



Script for Teacher

1.

San Antonio's most bitter and protracted labor struggle during the Great Depression was the pecan shellers' strike.

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Pecan shelling, the least desirable of all factory work, was done almost exclusively by Tejanos. Men handled the "cracking," or breaking of the shells,...

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...while women did the more tedious work of picking the nutmeat from the shell. In the process, workers cut and bruised their fingers and suffered respiratory illnesses from inhaling particles of pecan dust.

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Children as young as eight years old worked at the factories. A pecan shelling "factory" might consist of nothing more than a rented shed furnished with wooden tables and benches.

In 1938 companies announced a wage reduction to four cents a pound.

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Six thousand pecan workers walked away from their jobs—a huge number for the time period, when San Antonio's population was one-fourth of its present size.

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Twenty-one-year-old Emma Tenayuca rallied the workers with rousing speeches.

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Several hundred were arrested. The strike gathered wide community support.

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The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom set up a kitchen, feeding over one thousand strikers a day.

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During the strike, charges of police misconduct abounded—tear gassing, clubbing,...

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harassment, brutality, and threats of deportation. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sought an injunction...

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...to stop the mass arrests, but their request was denied.

After weeks of conflict, the strikers won an improved contract of seven cents a pound.

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In many ways it was a bittersweet victory. Small operators responded to the new wages by closing up shop...

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...while large operators converted to machine shelling. Jobs for pecan shellers fell by 75 percent.

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Nonetheless, the strike empowered Tejano laborers to believe that their voice could be heard at City Hall. They resolved to reject substandard conditions and drew inspiration from the strike for new organizing efforts.