

0. Cesar Chavez: Standing Up for Migrant Farm Workers - Story Preface

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*Students must have initiative,
they should not be mere imitators.
They must learn to think and act
for themselves and be free.*

Cesar Chavez
From "Education of the Heart"

One might wonder how a skinny, shy, Mexican-American man who—without formal education or experience with public speaking and no money or political connections—could take on the established culture of segregation, racism, dangerous working conditions, unfair wages and inhumane living conditions that existed for migrant workers in the United States in the 1950s.

Against all odds, Cesar Chavez made it his life's mission to call attention to the plight of migrant workers and make their lives better.

This is the story of how he did this, including his successes and his failures, his personal and public struggles and the sacrifices he made to achieve some small equalities for migrant farm workers.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Cesar-Chavez-Standing-Up-for-Migrant-Farm-Workers>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Cesar-Chavez-Standing-Up-for-Migrant-Farm-Workers>

Media Stream

Plight of Migrant Farm Workers

During America's Great Depression, migrant farm workers moved from place to place as they followed crop harvests.

Their vehicles frequently broke down while they were en route, causing even more problems since they had no funds to make repairs.

Dorothea Lange took this picture during May of 1937. At the time, she was working for the federal government's Resettlement Administration (later known as the Farm Security Administration).

The Library of Congress, which maintains the original negative, provides this [image description](#):

Three related drought refugee families stalled on the highway near Lordsburg, New Mexico. From farms near Claremore, Oklahoma. Have been working as migratory workers in California and Arizona, now trying to get to Roswell, New Mexico, for work chopping cotton. Have car trouble and pulled up alongside the highway.

"Would go back to Oklahoma but can't get along [by making a living] there. Can't feed the kids on what they give you (relief budget) and ain't made a crop there you might say for five years. Only other work there is fifty cents a day wages and the farmers can't pay it anyways."

One of these families has lost two babies since they left their home in Oklahoma. The children, seventeen months and three years, died in the county hospital at Shafter California, from typhoid fever, resulting from unsanitary conditions in a labor camp.

These were, as Great-Depression survivors recall, "terrible times."

Click on the picture for a better view.

Image, described above, online via the Library of Congress. Public Domain.

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