

Study Guide "Crystal City '69"

A Synopsis:

The area now known as Crystal City was carved from ground purchased by two wealthy Anglo land developers in Zavala County in 1905. Its population quickly grew to become a home for many migrant workers, and small farmers, mainly people of Mexican descent. Making a living was based was cruel and unjust; based solely on the power and the whims of the wealthy ranchers and farmers. The large ranches operated on a system called "hacienda", one closely resembling the slave plantations of the deep south-the only real difference being that the haciendas' laborers or their family members were not literally bought or sold by the landowners. By the 1930's they comprised over 80% of the population while Anglos slightly less than 20%. This fact however, was not reflected in the political representation which was overwhelmingly dominated by the Anglo minority. Discriminatory voter registration practices, election fraud and government manipulation effectively denied the reality of majority rule. The public schools also reflected this upside down reality: the teachers, administrators, and school board, were overwhelmingly Anglo, the use of Spanish within the school was forbidden and a punitive act. Cheerleaders, homecoming queens, and other student representations were either non-existent or a small token.

In 1969, students-mainly several female senior class members-decided 'enough was enough' and they began what quickly became a much wider movement for change. This small group of student activists began collecting the signatures of fellow students for a petition drive that insisted upon an end to discriminatory policies and practices. The school principal rejected their demands, tossed their petition into the trash can, refusing to even consider their concerns. The students refused to give up; they stood tall, and took further action. They began to organize, to mobilize and to press on for equality and for fair treatment. Their brave efforts became a sparkplug for the community that generating momentous parental support, a successful school walkout, and the eventual acceptance and adherence to their demands. But things did not end there. Those successes led to a dramatic increase in community involvement and a sweeping change in Crystal City, within Zavala county's political representation and beyond. Within three short years the evidence of majority rule and of a more viable democracy became a concrete reality throughout South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley

Refusing to Stand Silently By

Vocabulary words: Define the following words and use each in a sentence

Amnesty

Boycott

Chicano/a

Gringo

Hacienda

La Raza Unida

Petition

Self-determination

What did you learn from the play?

1. How did the Anglo minority manage to control a town that was mostly Mexican American? Do you think similar things are going on today?
2. How did the characters in the play become involved in community activism? What motivated them to become involved? What kind of help did they need and receive while participating in the movement? What kept them from giving up or becoming discouraged when things were difficult? How do activists face disappointment after disappointment and manage to keep going forward?
3. How important is cultural identification to the characters in the play? How did cultural identity affect the gains or the outcomes of the Crystal City movement? How did cultural identity impact the larger movement for self-determination? Does self-identification as either Chicano, Hispanic, Mexican-American, Latino/a help or hinder the characters in the play and their movement?
4. What adult/parent support or the lack of support were present in the Crystal City movement? Does this support or lack of support persist today? How? Why or why not?
5. Does self-identification (whether it be in terms of race, culture, lifestyle or interests) help or hinder you? Do parents help or hinder you in fulfilling your dreams and meeting your goals?

Student Activity:

List what do you believe are the most crucial issues facing the world today (for example, hunger, global warming, AIDS)? Then decide which one or two are the most important issues to you. What do you know about that particular issue? Very little? Some? A lot? If you know a lot about that issue, what are you doing about it? If you know nothing or very little, how can you learn more about it? Finally, what further actions can you take to work on this issue?

Note: Any action steps don't need to be world sweeping, or on a large scale. In fact, consider even 'small steps' like getting to know or smiling at a person you don't usually interact with (as an active response to an issue or concern like racism, or intolerance) or by registering to vote or becoming involved in a community organization (as an active response to an issue or concern about poverty, government, or apathy), or taking a meal or a dish to an elderly couple in the neighborhood or to a homeless person (as an active response to world hunger or homelessness).

Resources-YOUTH WEBSITES: Visit any of the web sites below and discover how youth today are building connections between cultures and making a difference within their communities.

globalyouthconnect.org

Global Youth Connect is a global youth movement that seeks to build and support a community of youth who are actively promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to educate and inspire the next generation to work for peaceful change.

dosomething.org

Do Something is a nationwide organization, providing the support to help young people make a difference in their communities. The Do Something website is a place where young people can learn more about the causes that matter to them and how to take action in the world.

mixitup.org

Mix It Up is a nationwide program that believes in the power of youth to create and sustain real change. It provides free tools and ideas to help youth break down the walls of division in their schools and communities.

takingitglobal.org

TakingITGlobal.org is a global online community, providing youth with inspiration to make a difference, a source of information on issues, opportunities to take action, and a bridge to get involved locally, nationally and globally.

wordscanheal.org

Words Can Heal is a national campaign to eliminate verbal violence, curb gossip and promote the healing power of words to enhance relationships at every level.

oneworldeducation.org

One World Education provides free online teaching resources designed to bring youth perspectives about culture and social issues into the classroom. One World invites students to share their written reflections about an issue or cause with which they feel a personal connection, and then creates lesson plans based on the topics students write about.