

# GOOD FIRE

## Tending Native Lands

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### STUDENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

Fire is a critical tool that supports Native lifeways. It helps increase food resources for both humans and animals, makes plants better for basketry, increases the availability of medicinal plants, and more. This is *cultural burning*. This is *good fire*.

## Working with Fire

For thousands of years, fire has played an important role in Native culture, shaping both habitats and human communities.



What do you hear, see, or wonder as you enter the space? Who is present and what are they doing? What emotions does this atmosphere bring up for you?



Find a story or artwork that you connect with. What drew you to it? What do the stories in this section have in common? Do you have a personal connection to fire?



How is *cultural burning* different from a wildfire? What cultural practices rely on fire, and in what ways? What is lost when *good fire* is not used? How do the fire cycle and Native Californians influence each other?



**TOP IMAGE:** A young person, Juanita Blake (Karuk, Pomo), uses a traditional pitch stick to ignite fire for the first time, under the guidance of Jessica Angel (Chinook Indian Nation), detail. Photo by Stormy Staats, on behalf of the Karuk Tribe.

**BOTTOM IMAGE:** Harry Fonseca, *The Maidu Creation Story*. 2014.45.1

# Good Fire, Interrupted

When settlers arrived in California, they created racist policies that stopped Native Californians from caring for the land and forced them from their ancestral homelands. This led to the decline of ecosystems and suppression of Native cultures across the state.



**Why has *cultural burning* been prevented or suppressed in California? What industries or groups contribute to fire suppression? How does this affect the land and the people that live there?**



## Future of Fire

Even after colonization, Native Californians have resisted and worked to pass down cultural knowledge. They are restoring ecosystems and cultural practices that will sustain future generations.



**What groups are working to bring back *good fire* today? How is cultural burning and land stewardship connected to tribal sovereignty, or the freedom to self-govern?**



**What's something you learned about *good fire* today? How have your perceptions of fire changed after visiting this exhibit?**

**TOP IMAGE:** Harry Courtright, Building a reservoir with hydraulic mining techniques, reproduction. Gift of Herrington & Olson. H72.131.50

**MIDDLE IMAGE:** Renée Leann Castro-Ring (Lisjan band of the Ohlone Tribe), *Rinihmu Pulte'irekne*, 2025. Mixed media triptych: wood, metal leaf, acrylic, pine nut beads, olivella (*Olivella*) shells. Courtesy of Renée Leann Castro-Ring (Lisjan band of the Ohlone Tribe).

**BOTTOM IMAGE:** Vikki Preston (Karuk), *Karuk Indigenous Women Training Exchange*, 2022. Digital image on vinyl, 2025. Courtesy of Vikki Preston (Karuk).