

Whose Rights Are They?

Grade 8



“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

Based on this passage from the Declaration of Independence, signed in Congress on July 4, 1776, answer the following questions on the back of this sheet or on a separate piece of paper:

1. What rights does this passage grant to “all men”?

[Answer: Life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and the right to alter or abolish a government that the people believe has become destructive.]

2. Were all U.S. citizens granted these rights? Explain.

[Answer: No. The rights described in this passage applied only to white men. Women, slaves, and children were considered to be property and were believed to be inferior, and they were, therefore, not granted the same rights as white men.]

3. Are all people treated equally today? Are these rights granted to animals?

[Discuss as a class.]

4. According to this document, who has the power (and obligation) to demand change in any governing body or law that is faulty, corrupt, or destructive? Give an example of a group that demanded a change in the way that it was treated.

[Answers may vary. Example: The people have the power to demand change. Women, for example, fought for their right to vote. It wasn't until 1920 that they were granted suffrage in the U.S. Until that point, a woman was considered to be the property of her husband or father. Fanny Wright questioned the conventional ideals of a “woman's place” and sparked an awakening for universal suffrage in her book *Course of Popular Lectures* (1829). She also advocated free secular education, and the abolition of slavery.]

History has shown that not all people have been granted “unalienable rights” and protection. Oppression has been based on a hierarchical structure in which those in power rule over those with less power. The campaign for universal suffrage and the campaign for animal rights sprang from this oppression.

César Chávez experienced the inequality that farm workers, even as American citizens, faced every day. In 1965, the United Farm Workers (UFW) led the first boycott to protest the National Labor Relations Act, which provided the right to unionize and participate in collective bargaining to industrial workers but not to farm workers. It took another 10 years before farm workers were granted the rights and protection that they deserved under the Agricultural Labor Relations Act.

What actions did Chávez and the UFW take to secure these rights for farm workers?

[Answer: They led nonviolent boycotts, protests, fasts, and demonstrations for better wages, fair treatment, and safe working conditions for farm workers.]

[Discuss the importance of the UFW's grape boycott in the 1980s.]

Chávez encouraged the public to become a voice for farm workers' rights by asking people to boycott farm products. What does it mean to boycott?

[Wording will vary. Example: Boycott means to engage in a concerted refusal to have dealings with a person, business, or organization, usually to express disapproval or force acceptance of certain conditions.]

Is boycotting a nonviolent form of protest?

[Answer: Yes, boycotting demonstrates opposition without using violence.]

Chávez embraced Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence toward all life. He became a vegetarian and connected his campaign for farm workers' rights to a campaign for the rights and protection of another oppressed group that needed his voice. What was the other group that Chávez advocated for?

[Answer: Animals]

"When we are really honest with ourselves we must admit that our lives are all that really belong to us, so it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of men we are. It is my deepest belief that only by giving life do we find life, that the truest act of courage, the strongest act ... is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally non-violent struggle for justice."

—César Chávez

Explain the quote above, and apply it to Chávez's decision to become a vegetarian.

[Answers will vary. Example: Because he believed that our lives are our only possessions, Chávez knew that what he did with his life would stand for who he was and that he had to decide whether to sacrifice for others or lead a self-satisfying life. He chose to sacrifice for others, and becoming a vegetarian was one way that Chávez used his life to help others and demonstrate the importance of nonviolence.]

As a vegetarian and an activist, Chávez demonstrated his disapproval of the mistreatment of animals on factory farms. He also spoke out against the abuses that animals endure in laboratories, circuses, and other industries that exploit animals. Chávez believed that animals deserve to be treated with dignity, respect, compassion, and empathy.

How is Chávez's involvement in the animal rights movement related to his beliefs about the importance of nonviolence and self-sacrifice?

[Answers will vary. Example: Chávez believed that the best way to teach others about nonviolence was to set an example, and he was aware of the violence involved in industries that profit from exploiting animals. Because of this, he became a vegetarian and worked to spread the word about the suffering that animals endure in these industries. His actions also involved self-sacrifice. He believed that animals' right to live a life free of abuse and exploitation was more important than a desire to eat their flesh or see them perform.]

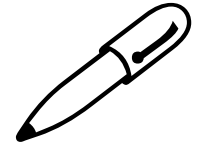
What does "sacrifice" mean to you? Explain.

[Answers will vary. Encourage the class to discuss their answers.]

Activity: In May 2002, Article 20A of Germany's Constitution, which calls for the protection of the "natural foundation of life" for future generations, was changed to extend that protection to animals as well as humans. Read the U.S. Bill of Rights and revise it to reflect Chávez and Gandhi's position against discrimination and violence. Your version should clearly explain the rights and protection granted to humans and animals.

Name: _____ Date: _____

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