

ON TEACHING STATE HISTORY WITHOUT MENTIONING RAPE, RELIGION,
SMALLPOX, GENOCIDE, EXTINCTION, JOHN WAYNE, CASINOS, OR THE
ETYMOLOGY OF THE PHRASE *INDIAN GIVING*

Someone has made her decent
as she squats before a fire; drawn leggings
and sleeves and a ballpoint necklace
above sagging breasts for a place
on our shelf, Chumash by *Chumash*.
A swordfish head with buckskin legs dances
at the shoreline, luring Orca to the shallows.
The girls fall silent, watching me.
Flags and gold. Wolves and poppies.
*The grizzly was extinct here
before it graced our flag.*

We trace rivers in blue, borders in red,
and inhale the musk of men long dead
rising from the pages. *Cabrillo did not wish
to harm the natives. He gave them beads
and cloth in return for pelts and gold.*

We speak of women's lives: the burden strap,
the weaving, the gathering of olives and agave,
and glue tissue paper poppies to skies as blue
as marlin. We make our arms like cartoon cactus,
groaning for water. *The Sequoia lives five hundred years,*
Leah reads, and frowns, defiant finally: *Only Hashem
lives forever.* At recess she crouches by the broken
bench, ear pressed hard to splintered slats: our redwood.

Wampum: a secret folded in a grubby square,
sealed with heart-shaped stickers,
pressed to my palm like an acorn,
as bitter at the center, and as sweet:
*I love you, teacher. Your face is sad when you tell
about the Indians.*

- Anna Scotti