemporary leader who has contributed to the contributed to political/military resistance, the protection of cultural resources or the health and welfare of a tribal community associated with your mission. End your with a section the demonstrates these tribal communities today.