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## Speaking Out for Change

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### Ready

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Today's article is about Emma Tenayuca. She helped workers in the 1900s. What do you think of this idea?

**How can we make work fair and safe? Listen to what the workers say.**

Agree

Disagree

Explain why you voted the way you did.

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## Read

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**SAN ANTONIO, Texas** (Achieve3000, June 20, 2022). How do you bring about change? Emma Tenayuca used her voice. She wanted to help Mexican American workers.

Tenayuca was born in 1916. She grew up in San Antonio, Texas. She was just 13 years old when the Great Depression began. It was a time when many people lost jobs and money. Tenayuca's family and neighbors struggled to get by.

The government made programs to help people find work. But Mexican Americans were left out. They often could not join labor unions either. Labor unions are groups that fight for workers to be treated fairly.

Tenayuca saw how the workers were treated. She knew it was wrong. And she wanted to change it.

At 16, she took part in her first strike. It was at a cigar factory. Workers wanted better pay. Tenayuca was arrested, but she didn't stop fighting for change.

In fact, Tenayuca began working with many labor unions. She gave speeches and led strikes. Workers had a special name for her. It was "La Pasionaria de Texas" (The Passionate One of Texas). They knew she could help them.

In 1938, Tenayuca led another strike. It was for pecan workers. Pecans are a kind of nut. And they were a big business in San Antonio. The city had 400 pecan factories. Most of the workers were Mexican American women. But they were paid very little. And they worked in rooms with few windows. This made many of them sick.

Tenayuca led 12,000 workers through the streets. It was the biggest strike in the city's history. Pecan factory owners finally agreed to pay their workers more money.

This was a big win! Tenayuca's work helped start a movement. It made things better for Mexican American workers. She showed that anyone can speak out for change.

### Think about and discuss these questions:

- What passages in the article help you better visualize, or picture, the events described?
- What qualities or skills do you think helped Tenayuca become a labor leader?

### Dictionary

**arrest** (*verb*) to take in someone who may have broken a law

**factory** (*noun*) a place where things are made to sell

**movement** (*noun*) work by a group of people who are all trying to get the same thing done (such as change laws)

**passionate** (*adjective*) full of feeling or showing strong feelings

**program** (*noun*) something that is set up to fix a problem or get something done, often to help people

**strike** (*noun*) when people stop working because they don't like the way things are at work



Photo credit: San Antonio Light/UTSA/San Antonio Express-News/ ZUMA

Called "The Passionate One," Emma Tenayuca tirelessly fought for the rights of Mexican American workers.

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## Respond

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### PART 1

#### Question 1

The article talks mainly about \_\_\_\_\_.

- (A) how Tenayuca helped Mexican American workers
- (B) why workers had a special name for Tenayuca
- (C) how the Great Depression hurt Tenayuca's family
- (D) why Tenayuca took part in the cigar factory strike

#### Question 2

Think about the article. Why did the pecan workers go on strike?

- (A) Because they didn't like pecans
- (B) Because Tenayuca was arrested
- (C) Because they were paid very little
- (D) Because Tenayuca gave a speech

#### Question 3

Think about the article. The reader can tell that \_\_\_\_\_.

- (A) pecan factories in Texas were a lot better than cigar factories
- (B) Mexican American workers were not treated fairly
- (C) the government had programs to help all Americans
- (D) Mexican American workers thought Tenayuca was too young to help

#### Question 4

Which means the **opposite** of *arrest*, as it is used in the article?

- (A) stop
- (B) trick
- (C) chase
- (D) free

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## Reflect

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Now that you have read the article, indicate whether you agree or disagree with this statement.

**How can we make work fair and safe? Listen to what the workers say.**

Agree

Disagree

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**Write**

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Why did Tenayuca work with labor unions? How did her work make a difference? Use facts from the article.