

Cesar Chavez

When “Papa Chayo” Chavez migrated from Mexico to the United States, he never dreamed that one of his grandsons would become a famous labor leader. That grandson, Cesar Chavez, founded this country’s first successful union for farm workers and helped bring these workers hope, justice, and respect.

Cesar was born in 1927 near Yuma, Arizona. His father owned a store and ran the family farm. He taught Cesar that it was important to stand up for his rights and the rights of others. Cesar’s mother made sure that he understood that violence and rudeness were wrong.



In the 1930s the Depression brought hard times to the Chavez family. Cesar’s father lost his store and then the farm. In 1938 they were forced to pack their belongings into their old car and head for California. There they joined the thousands of migrant farm workers who traveled from place to place looking for work wherever fruits or vegetables needed to be picked. Like other migrant workers, the Chavez family was often housed in rundown shacks with no bathroom, running water, or electricity. The backbreaking labor was very low paying and frequently lasted from sunup to sundown. Cesar went to school when and where he could, but he quit after the eighth grade to **toil** full-time in the fields.

Chavez dreamed of improving the lives of farm workers. In 1952 he began working for an organization that provided assistance to Mexican-Americans, many of whom worked in the fields. More and more convinced that farm workers could help themselves best by forming a union, Chavez left this job in 1962 to start the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). He traveled around California talking to migrant workers and signing up members. By joining together, he explained, they would have more power.

In 1965 the NFWA began a strike against California grape growers to protest the poor treatment of the workers. The pickers came to the fields but refused to work. Some growers threatened them with shotguns and snarling dogs, but Chavez insisted that the strikers not use violence of any kind. To draw attention to their cause, Chavez led a 340-mile march to the state capital in 1966. College students, religious leaders, and hundreds of others joined the march. Then Chavez called for a boycott of grapes. He sent union representatives all over the United States, asking people not to buy California grapes until the pickers were treated fairly. Finally, by 1970, most of the grape growers had agreed to give the workers higher pay and better working conditions.

Chavez continued to lead the union in their struggle against farm owners. There were victories and setbacks, but he never gave up. In 1994, a year after his death, this dedicated and determined man was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

RCP#28

Name: _____

COMPREHENSION CHECK

1. Based on what you read in this biography, you can conclude that Cesar's father didn't buy and run a store when they went to California because

- A. California already had too many stores.
- B. he preferred working on farms.
- C. he had lost his savings and was now very poor.
- D. he was tired of being a store owner because it was hard work.

Grade: _____

2. Which of these is the best synonym for toil as it is used in paragraph three?

- A. wander
- B. work
- C. teach
- D. study

3. Cesar attended more than 30 different schools. From what you read, why do you think he changed schools so often?

- A. His mother kept looking for better schools for him to attend.
- B. His family was constantly moving around the state.
- C. He continually got into trouble.
- D. He wanted to find a school where he could study farming.

4. What had Chavez learned as a child that helped influence him to start a union for farm workers?

- A. It is wrong to be lazy.
- B. It is important to work in the fields from sunup to sundown.
- C. It is wrong to be rude.
- D. It is important to stand up for your rights and the rights of others.

5. In what year did Chavez start signing up members for the NFWA?

- A. 1962
- B. 1965
- C. 1952
- D. 1970

6. Why do you think many of the leading grape growers did not want to pay higher wages to their grape pickers?

- A. They felt the work was very easy and didn't deserve higher pay.
- B. They couldn't afford to pay the pickers more money.
- C. They felt that many of the pickers were troublemakers.
- D. They wanted to keep most of their profits for themselves.

7. Why did the grape boycott help to pressure growers to accept the union's demands?

- A. Their workers were picking too many grapes.
- B. They had to start making their grapes into jelly and juice.
- C. They were making less money because sales of their grapes dropped.
- D. They had to start advertising their grapes in newspapers and on television.

8. What did Chavez help bring to farm workers?

- A. justice
- B. hope
- C. respect
- D. all of the above

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