

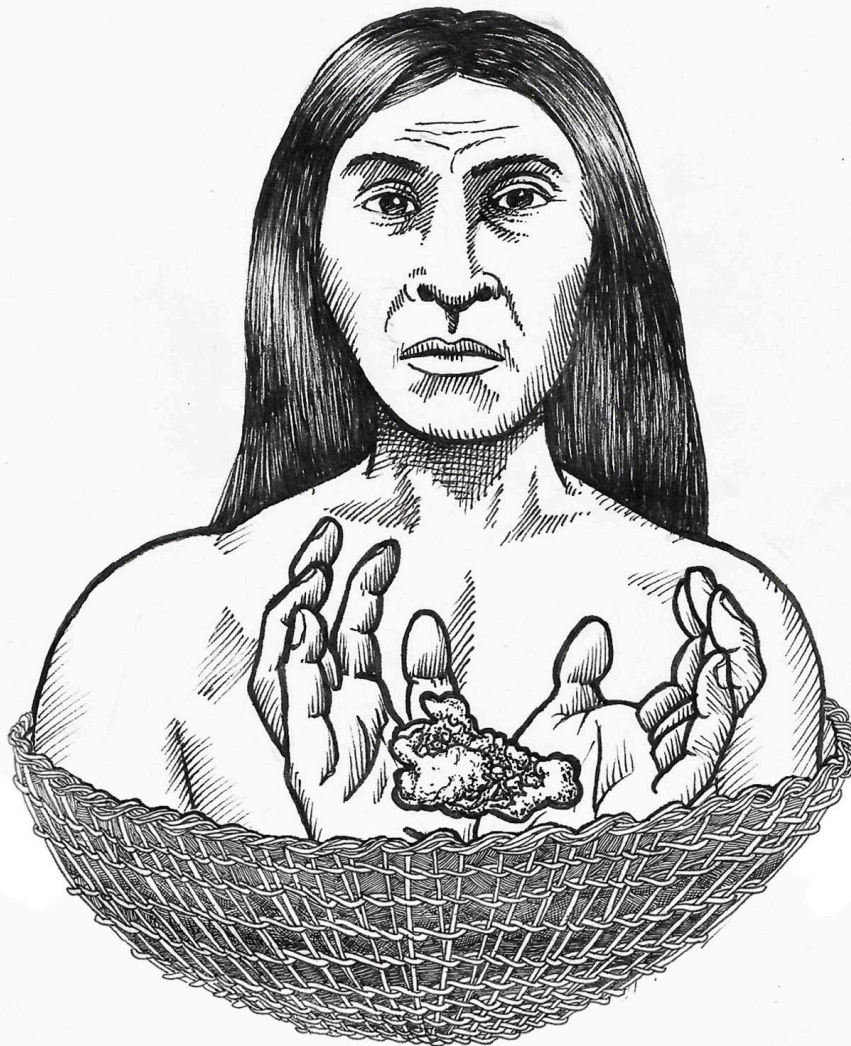


**Redbud Resource Group**  
Native Minds Changing Lives.

# **Weaving the Future, Confronting the Past**

**California's Complex Origins and Native-Settler Relations**

By Redbud Resource Group



## Unit Introduction

The following lessons are part of a multi-year project to expand the visibility of California Native people in the K-12 classroom. These lessons provide introductory information about the California Indian Genocide, which was at its peak from the mid to late 1800s during the *California Gold Rush*. This project will continue to expand to feature survivor accounts, upstander examples, contemporary impacts, and an ecological exploration of the genocide's legacy.

The California Indian Genocide has no formal ending, and remnants of it exist in many forms today. At the same time, California Native communities, families, and governments remain committed to resistance, healing, and collaboration to bring justice to our families and to rebuild our communities and ecosystems.

### Genocide Education Partnerships

This project was created in partnership with the [California Teachers Collaborative for Holocaust and Genocide Education](#), a consortium of Genocide Education experts from around the world. Redbud Resource Group has integrated structures and best practices from Genocide Education leaders, including *The Genocide Education Project*, *Facing History and Ourselves*, and other sources, ensuring that these lessons can be smoothly integrated into the classroom.

### The Definition of Genocide: Limitations

The United Nations' definition of genocide is a primary framework used throughout this unit. The UN definition of genocide is the most widely accepted definition of genocide and is the most referenced in Genocide Education globally.

As Native people, we recognize the limitations of this definition and believe that ecocide, or the systematic destruction of the ecosystem, goes hand-in-hand with the genocide of people, especially Indigenous people. In future California Indian Genocide lessons, we plan to expand students' understanding of genocide to include ecocide, as Indigenous peoples are inseparable from the Indigenous environment, and violence against Indigenous people often corresponds with violence against the environment, with which we have an ancient symbiotic relationship.

We also acknowledge that Native communities have been heavily impacted by cultural genocide through the Indian Boarding School System and other forced [assimilation](#)

[policies](#). While the UN's definition of genocide does not include cultural genocide, the attempted decimation of Native culture and identity via systematic cultural erasure is unignorable.

To read more about Indigenous understandings of genocide and ecocide in California and across the U.S., check out these resources:

- [“To destroy in whole or in part”: Remembering Our Past to Secure Our Future](#)” by Jack Norton. 2020.
- [Native Voices on Teaching California Indian History and the Missions](#). *News from Native California*. 2014.
- [Gold, Greed & Genocide](#), curriculum by International Indian Treaty Council.
- [Native American Heritage Commission](#) - Digital Atlas with timelines of genocidal incidents by region.
- US History Through a Native Lens [timeline](#)

## A Note on Language

**American Indian**- A political and legal term referring to members of sovereign Indigenous Nations whose borders fall within the boundaries of what is now the United States. The US Constitution refers to *Indian Tribes* as separate sovereign entities that have formal political, legal, and economic relationships with the US Federal and State governments. The term “Indian” has been used to disenfranchise Indigenous people in some cases, particularly in decisions regarding citizenship, schooling, and political and economic freedom within the United States. In the 20th and 21st centuries, Native people have used the term American Indian when advocating for political sovereignty and power.

**Native American**- A term referring to individuals and communities who have ancestral and cultural identities connected to specific Indigenous communities within the United States and/or Americas.

**Tribal person**- A political term referring to members of politically sovereign Indigenous Nations.

ie. “I am a *Tribal* citizen of Berry Creek Rancheria Band of Maidu Indians of California.”

**Tribal name**- Native people/communities are most accurately referenced by their Tribal names. Ancestral names often refer to specific geographic locations from which the community originates. Modern political names often use political titles given to the Tribe

by the federal government of the United States. Modern Native people might refer to themselves by their ancestral community name and/or by the name of the sovereign political body of which they are citizens.

ie. “I am *Maidu*, a citizen of Berry Creek Rancheria Band of Maidu Indians of California”

**Indigenous**- when referring to a person, this term is always capitalized and denotes a person whose ancestral roots are tied to a specified geographic place. Indigenous groups have distinct languages, cultures, and traditions that are often closely tied to their ancestral territories.

**California Indian Genocide**- A period from roughly 1846 to 1873 in which the CA government passed legislation and allocated funding towards militia campaigns with the explicit purpose of eradicating California’s Indigenous populations. This unit reviews the events of the California Indian Genocide. Since its founding, the US government has had a political and economic relationship with “Indian Tribes” as stated in the US Constitution, which was further solidified through the negotiation of treaties throughout the 19th Century. *The California government understood Indigenous communities as a network of sovereign political nations.* In California, rather than enter into treaties, the government systematically murdered “Indian Tribes,” avoiding political acknowledgment and political responsibility. Because “Indian” is a political term widely represented in Indian Law and US political discourse, California’s genocidal actions are referred to as the California Indian Genocide.

### ***Language Recommendations for Students***

- Students who are uncomfortable or unsure about correct terminology can simply use the term Native when referring to California’s Indigenous peoples.
- Students should feel comfortable using the term Indian when it is used in the *official title of a law, court case, or political decision*. The term Indian can be used in a derogatory way, so limit student use to official titles/documents/events.
  - Note- Many Native people do refer to themselves as Indian, but this is not recommended for non-Native students.
- Students should refer to Native people by their Tribal name whenever possible.

## **Standards and Frameworks**

Lessons are aligned with High School Common Core Standards, the California History-Social Sciences Framework, the Seven Essential Understandings of California

Native History and Culture, and the 6 P's of California Indian Education. The [Seven Essential Understandings](#) guide teachers who want to respectfully and accurately incorporate Native history and perspectives into their classrooms. [The 6 P's of California Indian Education](#) help educators reframe California Native Studies through a Native lens, with a focus on holistic Native identities as opposed to stories rooted in stereotypes and perpetual victimhood.

### **Notes on Sourcing: Challenges and Limitations**

Ideally, California Indian Genocide lessons would largely feature primary sources from Native survivors. The California Indian Genocide occurred during a time when few California Native people spoke English (this varied depending on the geographic region), and few had access to materials needed to record their testimonials. While some testimonials exist, many, but not all, are second-hand or testimonials from descendants of survivors. *Whenever possible, we integrate primary sources from Native people into our lessons. When primary sources are unavailable, we use secondary and academic sources written by Native people or close allies.*

Many of our non-Native sources are political documents and court records, with a focus on State and Federal Indian policy, as well as newspaper articles and propaganda from settlers who recorded events of the genocide. These sources can sometimes feel outdated and *may feature offensive or stereotypical language that would not be used to discuss California Native people today.* Sometimes, we must use anthropological sources that no longer meet ethics standards, however, we often use these to prompt conversations around representation and accuracy.

Overall, we strive to use California Native primary, secondary, and academic sources as much as possible. We believe this is essential to telling the story of California Native people respectfully and with fidelity.

### **Tips** for Framing a Violent History through a “Resilience and Resistance” Lens

The California Gold Rush is recognized as one of the most violent and brutal periods in U.S. history. The vast majority of accounts from the California Indian Genocide feature inhumane acts of violence, sexual assault, forced removal, ecocide, and more. Violence during this time was systematic, planned, and paid for by both the state and federal governments, and there were few vocal upstanders throughout the system.

Those who did speak out against the extermination of California Native people usually spoke out of economic interests, wanting to protect the Indian laborers who made their businesses and ranches function. Few survivor-written accounts exist, and stories of Native rebellion are often passed down orally in families.

⇒ ***As an educator, how can you teach this history while uplifting the resilience of the Native community?***

It is essential to communicate to students that the California Indian Genocide failed to eradicate the Native population and that many California Native communities, cultures, and languages still exist today. Despite the violence inflicted upon the community, Native people found ways to preserve their cultures and protect their families. Every California Native person alive today is a descendant of genocide survivors, and this continued existence is proof of successful resistance and resilience.

For non-Native and Native students alike, it is important to explain that they are learning about the California Indian Genocide to gain a fuller understanding of how their state came to exist as it does today - these lessons give insight into the violent actions of non-Native extremists and decision makers whose behavior greatly impacted the community and ecosystem as a whole. Non-Native students are invited to celebrate the successful resistance of the Native community and to align themselves with the values of upstanders who did not engage in violence or actively spoke out against genocide (more lessons featuring resistance and upstander accounts will be added to this unit over time). The reality is that the political, cultural, and ecological impacts of the California Gold Rush and California Indian Genocide are still felt today by ALL people, and so learning about this period is essential for the healing of ALL people. *The purpose of this unit is not to make non-Native students feel guilty but to provide them with tools to make informed decisions within their communities moving forward.*

**When framing this unit, consider the following:**

1. For California Native people, contemporary existence is proof of our resistance against the genocide. If some of our ancestors did not find ways to survive, then Native communities and families would not exist today. Survival is proof of resilience and resistance.
2. For some California Native people, assimilation (forced or coerced) was a necessary part of survival. No living California Native people have completely escaped



assimilation, and in many cases, it was this process that ensured the survival of Native families, however unjust the assimilation process.

3. Having partially intact cultural knowledge and practices is proof of genocide survival. Having incomplete cultural knowledge is not a deficit. The existence of partially complete cultural knowledge is a gift from one's ancestors and opens doors to cultural revitalization for future generations of California Natives. Partial cultural memory is proof of genocide survival.

◆ ***Important things students should know before learning about the California Indian Genocide:***

1. The traditional and contemporary Indigenous geography of their state/region
  - a. [Where I Live lesson](#), Redbud Resource Group
  - b. Video 1- Seeing Our Native Students: [Where Are We?](#)
2. Basic information about their local Tribes (political status, contemporary involvement in the community, any political movements or current events)
3. Knowledge of California's colonial history (Missions, Ranchos, Gold Rush/Westward Expansion)

## **Social-Emotional Tips for Teachers**

Addressing sensitive topics like the California Indian Genocide requires a thoughtful approach. To ensure students are supported emotionally and mentally, review this list of social-emotional tips for teachers:

- ❖ **Safe Space:** Begin by establishing your classroom as a safe and supportive space. Ensure that students know they can express their feelings without judgment.
- ❖ **Content Warning:** Provide a heads-up to students that the topic may be challenging and triggering. Let them know the importance of understanding this history while acknowledging the discomfort it may bring.
- ❖ **Check-ins:** Regularly check in with your students, both as a group and individually. This will give them an opportunity to share their feelings or ask questions.
- ❖ **Breathing Exercises:** Introduce simple breathing exercises or moments of mindfulness before and after the lesson to help students center themselves.

- ❖ **Physical Activity:** It's important to be aware that meditation and mindfulness exercises have the potential of triggering trauma responses in people with PTSD. Something physical like stretching or going for a jog are good alternatives for processing information.
- ❖ **Provide Alternatives:** If a student finds the topic too distressing, have an alternative assignment or activity ready (*i.e.* Mini Lesson 2: Native Healing and Resistance), or allow them to step out of the classroom. A physical activity such as
- ❖ **Discussion Circles:** Facilitate open discussions where students can process what they've learned, share their feelings, and listen to their peers.
- ❖ **Empower Through Action:** Sometimes learning about injustices can leave students feeling powerless. Discuss ways they can make a positive impact, whether through advocacy, education, or community service.
- ❖ **External Resources:** Have a list of counselors, helplines, or community resources available for students who may need additional support or someone to talk to.
- ❖ **Reflective Journaling:** Encourage students to keep a journal where they can process their feelings and thoughts privately.
- ❖ **Continuous Learning:** Acknowledge that this is a continual learning journey for everyone, including yourself. Stay updated on best practices and resources to approach such topics.

Lastly, always be open to feedback from students. Their perspectives can offer valuable insights on how to best support them through challenging subjects.

### Contemporary Connections: Extension Ideas

1. *Integrate examples of contemporary Native existence before and after California Indian Genocide lessons.* You may be able to thematically pair contemporary events to the lessons, depending on the news cycle.
  - a. Look out for current events around Native communities, including [new legislation](#) being passed, [environmental wins](#), [media representation](#), and more.
  - b. Visit Redbud's YouTube channel to view our *Steps to Land Back* series as a part of our [Going Beyond Land Acknowledgements](#) program.
2. *Feature examples of cultural revitalization.*



- a. Language revitalization stories ([Yurok language in public schools](#)), return of coming-of-age ceremonies ([Long Line of Ladies](#)), cultural burning practices ([Ron Goode](#)), land repatriation ([Sogorea Te](#)), NAGPRA/ancestral remains and repatriation of cultural items ([AB-275](#)).
3. *Pair California Native modern art and literature with California Genocide lessons.*
  - a. [Bad Indians](#) by Deborah Miranda provides reflections on assimilation, survival, and cultural revitalization in contemporary California Native communities.
  - b. Teach Redbud's [lesson](#) on contemporary California Native art.
4. *Plan field trips to Native-led spaces including art galleries, co-managed parklands, murals, etc.*
5. Bay Area educators can sign up for [Redbud's newsletter](#) to stay up-to-date on local events and opportunities.
6. *Include ongoing examples of genocidal events in the classroom, with stories of Native resistance.* Native people have been fighting family separation, assimilation, ecocide, forced removal, and identity politics from the 20th century into the 21st.
  - a. i.e. The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives movement and California's efforts to address the epidemic ([Sovereign Bodies](#))
  - b. [ICWA and the Supreme Court](#)- Indian Child Welfare Act

## **Existing Redbud Educational Resources to Support Learning and Teaching**

**Additional materials are available for free at:**

**[Redbudresourcegroup.org](https://redbudresourcegroup.org) > Education Resources**

1. **From Erasure to Invisibility: Ethnic Studies Support Lessons**
  - a. [Intro to Native Identity](#)
  - b. [The Myth of Inevitable Extinction](#)
  - c. [Ishi Case Study](#)
  - d. [Assimilation and Resistance](#)
  - e. [Repairing Relationship to Place](#)
  - f. [Cultural Revitalization](#)
  - g. [Cultural Visibility Project](#)
2. **Policy Timeline Reference**
3. **Seeing Our Native Students Video Guide**

- a. Note: This collection is great for both teachers and students, and covers topics ranging from stereotypes, tribal membership/tribal structures, cultural connection, and more.

## Resources

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