

Young Cesar Chavez

By

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CHARACTERS:

YOUNG CESAR -Cesar Chavez at ten years old.

CESAR CHAVEZ -as a young man of twenty five

JUANA CHAVEZ -Cesar's mom

LIBRADO CHAVEZ -Cesar's dad

RITA CHAVEZ -Cesar's little sister

RICHARD CHAVEZ -Cesar's little brother

MAMA TELA -Cesar's grandma

HELEN FAVELA -the young lady Cesar will marry

SHERRIFF JOHNSON -a world weary lawman

BOSSMAN -the manager of Happy Fruit Ranch

DOLORES -a farmworker with attitude

JAIME -a farmworker down on his luck

ANTONIO -a farmworker ready to fight

NARRATOR -who sets the scene and guides us through the play

SCENE 1

SETTING – The interior of the Chavez home.
LIBRADO, JUANA, MAMA TELA, RITA, RICHARD, and
YOUNG CESAR are having dinner together.

[the NARRATOR steps forward]

NARRATOR:

When he was a boy, Cesar Chavez lived on his family's farm with his mother, father, brother and sister. His parents were strict but loving. They stressed the importance of education and helping others. Life might have been easy for young Cesar, but trouble has a way of catching up with the innocent.

JUANA:

How was everyone's day today?

RITA:

I had a great day. We're learning about volcanoes and there was Jell-o for lunch today and Jenny invited me to her birthday party, oh and Cesar has a girlfriend!

CESAR:

Shut up Rita!

RICHARD:

Oh my sweetie pie, I love you so much!

[Cesar punches Richard in the arm]

LIBRADO:

Cesar! Keep your hands off your brother!

JUANA

Does this girl have a name?

CESAR:

Her name is Helen and she's not my girlfriend.

RITA:

That's not what it looked like at lunchtime. I saw you making goo goo eyes at her.

MAMA TELA:

Don't pick on your brother mija. He's so sensitive!

RITA

Sorry Grandma

[There is a knock on the door]

JUANA:

I'll get it.

[Sheriff Johnson stands in the doorway holding a piece of paper]

JUANA

Yes Sheriff? What can I do for you?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

(with a heavy gringo accent) Buenas nachos Seeneeora Chavez. I got this eviction notice here says y'all are to quit these here premises immediately.

JUANA

What!?! That can't be! Librado!

[Librado is up from the table moving toward the door]

LIBRADO

What's the meaning of this?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Come on now folks, you musta known this was comin'
You fell behind on your taxes and now you're
sittin' on the government's property.

LIBRADO

That can't be. Sure, I'm a couple of payments
behind until the crops come in but this is still my
farm, my house!

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Not any more. Look you need to complain to the
state government, not me. I'm just following
orders. Now I have a couple a deputees in the car
to help you move your stuff onto your truck if you
want...

LIBRADO

No way! They can't do this to us! If we were white
I bet they could carry us for a couple of months
until we harvested! They do it all the time! This
is our land! We worked for it and we're not moving!

CESAR

Tell 'em dad!

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Now look here Chavez, I don't want to have to take
y'all to jail...

LIBRADO

Go ahead! Take us to jail! What law have we broken?
Owning a farm while Mexican?

RICHARD

Cool we're spending the night in the slammer, the
hooskow, the steel bar motel...

JUANA

Callate Ricardo! No one is going to jail! Escuchame Librado. You know this pendejo Sheriff will do what he says. They'll take the kids and put them in an orphanage. They'll break up our family. Is that what you want?

LIBRADO

Juana, you know that's not what I want. All I ever wanted was for us to be together and to have a home.

JUANA

We will honey. We will mi amor. But now...

LIBRADO

Now we start packing. Okay everyone lets start moving.

[Everyone gets up from the table except for MAMA TELA. As LIBRADO and JUANA grab either end of the table, the SHERIFF walks offstage. Rita takes the chair she was sitting on offstage.]

RITA

But I like it here!

[RICHARD takes his chair offstage]

RICHARD

Where are we going?

LIBRADO

We're going on an adventure.

[CESAR picks up his chair and takes it offstage]

CESAR

What about school?

JUANA

We'll find you an even better one mijo.

[JUANA and LIBRADO move the table offstage leaving only MAMA TELA sitting in her chair. She gets up, holds her chair for a moment and looks up at the sky.]

MAMA TELA

Dios Mio! I wish I understood you better.

[She picks up her chair and moves it offstage]

SCENE 2

SETTING – Vineyards in Central California.
LIBRADO, JUANA, RITA, RICHARD, MAMA TELA and YOUNG CESAR are picking grapes.

[the NARRATOR steps forward]

NARRATOR:

The Chavez family moved to Delano, California where life was not always easy. At times, they were homeless, sleeping on the side of the road. Like many other migrant farm workers, the whole family worked in the fields and when the harvesting was done, they were forced to move on.

RITA

When can we stop? My hands hurt.

JUANA

Just a little bit longer baby.

LIBRADO

We stop when the boss says stop. If we stop before that he'll pay us nothing.

RICHARD

Are we gonna sleep inside tonight?

CESAR

If we pick enough we can pay for a room, right dad?

LIBRADO

That's right son.

CESAR

When can I go back to school? I don't want to do this forever dad.

LIBRADO

Believe me Cesar, your mom and I don't want that either.

JUANA

Cesar, why don't you check on Mama Tella. It's hot out here. Bring her some water.

[JUANA hands CESAR a canteen which he brings to his grandmother in another part of the field where she is picking more slowly]

CESAR

Here grandma, take a little rest. Toma eso. Esta fria y fresca.

MAMA TELA

Gracias mijo. (*takes a drink*) You're such a good boy. I know this has been hard for you. Are you alright?

CESAR

I don't know grandma. It's not fair. Why do some kids get to go to school while we have to work all day and not rest 'til the sun goes down.

MAMA TELA

You're right. It's not fair. So what are you going to do about it?

CESAR

What can I do? God made some people rich and us poor.

MAMA TELA

God didn't do that. He didn't make owners and pickers. Men did that. And what men do, other men can change, with God's blessing. Look at this land. When you're not bent over a fruit basket, when you stand up and look around you and really see it, it's beautiful. It's God's gift to us. (*She starts picking again*)

CESAR

It may be beautiful to you Grandma, but I'm getting out of here as soon as I can.

MAMA TELA

Si. Si. Creo que si. I believe you will. Just remember that God wants us to be good to each other, fair and kind and wherever you go, always keep us in your heart.

CESAR

I promise Mama Tela. I'll never forget.

[They continue picking as they move offstage.]

SCENE 3

SETTING – Happy Fruit Ranch in Delano, California. HELEN is picking grapes. CESAR, a young man now, is handing out flyers to the workers.

[the NARRATOR steps forward]

NARRATOR:

When he was 17, Cesar joined the Navy and served his country for two years during World War II. After the war he came back to the fields of Delano.

NARRATOR:

Though he never finished school, he read constantly, absorbing the works of Ghandi, St. Francis and a young minister named Dr. Martin Luther King. Cesar became a community organizer and was hired to get new immigrants registered to vote.

[Cesar is handing out flyers and stopping pickers to talk to them]

CESAR

Usa su voz! Necesita a registrarse! Register to vote! Make your voice heard! Have you registered to vote yet? You know we can change things around here if we just... (CESAR *stops mid-sentence when he spots HELEN*)
Buenos Dias Linda.

HELEN

My name's not Linda, It's Helen.

CESAR

Very funny. You think I forgot?

HELEN

I don't know. Maybe all that time on the ocean washed me out of your brain.

CESAR

Come on now. (*He takes her hand*) You know these legs couldn't wait to hit dry land just so they could jitterbug with you. (*He starts to dance with her*)

HELEN

Cesar stop. If the boss man catches us, I'll get fired. You could get hurt.

CESAR

I'm not afraid of him and besides, a smart beautiful girl like you doesn't need to be out here in the fields.

HELEN

Yes I do. Ever since my dad died, if I don't work, my family doesn't eat.

CESAR

Believe me, I understand. But we're going to change all that. I'm going to take you away from here. So, what are you doing tonight?

HELEN

I don't know I have some housework to do for my mom and...

CESAR

We're having a meeting tonight and I want you to be there and afterwards, we can get some dinner and talk about the future, our future.

[BOSSMAN enters with a wooden baseball bat and approaches the couple]

BOSSMAN

Hey! What are you doing!?! Those grapes aren't going to pick themselves. Now get back to work! You (*to Cesar*). I know you. You're one of those outside agitators tryin' to stir up trouble.

CESAR

Calmate burro! I don't want any trouble. I was just leaving.

[CESAR backs away facing BOSSMAN and HELEN.
BOSSMAN walks off stage. CESAR runs back on stage
and kisses HELEN on the cheek]

CESAR

I'll see you tonight.

[CESAR runs off stage]

SCENE 4

SETTING – On a farm outside of town a meeting is taking place. CESAR, HELEN, DOLORES, ANTONIO and JAIME are talking.

[the NARRATOR steps forward]

NARRATOR:

Cesar and Helen would go on to marry and raise eight children. Using non-violent methods, they would begin a movement that would change the lives of farm workers everywhere. Along with Dolores Huerta and many brave and dedicated workers, they would create the United Farmworkers Union. One of the most influential and powerful organizations in the world.

JAIME

If we walk off the farms and ranches, the owners will just find new immigrant labor to take our places and pay them even less.

HELEN

Our people need to feed their families. You can't expect them to go hungry, no matter how good the cause is.

ANTONIO

I'm so tired of being treated like a dog and then having to beg for more work. I say we just pick up some shovels and start cracking heads open. There's more of us than there are of them...

CESAR

No. If we use violence, that gives the owners an excuse to call in the police and the National Guard. They'll shoot to kill and claim we were to blame.

DOLORES

This is all about money. That's all the owners care about. We have to focus our attack on their wallets.

CESAR

Dolores is right. We need to find a way to make them understand that if the owners can't give our people a living wage, they won't survive either.

DOLORES

What if people stopped buying grapes? That would make them stand up and take notice.

CESAR

Yeah, what if there were grapes going bad in supermarkets all over the country because no one was buying them.

DOLORES

Then the owners couldn't sell any more until they started paying our people enough to live.

JAIME

If each of us told our friends and families and they all told everyone they knew to stop buying...

ANTONIO

Oh man. I'd love to see the look on their faces when they start losing money because of some poor workers.

CESAR

We would need national news coverage and we'd need to convince Americans all over the country,

housewives and businessmen, soccer moms and little league coaches to stop buying grapes. I wonder, could we do something like that?

JAIME

Si, se puede.

CESAR

Could we make the whole country care about what's happening to us here?

ANTONIO, DOLORES AND HELEN

Si, se puede!

(RICHARD, JUANA, RITA, LIBRADO and MAMA TELA step on stage. Everyone is standing]

CESAR

Can a few poor Mexicans change the lives of mistreated farm workers everywhere?

ENTIRE CAST

Si se puede!

CESAR

Why? Because the people united can never be defeated! (*begins chanting*) The people united can never be defeated!

(The ENTIRE CAST joins arms, faces the audience and chants]

ENTIRE CAST

The people united will never be defeated! The people united will never be defeated! The people united will never be defeated!

CESAR

Viva la gente!

WHOLE CAST

Viva!

CESAR

Viva libertad!

WHOLE CAST

Viva!

CESAR

Viva justicia!

WHOLE CAST

Viva!

NARRATOR

Viva Cesar Chavez!

WHOLE CAST

Viva!

The End

