

# Si Se Puede!



*Teaching Elementary School Students  
about the life and work of  
César Chavez  
&  
Dolores Huerta  
of the United Farm Workers*



# Introduction

This curriculum was designed for elementary and middle school students to understand the history of two American civil rights leaders: Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, the co-founders of the United Farm Workers.

Each lesson plan lays out the objective, materials needed, vocabulary, and expected outcomes of the lesson. The Appendices in the back of the curricula contain photos which make useful visuals for the lesson plans, biographies, and historical information.

This curriculum is built on the work of the Cesar Chavez Foundation, the California Department of Education “Cesar Chavez Day” model curriculum, the “Teaching Tolerance” curricula, and lesson plans created by New Mexico union organizer Bill Bradley. It includes Appendices with photographs and information to supplement the lesson plans.

There is also a Resource section which lists helpful books, films, and websites. The children’s books about Chavez and Huerta are highly recommended for the lesson plans.

Please feel free to give feedback to the Recuerda a Cesar Chavez Committee at: [rcccabq@gmail.com](mailto:rcccabq@gmail.com)

Gracias!

*Sayrah Namasté*

*Editor*

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# Lesson 1: Where Does Food Come From?

## Objective:

Students will reflect on where their food comes from, beyond the marketplace and to the farms and the farm workers.

## Materials:

Fresh fruits and vegetables in bite sizes

Photos of farm with farm workers (see Appendix A).

## Lesson Plan:

1. Ask the students what their favorite foods are. Pass around the fresh fruits and vegetables for the students to eat.
2. Ask the students where this food came from. What kinds of workers are involved in getting the food to them (farmers, farm workers, truck drivers, grocery store clerks, etc).
3. Ask students if they have ever worked on a farm or in a garden to grow and harvest food.
4. Talk about the struggle of farm workers in the United States. Show the photos (Appendix A). Explain that many farm workers are called migrant workers because they move from farm to farm as the crops need to be harvested. Moving from one place to another is a difficult thing for a family. Many times children attend more than five different schools in one year because their parents must follow the crops. César Chávez and his family also moved many times, traveling throughout California during the harvest season. César attended over 36 different schools.

## Vocabulary

Migrant farm workers

Harvest

## Expected Outcome:

Students will acknowledge they depend on farm workers to be able to eat, and that farm workers have not been treated well. They will be able to explain what a day in the life of a farm worker was like in the 1960s.

## Lesson 2: Who was Cesar Chavez?

### Objective:

Students will be able to recognize a photograph of Cesar Chavez and be able to state 2 reasons why he is an important part of American history. Students will be able to state how the life of farm workers changed because of Cesar Chavez.

### Materials:

Biography and photos of Cesar Chavez (see Appendix B).

Story book on Cesar Chavez (see Resource page).

### Lesson Plan:

1. Ask the students if they have a hero. What makes them a hero (helping people, being strong, etc)? Review historical ‘heroes’ in American history who have stood up for the oppressed: Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Harriet Tubman, etc. Ask students if they have ever heard of a man named Cesar Chavez.
2. Tell the story of Cesar Chavez (Appendix B). Or use children’s books about Cesar Chavez (see Resource page).
3. Ask the students to name 2 important things that Cesar Chavez did.

### Vocabulary

Farm worker

Cesar Chavez

### Expected Outcome:

Students will understand the role of Cesar Chavez in American history and in the farm worker movement.

## Lesson 3: Who was Dolores Huerta?

### Objective:

Students will be able to recognize a photograph of Dolores Huerta and be able to state 2 reasons why she is an important part of American history. Students will be able to state how the life of farm workers changed because of Dolores Huerta.

### Materials:

Biography and photos of Dolores Huerta (see Appendix C).  
Children's' book about Dolores and/or Cesar. (see Resource page)

### Lesson Plan:

1. Ask the students if they have a hero. Review historical 'heroes' in American history who have stood up for the oppressed: Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Harriet Tubman, etc. Ask students if they have ever heard of a man named Cesar Chavez. Ask the students if they have ever heard of a woman named Dolores Huerta.
2. Tell the story of Dolores Huerta (Appendix C). One of the most known slogans she coined: "Si Se Puede" which means "Yes we can".
3. Ask the students to name 2 important things that Dolores Huerta did.

### Vocabulary

Huelga/strike  
Si Se Puede

### Expected Outcome:

Students will understand the role of Dolores Huerta in American history and in the farm worker movement.

# Lesson 4: United Farm Workers

## Objective:

Students will learn what a union is and the history of the United Farm workers Union. They will learn Spanish phrases of the movement.

## Materials:

Picture of UFW flag (see Appendix D).

Description of United Farm workers Union and photo of worker with short handled hoe (see Appendix D).

Red and white paper, black marker, stick to make UFW flag.

## Lesson Plan:

1. Discuss with students what a union is. Do they know anyone in a union?
2. Tell the history of the United Farm Workers (see Appendix D). Talk about the terrible conditions that farm workers lived and worked in and the discrimination they faced. Use photo of worker with short handled hoe. Ask students if they think they could work like this for an hour? For a day?
3. Discuss what students would do if they were a farm worker living and working in those conditions. Explain how the union helped their lives improve.
4. Role play the farm workers, Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and the farm bosses. Have students make the UFW flag. Learn the slogan, coined by Dolores Huerta: “Si Se Puede” which meant “Yes We Can”.

## Vocabulary

Labor union

United Farm Workers

Si Se Puede

# Lesson 5: How Cesar & Dolores Made Change

## Objective:

Students will learn what a boycott is and the vision and methods of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta.

## Materials:

Photos of UFW protests and boycotts (Appendix A).

Paper and markers to make signs.

## Lesson Plan:

1. Discuss what a protest and what a boycott is. Show photos and ask if students have ever seen people holding signs of protest.
2. Describe the conditions that farm workers live & work in. Tell of how the farm workers are promised money to pick the grapes but never get the money.
3. Explain how a boycott works, especially about how if the people stop buying the grapes it will cause the stores to have too many grapes on the shelves, stores will not need to buy more grapes, farm owners will begin to lose money because they will not be able to sell their grapes, the farm owners will see the need to change their ways and start treating the workers fairly. Once this occurs the boycott will be stopped and people will buy the grapes again and the owners will get more money. One of the most important things to remember is that the public will have to be convinced that the boycott is justified and they will need to support the boycott by not buying the grapes. If the public does not support the boycott the boycott will fail.
4. Talk about the protests of UFW and the foods they boycotted. Discuss why Cesar & Dolores wanted people to boycott the food.
5. Have students create their own protest or boycott signs for UFW.



# Lesson 6: Teatro Campesino

## Objective:

Students will be enact a short skit from the farm worker struggle.

## Materials:

Photos of leafleting/boycott (Appendix A)

Signs, leaflets

Hats, bandannas

## Lesson Plan:

1. Students will role play a scene of a boycott at a store.
2. Students take on roles: Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, farm workers, boycott supporters (such as students), store customers, and store manager.
3. Building on Lesson 5, the teacher will explain how UFW tried to win public support for their boycott by leafleting at grocery stores. Customers had different reactions: some ignored them, some took and read the leaflets, some talked with them, store managers wanted them to leave, etc. Show photos from Appendix A.
4. After the skit, everyone debriefs the role play. What did it feel like to leaflet? What did it feel like when the store manager wanted them to leave? What did customers say?

## Vocabulary

Boycott

Leaflet

## Expected Outcome:

Students will understand how protests and boycotts work and how it helped the farm workers win their rights.

# Lesson 7: Short Handled Hoe: Fighting Injustice

## Objective:

Students will be able to understand one aspect of the harsh working conditions existing for farm workers in terms of both physical pain and being made to feel sub-human. Students will be able to get a sense of the injustice of exploitative treatment towards workers.

## Background:

*Many elder farm workers can remember the harsh working conditions in the fields before Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers of America brought about many improvements,. One of the worst experiences for farm workers was the use of the “short handle hoe.” Many disabilities and pains can still be directly connected to bending down to weed the fields with the short handle hoe.*

## Materials:

Masking tape,  
Yard or meter sticks, 12” rulers,  
small flat objects – i.e. beans, cheerios, etc.

## Lesson Plan:

1. Mark off two taped lines about 15 to 20 feet long. Place another parallel line about 3 feet away from the first lines.
2. Discuss the practice of the short handle hoe in the fields of years past: Why would the short handle hoe physically hurt the workers?
3. Split up the class into two groups. Explain that they will be “weeding” in the field. The group that completes the job the best will “win.”
4. Sprinkle half of the objects on one side of both lines. The students will have to use their “hoes” to push the “weeds” across the line 3 feet away. One team will be given the yardsticks and the other the 12” rulers. Time the groups and look for efficiency. The teacher may ask the students to switch “hoes” later on.
5. Discuss the results:

# Lesson 8: Building Allies

## Objective:

Students will be able to understand what it means to be an ally and write a letter in support of UFW campaigns.

## Materials:

Sample letter

Paper and pens

## Lesson Plan:

1. Discuss what it means to be an ally (standing up for a friend being picked on, etc). Talk about the role of allies in UFW: supporting the boycotts, public support from leaders like Martin Luther King Jr, and Bobby Kennedy, etc.
2. Go to the UFW website ([www.ufw.org](http://www.ufw.org)) before class and look at current campaigns they are asking for support. Look at sample letters to growers and businesses and read to class.
3. Discuss the issues that UFW is asking for support from allies. Read the sample letter.
4. Have students write their own letter based on talking points of UFW.
5. Either send letters (check with parents first) or hang in class or hallways.

## Vocabulary

Ally

Boycott

## Expected Outcome:

Students will get the experience of being an ally and petitioning for change in support of farm workers.

# Lesson 9: Impact of UFW on American History

## Objective:

Students will be able to make a timeline of the events during the UFW.

## Materials:

Poster board or chalkboard

Markers or chalk

Pictures or images

## Lesson Plan:

1. Review what the students have learned about farm workers, Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and UFW. See Appendix E for highlights of the movement.
2. Write a timeline on poster board or chalkboard, starting with the births of Cesar and Dolores. Add the important dates in writing.
3. Students can also add photos or picture or drawings to the events.
4. Discuss the timeline. Note the length of boycotts until the date of agreements with growers for example.

## Vocabulary

Historical timeline

## Expected Outcome:

Students will have an overview of the entire farm worker movement and the key events.

# Appendix A: Farm workers



Farm worker using short handled hoe.



# Appendix B: Cesar Chavez

César E. Chávez was a good man who dedicated his life to helping others. As a young boy, César worked on his family's farm. When César was ten years old, his family's home was taken away from them because they did not have enough money.

César's family moved to California to find work. They began working on farms picking fruits and vegetables. César's family would move from farm to farm looking for work, just like many other families who also lost their homes.

Working on the farms was very difficult. Farm workers like the Chávez family would work very long hours. They often had few bathrooms and little clean water to drink. Farm workers suffered a lot and they were not treated with respect or dignity.

César's family worked very hard on the farms, but they made very little money. Everyone in the family had to work, even the children. To make things worse, sometimes the men in charge of the farm workers would cheat and steal money from the farm workers, including César's family. These men would often run away so they would not get caught.

César's family had very little money and many times they did not have enough food to eat.

When Cesar became an adult, he married his girlfriend Helen and they had eight children. He worked for a community organization that helped people to vote. Then he met Dolores Huerta and formed the United Farm Workers union. César and the farm workers wanted the companies and grow-



ers that owned the farms to respect farm workers by providing them with fresh water to drink, bathrooms in the fields, and fair pay for a day's work.

The companies and growers refused to treat the farm workers with respect and dignity. The growers did everything they could to stop César and the farm workers. They even turned to violence and hurt many farm workers and people who helped the farm workers. César was upset.

César did not believe in violence. Like Martin Luther King, César wanted to bring change in a nonviolent way. Many people supported César because he believed in nonviolence, including Martin Luther King who wrote him a letter of support. Like César, they also believed that farm workers deserved better treatment.

After five years of workers striking, some growers in California agreed with César and started to provide farm workers with fresh water to drink, bathrooms, and better pay. César, Dolores, the farm workers, and friends won.

César died on April 23, 1993. He was sixty-six years old. People all over the world remember César E. Chávez as a man of courage who fought to improve the lives of all people.

# Appendix C: Dolores Huerta



Dolores C. Huerta is the co-founder of the United Farm Workers of America. She has played a major role in the American civil rights movement.

Dolores Huerta was born on April 10, 1930 in a mining town in northern New Mexico, where her father, was a union organizer. Her mother was a businesswoman who owned a 70-room hotel in California, which often put up farm worker families for free.

Dolores' mother taught her to be generous and caring for others. Because of her mother's community activism, Dolores learned to be outspoken. After high school, Dolores attended college and received a teaching degree. Dolores left her teaching job because in her words, "I couldn't stand seeing kids come to class hungry and needing shoes. I thought I could do more by organizing farm workers than by trying to teach their hungry children."

Dolores met Cesar Chavez and they both realized the need to organize farm workers and created the United Farm Workers Union.

In 1965, over 5,000 grape workers walked off their jobs in what is now known as the famous "Delano Grape Strike." The strike would last 5 years.

In 1966, Dolores negotiated the first contract with the Schenley Wine Company. This was the first time in the history of the United States that a negotiating committee comprised of farm workers negotiated a collective bargaining agreement with an agricultural corporation. These contracts established the first health and benefit plans for farm workers.

Dolores spoke out early and often against toxic pesticides that threaten farm workers, consumers, and the environment. These early union agreements required growers to stop using such dangerous pesticides as DDT and Parathion. Dolores directed the UFW's national grape boycott taking the plight of the farmworkers to the consumers. The boycott resulted in the entire California table grape industry signing a three-year agreement with the United Farm Workers.

In 1974 she was instrumental in securing unemployment benefits for farmworkers. Dolores directed the east coast boycott of grapes, lettuce, and Gallo wines. The boycott resulted in the enactment of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, the first law of its kind in the United States, which granted farm workers the right to collectively



organize and bargain for better wages and working. Her work on behalf of immigrant farm workers resulted in the Immigration Act of 1985.

As an advocate for farm worker rights Dolores has been arrested twenty-two times for non-violent peaceful union activities.

# Appendix D: United Farm Workers





# Appendix E: Timeline

1927 Cesar Chavez is born on March 31, 1927, in Yuma, Arizona, to a Mexican American family.

1930 Dolores Huerta is born on April 4, 1930 in Dawson, New Mexico.

1933 Dolores' parents divorce and she moves with her mother and siblings to California, where her mother runs a restaurant and hotel. Her mother often gives free housing to migrant farmworkers.

1938 The Chavez family is evicted from its land after losing their livelihood in the Great Depression. They become migrant farm workers in Arizona and California.

1942 Chavez quits school at age 15 to work full-time in the fields.

1948 Chavez marries Helen Favela. Over the years, they have eight children.

1952 Chavez joins the Community Service Organization (CSO) in San Jose, Calif., and becomes an organizer in the Mexican American community, spearheading voter registration drives and fighting racial and economic discrimination.

1955 Dolores quits teaching because she wants to directly help farm workers.

1962 Cesar and Dolores create the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) in Delano, Calif. The organization is dedicated to the rights of migrant workers, including a minimum wage, insurance, & collective bargaining.

1965 The NFWA, primarily made up of Mexican Americans, joins the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), primarily made up of Filipino Americans, who had begun striking against grape growers in Delano. It is the beginning of the five-year Delano grape strike, which received much national attention. Chavez advocated strikes, picketing, boycotts, marches, and other non-violent means to achieve the union's aims, modeling his movement on Gandhi and the civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King.

1966 The strikers march 250 miles from Delano to Sacramento, California's capital, to present a list of their demands. Several grape companies agree to sign a contract with the union. These were the first contracts for American farm workers. The NFWA and AWOC merge, forming the United Farm Workers (UFW).

1968 Cesar and Dolores lead a national boycott of California table grape growers, which becomes known as "La Causa." By the end of the boycott in 1970, 17 million Americans supported it, including many political and civil rights leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King.

1970 The UFW signs a contract with most California table grape growers, ending the strike. Cesar and Dolores organize a nationwide lettuce boycott.

1973 The UFW organizes a lettuce growers strike.

1975 The California Labor Relations Act goes into effect, allowing farm workers the right to boycott and to collective bargaining.

1988 Chavez undertakes a 36-day "Fast for Life" to call attention to the health hazards farm workers and their children face by exposure to pesticides.

1993 Chavez dies on April 23, 1993.

1993 Dolores Huerta is inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

1994 President Bill Clinton awards Chavez a posthumous Medal of Freedom.

1999 Dolores Huerta is awarded the Eleanor Roosevelt Award.

2000 California establishes a state holiday on Chavez's birthday to honor him.

# Resource Page

## Children's Books:

Side by Side/Lado a Lado: the story of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta by Monica Brown

Harvesting Hope: the Story of Cesar Chavez by Kathleen Krull

Cesar Chavez: the Struggle for Justice by Richard Griswold del Castillo

## Films:

Short animated film with history of Chavez, Huerta, UFW:

[www.brainpop.com/socialstudies/famoushistoricalfigures/cesarchavez/](http://www.brainpop.com/socialstudies/famoushistoricalfigures/cesarchavez/)

39 minute Teaching Tolerance video

<http://www.tolerance.org/kit/viva-la-causa>

PBS documentary "Fight in the Fields"

## Websites:

Cesar Chavez Foundation

[www.chavezfoundation.org](http://www.chavezfoundation.org)

Dolores Huerta Foundation

[www.doloreshuerta.org](http://www.doloreshuerta.org)

United Farm Worker website

[www.ufw.org](http://www.ufw.org)