



## California Humanities Awards \$89k for Civic Education in Middle Schools

**For Immediate Release**

**Media Contact: Kerri Young, Communications Manager, [kyoung@calhum.org](mailto:kyoung@calhum.org)**

**May 6, 2024—(Oakland, CA)**—California Humanities is delighted to announce the 2024 Civics + Humanities Middle Grades Grants Program to eight educators across the state.

Civics + Humanities Middle Grades Grants is a statewide pilot program that offers \$5,000–\$15,000 grants to support civics education for California’s middle grades youth (grades 6–8 or ages 10–14) in school and in the community. 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 in their school years and into the future.

From San Diego to Los Angeles to East Palo Alto, the projects will immerse young Californians in civic life. In San Diego, the Middle School Civics Program introduces students to public service and city governance. In Los Angeles, Film Independent guides sixth graders through representation and identity in media, a nod to the ever-growing complexity of digital citizenship.

Meanwhile, EPACENTER in East Palo Alto will empower youth through multimedia storytelling, and in San Francisco, the San Francisco Film Society exposes students to documentary films on cultural identity. In Pasadena, New Horizon School encourages young Muslim students to address social issues through writing and filmmaking, amplifying their voices. And this summer, a project in Saratoga will unveil a permanent Ohlone Territory Living Land Acknowledgement Monument in the shape of a hummingbird, a sacred figure in the Ohlone creation story.



2024 Planning grantee project *A PATH FORWARD: The Umunhum Trail*, will create a two to three-hour middle school field trip and accompanying study guide exploring indigenous traditions and environmental stewardship at the Montalvo Arts Center, in partnership with the Santa Clara County Office of Education. Image courtesy of Montalvo Arts Association.



2024 Planning grantee project *Do You Know the Way to San José?* is a collaborative podcasting project between Quimby Oak Middle School's Lobo School of Innovation (LSI)



project-based learning program and History San José. Photo courtesy of Lobo School of Innovation.

During the grant period, the Civics + Humanities 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 continue a successful program—over the course of eighteen months, and Planning grantees (\$5,000) who will research and design a new project over twelve months. The goal is to offer space for community and camaraderie among these educators who share a mission to bring middle grades students into the civic life of California’s towns and cities.



2024 Implementation grantee project *We're Still Here! East Palo Alto Youth Speak*, led by EPACENTER, will present a community media and storytelling project will highlight the voices of young people whose families have been in East Palo Alto for generations and are “still here.” Image courtesy of EPACENTER.

These awards mark a milestone in our journey to improve humanities education across California. Through statewide discussions and research conducted by [SRI Education](#), we discovered a pressing need to strengthen humanities and civics education in middle schools. With these grants, we are committed to helping educators in California create project learning experiences led by students.

“We are proud to welcome the second cohort of the Civics + Humanities Middle Grades Grant Program,” said Rick Noguchi, President and CEO of California Humanities. “Middle schoolers are exploring who they are and where they belong. These projects help them study real-life problems and get involved in their community in a welcoming environment.”

## **2024 Civics + Humanities Middle Grades Grant Awards**

### **Implementation Grants**

#### **City of San Diego Middle School Civics Program**

City of San Diego

Project Director: Leslie McNabb

City of San Diego Middle School Civics Program focuses on unhoused and foster middle school students to provide an introduction to public service, work readiness skills, and an understanding of city government. The summer 2024 and 2025 programs will give middle school students an opportunity to learn from, and work with, City employees in various departments such as library or police. They will learn about city challenges, how to approach them, and research solutions departments could implement. Students will discover how they can actively engage in civic life and create a sense of identity within their communities, all while learning of the benefits of a career in public service. Resources for clothing and school supplies will be provided to support participants in the upcoming school year. Ultimately, middle school students will be encouraged to apply for City internships when they are 16 and coached to gain permanent employment with the City of San Diego. The City of San Diego Middle School Program is an expansion of the existing City of San Diego Civics Internship Program (ages 16-30), launched in Summer 2023 as a part of the City’s Employ & Empower Program, with funding by the state’s #CaliforniansForAll initiative.

#### **Youth Voices: Exploring Identity and Representation Through Filmmaking**

Film Independent, Los Angeles

Project Director: Sarah Berkovich



Film Independent will build upon previous research planning project to implement a sixth-grade film and humanities curriculum exploring issues of representation and identity in visual media. Mentors (professional filmmakers who have gone through their Artist Development programs) will conduct a series of four media literacy and production lessons for up to 30 sixth graders at John Muir Middle School in South Los Angeles. The students will learn about how media represents point of view and can highlight different identities, including through viewing and discussing Mentors' films. They will then apply their learnings to create their own media projects on a related humanities topic of their choosing related to representation and identity. The project will culminate in a fieldtrip to Film Independent, where the students will participate in a capstone activity and celebrate their work by viewing their projects in a real theater. This curriculum will help sixth-grade students examine different voices in storytelling, think critically about the media they consume, and be empowered to find their unique voices and places in broader society through storytelling. Ultimately, the goal is to build the foundation for a more inclusive social narrative representative of diverse voices in our communities.

### **We're Still Here! East Palo Alto Youth Speak**

EPACENTER, East Palo Alto

Project Director: Nadine Rambeau

EPACENTER presents a community media and storytelling project entitled **We're Still Here! East Palo Alto Youth Speak**. This project will spark a love for learning among middle school-aged youth by combining fun, engaging activities such as media production and multimedia storytelling, to delve into civics and humanities right in their own backyards. With a changing landscape and many families of color being displaced due to gentrification, this project will highlight the voices of young people whose families have been in East Palo Alto for generations and are "still here." EPACENTER will bring in award-winning humanities advisor Kameelah Rasheed, born and raised in East Palo Alto, to lead a series of weekend workshops that explore the history of East Palo Alto and current issues impacting residents' daily lives. Rasheed will then introduce youth to a range of platforms for artistic expression and storytelling. In partnership with local media, newspapers, and archival nonprofits, youth will create a multimedia series that highlights the history, culture and current day issues of East Palo Alto from young people's perspectives

culminating in a capstone event at EPACENTER.

### **Learning Civics + Humanities through Film**

San Francisco Film Society (SFFILM)

Project Director: Keith Zwolfer

SFFILM will provide over 1,200 middle school students with access to high caliber and thought-provoking documentary films that focus on cultural identity and civic engagement through its **Schools at Doc Stories** education program. The project will develop media literacy and bring awareness of current world events with in-person viewing opportunities of documentary films by current filmmakers, augmented with post-film in-person discussions with culture bearers and topic experts where students can analyze, discuss, process and use critical thinking skills in a group setting. Past Doc Stories films shown (like the series *We The People* that combined music and animation, and guests for the Q&A including series creator and Peabody awardee Chris Nee) have focused on civic engagement, social justice, social movements, political science, women and gender studies, diversity, equity, and government. Study guides developed by a middle school teacher will provide pre- and post-discussion activities. Topics for discussion will emerge through classroom exchange with students including surveys to help select films and speakers to address subjects and issues relevant to the lives and experiences of middle grades students in California today.

### **Uplifting Young Muslim Voices**

New Horizon School, Pasadena

Project Director: Leonard Elick

The goal of this program is to develop in each student a positive identity as an American Muslim who is prepared intellectually, socially, emotionally, and spiritually to succeed in a diverse and ever-changing world. Social issues, domestically and internationally, affect the way students feel and how they view themselves in the world. This is especially true in spaces in which their local communities challenge or malign their identities. This project will have students address social issues in two contexts: 1) an international issue that is affecting their lives here in California; and 2) a local issue affecting the larger community. Their final project will be to write a letter to local government officials offering alternative policies to tackle both issues, highlighting their own personal and community

stories. These letters will be documented through film and shared widely with local organizations and leaders. This project will empower young Muslim leaders to find their voice and share it with the broader community. Students will spend time in self-reflection, exploring their identity and their place in society, while also learning about public policy and community engagement.

## **Planning Grants**

### **A PATH FORWARD: The Umunhum Trail**

Montalvo Association, Saratoga

Project Director: Cynthia Taylor

In the summer of 2024, Montalvo Arts Center will unveil a permanent Ohlone Territory Living Land Acknowledgement Monument on their grounds titled "A Path Forward." The Hummingbird public sculpture, a key figure in the Ohlone creation story, is one of seven sacred points along Santa Clara County Park's trail system that will guide visitors to stations providing augmented reality (AR) experiences and prompts that engage them with artistic, cultural, and scientific content specific to the grounds and forest. Montalvo's Outreach & Education Department will create a two to three-hour middle school field trip and accompanying study guide in partnership with the Santa Clara County Office of Education for, **A Path Forward: The Umunhum Trail**, an exploration and celebration of the interdependent relationships of culture and nature. The multi-disciplinary activities and learnings developed for this project will support integrated learning, empathy, and connection with indigenous traditions. With the Umunhum (the Ohlone word for Hummingbird) as an avatar, this program will foster understanding of humankind's footprint on the land, create civic engagement, and impact environmental stewardship.

### **Do you know the way to San Jose?**

Lobo School of Innovation, San Jose

Project Director: Christopher Rivas

**Do You Know the Way to San José?** is a collaborative podcasting project between Quimby Oak Middle School's Lobo School of Innovation (LSI) project-based learning program and History San José. Rooted in the Civics + Humanities Middle Grades grant's mission, this project empowers California middle schoolers to preserve and interpret San José's vibrant history, fostering a deep sense of historical appreciation



and belonging. Through podcast production, students critically examine local histories, advocating for narratives that foster a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of San José. Aligned with California Humanities' vision, the initiative nurtures students' knowledge and understanding of historical figures, sparking thoughtful conversations about the state's past and sharpening their research, critical thinking, and communication skills. The ultimate aim is to inspire middle schoolers towards civic participation. In essence, "Do You Know the Way to San José?" amplifies youth voices, becoming a catalyst for a more interconnected and culturally enriched Californian society. Through the transformation of historical research into engaging podcast episodes, students emerge as storytellers and custodians, contributing significantly to a broader understanding of San José's heritage in the digital age.

### **Centering Linguistic Justice in Creative Writing Workshops**

916 Ink, Sacramento

Project Director: Ian Hadley

916 Ink will partner with a research fellow and an associate professor from California State University, Sacramento to research and advise on the design of an inclusive, humanities-based creative writing program for middle-school students that centers linguistic justice. Planning activities will include community engagement and focus groups, the creation of staff and volunteer training resources, evaluation tools and curriculum frameworks and rubrics. This initiative will use an antiracist Black Language pedagogy to intentionally center the linguistic, cultural, racial, intellectual, and self-confidence needs of Black students, recognizing that language experiences are not separate from racial experiences.

---

### **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](http://calhum.org), or like and follow on [Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

###



Students participating in a San Diego Fire-Rescue visit, part of 2024 Implementation grantee the *City of San Diego Middle School Civics Program*. Image courtesy of the City of San Diego.