

César Chávez: Education of the Heart Grade 6



Pericles, a Greek politician who lived from 490 to 429 B.C., was an influential leader and a persuasive speaker during the Golden Age of Athens. He believed that distributing power more equally between the wealthy and the poor would result in a stronger Athenian democracy.

César Chávez was another revered leader. He championed the campaign for farm workers' rights from 1962, when he established the United Farm Workers, until his untimely death at the age of 66 in 1993. He was also an advocate for vegetarianism and animal rights, and he believed that kindness and compassion for all life are the marks of a civilized society.

Compare the following quotes:

"As for poverty, no one need be ashamed to admit it: the real shame is in not taking practical measures to escape from it."

—Pericles

"We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community. ... Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own."

—César Chávez

Do you think Pericles meant that it is shameful to be poor or that it is shameful to not work to better one's life? Explain your decision.

[Answer: Being poor is not shameful, but refusing to take steps to improve one's situation is.]

How is Chávez's message similar to Pericles' message?

[Answer: Like Pericles, Chávez believed that people should take action to improve their lives, but Chávez also believed that people should not stop there. He believed in the importance of helping others, as well.]

If something that you did (a habit or hobby, for instance) had a negative effect on another person, would you stop? (For example, smoking is not only bad for the smoker, but for anyone who is nearby.) Explain.

[Answers will vary.]

If you discovered that something that you liked to do was hurting animals, would you stop? (For example, would you stop hunting or fishing after considering the pain that your hobby brings to animals? Would you stop using animal-tested cosmetics after learning that rabbits and other animals are blinded to test their toxicity?) Explain.

[Answers will vary.]

What do Pericles' and Chávez's messages tell us about maintaining a peaceful society?

[Answer: We are all responsible for caring for ourselves in this world, but in doing that, we must not forget to be concerned about others and to take it upon ourselves to do our part to help them.]

[Teachers: Gandhi said, “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” Use this quote to lead into the next section.]

As a young man, Chávez began to read the works of Mohandas Gandhi, a man who brought about massive social change through peaceful, nonviolent protests. Contemplating the concept of nonviolence, Chávez began to connect it to the value that people place on animals. It was through his relationship with his dog, Boycott, that Chávez finally discovered how amazing and sensitive—and just how much like people in their needs and desires—other animals are. To Chávez, being an advocate for people meant advocating for all animals.

“The respect for all living things is essential to anyone working for social change. ... What benefits the animals, benefits the people, too.”
—César Chávez

How does this quote relate to the two previous quotes?

[Answer: The universal theme echoing from all three quotes is that compassion and empathy should have no boundaries. We have a responsibility to make the world that we live in better for each other, for the animals, and for the environment. The abuse of animals and the abuse of humans go hand in hand.]

Under each of the following quotes by Chávez, write a few sentences explaining why each statement is important for people and for animals. Then choose one quote and, on another piece of paper, write an essay explaining how it relates to your life. Share your essay with the class.

[Answers will vary.]

Quote 1: “From the depth of need and despair, people can work together, can organize themselves to solve their own problems and fill their own needs with dignity and strength.”

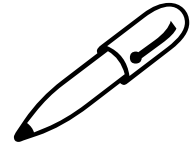
Quote 2: “Kindness and compassion toward all living things [are the] mark[s] of a civilized society. Conversely, cruelty, whether it is directed against human beings or against animals, is not the exclusive province of any one culture or community of people.”

Quote 3: “We are convinced that nonviolence is more powerful than violence. We are convinced that nonviolence supports you if you have a just and moral cause. ... If you use violence, you have to sell part of yourself for that violence. Then you are no longer a master of your own struggle.”

Quote 4: “We can choose to use our lives for others to bring about a better and more just world for our children. People who make that choice will know hardship and sacrifice. But if you give yourself totally to the non-violent struggle for peace and justice, you also find that people give you their hearts and you will never go hungry and never be alone. And in giving of yourself, you will discover a whole new life full of meaning and love.”

Name: _____ Date: _____

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