

Third Place Winner
Division I– 7-9th Grades
Harvesting Courage
by Kalem P.
Eagleview Middle School, Colorado Springs, CO

Farmers were getting very little pay, they could barely provide for their families. Working in the fields for hours, no bathrooms, no water, just work. In 1937, the wealthy landowners of California, treated their farmers with little to no respect. Most of these farmers were migrants and would have to move to different fields based on the seasons of the crops. They worked hard but were treated unfairly. The landowners didn't care about them and would even scam the workers out of their money. If they complained, they would be replaced. The farmers needed someone to display moral courage, meaning someone that would stand up for them no matter what.

Cesar Chavez was raised to be hardworking and respectful. He was taught at an early age to help others. He worked in the fields with his family as a child and experienced the struggles farmers faced. That's why he dedicated his life to improving the treatment of farmers. Before his famous courageous stand against the mistreatment of farmers, he worked for the Community Service Organization. This organization focused on helping Mexican Americans fight against racism from the government, schools, police and the workplace. He assisted many Mexican Americans throughout California and his leadership helped many people get the respect they deserved within their community. This motivated him to start a movement called the National Farm Worker Association. The main purpose of this new association was to improve the working conditions, pay, and treatment of farmers, especially migrant farmers. Many people wanted to join Cesar's union. The people that joined were from all different backgrounds, even though some of them were discriminated against in their daily lives, they all wanted to take a stand and help this cause.

Cesar did not believe in violence. He tried to negotiate with landowners peacefully. He was devoted to changing the way farmers were treated and wanted everyone to be treated the same. No more untrustworthy landowners and unfair pay. Cesar refused to be ignored and encouraged union members to strike rather than go to work. He felt this would be an impactful way for grape growers to hear their concerns. Not only did the growers listen, but the strike eventually got the attention of many others, including government officials, who started to pay attention to the issues. Cesar led a 300-mile, 25 day march to keep the strike noticed and, in the end, a large grape company was willing to meet and negotiate better pay and conditions for farmers. Some farmers were frustrated by the strike. They weren't earning money and it was hard to pay their bills. Some started to damage the farm employer's property. Cesar had to show that violence is not the way. Inspired by Gandhi's peacefulness, Cesar stopped eating. He chose to fast until the union members agreed to stop using violence against the landowners. Not eating was hard on Cesar's health and he went 25 days without food before deciding his point was made. Cesar called for a boycott on grapes grown in California. The growers were losing millions of dollars, and this made them want to make a deal with the farmworkers. The Great Delano Grape Strike lasted five years and Cesar's persistence had changed the migrant farmers' lives forever. Later in Cesar's life, he fasted again to draw attention to the dangers of pesticides. The pesticides used on the crops were meant for keeping animals away, but they were very harmful to the workers. The

toxic chemicals from the pesticides could be inhaled by the farmers. This time his fast lasted 36 days. Ultimately, growers kept on using pesticides, but Cesar continued to talk about the problems they can cause for farmworkers.

Cesar's actions positively impacted the world. Cesar Chavez acted with moral courage by showing the importance of taking a stand to fight inequality and promote peace within the community. He was a symbol of hope to people who didn't have a voice. His protests and strikes were successful in creating change for farmers. His fasts raised awareness about problems without using violence. Cesar was a determined man, who never gave up on his goals. At one point, Cesar was put in jail for a boycott and strike on lettuce. Even while in jail, he kept his cause alive, and many people gave him a lot of support. Cesar said to his supporters, "They can jail us, but they can never jail the cause!" The slogan, Si, se puede, which means Yes, it can be done! in English was used in Cesar's organization. Cesar dedicated his life to helping the farmers. He truly believed in equality with everything he had.

I am inspired by the courage Cesar Chavez showed in standing up for others. I see the importance in communicating peacefully and working hard for what you believe in. I will take what I learned from his story and apply it to myself to stand up for renewable food sources. Meat production is a massive problem around the world. If humans use more plants in their diet, we will be saving energy and resources. Meat production is also taking away animal habitats. Connecting to Cesar, I can take a peaceful stand while raising apprehension on the problem. When Cesar was alive there was no social media to spread the word, but I can use social media to advocate. On social media, I can work with groups of people that I might not be able to link up with in everyday life. This relates to Cesar because he was part of associations that worked together to contribute to a cause. Most importantly, I must stand up for what I believe in by fully committing to it. I need to advocate for my cause not because I want to be an important person in history, but having moral courage means I need to stand up for what I fully believe in. Like Cesar, I can show moral courage too.