

USA 41

MENDEZ V. WESTMINSTER 1947

TOWARD
IN OUR
EQUALITY
SCHOOLS

2007

1. PRE-READING

Look at the picture.

- ▶ What country is the stamp from?
- ▶ How much does the stamp cost?
- ▶ What names do you see on the stamp?
- ▶ What are the two young people doing?

Read the title of the story. Look at the picture again.

- ▶ What do you think this story is about?
- ▶ Can you guess what happens?

The School and the Stamp

In October 2007, post offices in the United States began selling a new stamp. On the stamp, there is a drawing of two strong young people with black hair. They are reading a book, and a bright sun is shining on them.

There is a true story behind that stamp. The story begins in 1945 with a man named Gonzalo Mendez.

Gonzalo Mendez was born in Mexico and came to the United States when he was a little boy. He dropped out of school at age ten to become a farm worker. He and his wife, Felicitas, had three children and owned a small but successful café in Santa Ana, California.

In 1945, Gonzalo heard about an asparagus farm that was for rent. The farm was in Westminster, California, about seven miles from Santa Ana. Gonzalo was excited about renting the farm; this was his chance to be a real farmer, not a farm worker. He and Felicitas talked it over, and they decided to move to Westminster.

After the Mendez family moved to Westminster, Felicitas took the three children to an elementary school there. That is when the story behind the stamp really begins. Felicitas found out that her children could not attend the school. They had to attend the "Mexican school."

The "Mexican school" was in an old building. The textbooks were old, too. When the children came home and described the school to their father, he told them, "You will not go to the 'Mexican school.' You will go to the other school."

Gonzalo talked to other Latino parents in Westminster. "The other elementary school is better than the 'Mexican school,'" he told them. "Let's go to court. Let's fight to get our children into that other school."

The Latino parents agreed with Gonzalo: The other elementary school was better in every way. But the "Mexican school" was closer. "Our children will stay at the 'Mexican school,' close to home," the Latino parents told Gonzalo.

So Gonzalo decided to fight alone. He spent all his savings to hire a lawyer, and he went to court.

Latino families in other cities in Southern California heard about Gonzalo Mendez. Their children, too, had to attend "Mexican schools." Four Latino families decided to help Gonzalo. They gave him money for the lawyer and went to court with him.

The judge decided that the Latino families were right: Separate schools for Latino children were unfair. At that time, there were 5,000 Latino children who had to attend "Mexican schools" in Southern California. After the judge's decision, they could attend any school.

The Mendez children went to elementary school and then to high school; some went to college, too.

In 2007, the Mendez family celebrated the new stamp, which they liked very much. They especially liked the way the two young readers bend like plants toward the sun. "That's how it is," they said. "Education brings light into people's lives. This small stamp tells our whole story."

2. VOCABULARY

Which words have the same meaning as the words in *italics*? Write the letter of the answer on the line.

- d 1. There is a *picture* of two strong young people on the stamp.
2. Gonzalo *stopped going to* school when he was ten years old.
3. The Mendez children *were students at* the "Mexican school."
4. The Latino families in Westminster *thought Gonzalo was right*.

- a. dropped out of
- b. agreed with Gonzalo
- c. attended
- d. drawing

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The judge decided that the Latino families were right: Separate schools for Latino children were unfair. At that time, there were 5,000 Latino children who had to attend "Mexican schools" in Southern California. After the judge's decision, they could attend any school.

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3. COMPREHENSION

◆ UNDERSTANDING THE MAIN IDEAS

Complete the sentences. Write your answers on the lines.

1. When does the story behind the stamp begin?
It begins in 1945 with a man named Gonzalo _____.
2. Why was Gonzalo excited about renting the asparagus farm?
It was his chance to be a real _____, not a _____.
3. What did Felicitas do after the Mendez family moved to Westminster?
She took her _____ to an _____ school there.
4. Where was the "Mexican school"?
It was in an _____ building.
5. What did Gonzalo Mendez tell the Latino parents in Westminster?
He said, "Let's _____ to get our children into that other _____."
6. Why did the Latino families in Westminster want their children to stay at the "Mexican school"?
It was _____ to home.
7. How did the four Latino families help Gonzalo?
They gave him money for the _____ and went to _____ with him.
8. What did the judge decide?
The judge decided that _____ schools for Latino children were _____.

◆ UNDERSTANDING PRONOUNS

Look at the pronouns. (They are in *italics*.) Write the letter of the answer on the line.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <u> a </u> 1. <i>They</i> began selling a new stamp in October 2007. | a. post offices in the United States |
| <u> </u> 2. A bright sun is shining on <i>them</i> . | b. the textbooks at the "Mexican school" |
| <u> </u> 3. <i>They</i> had to go to "Mexican schools." | c. Latino children in Southern California |
| <u> </u> 4. <i>They</i> were old. | d. the young people on the stamp |
| <u> </u> 5. Gonzalo talked to <i>them</i> . | e. Latino parents in Westminster |

◆ FINDING INFORMATION

Read each question. Find the answer in the paragraph below and circle it. Write the number of the question above your answer.

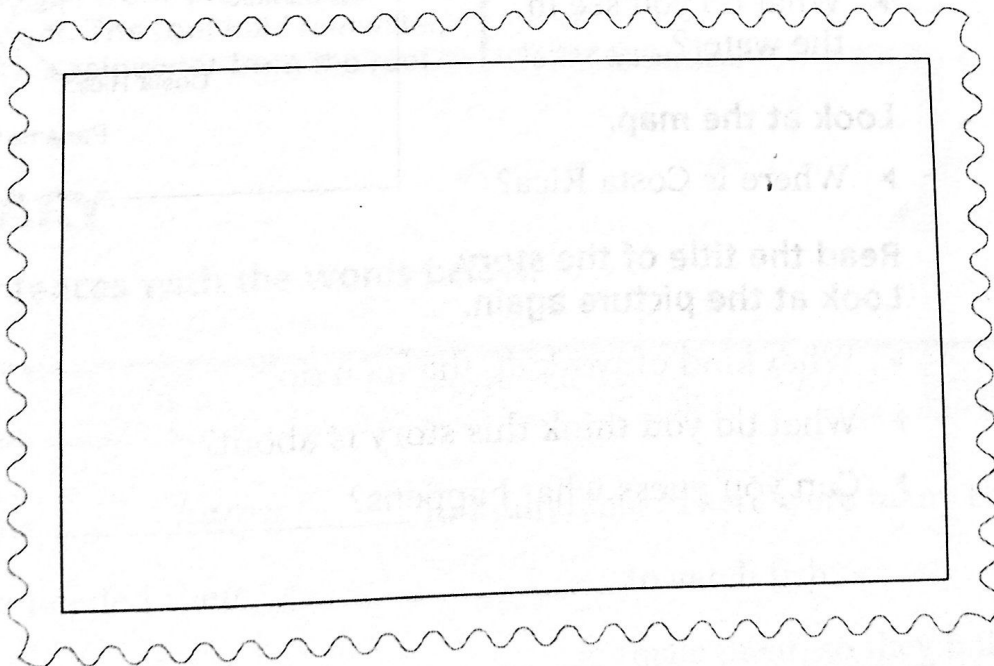
1. Where was Gonzalo Mendez born?
2. When did he come to the United States?
3. How old was he when he dropped out of school?
4. Why did he drop out of school?
5. What was his wife's name?
6. How many children did they have?
7. What did they own?
8. Where was it?

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4. DISCUSSION/WRITING

Imagine this: You are an artist, and you are going to design a postage stamp. Think about important people, places, and things in your community. Which one will you put on the stamp?

In the space below, draw a picture of an important person, place, or thing in your community. Complete the sentences below the picture. Then share your picture and your sentences with a partner.



This is _____ . He/She/It is important
because _____ .