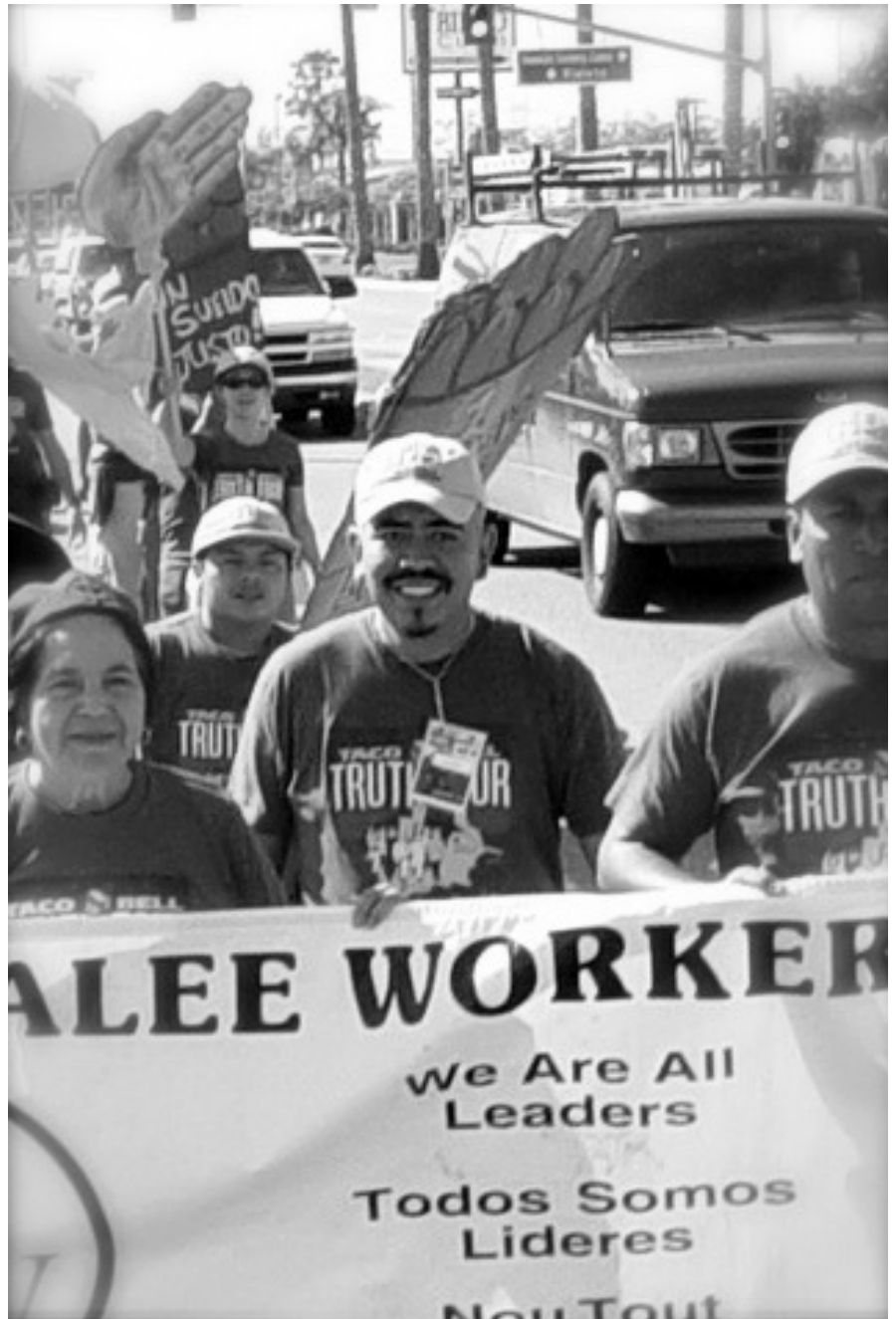


LUCAS BENITEZ

Lucas Benitez, a member of Coalition of Immokalee Workers and a farm worker himself, has become a leader in the fight to end slave labor, human trafficking and exploitation in agriculture fields across the U.S. The CIW partnered with the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Human Rights to lobby major produce buyers in the fast food industry to implement an industry-wide surcharge on Florida tomatoes that will provide a livable wage for Florida's farm workers. In March 2005 and April 2007, CIW signed historic agreements with Yum! Brands (parent company for Taco Bell) and McDonalds, respectively, implementing the CIW's demand for the one penny more per-pound wage increase. RFK Center and CIW are working to broaden consumer and government awareness to instigate legislative change to eliminate the exploitation and enslavement of U.S. farm workers. RFK Center is also a founding member of the Alliance for Fair Food (AFF), a network of human rights, religious, student, labor and grassroots organizations dedicated to advancing the human rights of farm workers.

Farming has become a multi-billion-dollar industry in which corporations negotiate with growers to purchase mass quantities of product for the lowest possible prices. To maintain profits and income for growers, suppliers and labor contractors, farm workers' wages have been drastically reduced to far below poverty levels. Furthermore, the rights to organize and collectively bargain for farm workers are not protected by the National Labor Relations Act. Many of these workers have become enslaved and victims of gross human rights abuses. In response to this crisis, the CIW, a farm workers' rights group, was developed to promote fast food industry-wide change.



“THE RIGHT TO A JUST WAGE, THE RIGHT TO WORK FREE OF FORCED LABOR, THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE — THREE OF THE RIGHTS IN THE UNITED NATIONS’ UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS — ARE ROUTINELY VIOLATED WHEN IT COMES TO FARM WORKERS IN THE UNITED STATES.”

REMARKS BY LUCAS BENITEZ (CIW):
2003 RFK HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD CEREMONY
November 20, 2003

Mrs. Kennedy, Senator Kennedy, and Mrs. Kerry Kennedy, I bring you thanks from all the members of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers for this wonderful day.

But before I begin, I feel that I must tell you that today my companeros and I feel a little disoriented, as if we were lost in a sort of dream world where you can no longer know just what is real.

Just two days ago, we marched into downtown Miami surrounded by nearly 3,000 police — police in riot gear, mounted police, police on bicycles, police on foot, police in helicopters hovering above Miami's skyline, their propellers beating out the soundtrack to what seemed to us like a movie about martial law in the US — all because we were there to call for fair trade that respects human rights, not free trade that exploits human beings.

Yet today, we stand here in this historic city — in the heart of the US government — receiving this prestigious award for our work in defense of human rights.

Truth is, my companeros and I are confused. It's hard for us to understand in which of the two worlds we actually live — in the world where the voice of the poor is feared and protest in defense of human rights is considered the gravest of threats to public security? Or in the world where the defense of human rights is celebrated and encouraged in the pursuit of a more just and equitable society?

While this question may well be the most complex and important question that we must face in this new century, there is no doubt about how Robert F. Kennedy would answer were he still with us today. He — like that other great hero who was torn away from us 35 years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King — would have been there with us in the streets of Miami, quite possibly feeling the same fear we felt facing such overwhelming force arrayed against us, but carried forward by faith and by his powerful commitment to social justice.

This award today is the proof, testimony to Robert Kennedy's vision, his belief that we as workers and poor people also are part of this democracy, that our voices must be a part of this country's great chorus and our interests taken into account, because without justice, true peace, lasting peace, is not possible.

Looking around at the people here today — we see workers and CEO's, students and religious, artists, politicians, prosecutors from the Department of Justice, union leaders, friends, family members, colleagues from the Freedom Network, shareholders, civil rights activists — I can assure you that it isn't everyday that you find all these people in the same room!

But in all seriousness, we are united here despite our different lives and points of view. What brings us together is a feeling that we all have in common, something deeply rooted in our humanity — we are all disgusted by the fact that fundamental human rights continue to be violated in this day and age in this great country.

Behind the shiny, happy images promoted by the fast-food industry with its never-ending commercials on TV, fueled by over \$3 billion in marketing annually, and behind the supermarket advertising that celebrates the abundance of our harvest each Thanksgiving, there is another reality.

Behind those images, the reality is that there are farm workers who contribute their sweat and blood so that enormous corporations can profit, all the while living in sub-poverty misery, without benefits, without the right to overtime or protection when we organize. Others are working by force, against their will, terrorized by violent employers, under the watch of armed guards, held in modern-day slavery. The right to a just wage, the right to work free of forced labor, the right to organize — three of the rights in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights — are routinely violated when it comes to farm workers in the United States.

Is this the true face of democracy in the 21st century? Is this all we can hope for our future and for our children's future?

We answer from the bottom of our hearts: NO! We can — we must — hope for a better world, because a better world IS possible!

So, it's left to us to continue struggling in that same spirit, for a world where poor people, people without a voice, demand and obtain the respect and dignity due to them, where corporations no longer define the limits of our liberty, where they don't dictate our dreams, fence in our imagination, and block the roads toward our destiny.

And in this same spirit, I want to close with a special greeting to all our fellow members of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. We had to leave the march in Miami in order to come here, but they are continuing with the struggle, continuing with the work of building, step by step, another, better world.

As Robert F. Kennedy said, "Some see the world as it is today and ask why. I see the world as it could be and ask, why not?" His vision of 35 years ago is by no means lost — we of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers are marching toward that vision today. Thank you.

DEFENDING LABOR RIGHTS:

LUCAS BENITEZ

LESSON GRADE LEVEL: 6-8

HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE: LABOR RIGHTS

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS:

- **Article 4:** Freedom from Slavery
- **Article 23:** Right to Desirable Work and to Join Trade Unions
- **Article 24:** Right to Rest and Leisure
- **Article 25:** Right to Adequate Living Standard

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- How does the food we eat come to our table?
- Are the people who harvest our food treated fairly?

TIME REQUIREMENT: 160 minutes

OBJECTIVES:

After this lesson, students will be able to

- Describe the labor conditions of farm workers in the United States.
- Create an action plan defend the rights of farm workers.

STUDENT SKILLS:

- Thinking critically
- Research and analyzing
- Writing
- Interpersonal & group relations

NEW YORK STATE LEARNING STANDARDS:

- Social Studies Standard 1: History of the United States and New York
 - Intermediate KI 3 PI 1, 3, 4; KI 4 PI 1, 2, 4
- Social Studies Standard 4: Economics
 - Intermediate KI 1 PI 1, 2, 4, 5, 6; KI 2 PI 1, 2, 3, 4
- Social Studies Standard 5: Civics, Citizenship, and Government
 - Intermediate KI 1 PI 1, 3; KI 3 PI 2, 3; KI 4 PI 1, 3
- English Language Arts Standard 1: Language for Information and Understanding

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

ANTICIPATORY SET:

- Show a tomato to students. Ask them “What do you see? Instruct the students to describe what they see in their journal. Ask students to write for 3 minutes in their journals.
- Have students share their responses with a partner. Ask for a few volunteers to share their descriptions with the class.
- After hearing a few descriptions, the teacher may note that the students described what they saw but did not describe where the tomato came from or what people are behind the tomato. Ask the students how they think the tomato got to the store. Call for volunteers to respond.
- Ask students to define the vocabulary words and describe how they are related. If you have an interactive whiteboard students can move the words around into a hierarchy or create a concept web and respond in writing in their journals or notebooks.
- Read the two excerpts to the students

“... And don't forget in doing something for others that you have what you have because of others. Don't forget that. We are tied together in life and in the world. And you may think you got all you got by yourself. ... You reach on over to get a little coffee, and that's poured in your cup by a South American. Or maybe you decide that you want a little tea this morning, only to discover that that's poured in your cup by a Chinese. Or maybe you want a little cocoa, that's poured in your cup by a West African. Then you want a little bread and you reach over to get it, and that's given to you by the hands of an English-speaking farmer, not to mention the baker. Before you get through eating breakfast in the morning, you're dependent on more than half the world.”

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. From “The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life,” delivered at New Covenant Baptist Church in Chicago on April 9, 1967.

Find complete transcribed text at <http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/mlk/king/words/completelife.html>

“Look at the things in your living room or refrigerator and realize they were made by thousands of people on different continents. The lemons we buy at the grocery connect us with a food chain, with people coming up from Mexico, being sprayed by pesticides. It's easier to see just a lemon, but only when we see the whole line can we feel connectedness and responsibility.

—Barbara Kingsolver, writer. From her book: *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, Harper Collins (2007).

- After reading, ask the students how the two quotes reflect the work behind the tomato.

- Intermediate Reading PI 1, 2, 3, 4, 6; Writing PI 1, 2, 3, 4
- English Language Arts Standard 3: Language for Critical Analysis and Evaluation
 - Intermediate Reading PI 1, 3, 4; Writing PI 1, 2
- English Language Arts Standard 4: Language for Social Integration
 - Intermediate Listening/Speaking PI 1, 2; Reading/Writing PI 2, 3

VOCABULARY:

- **Farmer**
- **Farm worker**

- **Family farm**
- **Agribusiness**
- **Factory farm**
- **Coalition of Immokalee Workers**

CONCEPTS:

- **Migrant labor**
- **Human dignity**
- **Courage**
- **Fair Food**

TECHNOLOGY REQUIRED:

- Computer
- Projection equipment for online videos.

MATERIALS:

- Lucas Benitez Biography
<http://www.speaktruth.org/> Click Defenders/Click Interview/Scroll to Lucas Benitez
- Google video, Immokalee: From Slavery to Freedom
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=432032765491018200#>
- Editorials and op-ed pieces from NYS Newspapers on Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act
- Tomato

ACTIVITY 1:

- Distribute to students the biography of Lucas Benitez
<http://www.rfkcenter.org/print/248>
- Show students the video: Immokalee: *From Slavery to Freedom*
 - A look at the history of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, focusing on the successful Taco Bell boycott. You can choose to show sections of the video for a shorter presentation.
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=432032765491018200#>
- After viewing the video, discuss the following questions with the class:
 - How is Lucas Benitez a leader in human rights work for farm workers?
 - Describe the life of a tomato picker in Immokalee, Florida.
- The video states that tomato pickers will work 12 hours in the hot sun, in order to pick 4,000 pounds of tomatoes, which will earn them \$50 a day. What would the hourly wage be? How does this compare to the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour? How do the tomato growers get away with paying them such low wages?
 - How has the Coalition of Immokalee Workers changed the lives of the workers so far?
 - Why did the CIW target Taco Bell (a large purchaser of tomatoes) for a boycott? Why didn't they negotiate with the tomato growers?
 - What methods did the CIW use to help get the message out about the plight of the workers? Were these effective? Why or why not?

- Show students the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) website: www.ciw-online.org. There are wonderful photo essays, video clips of current actions. Since the Taco Bell victory in 2005, CIW had won victories from MacDonalds, Burger King, and food service giants Aramark and Sodexo. Their current campaigns are focusing on supermarket chains, such as Ahold, (Stop and Shop), Publix, Kroger, and Chipotle.

ACTIVITY 2:

- Ask the students the following questions:
 - What is the state of food production in the United States?
 - How are farm workers treated nationally?
- Have the following quote on the board or interactive whiteboard.
- Instruct the students to respond to the quote and discussion questions in their journal.

"Not everyone can afford to eat well in America, which is shameful, but most of us can: Americans spend, on average, less than 10 percent of their income on food, down from 24 percent in 1947, and less than the citizens of any other nation."

—Michael Pollan, "Unhappy Meals," *The New York Times Magazine*, January 28, 2007.

TEACHER TIP: Tell students that Pollan is a best-selling author of *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and other books and articles about food production in America.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

- Ask students the following questions prior to showing the Fair Food Project Web site:
 - Why do you think food in America is so cheap?
 - Who is paying the costs?
 - Would you be willing to pay more for your food so that people, animals and the environment were treated better?
- Show students the videos on the Fair Food Project website. They are excellent. <http://www.fairfoodproject.org/main/> There is a teacher and a student resource center with action guide. The section “About this Documentary” had other wonderful resources.
- After viewing the Web site, conduct a class discussion using the following questions:
 - What images did you find the most powerful?
 - Did anything in the movie surprise you?
 - What are some of the root causes of poor agricultural working conditions?
 - Even though sustainability is often defined as being environmentally sound, economically viable, and socially equitable, social equity is often left behind in discussions of sustainability and sustainable food. Why do you think this is?
 - When you buy food do you know how the workers who grew it were treated? Do you find it easy or difficult to get information about your food? Why?
 - What do you see as the most promising way to make change in terms of improving farm labor conditions? Legislation, organizing and unionizing, consumer support?
 - What are the pros and cons of each approach?
 - How can we have food that is fair to workers and affordable to consumers?
 - How can we support farmers with good labor conditions?
 - Immigration policy is one of the major barriers to better farm labor conditions. How can we work towards an immigration system that meets the needs of workers, their families, and employers? What might this system look like?
 - What do you see as the biggest barriers to a more fair food system?
 - What do you see as the most promising opportunities?
 - Where do you have power to make change? What might be some things you could do from where you are to get involved and support fair food?

ACTIVITY 3:

- Prior to assigning the students the editorials, ask the following questions:
 - How do you think farm workers treated in New York State?
 - Are they protected by fair labor laws locally?
- Assign students 2-3 editorials about the Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act. and decide their position on the legislation and what they think the next step should be.
- Ask the students the following questions:
 - What is an editorial?
 - What is an op-ed piece in a newspaper?
 - What is a blog?
 - How are these articles different from news articles?
 - How are these published in newspapers or online?
 - Who decides what is printed?
- Distribute to the students “This Must Be NY’s Final Harvest of Shame” op-ed NY Daily News November 26, 2009
 - http://www.nydailynews.com/opinions/2009/11/26/2009-11-26_this_must_be_new_yorks_final_harvest_of_shame.html#ixzz0xgVWNzaei
- Ask them to read the editorial.
- Lead the class in a discussion after reading, using the following questions:
 - What is the background of the author of this op-ed piece? What is her position on the Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act? Why?
 - Why do you think the author published this article on Thanksgiving day? What is the contrast she is making here?
 - What are some of the labor conditions the author describes for the farm workers? What are the reasons for these conditions?
 - Why do you think it has been so long since the labor abuses of farm workers have been exposed and nothing has changed?
- Distribute to the students “Don’t Kill Our Local Farms” op-ed in NY Post Jan. 23, 2010
 - http://www.nypost.com/f/print/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/don_kill_our_local_farms_Ji6VYXqZJLb4CFtNeQc3wK
- Ask them to read the editorial.

- After reading, lead the class in a discussion using the following questions:
 - Who is the author of the editorial? What is the author's position on the Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act? Why?
 - Who are the "special interest groups" described in the article?
 - According to the author, should farm workers have the same rights and protections as workers in other occupations? Why or why not?
 - According to the article who would "lose" if the Legislature gets involved in family farming practices? What does the author say would be the effects of the bill if passed?
 - The article claims that this bill would threaten the ability to provide local food for local people. What do you think?
- Distribute to the students "Same Old Politics Hurts N.Y. Farmworkers" *Times Union* January 29, 2010
 - <http://albarchive.merlinone.net/mweb/wmsql.wm.request?oneimage&imageid=9368953>
- Ask them to read the editorial.
- After reading, lead the class in a discussion using the following questions:
 - What is the background of the author of this op-ed piece? What is her position on the Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act? Why?
 - What did the author of the article predict? What actually happened to the bill to protect farm workers in New York state? Why?
 - What is the Farm Bureau's argument about changes in the rights for farm workers?
 - According to the author, why did the bill to protect farm workers' rights fail to pass?
 - How does California protect farm workers? Have labor protections in California agriculture hurt their business?
 - Why has it been so hard to achieve rights for farm workers?
- Assign the students to read a blog post, Lewis County Uncovered: Is this Darrel's Time" by Bruce Krug, a retired dairy farmer: <http://lewiscountyuncovered.blogspot.com/2010/03/is-this-darrels-time.html>
- After reading, lead the class in a discussion using the following questions:
 - What is the background of the author of this blog? What is his position on the Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act? Why?
 - According to the author, why are dairy farms going through a tough time?
 - What would the proposed law give farm workers?
 - Who has opposed rights for farm workers?
 - On what do large farms depend to survive?
 - Who does the author of the article point to as sharing the blame for the problems of farm workers?
 - According to the author, what are the other reasons this bill should be supported?
- Ask the students to record their answers to the following questions in their journals or notebooks.
 - When they have completed the task, lead a class discussion using the questions.
 - Which of the authors makes the most compelling argument?
 - Whom do you agree with the most?
 - Do you support the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act? Why or why not?
 - What can you do about it?
 - The legislation did not pass in 2010.
 - What do you think the next step should be?
 - Should we forget about this bill or keep trying?

TEACHER TIP: You may want to read aloud or show the students the *NY Daily News* editorial of Friday August 6, 2010, which explains why the bill failed and who did not vote for it after committing to it.

<http://www.nydailynews.com/fdcp?l282854107765>

BECOME A DEFENDER

- Respond to the following quote. Think of how it applies to some of the stories or articles we have read throughout this unit and how it applies to you personally.

“Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

—Senator Robert F. Kennedy, June 6th, 1966

Apply this quote to Lucas Benitez and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers.

- Show students this quote from Cesar Chavez, founder of the United Farm Workers Union, in 1984:

“All my life, I have been driven by one dream, one goal, one vision, to overthrow a farm labor system in this nation that treats farm workers as if they were not important human beings. Farm workers are not agricultural implements. They are not beasts of burden to be used and discarded.”

Ask, has Chavez’s dream been realized yet? Why or why not? What can we do to defend the rights of farm workers and make his dream come true? Present some of the following ideas for them to choose.

- On a personal level think about what you have done in your life to make a difference, and if you had one dream or one goal what would that be.
- Write a poem about child labor to share with your classmates and school. Send it to your local newspaper, or state representative, or Member of Congress. You may also be able to publish your poem on the web. Make sure you include information from at least two sources. Your poem should be at least 20 lines.
- Create a poster which teaches the issue to other students. You must use at least 2 sources, Write the information IN YOUR OWN WORDS (no plagiarizing) LARGE enough to be read from a distance, and have graphics to illustrate your points. Your poster will be prominently displayed in the school, or you can send your poster to your state senator to encourage him or her to sponsor Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about the injustices faced by farm workers and what readers can do about it. You may want to encourage the readers to support the Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act.
- Create a PowerPoint presentation to teach others about what you have learned. E-mail a copy to a government official or executive in the food industry who has the power to make a change.
- On a local or national level write to the President of Subway asking them to support CIW to pay an extra penny per pound for tomatoes:

Mr. Fred DeLuca, President
Subway Headquarters
325 Bic Drive
Milford, CT 06460

The next time you visit Stop and Shop, hand the manager a letter asking their company to partner with CIW to end slavery in Florida tomato fields. You can download a sample letter at

<http://www.ciw-online.org/tools.html> .

- Write a letter to your New York state senator or Assembly member to ask them to sponsor the Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act. You can find his or her address at <http://www.state.ny.us/>
- On a global level, research other industries and places around the world where labor rights are violated.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES

- Read “The Circuit” by Francisco Jimenez, a short story told through the voice of a migrant worker child, written by a former migrant worker.
- Have students read the oral histories of migrant workers in New York state. Some compelling stories are available in the Sowing Seeds for Justice Dinner Journal, November 2008.

TELL US ABOUT IT

The Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights is sponsoring an annual contest honoring a student who submits the best advocacy activity based upon the lesson studied. A goal of the lesson is to instill into each student that one voice, one person can make monumental changes in the lives of many. Tell us how you “Became a Defender”!

THE CRITERIA FOR THE CONTEST ARE:

- A one-page summary of the advocacy activity
- Digitized copies of materials that can be sent electronically
- Photos of the activity (please include parental consent form)
- A one-page summary of how the activity made a change in the lives of one person or many

THE PRIZES INCLUDE:

- A week long “virtual” internship at RFK Center
- An opportunity to meet the defender through a SKYPE visit,
- A visit from Kerry Kennedy or a defender to your school
- A poster of a *Speak Truth to Power* Human Rights Defender
- A donation of a signed copy of *Speak Truth to Power* for the school library

The application and instructions for entry can be downloaded here ([link for materials](#))

The deadline for all applications is the third week in November.

The winning student and teacher will be notified by the last week of January.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Labor-Religion Coalition of New York State

<http://www.labor-religion.org/>

The Labor Religion Coalition of New York State works in partnership with social justice organizations across the state. They are housed in NYSUT headquarters and work closely with NYSUT on social justice education.

Labor-Religion, Rural and Migrant Ministry and the Justice for Farmworkers movement

<http://ruralmigrantministry.org/>

<http://www.justiceforfarmworkers.org/>

Labor-Religion partners with Rural and Migrant Ministry and the Justice for Farmworkers movement to bring about fair labor for NYS farm workers and lobby for the passage of the Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act.

The Alliance for Fair Food (AFF)

<http://www.allianceforfairfood.org/>

AEF is a network of human rights, religious, student, labor, sustainable food and agriculture, environmental and grassroots organizations who work in partnership with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), an internationally recognized human rights organization working to eliminate modern-day slavery and sweatshop labor conditions from Florida agriculture.

Student/Farmworker Alliance (SFA)

<http://sfalliance.org/>

SFA is a national network of students and youth organizing with farm workers to eliminate sweatshop conditions and modern-day slavery in the fields.

Heroes and Saints & Other Plays by Cherríe Moraga

http://westendpress.org/catalog/books/heroes_and_saints.htm

This collection of Moraga's first three successful plays established her as a leading Chicana playwright. *Heroes and Saints* has won particular critical acclaim due to its intervention in the history of the Chicano people. It grows out of the struggle of the United Farm Workers in 1988 and the revelations of a so-called cancer cluster in McFarland, California, in which many Chicano children were diagnosed with cancer or stricken with birth defects.

Interfaith Action

<http://www.interfaithact.org/>

Interfaith Action educates and animates people of faith to partner with the CIW in its efforts to improve wages in the fields, and put an end to modern-day slavery in the agricultural industry.

Farmworker Justice

<http://fwjustice.org/>

Farmworker Justice is a nonprofit organization that seeks to empower migrant and seasonal farm workers to improve their living and working conditions, immigration status, health, occupational safety and access to justice.

Video: Fighting for Justice for Farmworkers

http://store.bioneers.org/product_p/2008-benitez.htm

Equal Exchange

<http://www.equalexchange.coop/resources>

Michael Pollen

<http://michaelpollan.com>

Michael Pollen is a food activist, and author of many best-selling books about the industrialization and corporatization of our food supply. His website has some great articles, mostly appropriate for high school students.

Food Inc.

<http://www.foodincmovie.com/>

The documentary *Food Inc.* (2008) is also about the industrialization and corporatization of our food supply. It shows some shocking videos of factory farms and the conditions of the farm workers who labor on them.