

# 16 **Extraordinary** Hispanic Americans

**Second Edition**

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# To the Teacher

According to *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy*, a report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York (2004, second edition), “High-interest, low-difficulty texts play a significant role in an adolescent literacy program and are critical for fostering the reading skills of struggling readers and the engagement of all students. In addition to using appropriate grade-level textbooks that may already be available in the classroom, it is crucial to have a range of texts in the classroom that link to multiple ability levels and connect to students’ background experiences.”

Biographies about extraordinary people are examples of one such kind of text. The 16 Americans described in this collection should both inspire and reassure students. As students read, your instruction can include approaches that will support not only comprehension, but also learning from passages.

Reading and language arts skills not only enrich students’ academic lives but also their personal lives. The *Extraordinary Americans* series was written to help students gain confidence as readers. The biographies were written to pique students’ interest while engaging their understanding of vocabulary, recalling facts, identifying the main idea, drawing conclusions, and applying knowledge. The added value of reading these biographies is that students will learn about other people and, perhaps, about themselves.

Students will read stories demonstrating that great things are accomplished by everyday people who may have grown up just like them—or maybe even with greater obstacles to overcome. Students will discover that being open to new ideas, working hard, and believing in one’s self make them extraordinary people, too!

## Structure of the Book

### The Biographies

The collection of stories can be used in many different ways. You may assign passages for independent reading or engage students in choral reading. No matter which strategies you use, each passage contains pages to guide your instruction.

At the end of each passage, you will find a series of questions. The questions are categorized, and you can assign as many as you wish. The purposes of the questions vary:

- **Remembering the Facts:** Questions in this section engage students in a direct comprehension strategy, and require them to recall and find information while keeping track of their own understanding.
- **Understanding the Story:** Questions posed in this section require a higher level of thinking. Students are asked to draw conclusions and make inferences.
- **Getting the Main Idea:** Once again, students are able to stretch their thinking. Questions in this section are fodder for dialog and discussion around the extraordinary individuals and an important point in their lives.
- **Applying What You've Learned:** Proficient readers internalize and use the knowledge that they gain after reading. The question or activity posed allows for students to connect what they have read to their own lives.

In the latter part of the book, there are additional resources to support your instruction.

### **Vocabulary**

A list of key words is included for each biography. The lists can be used in many ways. Assign words for students to define, use them for spelling lessons, and so forth.

### **Answer Key**

An answer key is provided. Responses will likely vary for Getting the Main Idea and Applying What You've Learned questions.

### **Additional Activities**

Extend and enhance students' learning! These suggestions include conducting research, creating visual art, exploring cross-curricular activities, and more.

### **References**

Learn more about each extraordinary person or assign students to discover more on their own. Start with the sources provided.

## To the Student

The lives of many Hispanic Americans have made a difference in the story of America. Writers, artists, scientists, teachers, politicians, ministers, lawyers, doctors, businesspeople, athletes, and so many more have helped to make America what it is today. Hispanic Americans can be proud of their heritage. And it is a pride all Americans should share.

In this book you will read the stories of:

- Cesar Chavez, who used nonviolent tactics to gain better wages and working conditions for farm workers
- Dolores Huerta, who co-founded the United Farm Workers with Cesar Chavez
- Joan Baez, the internationally famous folk singer who has worked for antiwar and civil rights causes
- Ellen Ochoa, an astronaut who soared into outer space on the space shuttle Discovery
- Jaime Escalante, whose tough teaching methods and belief in his students inspired them to excel in mathematics
- Edward James Olmos, an award-winning actor who speaks out against violence and promotes education
- Judy Baca, an artist who planned and helped young people paint the largest outdoor mural in the world
- Sandra Cisneros, a well-known author who tells the stories of strong Hispanic women
- Roberto Clemente, the first Hispanic American to enter the Baseball Hall of Fame
- Henry B. Gonzalez, who has served the American people with honesty and independence since being elected to Congress in 1961

- Roberto Goizueta, who, as chairman of the Coca-Cola Company, is in the top ranks of American business
- Antonia Novello, the first woman and the first Hispanic American to serve as surgeon general of the United States
- José Feliciano, who, despite blindness and poverty, became an internationally known singer and guitarist
- Jorge Ramos, one of broadcast journalism's most influential news anchors
- Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the first Hispanic-American woman to be elected to the United States Congress
- Oscar De La Hoya, a boxing champion who has given back to his community

The motto on the Great Seal of the United States reads *E Pluribus Unum*. That is Latin for “Out of many, one.” The United States is made up of many people from many races. These people have come together to form one nation. Each group has been an important part of American history. I hope you will enjoy reading about 16 Hispanic Americans who have made a difference.

—Nancy Lobb

# Background Information

## Who are the Hispanic Americans?

The U.S. government defines “Hispanics” as people who speak Spanish or who are of Spanish, Portuguese, or Latin-American (Central or South American) descent. The three largest groups in the United States are Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban Americans.

Just as there is a wide variety of Hispanic groups, there are many different terms these groups use to refer to themselves. The term *Hispanic* is a general term that includes all of these groups.

Some prefer the term *Latino* instead of Hispanic. Other Hispanic Americans refer to themselves based on their heritage—that is, Cuban American, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and so forth. Some Mexican Americans prefer the term *Chicano*.

In this book, we have chosen to use the broader term *Hispanic American* to refer to all those with Spanish ancestry.

## How many Americans are Hispanic?

A 2005 census update showed there were 41.8 million Hispanic Americans in the United States. (That is 14 percent of the country’s total population of 290 million.)

The Hispanic population is increasing quickly. Half of the population increase is due to immigration, mostly from Mexico. A second reason is the high birthrate among Hispanics.

## Where do Hispanic Americans live?

Most Mexican Americans live in Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and California. Puerto Ricans live mostly in New York, New Jersey, and Illinois. Most Cuban Americans live in Florida.

In 2005, almost two thirds of Hispanic Americans lived in 25 large U.S. cities. In Los Angeles County, there are 4.6 million Hispanic Americans. That makes Los Angeles the second largest Spanish-speaking city in the world! (Mexico City is the largest.)

## **Why are so many countries Spanish-speaking?**

At one time, Spain was a world superpower. Spaniards put much energy into exploring and conquering new parts of the world. They settled much of North and South America. In 1492, Columbus landed in America. The first Spanish settlement in North America was at St. Augustine, Florida in 1563.

In Mexico, the Spanish conquered the native Indians. Intermarriage over the years produced the Mexican people (*mestizo*). Thus, the heritage of Mexicans is both Indian and Spanish.

Cuba and Puerto Rico were conquered by the Spanish, as well. The Spanish forced the native Indians into slavery. They also imported many African slaves. Thus, Cubans and Puerto Ricans have a Spanish, Indian, and African heritage.

## **Why did Mexicans immigrate to the United States?**

Many Mexicans became U.S. citizens in the 1800s. In 1821, Mexico declared its independence from Spain. Then in 1848, Mexico lost the Mexican War to the United States. The Mexicans had to give up the northern half of their land, including what is now California, Arizona, Utah, and Nevada, to the United States.

At that time, Mexicans living there were given the choice of becoming U.S. citizens or returning to Mexico. Eighty percent stayed and became U.S. citizens. Later, additional territory was purchased from Mexico. This land became part of Arizona and New Mexico. Many Mexican residents in this area became U.S. citizens.



In the late 1800s, more Mexicans came to the United States seeking jobs as the Mexican economy weakened. They worked as farm and ranch hands, railroad workers, miners, and factory workers.

Today, thousands of Mexicans continue to migrate north each year seeking work. There are always many Mexican immigrants, both legal and illegal. In 2005, there were 26.8 million Mexican Americans in the United States.

### **Why did Cubans immigrate to the United States?**

Before 1959, there were few Cuban immigrants. But in 1959, Fidel Castro overthrew the Cuban government and declared Cuba a communist state. He outlawed individual ownership of property and accumulation of wealth. Many middle- and upper-class Cubans fled Cuba. Castro allowed them to take only the clothes on their backs and five dollars in American money. The Cuban government took the rest of their wealth. Most of these people ended up in Miami, Florida. Most of them were educated, professional people who were welcomed into the United States.

A second large group of Cubans was allowed to leave Cuba in 1980. This “boat-lift” of Cubans was controversial because, unlike the first group, most of these people were from the lower class. A number were even criminals or mentally ill individuals who Castro wanted to get rid of.

The number of Cubans in the United States rose from 30,000 in 1959 to 1.4 million in 2005. Cubans are a major force in Florida, especially in Miami.

### **Why did Puerto Ricans come to the United States?**

In 1898, following the Spanish-American War, Puerto Rico became a territory of the United States, and in 1917, Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship. Since that time, Puerto Ricans have had the right to travel unrestricted between the island and the mainland.

After World War II, the economy of Puerto Rico began to weaken. Many Puerto Ricans have come to the United States since then. In 2005, there were approximately 3.8 million Puerto Ricans living in the United States. Most of these people live in New York City. About 3.8 million Puerto Ricans still live on the island of Puerto Rico.

## **What other countries do Hispanics come from?**

Immigrants come from Latin American countries such as Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador. Most come to escape civil war, poverty, and political repression.

The 1969 border war between Honduras and El Salvador caused economic conditions to deteriorate in all of Central America. Civil wars and unrest in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua since 1979 have caused large migrations. The number of Central and South Americans in the United States was about 5.2 million in 2005.

# Dolores Huerta

## Civil Rights Activist

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Lettuce and tomatoes. Spinach, broccoli, and cucumbers. Strawberries and peaches. All of these crops and many others must be picked by hand. Growers need lots of workers to do this hard work. Most of the people willing to do this work are migrant workers from Mexico. They are called migrants because they migrate from one area to another as the crops are ready to be picked.

Most of these workers are poor. They have little education. Many do not speak English. And many are in the U.S. illegally. Because of these facts, it is easy to treat the workers unfairly.

For many years, the United Farm Workers (UFW) has helped farm workers organize to improve their lives. Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez co-founded the UFW in 1962.

Among Mexican Americans, Huerta is a folk hero. She is shown on murals. She is celebrated in songs. Today, she continues to work for the rights of farm workers.

Dolores Huerta was born Dolores Fernandez on April 10, 1930 in Dawson, New Mexico. Her parents divorced when she was five. Her mother moved Dolores and her brothers to Stockton, California, to live with her grandfather.

Dolores' mother was a model of strength, independence, and ambition. She worked hard to support her family. She was a waitress



and a cook during the day. At night, she worked in a cannery. She managed to save enough money to buy two small hotels and a restaurant.

Dolores and her siblings lived in one of the hotels. They all helped with the daily cleaning and renting of the rooms. Dolores' mother often put up farm workers and their families for free.

Although her father lived in New Mexico, he also inspired her. He was active in labor unions. Later, he went back to school and earned a degree. In 1938, he won election to the New Mexico state legislature. There he worked for better labor laws.

Dolores took free dance lessons that were offered in Stockton. She grew up thinking she would be a dancer. She was also active in the Girl Scouts until she was 18. Her troop was active in many community service projects. She won second place in a national Girl Scout essay contest.

Dolores was an excellent student. In English her senior year, she received A's on all her work. However, she was given a C on her report card. The teacher did not believe Dolores could have written the stories herself (because she was Hispanic).

Dolores earned a teaching degree from Stockton College. She got a job as an elementary school teacher. Most of her students were the children of farm workers. They came to school in old clothes that did not fit. They did not have enough to eat. And they missed a lot of school because they had to help in the fields.

Dolores was soon frustrated. She felt she was unable to meet her students' many needs. She later said, "I couldn't stand seeing kids come to class hungry and needing shoes. I thought I could do more by organizing farm workers than by trying to teach their hungry children."

In 1955, Dolores met Fred Ross. Ross was an organizer working for the Community Service Organization (CSO). He had come to Stockton to organize a local chapter of the CSO. Dolores was hired by the CSO. She

registered people to vote. She organized citizenship classes for immigrants. And she tried to get the city to improve Hispanic neighborhoods.

Because of her skill, the CSO sent Dolores to the state capital in Sacramento as a lobbyist. She was a 25-year-old Hispanic woman. In the mid-1950s, neither women nor minorities were respected in the capitol. But Dolores soon gained the legislators' respect.

It was in the CSO that she met Cesar Chavez. Both Cesar and Dolores wanted to start a union for farm workers through the CSO. But the CSO was not interested. So the two left the CSO. In 1962, they co-founded the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA).

Dolores later said, "People thought we were crazy. They asked, 'How are you going to organize farm workers? They are poor, powerless immigrants. They don't have any money and they can't vote.'"

It was the strike against California grape growers that made Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and the NFWA famous. The strike began with the grape growers union. The NFWA supported the strike. In 1966, the two unions merged. The United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) was formed. After 1972, this union was known as the UFW.

Dolores was the UFWOC's chief negotiator. By 1967, she had won gains for the workers with some wine-grape growers. She negotiated an agreement that raised the farm workers' wages. She also won the first medical and pension benefits for farm workers in history.

However, most of the table grape growers would not give in. So, in 1968, the UFWOC called for a national boycott of California table grapes. Dolores went to New York City to direct the boycott there. People all across the United States refused to buy grapes. Finally, in 1970, the growers gave in. Dolores negotiated new contracts with the growers. She won many benefits for the grape pickers.

The strike had made it clear that there were ties between the farm workers' struggle and the civil rights movement in the South. In 1966,

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. sent a telegram to the UFW. He said, “The fight for equality must be fought on many fronts—in the urban slums, in the sweat shops of factories and fields. Our separate struggles are really one—a struggle for freedom, for dignity, and for humanity. We are with you in spirit.”

In 1975, the California state legislature passed the Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA). Dolores had lobbied long and hard for it. The ALRA was the first law of its kind in the United States. It guaranteed the right of farm workers to form a union. It required growers to negotiate with the union. This law was a triumph for the UFW.

Dolores and Cesar Chavez were alarmed about the effects of pesticides on farm workers. Pesticides caused illness and death. They also caused birth defects among the workers’ children. In 1984, the UFW made a list of the most dangerous pesticides. Because of their work, many of these were banned.

In 1985, Dolores lobbied for a law to help farm workers who had lived, worked, and paid taxes in the United States for many years. These workers had not been able to become citizens. Dolores’s work resulted in the Immigration Act of 1985. This law gave 1,400,000 farm workers amnesty.

Dolores worked with Cesar Chavez for over 30 years. They founded the first medical and pension plans for farm workers. They founded the Farm Workers Credit Union. They formed the National Farm Workers Service Center, which provides affordable housing. They even started nine Spanish-speaking radio stations.

After Cesar Chavez’s death in 1993, Dolores continued the fight. She organized strikes. She directed boycotts. She negotiated contracts and worked as a lobbyist. She was arrested dozens of times for union activities.

Sometimes her activities put her in danger. In 1988, George H.W. Bush was running for president. He was speaking at a fundraiser in San Francisco. Republicans were not usually supportive of the farm

workers. So Dolores organized a peaceful protest outside the hotel where he was speaking.

A police officer asked the protesters to move back from the entrance. Dolores and the others did. But one officer knocked Dolores to the ground with his baton (club). She had several broken ribs and a ruptured spleen.

The attack was recorded on video. Dolores sued the city of San Francisco. She was awarded an \$825,000 settlement. She used most of the money from the settlement to form the Dolores Huerta Foundation. This group works to organize poor and working communities to get gains in housing, health, and jobs.

Dolores married Cesar Chavez's younger brother Richard. The couple had four children. Dolores had seven other children from earlier marriages. She was now raising eleven children. Today, her children credit her with giving them a sense of civic duty. She also inspired them to work hard and succeed in their careers.

In 1992, Dolores led a 165-mile march from Delano to Sacramento, California. She wanted the governor to sign a bill that required mediation in cases of disagreements between farm workers and growers. She was 72 years old at the time. The governor gave in and signed the bill.

In 1992, she was the second person to win the Puffin Prize by the Nation Institute. The award is given yearly to a person who has given a lifetime of sacrifice for a cause. Dolores used the prize money to form an institute to train new organizers for the future. It is called the Dolores Huerta Foundation's Organizing Institute.

Dolores Huerta has won many awards. In 1993, she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame. In 1998, she was named one of the "100 Most Important Women of the 20th Century" by *Ladies Home Journal*. President Clinton awarded her the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award in 1998. In 2000, she won the Hispanic Heritage Award. In May 2006, Dolores was awarded an honorary degree from Princeton University.

In 2003, Dolores resigned from the UFW. She still works long hours as President of the Dolores Huerta Foundation. She speaks across the nation on issues that affect immigrants, women, and children. There is still much work to be done. She has stated, “Immigrants are the new civil rights movement. They need to know how they can participate in the political process.”

In 2003, Dolores spoke at the Dolores Huerta Elementary School in Stockton. Most of the students there are children of farm workers. She told the students, “Your parents and grandparents do the most sacred work in the world. They feed everybody.”



## Remembering the Facts

1. How was Dolores's mother an inspiration to her?
2. How was Dolores's father an inspiration to her?
3. Why did Dolores give up her work as a teacher?
4. What made the NFWA famous?
5. Why was the ALRA important?
6. Why were Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez concerned about pesticides?
7. What is the purpose of the Dolores Huerta Foundation?

## Understanding the Story

8. Why do you think Dolores was named one of the 100 Most Important Women of the 20th century?

9. Why do you think Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. told Huerta, “Our separate struggles are really one”?
  
10. Why do you think Dolores says that immigrants are the new civil rights movement?

### **Getting the Main Idea**

Why do you think Dolores Huerta is a good role model for the youth of today?

### **Applying What You’ve Learned**

Dolores says that the goal of her foundation is to “show people how to work together and take on the issues that are affecting them.” Choose an issue that affects students in your school. Make a list of ways Dolores might advise students to get this issue addressed.