

## Cesar Chavez: An American Heroe



**Cesar Chavez (1927-1993)**

Cesar Chavez was born in Yuma, Arizona in 1927. Born to Mexican immigrants that earned a living as migrant farm workers, Chavez began working in the fields at a young age. The migrant nature of his family's work led them to move to wherever they could find employment. Therefore, the Chavez family moved around Arizona and eventually to California. Through these experiences, Cesar witnessed first-hand the difficulties and hardships that migrant workers faced. For example, there were problems with racism, corrupt growers, low wages, very difficult and even dangerous working conditions.

After serving in the United States Navy, Cesar Chavez began dedicating his life to improving conditions for migrant workers who were often among the nation's poorest. Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez employed nonviolent means to bring national attention to improving the lives of farm workers. Chavez helped form the National Farm Workers Association in 1960 and organized peaceful protests, boycotts and hunger strikes. These events gained the attention of the nation, especially lawmakers. One of the most famous boycotts he organized was a successful national boycott of California table grape growers in 1968. Chavez also participated in several hunger strikes. The hunger strikes gained the attention of the public but permanently damaged his health.

Cesar Chavez believed that one way to improve working conditions was to pass laws. Therefore, he worked to pass legislation such as the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act. The legislation that was passed secured wage increases and helped improve overall working conditions. These laws helped workers especially in the states of California, Texas, Arizona and Florida, where there are the largest number of migrant farm workers. Cesar Chavez passed away in 1993 but his legacy still remains. Many Americans revere him as an example of how to successfully fight injustice without employing violence.

\*Resources: [www.biography.com/people/cesar-chavez](http://www.biography.com/people/cesar-chavez)

[www.history.com/topics/cesar-chavez](http://www.history.com/topics/cesar-chavez)

**Reading Questions - Cesar Chavez: An American Heroe**

1. What were some of the difficulties that migrant farm workers faced that Cesar Chavez worked against?
2. How did Cesar Chavez gain the attention of the public and lawmakers for his cause?
3. In what ways did he achieve victory for the migrant workers?
4. Why was Chavez motivated to improve migrant agricultural workers' lives?
5. What four states have the most migrant farm workers?

**Free-Writing:**

How can non-violent means such as peaceful protests and boycotts have such a big impact on evoking change? Use examples from Cesar Chavez's life or others such as MLK, Jr. or Gandhi.

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