

THE TRUTH SHIA SET US FRE



Pomo dancers at Mission San Francisco de Solano, 2013.
Photos by Nikki Lim.

ALL THE

TIPS FOR TEACHING CALIFORNIA HISTORY TO KIDS

Written by **Vincent Medina**

It is our obligation as educators that when visiting the California missions and teaching about California Indian cultures, we ensure that the experiences of Native students are not delegitimized and that the sometimes-painful history of the missions is portrayed with visibility, accuracy, and fairness. This is not solely an issue of teaching students the truth, but also an issue of social justice.





Why is it important to empower children with the truth?

Historically, little has been done in public schools and at the California missions to accurately present Native perspectives. Teaching California Indian children inaccurate lessons about their history can have deep psychological impacts on Native communities, such as:

- Perpetuating hurtful stereotype that California Indian people are extinct or vestiges of the past;
- Affecting the self-esteem and confidence of thousands of California Indian school children who are mandated to go on tours of the missions and study the missionized Indian communities;
- Increasing the anger and lack of trust many Indian communities feel towards California's public schools and missions;
- Perpetuating inaccurate information and lies to the general public about the history of California Indians and missions.

Concepts, and practices to avoid when teaching about California's diverse Indian peoples and the missions include:

- Don't ignore California Indian communities, both contemporary and ancient, in your school's lesson plans. Kindly refrain from promoting the hurtful myth that we are extinct as a race. Remember that contemporary California Indian people number in the thousands, speak over sixty different languages, and have their own religious traditions and political and economic sovereignty. We have adapted to a changing world, but have found ways to keep our Indian identities alive and are thriving in the twenty-first century.
- It is inappropriate to use grave goods—material objects from archaeological sites—for classroom displays unless you have direct consent from the appropriate modern tribal communities.
- Please do not continue a pattern of portraying California Indians in minimalist, unflattering ways—remember that most of our material culture was made from organic materials! Our culture is richer than mortars, pestles, and arrowheads. Native California is one of the most geographically, linguistically, and culturally rich areas of the world.



Left to right: El Camino Real at Mission San Miguel; Vincent Medina teaching Ohlone history to school children at Mission Dolores, 2012; Mission Dolores neophyte baptismal record showing the names of Vincent's ancestors.

Words can hurt!

Teachers and parents who discuss Native Americans, past and present, should be aware of their language. To start with, when teaching about Indians, what shall we call them: Native Americans or Indians? Some people prefer to be called Native Americans, since the term *Indian* came from the early belief that the European visitors had reached India. Some people don't care. Find out the tribal name for the people you're discussing and use that. Or just call them *people*. The best way to find out what a child wants to be called is by *asking* how they would like to be identified.

Additionally, our American vocabulary is full of stereotypes of Indians, and while we may not even be aware of many of them, they can plant erroneous images and prejudicial biases in non-Indian children and contribute to the difficulties Indian children face in and out of the classroom. We can help by being aware of our own use of stereotypes, and by avoiding those words. Here are some words and terms to avoid when describing Native youth, or telling the history of American Indian people:

Sitting Indian style and **walking Indian file**. Present day Indians sit in chairs and walk with their friends and family just as everyone else does, but young children don't make the distinction between past and present. And we don't describe people as sitting or walking in the way of any other ethnic groups.

Running around like wild Indians. There are better ways to describe inappropriate behavior. This is hurtful, whether heard by a Native child or not.

Indian giver. Meaning someone who gives and then takes back. There are better descriptions than this stereotype.

Digger. No matter what those before you might have said, *digger* is a pejorative term comparable to the N-word.

Braves and warriors. These terms continue the idea of Indians as fierce and dangerous.

Squaw. This is inappropriate in all circumstances, as the word has sexual connotations in some cultures.

Papoose. This word means child in only one (non-California) language; why not say baby or child?

Indian princesses and **sons of chiefs**. A disproportionate number of Indians are described this way in stories. That's like characterizing present day people as daughters of the governor and sons of the mayor, something very few of us actually are.

Medicine men and **shamans**. Say doctors or religious leaders instead. In the past and present, Indian doctors treated—successfully—a variety of physical, psychological, and emotional ailments. It is imperative to understand these are our holy people, akin to priests, rabbis, or imams, and their titles should be as respected as such.

Team names. Teams use names like Braves, Warriors, Redskins, Indians, and so forth to imply ferocity and unrestrained violence in the same way other teams choose names like Sharks and Eagles.

Teepees, wickiups, wigwams, tule houses, and **hogans**. These words mean specific kinds of houses in specific languages, and they aren't interchangeable. Take the time to find out the appropriate word in the language of the people you are studying, or just say house (not hut).

War-whooping. Please flatly discourage this activity. If it was used, it was in warlike situations. We tell kids, "Do you know what kind of Indians make that noise? Indians who watch too much television!"

Left to right: Luiseño basketry at Mission San Luis Rey; drawing by Luiseño scholar Pablo Tac, circa 1830; Pomo cultural sharing at Mission San Francisco de Solano, 2013, photo by Nikki Lim.



Indian myths and legends. If you refer to the creation and morality stories of your own religion as myths and legends, then go ahead and use them when referring to Native religions as well! It's not appropriate to have children make up their own Indian myths and legends, unless you have them making up Bible stories as well.

Indian names. Occasionally teachers have children select "Indian" names as a part of a history study unit. In contemporary American culture, naming remains a formal religious ceremony or a permanent decision involving registration with a government entity. It was the same in Indian cultures. No individual named him or herself without outside help.

Indian superstitions. It's always the other guy who is superstitious. Don't call individual beliefs superstitions even if you don't believe them yourself.

Language. Some people think all Indians speak "Indian." There are 120 major languages in California alone and many Native people continue to speak these languages today. Neighboring groups might speak languages as different as Chinese and English. Many people were bi- and trilingual.

Smoke signals and **sign language.** These were used by some tribes but there seems to be no evidence of them in California.

Wandering and **roaming.** These terms suggest animal behaviors. Human beings travel to see relatives, hunt, get food (as at the grocery store), or admire the scenery. Indian peoples in California lived, and continue to live, settled lives.

War bonnets and **war paint.** War bonnets, in the American vernacular, are feathered headdresses that were worn under some circumstances by some Plains Indians. Many tribes wore other kinds of feather headdresses, which looked very different and had a different (often ceremonial) significance. Face paint was also used for many reasons besides

war, including for dance ornamentation, and the patterns of the paint were specific to the activity. No one went around all the time with a painted face.

Tomahawks and spears. Spears were used for hunting animals and perhaps warfare before the bow and arrow were invented, about 500 AD in California. Styles of bows and arrows were very different in different places. Making bows and arrows was time consuming and demanding. Children didn't make their own bows; an adult relative made them. Children—boys—hunted small game when they were old enough, usually with wood-tipped arrows.

Now, it may seem like there are a lot of things NOT to do when teaching about the culture of American Indians, but there are also a lot of positive things that can be shared. The cultures of California are complex, varied, and dynamic, as represented by the variety of languages spoken here even today. Here are some ways that different Native California people say hello:

- The Chochenyo Ohlone people of the East Bay say "**Hórsē Túuxi**" (which actually means "good day");
- The Northern Chumash people of the Central Coast say "**Hatyu**";
- The Karuk people of far northwest California say "**Ayukii**";
- The Mono people of the Central Valley say "**Manihu**."

Notice how different these words are? Keep in mind they are all spoken in this place that today we call California. Perhaps you can ask your students if they can imagine how it might be to live in a place where for thousands of years so many different languages were spoken, even if they were very geographically close to one another.



Answering the hard questions

Is this a New World? Did the Spanish discover California?

Teaching history and culture, especially to children, can be full of daunting and loaded words. The terms *New World* and *discovery of California* can be condescending and even hurtful. But what do we replace them with? Here are a couple of ideas.

New World is a very Eurocentric term that has been used since Europeans arrived in North and South America. There is documented proof that Native peoples have been living in California for *at least* fourteen thousand years. In the oral traditions of many Native people, California is where the very world began. Since this part of the world is actually quite ancient and old, perhaps a better term to use would be *the Western Hemisphere*.

Likewise, it is often said that Christopher Columbus *discovered* the Americas. When talking about the missions it is sometimes said that Junipero Serra *discovered* California. When I hear this, I often say “For thousands of years, I don’t think my ancestors were sitting on the shores of the Bay, twiddling their thumbs and saying ‘Hmm, I wish someone would come and discover me today.’” Indigenous people in California were living very good, settled lives for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. Instead of saying that the Spanish *discovered* California, perhaps we can say that the Spanish (or Europeans) and Native Americans *interacted*. *Interaction* is a more mutually inclusive term that signifies two cultures coming together.

How do we talk about Spanish colonization and the missions to children? How do we discuss the truth without terrifying the children?

This is a major question that many teachers ask me, and it’s a good one. California Indians who suffered under missionization deserve to have their stories and realities discussed,

but that history can be, at times, terrifying and difficult to relate to. I often give this scenario when I discuss the missions and the way Native people first might have encountered the Spanish:

Imagine that one day you walk home after a long day at school. When you get to your house, you realize the front door is already open! Inside your own house are people who look different from anyone you have ever seen before, they speak a language you have never heard, they have different-colored eyes, and they wear different clothes. These strangers sitting in your house tell you, “This is MY house now; all these things in this house belong to me now.” Maybe you feel scared, so you go into your bedroom, but those same people are sitting on your bed. Maybe they are playing with your favorite toys, or your iPad, or your Nintendo—and guess what they say? “All these toys belong to me now, but maybe, just maybe, I will let you use them, but only when I say you can.” Wow, you must be angry and annoyed at this point, huh?! Then you go into your kitchen and those same strange people are sitting at your kitchen table, and they’re eating your food, all your favorite foods that you love, and they say “Now this food is all mine, but maybe you can eat it, only when I say you can.” How angry you might be! And scared! And confused! Then these strange people tell you that on top of taking your house, now you can’t practice your religion anymore, you can’t wear your favorite clothes anymore, you can’t speak your language anymore—and maybe worst of all, you can’t even call yourself by your real name anymore. They are going to give you a new name, and if you call yourself by your real name or speak your language or practice your religion, you might be punished.

Ask the children how they might feel. Would they be angry? Confused? Scared? Upset? Is this fair? Is it unfair? You can also ask:

- *If someone tried to take their house, would they give it up?*
- *If someone tried to force them to change their language, would they give it up?*
- *If someone tried to make them change their religion, would they give it up?*
- *If someone tried to take their names away, would they give them up?*

This was the reality of life for missionized California Indians and it's not often taught. When faced with immense cultural changes and Spanish attempts to change their whole lives, Native peoples found ways to keep their cultures, religions, languages, and identities alive. Our ancestors did not simply relinquish their cultural identities, but found ways to adapt and survive even in these difficult times.

Are the Spanish all bad? How do we talk about hardships without villainizing a cultural group?

Not all Spanish people who came to California during the time of the missions were bad. Making sweeping generalizations and labeling an entire cultural group as inherently evil is wrong and unfair. Some priests and soldiers were not so good, and were particularly cruel to Indian people, but it is important to note that there were many Spanish soldiers and missionaries who came with good intentions and wanted to change Indian cultures, not necessarily kill all of the Indians in California.

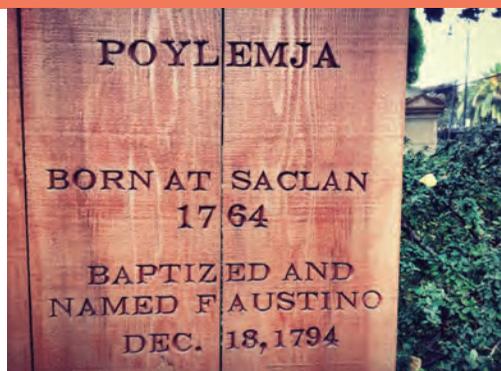
Why would Indian people come to the missions if they were so bad?

Ask the children this question. It's a complex issue, but Native people came for a variety of reasons, including:

- Some might have wanted to see the families they were separated from;
- Some might have come because Spanish cattle were depleting their food sources and they wanted to survive;
- Some wanted to see new technology, and were genuinely curious about the new arrivals;
- Some might have been genuinely moved by the Catholic religion;
- Some might have wanted to trade with the missions, as their traditional economies were changing;
- Some might have been frightened by the death and disease happening in their villages and looked for a solution from the Europeans who brought them.

As you discuss these reasons, remind the students that no matter what reason the Indians had for coming to the mission, as soon as they were baptized, they were forced to stay in the mission—even if they did not understand the language they were baptized in. And then ask the students: Does that sound very fair? Do you think what happened in the missions equated to slavery? If you want to go home, and try to escape, but are forced back to work at a place you don't want to be at—is that slavery?

Left to right, Gravemarker for Vincent's ancestor, Faustino Poylemja, at Mission Dolores; road sign for Indian reservations along the mission trail in San Diego County; Vincent's younger brother, Gabriel Medina, and his fourth grade mission model of the Indian siege of Mission San Jose, 2013.



The Fourth Grade Mission Model

Just because something has been done in a certain way for a long time does not mean that we have to continue the same process. For many Native people, missions are places of disease, death, abuse, and cruelty. As Deborah Miranda (Ohlone/Chumash/Esselen), author of *Bad Indians*, discusses, would it be acceptable to make a model of a plantation complete with enslaved African Americans? Would it be acceptable to make a model of a concentration camp where Jewish people perished? If these cases are not acceptable (and they are not), why is it acceptable to make models of California missions? Here are a couple of ideas for alternatives to building physical models of the mission:

- Build a California Indian village that represents the way the tribe near a particular mission lived. Would there be redwood bark houses or tule houses? Would there be a roundhouse? What might the people wear? Would they have boats from tules like the Ohlone and Miwok, or plank canoes like the Chumash and Tongva?
- Build a mission that shows resistance from California Indian tribes. Did you know many missions were attacked as a result of Spanish cruelty and abuse towards the Indians? What would that resistance look like?
- Build a changed landscape, showing how an area of California looked before and after contact with Europeans. What agriculture might be different? What about the natural environment? How might villages look different? How might clothing have changed?
- Avoid building any mission and instead focus on the natural beauty of California's unique landscapes, from the Central Valley to the coastal bluffs of Marin, from the expansive, endless ocean views of Santa Barbara and the Channel Islands to the immense and grand San Francisco Bay. How did this look before any Europeans arrived?

Many Native American parents and educators have argued that having students build scale models of missions has

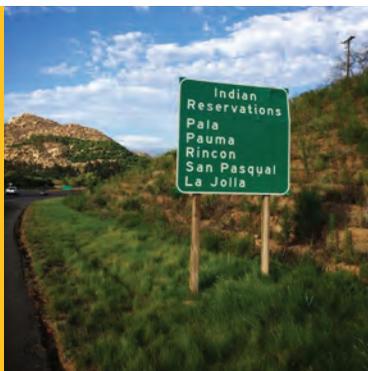
little-to-no educational value. It is also a harmful exercise to require of California Native students, given that many of them have ancestors that are connected to these institutions. In protest, many California Indian students and their families have staged revolts in their mission model projects.

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 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, changes in diet and nutrition, changes in child-rearing practices, and organized resistance efforts 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 and practices, accessibility of 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 inside and outside of the mission? Illustrate these visually on your map or poster board and provide captions explaining your conclusions.

Build a Sustainable Secularization Plan. It is 1821, and you are working to ensure Native Americans are granted rights as control of California is transferred from Spain to





Mexico. 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 what actually happened 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. First, form a team and assign each member a research topic focusing on the strategies the Spanish soldiers and padres used to establish the California missions. How were geographic locations selected and what purpose did they serve? What were the responses of the Native peoples where the missions were established and

what happened to them over time? What natural resources were important to the lives, cultures, and traditions of the Native populations surrounding the missions, and how did the mission impact these resources and practices? What contemporary issues are important to these tribes today?

Then use your research to 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 that pre-existed the mission. Collect historical and contemporary photos of tribal communities that illustrate the Native people who lived at the mission. Highlight events that illustrated resistance by these tribal communities and their efforts to protect their peoples, lands, and cultures. Highlight an historic or contemporary California Native leader who has contributed to the contributed to political or military resistance, the protection of cultural resources, or the health and welfare of a tribal community associated with your mission. End your presentation with a section that describes these tribal communities today.

Above, left to right: Ohlone culture bearer Jose Guzman, center, at the Pleasanton Rancheria in 1925, courtesy of the Smithsonian archives; Vincent teaching about an Ohlone tule house at Mission Dolores, photo by Nikki Lim.

Below, left to right: Plaque honoring Ascencion Solersano de Cervantes (Mutsun Ohlone) at Mission San Juan Bautista; Chichenyo Ohlone mural at the Berkeley Shellmound.



Native Heroes

We all need heroes. What heroes can we show children to replace, contrast, or add to the Spanish, Mexican, and American heroes they are so often presented with in California's schools?

Pablo Tac

Pablo Tac was born in the early 1820s at Mission San Luis Rey. His parents were both Luiseño and his grandparents contributed to the construction of the mission. Tac is one of the few California Indians to write about his experiences in the missions. The priest in the mission was fond of Tac, who helped him in his daily routines, and took him and another Luiseño boy with him to Rome to study at the Vatican. Tac lived in a politically complicated time, during the fall of the Spanish empire and the secularization of the missions. Knowing that the missions were doomed to fail or be secularized after the Mexican government took control, the priest at San Luis Rey fled to Mexico City with Tac and the other Luiseño boy. Tac may have been influenced by the debates going on in Mexico at that time about the rights and equality of indigenous people.

After living in Mexico City for two years, the trio sailed to Barcelona and then Rome. At the Vatican, Tac studied linguistics and created a Luiseño dictionary based on the language forms he learned in studying Latin and Spanish. Tac also wrote about his experiences in the mission and argued for the equality of indigenous people. Since he wrote with the instruction of other priests and had his work edited and republished, the accuracy of Tac's writing remains questionable. Tac also recorded many of the customs he learned

while living in the missions and the stories that his parents and grandparents shared with him. Tac's parents experienced the harsh conditions of the mission and watched their children succumb to the deadly diseases brought by the Spaniards. Tac is one of the few Native scholars to be trained at the Vatican; his class consisted of three other Native people, including two from the Midwest and one from the Carolinas. He died in 1841.

The Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island or Juana Maria

The people indigenous to the island of San Nicolas, which is about fifty miles off of the coast of Los Angeles, were sailors who often traded with the mainland. Their abundance of otters drew Russian hunters looking for otter pelts down from their settlements in Alaska. One group of these hunters clashed with the Indians living on the island and devastated the small tribe. Their population steadily declined after this confrontation. Eventually, the missionaries on the mainland sent a ship to remove the Indians from the island and bring them to the mission. The accounts of sailors report that a woman left the ship just before its departure in order to find her missing son. Eighteen years later, in 1853, otter hunters found a woman living on the island who was the same age as the woman who was left behind would have been by that time. The hunters took her to the mainland, where she lived with the ship's captain for seven weeks before she passed away from disease. Some of her tools and her dress were given to the California Academy of Sciences as a gift, but they were destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906.

Father Horra

Father Horra was one of the two original priests at Mission San Miguel Arcángel. Although he was not an Indian, he stood up for the rights of California Indians in the missions. Father Horra filed a complaint against his partner for mistreating the Indians in the mission, claiming that they were being excessively beaten and in some cases starved. Along with these accusations, he claimed that his partner was not following the model that had been established for running the missions because he let Indians live in their villages after they'd been baptized and did not teach all of them Spanish. The latter claims suggest that Father Horra was not against the mission system, only the people who were running it. Father Horra served only two months at the mission before the church declared him insane and sent him back to Mexico.

Chief Solano

Chief Solano was a Suisun Indian who lived during the early nineteenth century. His story serves as an important example of the romanticized legends behind the mission era. For over one hundred years, the legend of Chief Solano spread

throughout the region, although many of the facts in the story are not plausible. Mariano Vallejo, who was given command of the northern frontier of California by the Mexican government in the early nineteenth century, spread the tale of an Indian who negotiated peace with neighboring tribes or led his troops into battle against other Indians. Vallejo claimed to have met Solano in 1834 with an army of forty thousand warriors, but the Suisun were not known warriors and most of their population had been destroyed in an 1810 raid near Mission Dolores. As the surviving villagers either fled to the interior of California or were taken to the missions, Solano was most likely raised in Mission Dolores. He would have had trouble learning his traditional language and communicating with tribal leaders outside of the mission, and so would not have been able to put together a large army. The various explanations debunking the myth suggest that the tale of Chief Solano and his actual life are different stories.

Yozcolo

The resistance leader Yozcolo led a revolt and several raids in and around Mission Santa Clara in the nineteenth century. Yozcolo freed dozens of young women being held at the mission and fled into the interior of California. After his escape from the mission, Yozcolo gathered several followers and led raids on the pueblos and ranchos around the mission. His resistance was ended by the Mexican government in 1834.

Pomponio

Pomponio led raids and revolts from San Francisco down to San Luis Obispo and as far as San Diego in the early nineteenth century. He stole weapons, food, and horses from missions and ranchos across the state. Many of the Indians living in the missions sympathized with Pomponio and snuck him food and provisions when he was camped nearby. The military attempted to apprehend Pomponio several times but were unsuccessful for years. During a raid, however, Pomponio killed a soldier, sparking a manhunt and allowing the Mexican forces to marshal more troops to help catch him. Pomponio was caught in the early 1820s and sentenced to death by a council of judges. His death inspired several revolts against missions in southern California, including a rebellion in Santa Barbara consisting of two thousand Indians.

Chief Marin

Chief Marin, also known by his native name Huicmuse, was a Coast Miwok Indian from what is now southern Marin County. Huicmuse was born around 1780 in a traditional native community enriched by colorful ceremonies, the daily activities of hunting and fishing, and the nightly sharing of

tribal lore. Huicmuse first encountered the Spanish missionaries at Mission Dolores in his early twenties. It was at this time Huicmuse was baptized and given the name Marino. Marino experienced a different world inside the mission: new languages, new rules and regulations based on assigned chores, a strict time schedule, new codes of behavior, punishment, and a new faith forced upon his people.

During his time in the missions Marino was very smart and used his roles as a boatman, guide, and interpreter to his advantage. He was granted freedoms that others were not. Marino fled the mission in 1822, after Father Amoros grew angry with him. Marino lived in hiding, using his skills to outwit the Mexican military. In his memoirs of the time, Mariano Vallejo wrote about Marino hiding out on the “Marin Islands” near San Rafael, which were thereafter named “in honor of that chieftain. Who, while maintaining his savage dignity, was a terrible and greatly feared enemy of the whites.” There are various accounts of Chief Marin, as he became known, harassing the Spanish soldiers, attacking the missions, and evading capture.

Like many accounts of Indians during the mission era, Chief Marin’s story comes from a variety of different sources that may or may not have told the truth. Missionaries recorded accounts of raiding Indians because they were a threat to the missions and pueblos, but newspapers in the mid- and late-nineteenth centuries often dramatized these accounts. Vallejo’s accounts have been debunked by historians because his timeline does not fit with accounts of other military actions or what we know about the cultures of the tribes in northern California.

Estanislao

Estanislao was a Yokuts-speaking Lacquisamne tribe member living at Mission San Jose. At the mission he worked as a cowhand and mule tamer and was eventually appointed one of the *alcaldes* over his people. Estanislao was an intelligent, talented man and he didn’t approve of the way he and his people were treated. Stories of other revolutionaries inspired him to take action.

In 1828 Estanislao escaped Mission San Jose and fled toward the mountains. Estanislao wrote to the mission father and told him that he and his people would not return to the mission and would fight if soldiers were sent to capture them. Estanislao and his allies twice defeated military groups sent to recapture him, but the mission leaders would not give up. They were determined to bring back all the baptized Indians and punish the resistance leaders as well as any group or person who harbored the escaped Indians. The missionaries requested the Mexican government’s help to end this resistance. The Mexican government sent over 150 men led by Mariano Vallejo. This time they brought more powerful weapons, including one cannon, and captured Estanislao, but not before he became a hero to his people. ▼