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## Why are stories so important?

In 2001 the California Council for the Humanities imagined a statewide initiative that would use the power of personal stories to connect Californians and further our mission of strengthening California communities. That initiative, California Stories, is now bringing together thousands of people to share stories and find common ground for addressing communitywide issues.

In these pages we report on the four programs conducted during the first three years of California Stories: Reading *The Grapes of Wrath*, Communities Speak, the California Documentary Project and the California Story Fund. Together these programs are providing a rich narrative of contemporary California and laying the groundwork for community action around shared issues of concern.

The opportunity to share stories is particularly important here in California, the most highly diverse state in the United States and home to the greatest number of immigrants of any state. Today approximately half of California residents were born elsewhere, with foreign-born immigrants and their children making up more than one-quarter of the state's population.

The diversity of California is one of its greatest strengths — and also its greatest challenge. How do people from different cultures and backgrounds connect to one another and the place where they live? How do we solve the problems we face if we don't come together?

What we have found is that when people tell their stories and others listen, a trust develops that can change community dynamics. In fact, story-sharing is often the spark that prompts people to work together to find solutions to some of today's most pressing concerns.

These pages offer you a glimpse of what California Stories has accomplished so far. The stories we are uncovering are providing us not only with insight into where we've been, but also inspiration for where we are going.

JAMES QUAY

Executive Director