



California Humanities Awards \$180k to 14 Projects to Support Civics Learning in Middle Grades

For Immediate Release

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April 25, 2023—(Oakland, CA)— California Humanities is delighted to announce awards for the 2023 Civics + Humanities Middle Grades Grant program to 14 projects across the state.

Civics + Humanities Middle Grades Grants is a new pilot program that offers \$5,000-\$15,000 grants to support civics and humanities education for California’s middle grades youth (grades 6-8 or ages 10-14) in school and out-of-school settings. In the critical middle grade years, California Humanities sees a powerful opportunity to cultivate the skills and habits young people need to actively engage in civic life through their school years and into the future. We hope these grants will empower a pipeline of California students to step into their roles as civically engaged community members.

From Watsonville to Berkeley to San Diego, some of the awarded projects weave together topics such as history, music, and art to cultivate unique learning environments for fostering civic engagement. For example, youth organization Outside the Lens will develop a program for youth in grades 6-8 to study Chicano Park, a series of public murals painted by activists and artists on the concrete pylons and walls of the Coronado Bay Bridge in San Diego. Students will learn about site’s significance, and how the practice of civil disobedience there can serve as a model for present-day civic engagement.

Another project, Mariposa County Arts Council’s “Kosokehkimal,” incorporates Indigenous education and ecology. Centered around a field trip program to Wahnoga Village, the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation’s Teaching & Healing Center in Yosemite National Park, the experience will deepen students’ understanding of cultural resilience and the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples through the complicated lens of the National Park Service.

During the grant period, the Civics + Humanities grantee cohort will meet to share lessons from the field. The meetings will include Implementation grantees (up to \$15,000) who are poised to launch a pilot project—or further develop a program—over the course of eighteen months, and

Planning grantees (\$5,000) who are in a research and design phase of up to twelve months. The goal is to bolster community and camaraderie among these educators in the emerging nexus of civics and humanities youth education.

These awards mark the fruition of several years of research and development at California Humanities, led by outgoing President & CEO Julie Fry. In statewide convenings, California Humanities met with leaders in the field of education to discuss ways to better infuse the humanities into California grade school education, based upon research conducted by SRI Education ([read the report](#)). These specialists focused on the middle grades to amplify and expand civics and humanities education.

“We are proud to welcome the first cohort of the Civics + Humanities Middle Grades Grant Program” said Julie Fry, outgoing President & CEO of California Humanities. “Middle school students are at an age defined by questions about identity and belonging. These projects create fresh paths for youth to address issues in their lives and find ways to become engaged community members.”

2023 Civics + Humanities Middle Grades Grant Awards

Planning Grants:

Youth Voices: Exploring Identity and Representation Through Filmmaking

Film Independent Inc, Los Angeles

Project Director: Sarah Berkovich

Film Independent will research and build a program to serve middle schoolers in exploring issues of representation and identity in film/media. The project team will partner with John Muir Middle School (Los Angeles) to conduct focus groups with approximately 60 students about understanding of media and how they identify with on-screen narratives; and engage with their teachers to assess how this program could help enhance topics of civics and humanities courses.

Artists as Changemakers

Kala Art Institute, Berkeley

Project Director: Gisela Insuaste

Kala Art Institute will work with a small research team and youth advisory board to plan and design an arts integrated civics and humanities program for middle school youth (ages 10-14, grades 6-8) focusing on artists as changemakers and creative problem solvers. Kala will work with neighboring schools in the tri-city area where Kala is located and where Berkeley, Oakland, and Emeryville come together. Building on Kala’s Artists-in-Schools, field trips, and onsite youth

art programs, the project will combine studio art practices for middle school students with walking tours, podcasts, and storytelling that will ground us in neighborhood history and provide a platform for youth to explore subjects and issues relevant to their lives and the world around them.

Telling Our Story: Chicano Park

Outside the Lens, San Diego

Project Director: Liliana Hueso

Outside the Lens will develop a program for youth in grades 6-8 to study Chicano Park, learning its history and how the practice of civil disobedience at this site can serve as a model for present-day civic engagement. Students will study the history of Barrio Logan and Chicano Park, the Chicano mural movement, histories of civil disobedience, and elements of architecture and urban studies. Students will document their work through digital photography and video, answering the question, What can we do to create a better world?

Implementation Grants:

Anne Frank: A History for Today traveling exhibit and peer learning in Los Angeles area schools

Anne Frank Los Angeles

Project Director: Margrit Polak

Anne Frank: A History for Today is a unique traveling exhibit created by Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and hosted by local schools. The project uses peer to peer learning to teach the history of the Holocaust from the perspective of Anne Frank and her family. Middle school student docents in the Los Angeles region will be trained to lead tours of the exhibit for their classmates, to better understand the dangers of racism and antisemitism, the importance of democracy and freedom for defending the rights of all citizens and how bystanders can become upstanders.

Project Citizen: Empowering Community Engagement

Center for Civic Education, Calabasas

Project Director: Donna Phillips

Teachers will facilitate The Project Citizen: Empowering Community Engagement (PCECE) for approximately 100 students, who will engage cooperatively as a class to identify a problem in their community, research alternative public policy-based solutions, and develop and present a solution to others in their community. In addition to increased knowledge of public policy and government, students of PCECE will demonstrate improved civic and cooperation skills and increased community engagement. Upon the completion of this project, newly created

resources will be available for classes beyond this cohort, further increasing inclusion and benefits.

Amplifying Sanctuary Voices: Exploring Migration Project

East Bay Sanctuary Covenant, Berkeley

Project Director: Daphne Morgen

This project will build on Amplifying Sanctuary Voice's (ASV) rich repository of multimedia migration stories to create resource guides for middle school educators and students. ASV will partner with its youth advisory board to adapt existing materials for middle school students and develop lesson plans with activity ideas and discussion prompts. ASV will organize interactive classroom presentations and field trips to its exhibits and to community-based nonprofit organizations. Their curriculum will expose students to first-person narratives, highlighting different aspects of home and displacement and representing people from different countries living in California.

SF Japantown Then and Now

GenRyu Arts, San Francisco

Project Director: Melody Takata

SF Japantown Then and Now is a program that explores a San Francisco neighborhood and community that has continuously faced discrimination, oppression and displacement in the last 117 years. Drawing from experiences of different generations of Japanese Americans, youth in the program will engage with community members, artists, and activists who will share about social justice challenges and triumphs in their efforts to preserve its history, cultural identity, and home within the neighborhood of Japantown from 1900s to today. As youth learn about the history of Japantown, they will reflect and share stories of Japanese Americans at public Youth Showcases.

Kosokehkimal - Indigenous education and field trip program

Mariposa County Arts Council Inc.

Project Director: Clay River

The Mariposa County Arts Council (Arts Council) will implement a field trip program to Wahhoga Village, the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation's Teaching & Healing Center, in Yosemite National Park for middle school youth in Mariposa County. As part of a free, spring/summer day camp program, youth will spend five sequential days at Wahhoga participating in apprenticeship education from Tribal Elders and Indigenous educators. In this way, students will learn about/experience Miwuk history, culture, Tribal archeology, language, music, and contributions to medicine, arts and land stewardship. Ultimately, this experience will deepen students' understanding of the historical and contemporary issues surrounding cultural

resilience and the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples through the complicated lens of the National Park Service.

District-Wide American Music History Course

Music Preserves Foundation, Santa Ana

Project Director: Patti Compton

This project will develop a fully online interactive American Music History course that instills students with an appreciation for diverse cultural history and the civic engagement required by multiple generations of young people to move our society forward. Students will learn history from diverse perspectives and connect the dots between music, art, and civic engagement throughout American history. Students will encounter the Great Depression and the New Deal through country and folk music, study the era of segregation through rock and roll, see the era of civil rights riots through Motown, and study black pride through soul music.

Building Empathy

Pasadena Educational Foundation

Project Director: Sehba Sarwar

Building Empathy will engage 130 middle school students in the Pasadena Unified School District to explore civil liberties issues. Students and teachers will study different communities' histories and engage in research of past and present struggles for civil rights. The project will take place during school hours in classrooms and field trips to museums and cultural sites. A vital aspect of this project will be peer learning. High school students who are currently participating in a similar project will work with middle school students to share their own learning, research, writing, artwork, and other forms of expression on the theme of civil liberties and civic engagement.

Building an Ethos of Care: Listening to and Documenting Lessons from Elders

Regents of the University of California Berkeley

Project Director: Hillary Walker

Building an Ethos of Care focuses explicitly on the theme of care as civic participation. During summer youth programming, the project will support middle school students to take on the role of citizen photojournalists, exploring and capturing, through conversations and images, how the idea of care can be both an aim and end result of civic discourse and action. Students will interview elders, learn photography, and create photo essays that explore questions like: How do we care for each other, and what are the implications for civic issues? How have our elders experienced care in their lifetimes, and what lessons might they share?

Empowering Civics in Middle School

Riverside Unified School District

Project Director: Carolyn Power

Riverside Unified School District (RUSD) will expand its civics education program, currently offered at the high school level, to the middle school level. Students in grades 7 and 8 will learn to write a speech about a topic they care about or complete a civic engagement project about an important topic in their community. RUSD will implement [Mikva Challenge](#) civics curricula and engage their professional development services to train teachers and students. Students will showcase their work at two events hosted by RUSD: a fall Soapbox Riverside event and a Spring Civics Showcase.

Telling Our Stories Across Generations

Voice of Witness, San Francisco

Project Director: Erin Vong

In this seven-week program, students from Willie L. Brown Middle School and seniors from Sequoia Living engage in a series of interview-based storytelling and community building exercises. The project theme is 'How Did We Get Here'? and focuses on stories of how students, seniors, and their families came to the Bay Area, as well as their current relationships to this place. In initial sessions, students and seniors ask each other: What was your journey to this country or community like? In subsequent weeks, students will unearth new layers of the story through prompts and activities, including a culminating field trip to the Oakland Museum of California where students and seniors will experience the exhibitions together and make connections between California history and their own lives.

ABOUT CIVICS + HUMANITIES MIDDLE GRADES GRANTS:

The Civics + Humanities Middle Grades Grant is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities through the *A More Perfect Union* initiative, and the State of California through the California State Library. [Learn more here](#).

ABOUT CALIFORNIA HUMANITIES:

[California Humanities](#), a statewide nonprofit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities, promotes the humanities—focused on ideas, conversation, and learning—as relevant, meaningful ways to understand the human condition and connect people to each other in order to help strengthen California. California Humanities has provided grants and programs across the state since 1975. To learn more, visit calhum.org, or like and follow on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

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Planning grantee Film Independent Inc, based in Los Angeles, will research and build a program to serve middle schoolers in exploring issues of representation and identity in film/media. Image courtesy of Film Independent Inc.