

The Innocence Project

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In this project, students partner with the California Innocence Project (CIP), headquartered at the California Western School of Law. Students review case files of currently incarcerated individuals, including legal records, DNA evidence, and letters written by prisoners who claim to have been wrongly convicted—they may even debunk junk science that was presented in court. Students then recommend a course of action by writing interoffice legal memos for CIP lawyers and law students. In the culminating exhibition, students made their presentations to the CIP, which helps determine which cases are reopened in court.

Mackenzie King designed and launched this project at High Tech High Chula Vista. In 2017 Humanities teacher Peter Jana brought this project to the Gary & Jerri Ann Jacobs High Tech High, and in the 2021–2022 school year, humanities teacher Margaret Egler and biology teacher Jesse Wade-Robinson adapted it, adding the collaborative mural featured on this project card.



CALIFORNIA INNOCENCE PROJECT
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Student Reflection

My interest in law began with the California Innocence Project. We essentially decided whether the appellant was right in sending letters to the California Innocence Project, or whether we believed they were truly guilty. This inspired me to apply for an internship in the Carter Keep Courthouse in downtown San Diego, which gave me the opportunity to observe multiple trials, hearings, and sentencings. I studied the way the court room functioned and even the mannerisms and language used by the lawyers and the judge. The experience helped me greatly in pursuing a career in the field of law, and it all stemmed from the California Innocence Project.

—Emmanuel G

The Innocence Project was the first school project I had been a part of where showing other people my assignments was illegal. The cases can get very ugly, even more so because the project deliverable's quality may impact the course of someone's life. The responsibilities of the project can be extremely difficult, intellectually and emotionally. At the same time, the Innocence Project gives students a chance to help bring someone justice.

—Rigel B

