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Cesar Chavez

Today we're going to talk about Cesar Chavez...in just a minute.

Mexican American activist Cesar Chavez knew firsthand about the poor working conditions for migrant farmers in the US. When he was in eighth grade, he dropped out of school to harvest crops full-time with his family. They worked long hours, were often mistreated, and earned less than minimum wage.

Because of these experiences, Chavez was driven to fight for the rights of farmworkers like himself and his community. For inspiration, he looked to Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., who led movements based in nonviolent resistance.

In the 1960s, Chavez organized a strike by grape pickers in California and a nationwide boycott of California grapes. For five years, workers refused to pick grapes, and many people across the country refused to purchase them from stores. This and other nonviolent activism resulted in positive political change for workers everywhere. The grape strike, for example, ended when the strikers' demands were met: a pay raise, health care, and better safety measures for workers.

Together with Dolores Huerta, Chavez co-founded what would become the United Farm Workers labor union. Unions use strength in numbers to set standards for wages, working conditions, and general quality of life for laborers.

Where do you see Cesar Chavez's legacy today?