

MODULE 3 Curriculum

After viewing our film based on interviews with five California Indian people, discussion leaders may draw on some of the curriculum content found herein. The Curriculum is intended for students and professors after viewing “Carrying Our Ancestors Home.” The questions are intended as possible guides for students and professors to begin discussions within classes about issues of Indigenous rights, Native American health, the politics of NAGPRA and AB-2836 and ways of thinking about repatriation of human remains, grave items, and sacred material items.

Interviewees

Ernest Siva (Serrano/Cahuilla) Interview

Ernest Siva is Serrano and Cahuilla. He lives on a ranch in the traditional homelands of the Pass Cahuilla and Serrano people near Banning, California. Desert Serrano believe they came from a far-off place called Mara, and when they settled on earth, they inhabited an oasis in the Mojave Desert they called Mara. The Desert Serrano called themselves *Maarrenga'yam*, and they settled at the Oasis of Mara, today known at Twentynine Palms. The first inhabitants put the earth and their world into motion, and they named the places of importance to them. The elders and holy ones of *Maarrenga'yam* people often spoke of their “Little Brothers,” or the people who would one day enter their lands in need of help understanding the human relationship with other humans, animals, plants, and places. The “Little Brothers” mentioned in Siva’s interview refers to settlers who came to Southern California many years after Serrano people and their neighbors inhabited the region. In his interview, Ernest Siva still speaks of the “Little Brothers.” Long before settlers arrived, Serrano people lived and died at villages located in a huge geographical area from the Mojave Desert to the San Bernardino Mountains and valleys below. Originally, the people cremated their dead but as years passed, they also buried their dead. Over the course of many years, archaeologists have exhumed burials and cremations, placing the dead into boxes, and storing human remains for generations.

Additional information on Ernest Siva: Raised on and near Banning, California, and the Morongo Indian Reservation, Professor Ernest Siva is Serrano and Cahuilla, a noted elder and teacher who lives on the Morongo Indian Reservation and works as the Director of the Dorothy Ramon Learning Center in Banning, California. Trained in classical music at the University of Southern California, Siva taught music for many years at the University of California, Los Angeles. Now in his 80s, Ernest is the most accomplished singer of Bird Songs and Mountain Sheep Songs, musical traditions he has passed on to younger singers. He and his wife, June Siva, are Directors of the Pass Chorale, and accomplished musical and choir group of enthusiasts. His presentation for our video, “Carrying Our Ancestors Home,” focuses on traditional Serrano beliefs about the arrival of new people called Younger Brothers who needed to be taught Native ways, which included the Indigenous ways of death and treatment of the dead. We recently edited Siva’s interview and tightened the presentation.

Questions:

Cindi Alvitre is a descendant of the Moompetam or Salt Water Clan among the Tongva-Gabrielino people of the Los Angeles Basin. She is one of the original people of the region, including the Channel Islands. Alvitre earned the MA in History from the University of California, Riverside, and is completing her Ph.D. at UCLA. She is a mother, grandmother, weaver, writer, storyteller, and singer. She is also the author of a marvelous book, *Waa'Aka': The Bird Who Fell in Love with the Sun* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2020). Carly Lake painted the colorful illustrations in this unique book. Alvitre is a long-time professor of American Indian Studies and Anthropology at California State University, Long Beach, where she serves as the repatriation of ancestors, grave goods, and patrimony from the university to Native American tribes and communities. She is the coordinator of the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), a federal law passed in 1990. Alvitre is a leader of the Ti'at Restoration Project, which allowed her people to return to the ocean in tribally made boats known as Ti'at. In 1985, Alvitre and Sisquoc organized the Mother Earth Clan, which has served to preserve cultural traditions of Southern California tribal people. Since 2006, she has been a member of the California Indian Heritage Foundation, which was instrumental in securing funds to create the California Indian Heritage Center in West Sacramento. Alvitre's interview centers on issues involved with NAGPRA at her home institution and throughout the state of California. She is committed to caring for the ancestors at all costs and ensuring that institutions follow the letter and spirit of state and federal laws involving repatriation.

Additional information on Cindi Alvitre: Raised and living in the Los Angeles Basin, Professor Cindi Alvitre of Long Beach State University offered another interview focused primarily about her work as the Repatriation Coordinator at her university. Alvitre is Gabrieleno and Tongva from the Los Angeles Basin. She has been a leader of her people and an advisor to State Parks. She is involved in the preservation of Ancestors for many years. She spoke about her work preserving the site of *Puvunga*, an ancient village site and once the home of *Chinigchinix* a man/spiritual leader of her people. The site of *Puvunga* is located on the campus of CSU Long Beach and the focal point of years of contention between non-Native developers (including CSULB) and regional and state Native communities. Alvitre's interview is compelling. During Year 2, we edited her testimony and provided bibliography to our module to help others teach about repatriation issues of non-federally recognized tribes of Los Angeles and Orange Counties of Southern California.

Questions:

How did Cindi Alvitre's heritage help prepare her to deal with issues of repatriation of human remains and sacred objects? Does Alvitre's interview speak to her commitment to follow Native American protocols as well as state and federal laws involving repatriation? Do you think that caring for the remains of ancestors would be an easy task at a university? Do you think all professors, administrators, and staff at universities have a share common goal in returning the remains of the dead to tribes? Why would some professors oppose the return of human remains and sacred items to Indigenous tribes? Do you feel administrators of universities and museums have an obligation to follow state and federal laws regarding the return of human remains to tribes? Why or why not?