

Kindergarten Lesson on Labor Day and Larry Itliong by Sohyun An

GA Social Studies Standards

SSKH1 Identify the national holidays and describe the people and/or events celebrated.

e. Labor Day

Background Information

In Asian American communities, there is a long history of labor activism. For a lesson on Labor Day, you can introduce students to Larry Itliong, a Filipino migrant worker who initiated the Delano Grape Strike and co-founded the United Farm Workers with Cesar Chavez.

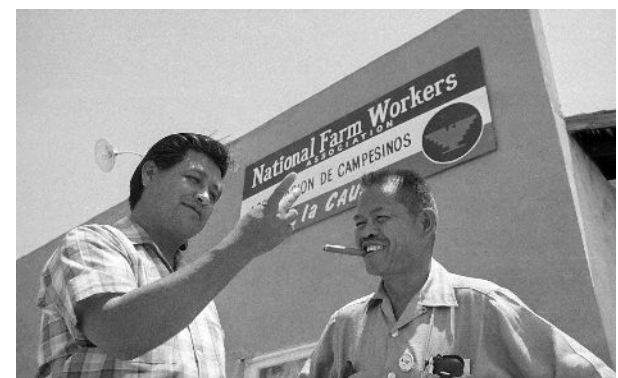
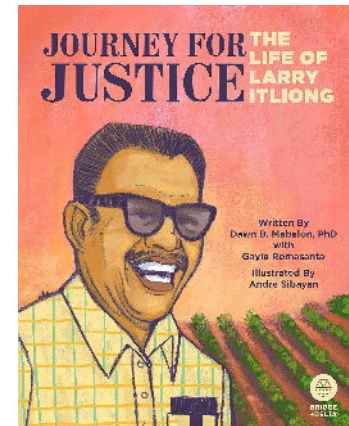
Larry Itliong was born in the Philippines in 1913, when the country was under the U.S. colonial rule. At school, Itliong learned that the U.S. was a place where anyone who worked hard would be rewarded. With the “American Dream,” Itliong migrated to the U.S. as a teenager in 1929, determined to go to college and become a lawyer.

Soon, Itliong realized that as a non-white person, life and work in the United States were more challenging than he was led to believe. He worked hard, moving up and down the west coast from California farms to Alaska canneries to save money for his education. But, the pay was not enough, and he had to give up his dreams of pursuing higher education.

Itliong experienced firsthand the exploitation of Filipino workers, who received less pay for harder jobs, were exposed to dangerous pesticides, were given little or no time off during the work day or week, lived in substandard housing, and received less food compared to white farmworkers.

Even when Itliong and fellow Filipino workers joined their white counterparts in a strike to receive better pay, the strike ended with only white workers receiving a wage increase and Filipino workers were left without jobs.

These experiences did not discourage Itliong from continuing his fight for justice. He joined the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) and recruited members throughout California in 1959. When Filipino and other workers in AWOC went on strike for better working conditions, owners brought in Mexican workers.



Itliong knew that the two groups would keep fighting each other while white owners continued to grow rich by exploiting both groups. He approached Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta of the largely Latinx National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) with the understanding that if the two largest ethnic groups in agricultural work united, their chances for success would increase.

The two groups went on strike from vineyards around Delano, California from 1965 until 1970. Many workers lost their homes since they lived in company housing. When growers brought in workers from other states, the strike progressed to calling for boycotts with the support of other workers' unions. This brought a lot of attention to and general support for the farm workers. During the strike, AWOC and NFWA merged to become the United Farm Workers (UFW) and finally won concessions from the growers, such as higher pay and medical insurance.

Instructional Suggestions and Resources

A. Video Clip and Read Aloud

- Introduce Larry Itliong and Delano Grape Strike through a short video clip, [Filipino American Farmworkers from PBS](#)
- Then, read aloud a picture book, [Journey for Justice: The Life of Larry Itliong](#). This book is a bit long for kindergarteners. So a teacher may need to read a shorter version of the storyline. While reading, focus on the illustrations and check in with the students' understanding of the storyline. Have a discussion after the video clip and read-aloud with questions below:
 - How were Filipino farm workers treated?
 - How did Filipino farm workers try to change unfair treatment?
 - What did solidarity look like during the Delano Grape Strike?
 - According to Larry Itliong, why might solidarity be important in the struggle for labor rights?

B. Science Connection

Tie the story of Larry Itliong to students' understanding and appreciation of farm workers and their labor for the food they enjoy.

- First, ask students how food gets from farms to their tables.
- Then, have students watch a music video by La Santa Cecilia's ["Strawberry Fields Forever."](#) This video begins with a strawberry cake at home and then explores how the strawberries were harvested.
- Ask students which parts of the process in the music video are unfamiliar to them and to consider the various skills and challenges that each stage of the harvest presents.
- Next, have students watch a short video clip from the [CNN show Inside Man](#) featuring filmmaker Morgan Spurlock picking oranges as a day laborer. In this video clip, Spurlock explains how the work impacts his body and graphics illustrate how much workers are expected to pick each day and how their pay is dependent on that amount.
- Ask students what they noticed about working in the fields as farmworkers and share their appreciation of farm laborers.

Do you want to include more stories of Asian American into your lessons? Check out this fabulous book, [Teaching Asian America in Elementary Classrooms](#) by Noreen Naseem Rodríguez, Sohyun An, & Ester June Kim.

