

Teaching history from **DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES:** Fifth Grade Lesson on Filipino Farmworkers

GA Social Studies Standards

SS5H6 Describe the importance of key people, events, and developments between 1950–1975.
b. Explain the key events and people of the Civil Rights movement: Brown v. Board of Education (1954), Montgomery Bus Boycott, the March on Washington, Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act, and civil rights activities of Thurgood Marshall, Lyndon B. Johnson, Cesar Chavez, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the early 1900s, immigrants from all over the world sought work in the United States. Many agricultural workers labored in California's valleys, where they followed the life cycle of various crops, then started the cycle over with another crop in another region.

Like many low-paying jobs that are often described as "unskilled," farm work required great skill and was very physically demanding. Laborers worked long hours in grueling heat and did not always have access to water and restroom breaks. They were paid by piece rate - that is, by certain quantities of the crop, such as a bushel of apples or a bucket of sweet potatoes, which incentivized workers not to take breaks, and allowed growers, or farm owners, to avoid paying a minimum wage, and to change how crop quantities were measured.

Filipino laborers began arriving on the U.S. mainland in large numbers in the 1920s. Along the West Coast, they organized for fair working conditions, launching their first strike in Watsonville, California in 1930. In 1959, the American Federation

of Labor chartered the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), which heavily recruited Filipino workers in Stockton, including an organizer named Larry Itliong. In late summer 1965, Itliong and fellow Filipino organizer Pete Velasco won a wage increase for grape workers in the Coachella Valley; as the next grape harvest was to take place further north in Delano, they set their sights there.

Seasonal workers from the Coachella grape fields expected to be paid the same wage in Delano, but they were not. So on September 8, 1965, Filipino grape workers, all members of AWOC, went on strike at nine farms. The growers responded with violence and shut off the gas, lights, and water in the camps where they lived. They also hired



Mexican workers to replace them. A week later, Itliong persuaded the mostly Mexican National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), led by César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, to join the Filipinos' strike. Together, the workers went on strike at 30 farms and set up roving pickets. Chávez and Huerta asked the public to stop buying grapes without a union label, leading to a national boycott on grapes and a secondary boycott on stores that sold grapes.

All this happened during the Civil Rights Movement, which helped the striking AWO and NFWA workers gain the support of people across the nation. In March 1966, NFWA organized a march from Delano to the state capitol of Sacramento. The grape strike was officially in the national spotlight, with Senator Robert F. Kennedy in attendance. By the time the pilgrimage arrived in Sacramento, an agreement had been negotiated between the growers and the union. In August 1966, members of AWO joined with NFWA to form the United Farm Workers (UFW), with Chávez as director and Itliong as assistant director. In time, the UFW would create a hiring hall, health services, a credit union, community center for members, and a retirement village. The UFW continues to operate in support of farmworkers' rights, alongside other organizations that push for similar cross-racial advocacy, such as the Farm Labor Organizing Committee and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers.

To learn more about Filipino farmworkers, watch Marissa Aroy's documentary *The Delano Manongs* and read *Journey for Justice* by Dawn Mabalon and Gayle Romasanta.



Complete Article and Lesson Plan



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