

Dolores Huerta: Building Coalitions to Change Society

Theme: Empowerment

Duration: 1-2 Class Sessions

Interdisciplinary Subject: English Language Arts

Grade Level: 6-8

Lesson Overview: In this lesson, students will explore the experiences of Mexican-American farmworkers in the United States and learn about how they – especially through the leadership of Dolores Huerta and the United Farm Workers – worked with others for improvements in pay and working conditions, as well as respect for their civil rights. Students will analyze primary sources that document working and living conditions at different times in order to build context and then analyze additional sources that highlight the contributions of Dolores Huerta, including a poem written to celebrate her work. Finally, students will write their own poem about a time they worked as part of a coalition to help solve a problem; they may also complete an additional (or alternative) writing assignment to write a letter to Congress.

Overarching Essential Question

- How can we build coalitions?

Lesson Essential Questions

- How did Dolores Huerta and the United Farm Workers work to change society?
- What was a time you worked in coalition with others to help solve a problem?

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe conditions facing farmworkers and how people organized to change them.
- Define relevant vocabulary in context: coalition, union, strike, boycott.
- Explore the contributions of Dolores Huerta to the farmworkers' struggle for justice.
- Draw connections between Dolores Huerta's work and their own ability to work with others to address problems.

Civic Knowledge

- Roles of citizens in American democracy

Civic Skills

- Identifying and describing information
- Explaining and analyzing information
- Clearly articulating ideas and interests

Civic Dispositions

- Respecting individual worth and human dignity

Materials Needed

- Teacher's Guide: Dolores Huerta: Building Coalitions to Change Society
- [PowerPoint slide pack](#)
- Library of Congress Primary Source Analysis Tool ([online version](#) or [PDF](#))
- [Optional: Scaffolded Analysis Tool](#)
- [Handout A – H.Res. 37 \(2007\)](#)
- [Handout B – Poem, "Huelga" by Diana García](#)

Library of Congress & Additional Resources

Primary Sources From the Library of Congress:

- *Pea pickers. Wages: one cent per pound. Hamper holds about twenty eight pounds. Near Niland, Imperial County, California.* February, 1939. www.loc.gov/item/2017773452/.
- *Mexican cantaloupe worker at 5:00 a.m. Imperial Valley, California.* June, 1938. www.loc.gov/item/2017770636/.
- *Housing typical of that afforded Mexican field workers of the Imperial Valley. These people are not migrants, but live on the edge of the ranches and work in peas and melons.* March, 1937. www.loc.gov/item/2017769676/.
- *Street meeting at night in Mexican town outside of Shafter, California. Organizer for United Cannery Agricultural Packing and Allied Workers of America Congress of Industrial Organizations-CIO talks to mixed crowd. The strike failed.* November, 1938. www.loc.gov/item/2017770938/.

- Photograph: *Interior of house rented to Mexican workers by Michigan Sugar Company. Saginaw County, Michigan.* By John Vachon. August, 1941. www.loc.gov/item/2017813400/.
- Photograph: *Boycott Lettuce & Grapes.* Chicago: Women's Graphics Collective, 1978. www.loc.gov/item/93505187/
- Webcast & accompanying transcript: *Celebrating "One Life: Dolores Huerta,"* a Library of Congress poetry reading https://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=7372

Additional Resources:

Photograph: Dolores Huerta, Huelga, Delano CA Grape Strikes, September 24, 1965 / by Harvey Wilson Richards / Harvey Richards Media Archive, ©Paul Richards
<http://npg.si.edu/exhibition/one-life-dolores-huerta>

Clip (38 seconds) from documentary film *Dolores*, in which Dolores Huerta explains how she coined what would become a slogan of the farmworkers' movement, "Sí, se puede" ("Yes, we can"). Posted by PBS's Independent Lens in anticipation of its airing of the documentary. <https://www.facebook.com/pbs/posts/10155525278982169>

Optional Resources:

Congressional Glossary from the Library of Congress
<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/congress/congress-glossary.html>

Dolores – Documentary film by Peter Bratt (2017)
 Official site: <https://www.doloresthemovie.com/>
 K-12 classroom edition available at: <http://www.rocoeducational.com/dolores>

Farmworker Movement Documentation Project. UC San Diego Library.
<https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/>

The Land Is Rich – Documentary film by Harvey Richards (1966)
<https://hrmediaarchive.estuarypress.com/the-land-is-rich-california-farm-worker/>

Standards

C3 Indicators

- D2.Civ.14.6-8. Compare historical and contemporary means of changing societies, and promoting the common good.
- D3.3.6-8. Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources to support claims, noting evidentiary limitations.

Teacher's Guide

I. Introduction

A. Brief Discussion

1. Ask students: *What are examples that you know of where people work together to reach a goal or solve a problem?*
 - a. Encourage them to think of examples from their lives and their community, e.g. sports and other activity teams, student council, religious organizations providing assistance to people in the community, etc.
2. Ask students: *Did working together require you to work with different kinds of people from different backgrounds – maybe even people you wouldn't have thought of working with before?*
 - a. Explain that this is what it means to work as part of a coalition – different people coming together to work towards a shared goal.
3. Tell students that today they are going to learn about one important way different groups of people in the United States have come together to create change: by organizing labor unions.
 - a. Ask students if they have heard of someone being in a union and what that means. Use the **Slide 2** of the slide pack to help students with the definition.
 - b. Note: the definition provided is a very simple one. Teachers may want to elaborate that workers wanting to make their job “better” might refer to issues of pay, working conditions, limits on hours, being allowed breaks, providing health insurance or other benefits, and improving living conditions.

B. Primary Source Analysis

1. Give each student a primary source analysis tool. You can choose to use the Library of Congress Primary Source Analysis Tool ([online version](#) or [PDF](#)) or the [scaffolded analysis tool](#), depending on your students' needs.

Put students in pairs to work with a partner as they complete the analysis.

2. Display **Slides 3-6**, directing students to complete the OBSERVE column as they study each slide.
 - ♦ Possible cues: Describe what you see. What do you notice first? What is interesting?
3. Next, display **Slides 7-10**. Be sure to view in “Presentation” mode so that the bibliographic information will appear as you click through each slide.
4. As captions are revealed, direct students to complete the REFLECT and QUESTION columns of their Primary Source Analysis Tool.
 - ♦ Cues to help them REFLECT: When do you think this photo was made? Why do you think it was made? What can you learn from examining this photo?
 - ♦ Cues to help them QUESTION: What else do you wonder about in this photo? Do you have more questions about the people, events, or time period?

C. Discussion: What did you see?

Ask students to share the most important observations, reflections, and questions they had about the photos they examined. Teachers may record these comments for later follow-up, including questions that may be answered as students complete the rest of the lesson activities.

D. Optional Activity to Build Greater Context

Time permitting, teachers may want to show some or all of a [seven-minute excerpt](#) of Harvey Richards's 1966 documentary film, *The Land is Rich*. See end of lesson for [film segment notes](#).

II. Lesson Tasks

A. Introduce Dolores Huerta and the United Farm Workers

1. Ask students what they think the workers in the photos might have wanted in order to make their jobs better and safer. How do they think the workers could ask for that?
2. Project **Slide 11** of the slide pack. The photo shows a meeting of workers with a union organizer as part of a strike in 1938; as the caption notes, the strike failed.
3. Project **Slide 12** of the slide pack to help the students define the term "strike."
4. Project **Slide 13** of the slide pack (photo of Dolores Huerta holding a sign that reads, "HUELGA"). Ask students what they notice about the photo. Who do they think this woman might be? How would they describe her? What does she look like she's feeling? Does she look tired? Angry? Determined? Fed up? Who do they think she's addressing with her sign?
 - a. Tell students that this woman's name is Dolores Huerta (second click on slide 13 will show her name) and that, when this picture was taken in 1965, she was leading a strike of farmworkers, specifically people who picked grapes, who were demanding better working conditions and better pay.
5. Project **Slide 14**, which provides background information about the founding of what became known as the United Farm Workers and shows a poster calling for a boycott of lettuce and grapes.
 - a. Note that the NFWA was a labor union that brought together mainly Mexican and Mexican-American farmworkers.
 - b. Note that the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee is usually referred to just as the United Farm Workers (UFW).

B. Congressional Resolution

1. Distribute [Handout A: H.Res. 37](#). Explain the source by letting students know that sometimes members of Congress want to make recognition of someone's accomplishments even more official and more special by putting it into a "resolution" that other members of Congress can also support; it is not a law, and it only applies to the house of Congress in which it is introduced – either the House of Representatives *or* the Senate.

For a definition of a resolution, specifically a "Simple Resolution" like H.Res. 37, see [this explanation from the Library of Congress](#).

2. Read the resolution with the students. Ask what they found most interesting or surprising.

In case students are interested to know more about this resolution, teachers can let them know that it was introduced by Rep. Hilda Solis (D-CA), gained 63 cosponsors, and was referred to the House of Representatives' Education and Labor Committee; it did not advance to a vote on the House floor.

3. If possible, play this very short [clip](#) to show students what she looks and sounds like today. Dolores Huerta explains how she coined what would become a slogan of the farmworkers' movement – "Sí, se puede" (usually translated as, "Yes, we can") – and is featured on the poster shown on Slide 14.

III. Closure

Two writing assignments are listed below; the first provides more of an ELA emphasis, while the second may lend itself more to use in a social studies class. Teachers can choose one or both depending on the kind of writing they want to emphasize with their students.

A. Reading & Writing Poetry

1. Using the link provided in the notes of **Slide 13** (also provided [here](#)), pull up the webcast of the poetry reading from the Library of Congress. Cue the video to minute 19:02.
2. Note that poet Diana Garcia was born in a migrant farm labor camp in California's San Joaquin Valley in 1950. She is now a professor of creative writing at California State University, Monterey Bay.
3. Distribute [Handout B: "Huelga" by Diana Garcia](#) so that students can read along with her as she recites the poem inspired by the photo on Slide 13.
4. After reading/hearing the poem, give students the chance to ask questions or share their reactions, including a focus on key elements of poetry and language that they may have already studied in the context of other literary and poetic works.
5. Direct students to write their own poem that celebrates a time they worked as part of a coalition to solve a problem. Encourage them to think about what that process was like, to consider what was challenging about it, and how they felt about the change they achieved.
6. Give students the opportunity to share their poems with their classmates. Teachers may want to explore similarities and differences between the themes or issues that students wrote about and those facing Dolores Huerta and the farmworkers.

B. Writing a Letter to Congress (Student instructions provided on **Slide 15**).

1. Refer students back to H. Res. 37. Ask them to think of someone – from history, from their community, or perhaps both – who they believe deserves to be honored by a House or Senate resolution for their work, either individually or as part of a coalition, to change society.
2. Explain to the students that now they have a chance to write a letter to either their Representative or their Senators. In their letter, they should note who they believe should be recognized by a resolution and explain why that person is deserving of this honor.

Students can look up their Representative by ZIP code [here](#) and their Senators [here](#).

Film Notes: *The Land is Rich*.

The film provides compelling footage that will help students to understand the realities that faced farmworkers and to see how the farmworker movement was one of collective action, of many people from different backgrounds working together to change society. See below for film segment notes.

- 0:16-2:27 shows the living and working conditions of farmworkers of all races, including considerable footage showing children working in the fields and fruit tree groves. (No narration, background music (in Spanish) is “La Peregrinación” (“The Pilgrimage) by Agustín Lira).
- 2:28-3:54 shows scenes from various marches and organizing activities of the farmworkers. (No narration, background music (in Spanish) is “Huelga En General” (“General Strike”) by Luis Valdez). Lyrics with translation for both of these songs are available [here](#).
- 3:55-7:07 begins narration and accompanies footage with explanation of the founding of the United Farm Workers and their 1966 march over 25 days (more than 300 miles) from the town of Delano, in California’s San Joaquin Valley, to the state capital, Sacramento.

This lesson is part of a larger initiative, Citizen U, which aims to integrate civic learning across the curriculum for students in grades 2-12. For more lessons like it, in Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies, or to learn more about related creative, community, and professional development opportunities, please visit our [Citizen U website](#)