


THE UNITED FARM WORKERS MOVEMENT THROUGH MUSIC AND POETRY



★ Est. Time: 60-90 minutes
Subjects: Social Studies, ELA
Age Range: Middle & High School


[View the classroom lesson version](#)

★ *TEACHROCK* ★



Essential Question: Who is Dolores Huerta, what role did she play in the United Farm Workers of America (UFW) movement, and how is she recognized today?

In this lesson you will:

- Discover the historical conditions that led to the UFW's struggle for labor rights
 - Understand the significance of the United Farm Workers of America movement as a historical event
 - Investigate the role of women in the UFW movement and the role played by Dolores Huerta in particular
 - Listen and read the work of Alice Bag, Nikki Darling, and Diana Garcia
 - Discuss how these historical events and figures are recognized and remembered today
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Dolores Huerta is a civil rights activist who fights for workers' rights, women's rights, and Latinx rights.





Read **this handout**, featuring the poem “A Street Called Dolores Huerta” by Nikki Darling.

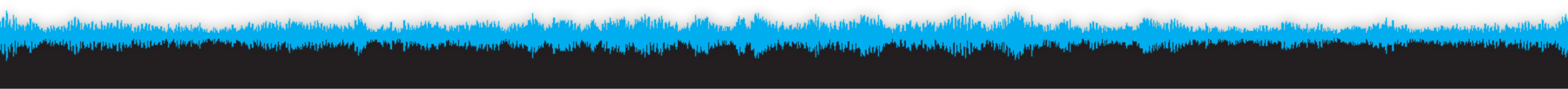
Consider or ask a friend:

- What is the name of the street you live on? Are the streets in your neighborhood or town named after a person? Is your school named after a person? Who are they named after? Make a list.
 - Why does the author think it is necessary to name a street after Dolores Huerta?
 - Why does the author think that an imagined street named Dolores Huerta would have potholes?
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Watch **this performance** of “A Street Called Dolores Huerta” by singer, educator, and activist Alice Bag. While watching, think about how the performance and poem compare.


Consider or ask a friend:

- Compare Darling’s poem with Alice Bag’s performance. What changes did Alice Bag make?
 - Does the music remind you of any other type of music you have heard or seen?
 - Why do you think Dolores Huerta is inspirational for these artists?
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Watch **this video** from the PBS series Latino Americans, from 1:28 to 3:49.

Then consider or ask a friend:

- What were the conditions like for farmworkers? Make a list of the hardships that they faced.
 - Who was César Chávez?
 - Who was Dolores Huerta?
 - What is a union and why did Chávez and Huerta decide to form one? How might a union help the situation of the agricultural workers?
 - What personal challenges did Huerta face?
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Watch **this video** from the same PBS series, Latino Americans, from 13:02 to 14:56.

Then consider or ask a friend:

- The UFW followed principles of nonviolence in their protests and actions. Can you describe the actions that the UFW took to support and publicize the farmworkers' cause?
- What is a strike/huelga? Why did the workers strike?
- What symbols did the UFW use? Why did the UFW use Mexican and Indigenous symbols and create signs and songs in Spanish? What did these symbols mean to the farmworkers?

(Questions continue on the next slide)

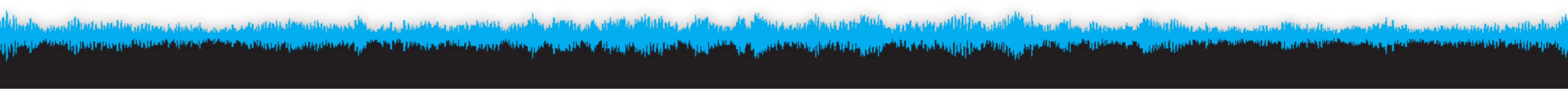


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- Consider the roles that Huerta and Chávez each took in the struggle for workers' rights. How do you think gender played a role in how Huerta was perceived and treated?
 - What did the UFW achieve or gain with their actions such as the march to Sacramento? Think about how their movement and tactics might have led to these changes and accomplishments.
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Read the lyrics to the song “El Picket Sign.”

Consider or ask a friend:

- What is being described in this song?
 - What is this song advocating? Why might the song advocate that “the strike is good for everybody”?
 - The lyrics refer to Benito Juárez, the first Indigenous President of Mexico, and Emiliano Zapata, who led a peasant revolution in Mexico in the early 20th century. What role do these figures play in the song? Why might have they been included?
 - What role might have singing “El Picket Sign” played for workers striking or considering a strike?
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Watch **this clip** of Huerta from her 2018 TEDTalk, or **read the transcript**.



Take notes on some of her ideas and main points while listening.

Then consider or ask a friend:

- In her TEDTalk, Huerta talks about mobilizing and organizing. What examples could you provide for both mobilization and organization?
- Huerta argues that it is important for everyone to be involved. Who specifically does she mention? Can you think of other groups that should be included in politics and activism in your community?

(Questions continue on the next slide)



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- Why is it important for marginalized or underrepresented voices in the community to be heard? How can we give space and center marginalized folks in movements?
 - Why do you think it is important for working class people from marginalized groups and backgrounds to be represented and hold positions of power in politics, government, and in their communities?
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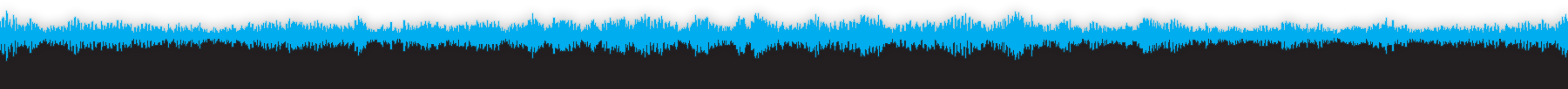
SUMMARY

- Dolores Huerta is a civil rights activist who fights for workers' rights, women's rights, and Latinx rights. She co-founded the organization United Farm Workers of America, the longest enduring farm workers union in the United States, with Ceasar Chavez in 1962
- Huerta organized one of the UFW's most successful nationwide boycotts, the Delano Grape Strike which started as a strike by Phillipino workers in California. The boycott ended with grape growers signing union contracts to ensure their protection
- The UFW and Huerta's legacy has been commemorated and celebrated over the years, with her slogan ¡Si, se puede! (Yes, we can!) being adopted by President Barack Obama in his 2008 presidential campaign, public spaces being named after her and other UFW leaders, and migrant and farmworker rights activists using the work of the UFW to continue fighting for agricultural workers today.

BE CREATIVE

Read “**Huelga**” by Diana Garcia. Draw a picture based on the description in the poem.

Then look at this **iconic photo** of Huerta, which inspired Garcia’s poem. Compare your drawing to the photograph. How do the poem and the photograph portray Huerta? Make a list of her characteristics.

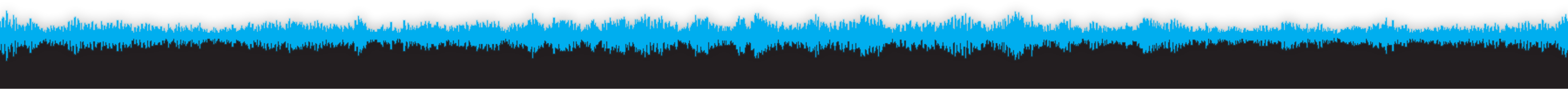


BE CREATIVE

Reimagine a public space like a park, street, building, or gathering space where you live (or imagined) that pays homage to a figure or community history that has been ignored.

Whether a street sign or park, draw what it would look like.

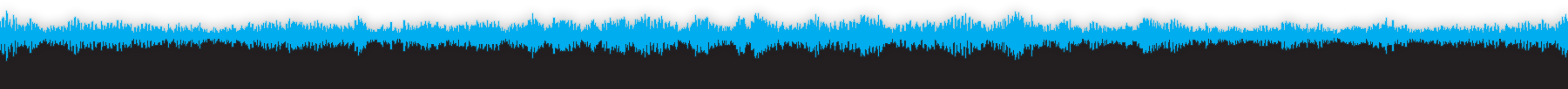
After drawing your reimagined public space or street name, write a statement for your piece, explaining your work and reason behind selecting the person or community you decided to celebrate in your work.



BE CREATIVE

In many regions of the United States, streets are named for powerful figures who committed violent acts and were involved in atrocities such as slavery, white supremacy, or colonization.

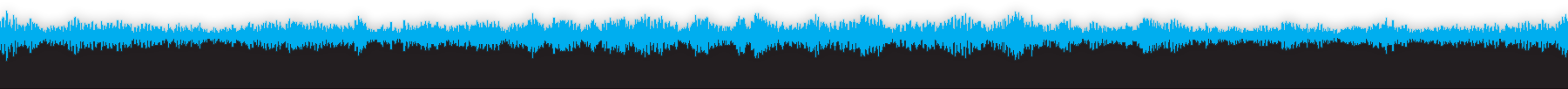
Imagine how living on or near one of these streets might feel for the marginalized communities that still bear the effects of these historical traumas. Then write an essay proposing what local governments might do to address this issue.



BE CREATIVE

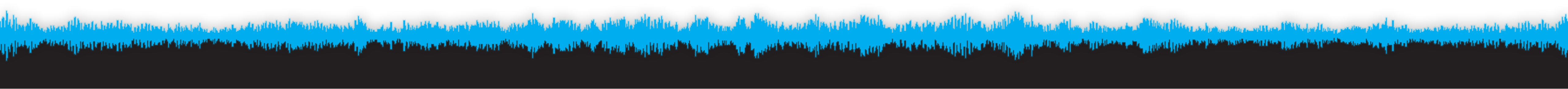
While the United Farm Workers movement achieved a great deal, some of these gains have been lost and there is still work to be done. What challenges and injustices do farm workers still face today?

Research recent activism efforts for farm workers and compare and contrast these with the actions of the United Farm Workers movement discussed in this lesson. You may consider the **Milk with Dignity** campaign organized by **Migrant Justice**, the Driscoll Berry Boycott organized by **Familias Unidas por la Justicia**, or the recent strikes that were supported by the **UFW** following the outbreak of Coronavirus on California pistachio farms.



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