

Open Up the Textbook (OUT)

Cesar Chavez and the Farm Labor Movement

Enlarge

Complicate

Contest

Vivify

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Grade Level: 11th Grade US History

In this OUT analysis, US History Students, students will study Cesar Chavez in order to better understand Cesar Chavez and the Farm Labor Movement. This OUT analysis provides students with documents that are meant to deliberately enlarge the textbook.

This strategy is implemented most effectively when students collaborate to analyze the texts in small, heterogeneous groups. The texts that accompany the textbook are complex and often include difficult vocabulary and syntax. (For a few words that are likely unknown to students and unidentifiable based upon context clues, helpful synonyms are provided in the footnotes.) Students should first annotate each text and then collaborate to answer the text dependent and specific questions that follow. Questions will highlight sourcing and perspective of the author, close reading of key details from the document that enlarge, complicate, contest, or vivify the textbook, as well as questions that help students corroborate (or not) the accuracy of individual documents. The writing task that follows is an independent activity wherein students will employ evidence from multiple sources to justify their analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Source A: The Textbook – *The Americans*, McDougal Littell, Page 976

As Jessie Lopez de la Cruz explained, thousands working on California’s fruit and vegetable farms did backbreaking work for little pay and few benefits. César Chávez believed that farm workers had to unionize, that their strength would come from bargaining as a group. In 1962, Chávez and Delores Huerta established the National Farm Workers Association. Four years later, this group merged with a Filipino agricultural union (also founded by Huerta) to form the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC).

Chávez and his fellow organizers insisted that California’s large fruit and vegetable companies accept their union as the bargaining agent for the farm workers. In 1965, when California’s grape growers refused to recognize the union, Chávez launched a nationwide boycott to the companies’ grapes. Chávez, like Martin Luther King, Jr., believed in using nonviolence to reach his goal. The union sent farm workers across the country to convince supermarkets and shoppers not to buy California grapes. Chávez then went on a three-week fast in which he lost 35 pounds. He ended his fast by attending Mass with Senator Robert F. Kennedy. The efforts of the farm workers eventually paid off. In 1970, Huerta negotiated a contract between the grape growers and the UFWOC. Union workers would finally be guaranteed higher wages and other benefits long denied them.

Source A Questions for Consideration

1. What was Cesar Chávez’s initial involvement in the labor movement?
2. Why did Chávez think the UFWOC was necessary? What did the organization provide for workers?
3. What methods of civil disobedience did Chávez use to achieve his goals? How long did it take?

Source B: Primary Source, Newspaper Article – Cesar Chavez's Hunger Strike Now in 25th Day, LA Times, August 10, 1988

DELANO, Calif. — Cesar Chavez enters the 25th day of his fast today and has given no indication that he plans to stop his hunger strike for union contracts and against five pesticides.

The hunger strike by the 61-year-old labor leader, if extended through Thursday, will exceed his 25-day fast in 1968 to gain recognition of the United Farm Workers union.

Dr. Fidel Huerta said Tuesday that Chavez's levels of uric acid remain constant but high, and his blood pressure is rising, UFW spokeswoman Lorena Parlee said. Huerta suggested that Chavez remain resting today with no visitors, Parlee said.

A caravan of Hollywood film and television stars came here Monday to give the 4-year-old boycott of California table grapes a publicity boost. They visited the labor leader, six at a time, at his bedside and then issued a strong public plea to support the table grape boycott.

Source B Questions for Consideration

1. How long had Chávez been fasting when this article was written?
2. What was Chávez trying to achieve by fasting?
3. What had Chávez's previous fast hoped to achieve?
4. What type of protest is fasting? Can you relate this document to others in this packet?
5. What new information/perceptions do you gain about Chávez based on this article?

Source C: Primary Source, Speech – Lessons of Dr. Martin Luther King Junior, Speech by Cesar E Chavez, January 12, 1990

My friends, as we enter a new decade, it should be clear to all of us that there is an unfinished agenda, that we have miles to go before we reach the Promised Land.

The men who rule this country today never learned the lessons of Dr. King, they never learned that non-violence is the only way to peace and justice.

The powers that be rule over a racist society, filled with hatred and ignorance. Our nation continues to be segregated along racial and economic lines.

The powers that be make themselves richer by exploiting the poor. Our nation continues to allow children to go hungry, and will not even house its own people. . . .

The United Farm Workers are dedicated to carrying on the dream of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. My friends, I would like to tell you about the struggle of the Farm workers who are waging a desperate struggle for our rights, for our children's rights, and for our very lives. . . .

The same inhumanity displayed at Selma, in Birmingham, in so many of Dr. King's battlegrounds, is displayed every day in the vineyards of California.

The farm labor system in place today is a system of economic slavery. . . .

Our workers labor for many hours every day under the hot sun, often without safe drinking water or toilet facilities.

Our workers are constantly subjected to incredible pressures and intimidation to meet excessive quotas. These women who work in the fields are routinely subjected to sexual harassment and sexual assaults by the grower's thugs. When our workers complain, or try to organize, they are fired, assaulted, and even murdered. . .

Source C Questions for Consideration

1. How much time has passed between the organization of the UFWOC and this speech?
2. According to the document, what method of protest is the only way to peace and justice?
3. How does Chávez describe segregation in the United States?
4. Describe the comparison Chávez makes to Birmingham.
5. Chavez compares the farm labor system to slavery. What kinds of examples does he provide to make this comparison?
6. Does Chávez seem to agree with the teachings of Dr. King? Defend.
7. What new information/perceptions do you gain about Chávez based on this document?

Source D: Secondary, Memorial Statue – Cesar Marching to Sacramento, Lisa Reinertson, 2001



Source D Questions for Consideration

1. List at least ten details that make up this statue.
2. Where is Chávez located within the statue? Why do you think the artist chose to place him there?
3. What part of Chávez's activism does the top image represent? What information about Chávez can you gain from this part of the sculpture?
4. What part of Chávez's activism does the bottom image represent? What information about Chávez can you gain from this part of the sculpture?
5. How does Chávez's physical position vary between the two sides? What do you think this means?
6. What new information/perceptions do you gain about Chávez based on this sculpture?

Source E: Primary Source, Newspaper Article – Day Laborers Protest Rebel Against Forced Membership in Cesar Chavez’s Union, by Charles C. Johnson, August 27, 2014

Over a thousand Mexican and Central American day laborers walked off the job at Gerawan Farming because they don’t want to join the United Farm Workers, the very union founded by Cesar Chavez.

That’s larger than any union protest ever by Cesar Chavez. Earlier this year over 2,200 day laborers walked off the job in Kerman in protest.

What the workers object to is forced unionization. In November, the workers voted to decertify their contract with the union by the Agricultural Labor Relations Board, who refused to certify it. Wearing shirts saying “Count Our Votes!” on the front and the First Amendment on the back, the workers tried to hand a petition to the ARLB...

For years the United Fruit Workers has neglected the farms. Indeed, by some estimates, only 70 United Fruit Workers in the Central Valley. There was no counter protest. “It’s dying,” says Rojas.

“The employer, the company, it always respects us like fieldworkers, like humans,” said Sylvia Lopez, a farmworker and one of the leaders of the protest. “They have our benefits, they have discounts, we have bonus. We have everything; it’s perfect.”

The farmworkers are protesting because last November they took a vote to decertify their contract with the UFW. The ballots were handed off to the ALRB, which has yet to count them. “We don’t know how they voted because the ALRB refuses to count the vote,” says Rojas...

Source E Questions for Consideration

1. What were the workers protesting against?
2. How does this protest compare to protests sponsored by Chávez?
3. How do the workers feel their employers treat them? How does this compare to Chávez’s speech in source B?
4. What does this document tell you about Chávez’s legacy?
5. What new information/perceptions do you gain about Chávez based on this article?

Writing Task

This is an informational writing task based on NVACS standards W 11-12.1.a, W 11-12.2.b. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the texts as well as the ways in which the textbook was enlarged.

Describe Cesar Chávez's involvement in farm labor movement. Be sure to include his legacy for supporting information.

- Answer the above question in approximately one half page using evidence from at least four of the texts provided.
- Write a clear thesis and provide 3 supporting details to support your thesis. After detail cited in a direct quote or paraphrase (your own words), please add the source letter in parentheses, for example (Source B).
- For each detail, clearly reason (explain) why this piece of evidence helps support your thesis. Underline your reasoning. Reasoning can be in the same sentence or the evidence or come before or after the sentence that includes the evidence.
- Choose 2 of the important vocabulary terms from the box below to include in your writing. Add at least two context clues for each term to demonstrate your understanding. Circle your context clues for each term.

Important vocabulary:

1. Union
2. Civil Disobedience
3. Boycott
4. Fasting