



TOPIC: Filipino American Farmworkers Fight for Their Rights

GRADES: 4-6

BACKGROUND ESSAY

During the 1960s, Asian Americans sought justice against discrimination and negative treatment in the United States through social activism. Through protests, Asian Americans worked together with people from different racial and ethnic groups towards a common purpose. An important example of Asian American activism and coalition building was Filipinos' leadership and participation in the farmworkers' movement.

The Filipino farmworkers were mostly men and known as “manongs,” which is a term of respect for elderly Filipino men. Filipinos had been discriminated against since they first immigrated to the U.S. in the early 1900s. For example, they were not allowed to live in most neighborhoods or marry white women. Filipino farmworkers had been laboring under terrible conditions for decades before the farmworkers movement. They worked long hours in dusty fields that made it hard for them to breathe and caused health problems. Health benefits were not provided, and they were paid little money with very few breaks. They did not have a union to help them demand for better conditions and rights. The *manongs* wanted increased wages and better treatment, but were ignored.

Larry Itliong, a central leader of the farmworkers movement, was a Filipino farmworker who had been organizing laborers for years throughout the west coast. In the summer of 1965 in Delano, California, he saw a great opportunity to fight for better working conditions and organized the *manongs* to strike against the farm owners. This meant that they would stop working until the owners listened to their demands for more rights. While they were on strike, Mexican American farmworkers were laboring on these same farms under terrible treatment. Separately, they

organized under the leadership of Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez, and were not planning to go on strike as the Filipinos did. Itliong recognized that if Filipinos did not work in solidarity with Mexican Americans, all farmworkers would not be able to gain better wages and more fair treatment. He saw the importance of working together across racial differences to achieve common goals. Thus, Itliong persuaded Cesar Chavez to form a coalition to strike for better working conditions. Together, they created the United Farm Workers Union and led a grape boycott that spread nationwide. Many Americans around the U.S. and the world heard about the boycott and joined in to show solidarity with the farmworkers. In the end, this coalition of Filipinos and Mexican Americans achieved better conditions for all farmworkers. The joint effort of these activists is a reminder of the justice and progress that is possible when people can come together to take action.

VOCABULARY

- **Boycott:** a type of protest when people refuse to buy certain products in order to demand a change
- **Coalition:** when different groups come together as one organization for a common purpose
- **Protest:** a way to show action for certain belief or changes
- **Strike:** a protest where people stop working to force an employer to meet their demands
- **Social Activism:** organized action to bring about social change such as better pay, improved working and living conditions, voting rights, etc.
- **Union:** an organization created to protect workers' rights; also known as a labor union

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How were Filipino farmworkers treated unfairly?
- How did Filipino farmworkers try to change this unfair treatment?
- Why might it have been a difficult decision to go on strike?
- Why was it important for the United Farm Workers union to be united?

ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Analyzing Causes and Effects

Have students work in pairs. Give each pair a sheet of paper and title it "Analyzing Causes and Effects." Then have them create a T-chart and title the left column "Causes" and the right column "Effects."

Explain how all actions have causes and effects and that they will learn about this concept by using the information they learned about the Filipino farmworkers.

Have students complete their T-chart by answering the following questions. They may write as many different answers to the questions as they like.

CAUSE: In the Cause column, have students answer:

- How were Filipino American farmworkers treated unfairly?

EFFECT: In the Effect column, have students answer:

- What did the farmworkers do about this unfair treatment?
- What happened as a result of their actions?

Convene as a whole group and facilitate a discussion by reviewing the questions that were posed.

Activity 2: Activism Role Play

Divide students up into groups of four.

Have each group research or think about a social problem that needs to be solved or fixed. It can be a local or global issue. You may provide some examples or facilitate a classroom discussion to brainstorm ideas for consideration.

Instruct small groups to brainstorm a plan to get the problem solved and write their ideas on a sheet of paper.

Each group will demonstrate their ideas by presenting them to the class or acting them out in front of the whole class.

Facilitate discussion by asking them these questions:

- What did you learn from the video clip when considering ideas to fix your selected problem?
- How can you apply what Filipino farmworkers did to what you might want to change in the future?
- The farmworkers in the video clip worked together to achieve change. How can you work with others to support your goal(s)?

FURTHER INFORMATION

- [“Grapes of Wrath: The Forgotten Filipinos who Led a Farmworker Revolution.”](#) NPR
- [“When Mexicans and Filipinos joined together.”](#) United Farm Workers.

Filipino





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