

## Parent-teacher guides son through alternative mission project



Lore about the project to create Spanish mission models in fourth grade reaches many California parents, if they haven't done the project themselves as a youth. Arienne Adamčíková and her son, Max Rostaing, got the assignment from their Spanish immersion elementary school in San Francisco, where many children from Maya-speaking families from the Mexican state of Yucatán attended. She liked the school for its close connections with families and focus on celebrating indigenous traditions.

But as spring rolled around during Max's fourth grade year, his emergency-credentialed teacher – with much on his plate – ended up assigning the traditional mission project as it had always been done.

Adamčíková, a Spanish language heritage teacher at a nearby high school, was aware that some teachers were doing alternative projects. So she set out to revise the project for Max to complete.

“The Native American perspective is huge in the way that I teach my own classes,” she says. “So I decided that we would do the mission itself, but we would also make sure that we were looking at the bigger picture and get the indigenous perspective.”

Adamčíková helped her son write to the Mission Rey de Francia near San Diego, which sent them information. But they also researched the indigenous population, the Luiseño, or Payómkawichum, Indians. They built the mission to scale, as the assignment had directed.

“But then we decided we were going to build the original Luiseño house that they would have had, and we built that in the middle of the mission grounds,” she says. They built the dome-shaped “kicha” out of felt, twigs, and cardboard; the original would have been made wood and leaves. Figurines to represent an indigenous family were placed next to the dwelling, facing the toy soldiers.

“We took Max’s toy soldiers and they were all protecting the church and aimed toward the Luiseño family,” she says. “Then all around (the building) my son wrote in Spanish a history of the Luiseño people and how they were affected by the incursion of the Spanish and the Spanish missionaries.”

Although she acknowledges that the modern-day soldiers pointing weapons at the indigenous people were a bit out of time context, it was an attempt to show how the people were under violent threat. Organized resistance to the Spanish and Mexican presence in their ancestral lands peaked in the Chumash revolt on three missions in 1824. That coordinated uprising involved 300 Mexican soldiers, six Franciscan missionaries, and 2,000 Chumash and Yokut Indians.

“They were trying to save their way of life and to save their people that were under threat. It was not a kindly relationship. It was really one in which they were the plantation slaves and we should tell the story that way,” she says.

While Max’s project was not the historically accurate and culturally appropriate alternative proposed by the California Indian History Curriculum Coalition, it demonstrates that many parents – whether they have Indian ancestry or not – are disturbed by the mission project as it has been assigned for decades. Rather than force parents to be responsible for constructing an alternative they believe is more appropriate, teachers should have properly vetted, standards-based curriculum available to them.

Adamčíková said she feels the project was a lost opportunity for several families that did not participate. “It was overwhelming and it’s big. Often the parent does most of the project,” she says. “I would love to see this mission project become something more appropriate.”