

Young Portrait Explorers: Dolores Huerta and César Chávez



Learning Objective: Learn about civil rights leaders Dolores Huerta and César Chávez and the Aztec symbolism in their portrait.

Portrait Discussion:

Spend 30 seconds letting your eyes wander through the painting *The Return to Aztlán*.

Faces: How many portraits do you see in this painting? At the top we see two large faces. These are Miguel Hidalgo (*top left*) and José María Morelos (*top right*), who fought for justice and freedom in Mexico's struggle for **independence** (freedom for a group to choose its own leaders and rules) many years ago. In the center we see Emiliano Zapata, who led the fight for freedom and the rights of farmers and workers in Mexico. The final two faces are César Chávez (*middle left*) and Dolores Huerta (*bottom right*) – two civil rights leaders in the United States. Each of these five faces represents someone who tried to help others.

Symbols: What other faces can you spot in this portrait? Zoom in to see tiny, colorful faces throughout the painting. What colors stand out to you? What do the colors remind you of? These faces represent **Aztec** (a large group that, for hundreds of years, was the most powerful group in what is now Central America) masks. The Aztecs were **Indigenous** (Native) to what is now Mexico. They called their mythological homeland Aztlán. Their laws, writings, and architecture are a source of pride for many people whose families come from Mexico. The Aztecs created ornate masks for a variety of purposes, including religious and ceremonial traditions.

Notice the black image in the center. This eagle became the symbol for a farmworkers' group called the United Farm Workers (UFW). The United Farm Workers began as an organization of mostly Mexican and Filipino American **farmworkers** (people whose job is to plant and harvest fruits and vegetables). In the 1960s, Dolores Huerta and César Chávez led peaceful protests by farmworkers as they demanded safer working conditions, fair pay, and better treatment. The black eagle and the phrase ***¡Sí se puede!*** (Yes, we can!) united the protesters. It is interesting to note that if the black eagle is turned upside down, it looks like an Aztec pyramid – a reminder of the powerful **heritage** (a family's history, culture, and traditions) of many Latinx people.

Historical Context: *César Chávez was a farmworker in California who became a leader in local organizations to support farmworkers and other workers in their fight for civil rights. Dolores Huerta was a schoolteacher who quit teaching because, "I couldn't tolerate 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." By the 1960s, Huerta and Chávez were leading protests and strikes and helping change laws in order to protect workers and their families. They were united in this work until Chávez's death in 1993. Huerta continues to fight for civil rights.*

Related Children's Book:

Side by Side: The Story of Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez/ Lado a lado: la historia de Dolores Huerta y César Chávez by Monica Brown

Activity: Group Portrait

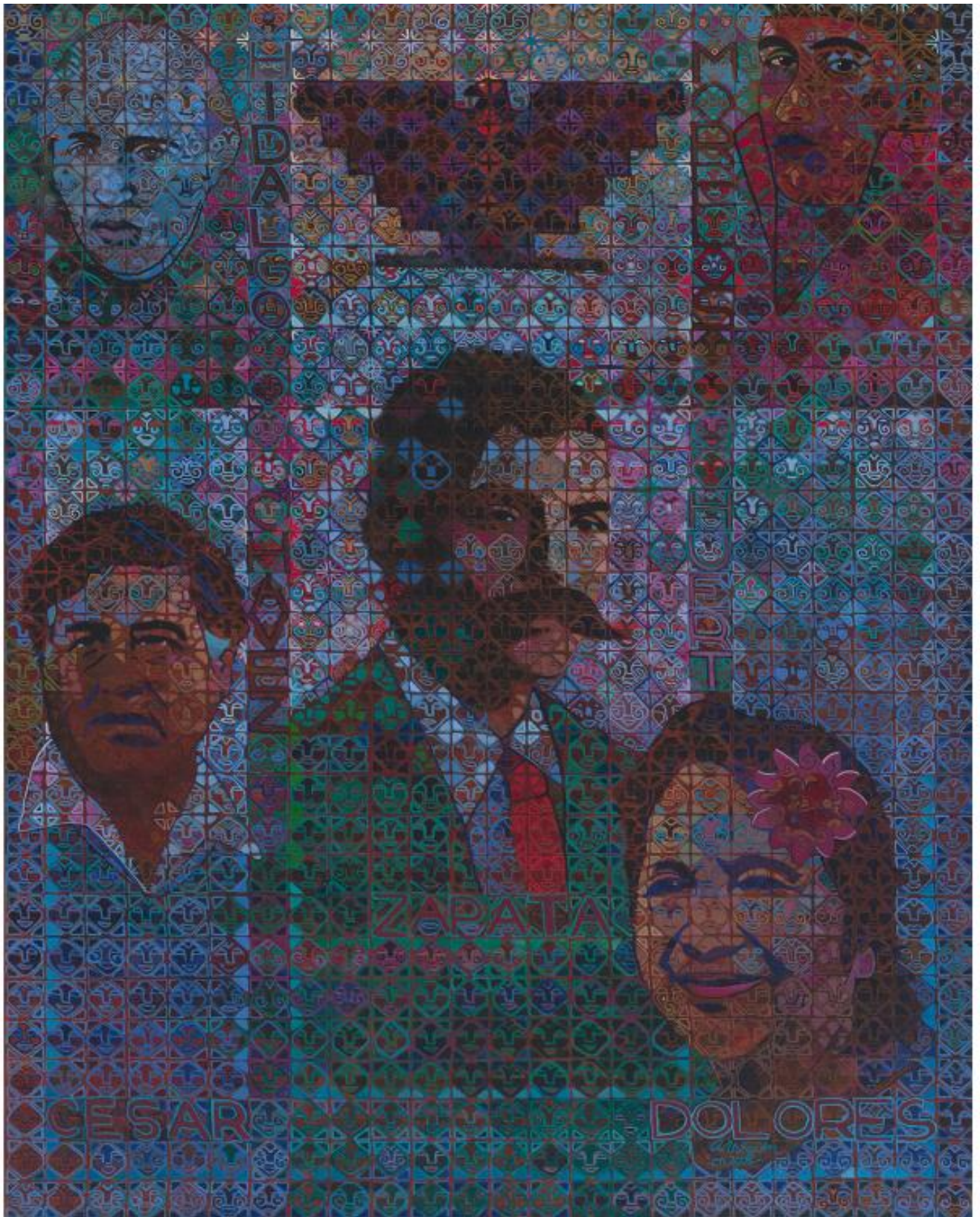
Materials:

Paper, pencil, and coloring instruments

Instructions:

Draw a portrait of people (historical figures, family, friends) who have something in common:

- Heritage
- Goals
- Talents or careers



The Return to Aztlán by Alfredo Arreguin, oil on canvas, 2006. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Felix Arreguin Velez and Catalina Toledo de Arreguin

Find the portrait on our website, here: https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.2007.214