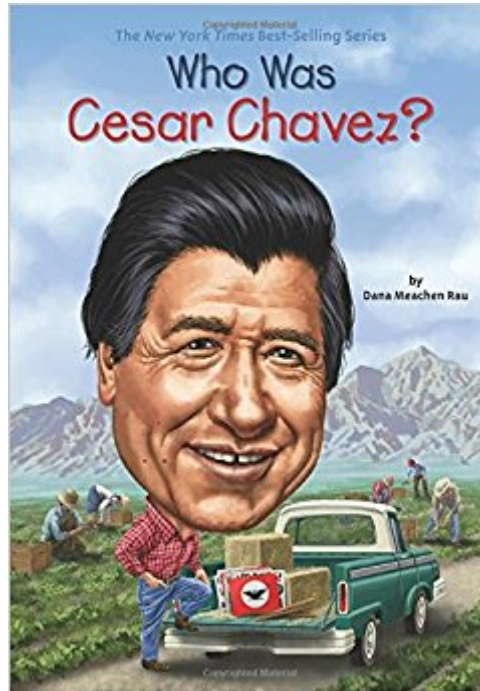




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Who Was Cesar Chavez?



Synopsis

Learn more about Cesar Chavez, the famous Latino American civil rights activist. When he was young, Cesar and his Mexican American family toiled in the fields as migrant farm workers. He knew all too well the hardships farm workers faced. His public-relations approach to unionism and aggressive but nonviolent tactics made the farm workers' struggle a moral cause with nationwide support. Along with Dolores Huerta, he cofounded the National Farmworkers Association. His dedication to his work earned him numerous friends and supporters, including Robert Kennedy and Jesse Jackson.

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Customer Reviews

Dana Meachen Rau has written more than 300 books for children, including picture books, early readers, nonfiction, and biographies.

Who Was Cesar Chavez? [The old theater in Fresno, California, was buzzing with people. A crowd of farmworkers and their families had gathered there for the first meeting of the National Farm Workers Association \(NFWA\). Cesar Chavez stood on the stage. He was shy, and not a](#)

strong public speaker. But his warm smile and friendly manner drew people in to listen. He had started this union—a group organized to protect workers’ rights—to help thousands of farmworkers, including many Mexican Americans, who lived in poverty and were treated unfairly in their jobs. This day, September 30, 1962, marked the beginning of more than just the farmworkers’ union. It was the start of a movement—a group of people working together to share an idea and bring about change. Cesar had once worked in the fields himself. He had watched his own family, and many others, suffer to earn enough money to survive. He had a vision for a brighter future for all farmworkers. Many things were decided at the NFWA’s first large meeting. Officers were elected and future plans were discussed. Union members unveiled their flag—a black eagle in a white circle on a red background. The colors had meaning: black for the hard life of the workers, red for the sacrifices they needed to make, and white for hope. At the meeting, they also agreed on their motto: Viva La Causa! (say: VEE-va la COW-sa) Long Live the Cause! Cesar had worked hard to get the union started, and there was still a long battle ahead. But he was a determined man. He believed in hard work. He believed in sacrificing time and money to help others. He believed in protesting peacefully instead of using violence. Cesar led a movement that brought major changes to the lives of farmworkers. He also changed the way Mexican Americans were viewed in America. With Cesar’s guidance, they came together. They demanded attention. America could no longer ignore them.

Chapter 1: The Arizona Ranch

Cesario Estrada Chavez was born on March 31, 1927. His family lived outside the town of Yuma in the Arizona desert. Mama Tella and Papa Chayo, Cesar’s grandparents, had come to the United States from Mexico. They had settled near Yuma in the late eighteen hundreds, bought land, and started a ranch. Papa Chayo died before Cesar was born, but his grandmother still lived in the main adobe house. Cesar, his parents, Librado and Juana, and his brothers and sisters, lived on the ranch, too. Cesar was the second of six children—older sister, Rita, and younger siblings Richard, Helena, Vicky, and Lenny. Sadly, Helena died when she was just a baby. At first, the family lived in a room off the main house. They owned only a few pieces of furniture. They had no electricity or running water. When their roof started leaking, the family moved into a cottage on the large ranch. Cesar and his brother Richard spent their time exploring, hiking, and playing outdoors together. They swam in the canal that brought water to the alfalfa, watermelon, grass, and cotton crops that grew in the fields. They liked to ride horses and climb trees. The family gathered for barbecues on summer nights with Cesar’s aunts, uncles, and many cousins who lived nearby. But the boys had work to do, too. Cesar’s father taught them how to chop wood, work with the horses,

weed the crops, and know when the watermelons were ripe. Librado was strict, but patient, as he shared important farming skills with his sons. ã ã Cesarãçâ ãâ„çs mother, Juana, wanted her children to grow up to be good people. She taught them to share with others without expecting anything in return. And, even though many Mexican boys were raised to be tough, she did not believe in fighting or violence. Cesar remembered one of her sayings throughout his life: ãçâ ãâ“It takes two to fight, and one canãçâ ãâ„çt do it alone.ãçâ ãâ• In other words, even if someone wants to fight you, you have the choice to walk away. ã ã The Chavez family was Catholic, but there wasnãçâ ãâ„çt a church close by. So Juana and Mama Tella taught the children their religion at home. They gathered around their grandmotherãçâ ãâ„çs bed at night to hear stories of the saints. The stories of these holy people who had lived very good lives made an impression on young Cesar. ã ã Beginning in 1929, many American banks and businesses went out of business. Millions of people lost their jobs and lived in poverty. This was known as the Great Depression. During the Depression, it was very difficult to find work. The Chavez family didnãçâ ãâ„çt suffer as much as many others, however. Their hard work on the ranch provided them with foodãçâ ãâ•fruit and vegetable crops, fish from the canal, eggs and meat from the chickens, and milk and cheese from the cows.ã ã Juana, with her generous heart, even invited less fortunate people over for meals. ã ã When Cesar was six, he was old enough to attend school. But when he arrived at the schoolhouse, the teacher wouldnãçâ ãâ„çt let Cesar sit next to his sister, Rita. She asked him to sit with the other children in first grade. He cried and insisted that he have a seat next to Rita. The teacher finally gave in. After a few days, Cesar felt ready to sit with his other first-grade classmates. ã ã But Cesar never really liked school. He would have much rather been outside on the ranch where he wasnãçâ ãâ„çt forced to wear shoes! At school, he also discovered how unkind some white people acted toward Mexican Americans. Cesarãçâ ãâ„çs classmates made fun of his brown skin and called him ãçâ ãâ“dirty.ãçâ ãâ• They tried to start fights with him. Cesar always spoke Spanish at home with his family. But his teacher hit him on the knuckles with a ruler if she heard him speaking Spanish in the classroom. ã ã At the time, more than 1.5 million Mexicans lived in the United States. Many had come in the early nineteen hundreds, looking for workãçâ ãâ•and there had been plenty of jobs. But during the Depression, jobs were scarce, and many white people blamed Mexicans. Some were deported, or sent back, to Mexicoãçâ ãâ•even if they were American citizens! Those who stayed faced racism in their communities. ã ã Even though the Chavez family was luckier than many during the Depression, by 1933 the ranch itself was in trouble. Arizona suffered from a drought. It had not rained for a long time. The canal was dry and the earth in the fields was cracked. No crops would grow. The family could not pay its bills. ã ã Hundreds of

thousands of other Americans who had lost their jobs headed to California to find work. California was suffering from the Great Depression, too. But there was no drought in California. And because the state has some of the richest farmland in the world, workers were needed to pick crops, which included tomatoes, lettuce, grapes, avocados, strawberries, peas, cherries, and corn. So in 1938, Cesar's father headed west to California. He hoped to earn enough money to support his family and save the ranch.

Excellent book series. My 3rd graders love them!

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My kids loved this book and learned so much about the story of our Latino Mexican-American hero. There is so much information that I didn't even know. Bought some of these books so they can read during vacation.

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