

SI, SE PUEDE!
THE LIFE OF DOLORES HUERTA

A Play in One Act

Written By
Chris Mannel

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

Narrator
 Title Card Narrator
 Mother, a migrant farm worker
 Daughter, an eleven year old girl
 Son, a nine year old boy
 Father, a migrant farm worker
 Alice Chavez, Dolores' mother
 Little Dolores, a twelve year old girl
 Miss Spector, a high school teacher
 Dolores Huerta, a young Mexican-American woman
 Manny/Maria, an elementary student
 Evelyn/Eduardo, an elementary student
 Alejandro/Adela, an elementary student
 Jesus/Jacinta, an elementary student
 Principal, an elementary school administrator
 Assemblyman, a California state legislator
 State Senator, a California elected official
 Government Aide, an assistant in Sacramento
 Lawyer, an attorney in Sacramento
 Judge, elected member of the California State Judiciary
 Chief of Staff, an executive assistant
 Cesar Chavez, union leader and community organizer
 Migrant Farm Workers, men and women
 Supporters, members of the United Farm Workers union
 Farmer, a farm owner in the Central Valley
 Policemen, uniformed officers from Delano
 Committee Members, men and women of the state assembly
 Leroy Gaylen, Sheriff of Kern County, California
 Robert Kennedy, former United States Attorney General
 Angry Owner, a disgruntled farmer
 Farm Worker, a Spanish speaking migrant
 Farm Owner, a grape farmer from the Central Valley
 Barack Hussein Obama, the 44th President of the United States
 Marine, an United States soldier

SETTING

California's Central Valley, 1942-2012

SI SE PUEDE! THE LIFE OF DOLORES HUERTA

Note: All Spanish dialogue is translated into English in parentheses directly afterwards.

SCENE ONE

NARRATOR

"Dolores [Huerta] es absolutamente intrépida, física y emocionalmente." -- Cesar Chavez.
("Dolores [Huerta] is absolutely fearless, physically and emotionally.") -- Cesar Chavez.

The CURTAIN RISES on the farm fields of Central California; grapes, lettuce, etc. Stage left there is a small HOUSE with a SIGN that reads 'El Motel'.

The TITLE CARD NARRATOR appears stage right with card -- STOCKTON, CALIFORNIA 1942.

A family of five (FATHER, MOTHER, SON, DAUGHTER and NIECE) enter from stage right; tired, scared and hungry.

MOTHER

Are you sure this woman will help us Papi? No tenemos dinero. (We have no money.)

DAUGHTER

Tengo tanta hambre... (I'm so hungry).

SON

Yo tambien. (Me too). I can't keep walking Papa, estoy cansado. (I'm tired.)

NIECE

She will not help us, no one has.

FATHER

Paciencia niños, (Patience children.) I have heard this woman is kind, ella nos ayudara. (She will help us.)

The Father knocks on the front door of the Motel. The door opens to reveal ALICE CHAVEZ (Dolores' Mother) and LITTLE DOLORES (age 12).

FATHER

Buenas noches Senora, señorita. (Good evening Mrs., Miss.) Soy Juan, mi esposa Leticia, mis hijos Yolanda y Miguel. (I am Juan, this is my wife Leticia, my children Yolanda, and Miguel, my niece Maria.) We are simple farm workers. The owner refuses to pay us until we have worked for one month, and we have no more money from our last job. Por favor, no tendras una cama para mi esposa e hijos? (Please, do you have a bed for my wife and children?)

ALICE

Of course Senor. Tenemos una cama para todos ustedes. (We have a bed for all of you.) There is also food inside. Please come in, por favor ven en.

The family nods and exits stage left, politely saying 'thank you/gracias' and 'God bless you/Dios te bendiga' to Alice.

Little Dolores tugs on her mother's sleeve.

LITTLE DOLORES

Mama, they said they had no money. How will they pay you?

ALICE

No te preocupes hija. (It's no problem sweetheart). Money is not important when you can afford to give.

LITTLE DOLORES

But they are strangers, they could be criminals, why should we help them?

ALICE

Criminals? An empty pocket and hungry stomach does not make you 'un criminal'.

(pause)

Dolores, my mother, your Abuela used to say -- *"When you see that something needs to be done, especially someone needs help, you have to help them. And don't expect any reward for what you've done because what you're doing is a reward in itself. And if you expect a reward, then you take away the grace."*

LITTLE DOLORES

Yes Mama.

ALICE

Bueno, mi amor. (Good my love.) Now off to bed with you. Tomorrow is school, and you will show them how smart you are, mi nina apasionada. (*'PassionFlower'*).

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE TWO

LITTLE DOLORES

"When I got into high school, it was really segregated. There were the real rich and the real poor. I later realized we were poor too and I got hit with a lot of racial discrimination."

Lights rise on inside a high school classroom. The STUDENTS are all finishing their work on the desks when the BELL RINGS. The students rise to leave.

Dolores, seated in the back, stands and begins to exit when her teacher, MISS SPECTOR, calls out to her.

MISS SPECTOR

Dolores, may I have a word please?

DOLORES

Yes of course Miss Spector.

MISS SPECTOR

This essay you turned in -- did you write it? Yes or no, be truthful.

DOLORES

Yes I wrote it. Is there something wrong?

MISS SPECTOR

Perhaps. It's good. *Too good, in fact.*

DOLORES

Too good? I don't understand. You said to try and make every paper different. I worked hard to do that.

Miss Spector stands up to glare at Dolores. Dolores steps back, shy.

MISS SPECTOR

I don't believe you. A little brown girl like yourself, using such big words, it doesn't feel right.

DOLORES

Please, I didn't cheat, that is my essay. I wrote every word. I promise.

MISS SPECTOR

I'm not convinced. Because of this, I'll have to give you a 'C' for the final class grade.

DOLORES

A 'C'?!? But I've gotten 'A's all year, in all my work!

MISS SPECTOR

I'm not so sure it was your work. Now move along before I report my suspicions to the Principal. Dismissed.

Miss Spector points to the door.
Dolores exits, her head down.

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE THREE

LITTLE DOLORES

"[When I became a teacher myself], I had students who didn't have proper clothing or shoes because of the poor wages their parents made. They were sick because their family had no health insurance... I thought I could do more by organizing [their parents] than by trying to teach their hungry children."

Lights rise on an elementary school classroom. There are about 10 STUDENTS seated at their desks with DOLORES (now their teacher) in front of the chalkboard.

DOLORES

Good morning, buenas dias. Today we will be starting with mathematics. Por favor, abra el libro de matematicas. (Please open your math textbook.)

Students do as they are told.
Dolores continues with writing on the board. She turns back around to the class.

DOLORES

Can someone tell me how to divide 10 into 2 equal parts?

No students answer, all looking around at each other.

DOLORES

Que es la mitad de diez? (How much is half of ten?)

Still no response from anyone. One student, MANNY (or MARIA), has his/her head down, obviously tired.

DOLORES

Manny/Maria? Amigo, estas bien? (Friend, are you alright?)

MANNY/MARIA

No Maestra, no me siento bien. (Teacher, I don't feel well.)

Another student (EVELYN/EDUARDO) raises her hand.

EVELYN/EDUARDO

Maestra, Manny worked all night with his papa (his father) in the fields.

DOLORES

Evelyn/Eduardo, take Manny to the school nurse.

Evelyn/Eduardo escorts Manny off stage right. Dolores notices something about two other students.

DOLORES

Alejandro/Adela, Jesus/Jacinta -- where are your shoes? Ha olvidado sus zapaticos? (Did you forget your shoes?)

ALEJANDRO/ADELA

No Maestra, both our shoes don't fit anymore.

JESUS/JACINTA

Mi madre dice que tenemos que esperar hasta que pueda pagarlo. (My mother says we have to wait until she can afford it.)

DOLORES

Boy and girls, who has eaten today?

STUDENT

(the only one raising their hand, excited)

I had a great breakfast this morning!

The entire class gives the Student a dirty look.

There is a KNOCK at the door. The PRINCIPAL sticks his head in.

PRINCIPAL

Good morning Students, Miss Dolores.

DOLORES

Good morning. Principal, tiene un momento para hablar? (Do you have a moment to speak?)

PRINCIPAL

What is it this time? Don't tell me the children are hungry again.

DOLORES

The children have no shoes sir. Is there some kind of clothing voucher we can give them?

PRINCIPAL

This is a school, not a charity. Their parents drink away their money, this is why these people are poor.

DOLORES

These people?

(pause)

I've been doing some serious thinking sir and I can't do this anymore.

PRINCIPAL

Can't do what?

DOLORES

Be a teacher here.

PRINCIPAL

What? You're a fine teacher, the students seem to love you!

DOLORES

That's not the problem sir. I'm in the wrong place. These boys and girls don't need me, their parents do. The parents can barely take care of their children. They need to be organized, to be more aware of their rights.

PRINCIPAL

Rights? For farm workers? That will never happen...

DOLORES

We will see about that. I'm leaving sir. Immediately.

PRINCIPAL

Wait a second, you can't just leave me right now!

DOLORES

I'm sorry, but yes I can. Si puedo. (Yes I can.)

She hands him the chalk and eraser and exits, leaving everyone dumbfounded.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE FOUR

LITTLE DOLORES

"I knew nothing about lobbying the day before I began it. CSO (Community Service Organization) just sent me [to Sacramento, to lobby the legislature into passing laws for poor people], paying us [with] nickels and dimes, and said 'You can do it!'"

Lights rise on outside the state capital building in Sacramento. Dolores waits on the steps with her clipboard, ready to approach anyone.

AN ASSEMBLYMAN exits the building, Dolores hurries to speak to him.

DOLORES

Excuse me Assemblyman, a moment of your time please?

ASSEMBLYMAN

What a pretty little thing... Are you a reporter?

DOLORES

No sir, I'm with CSO Stockton, and we'd like your support for disability insurance for farm workers--

ASSEMBLYMAN

A lobbyist? For farm workers? Not interested!

He scurries away. Dolores turns, approaches a STATE SENATOR walking by.

DOLORES

Senator, a bill for your needed support, aid for the Blind?

STATE SENATOR

There's enough help already, it can wait!

Suddenly a GOVERNMENT AIDE appears, she walks next to him, showing him her clipboard.

DOLORES

Please *Senor(a)*, a bill for Spanish versions of government documents and ballots?

GOVERNMENT AIDE

Leave me alone lady! Try learning English instead!

Dolores encounters a series of Sacramento personalities in her lobbying; a LAWYER, a JUDGE, a CHIEF OF STAFF. Each one brushes off Dolores as she pleads her case.

DOLORES

Disability assistance?

LAWYER

No!

DOLORES

Removal of citizen requirements for public assistance?

JUDGE

Forget about it!

DOLORES

Resident Aliens eligible for old age pensions?

CHIEF OF STAFF

Never going to happen!

DOLORES

(to the Audience)

At least that's what they told me. And yet, by the end of 1961, I had helped pass 15 bills through the state legislature. Si su puede...

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE FIVE

LITTLE DOLORES

"I had heard a lot about [Cesar Chavez] from Fred Ross. Cesar this and Cesar that... and he didn't make much of an impression on me.

[But I knew] he was a great organizer, [but] he was very unassuming. So one day, he called me over to his house and said...."

Lights rise on the home of CESAR CHAVEZ. Cesar opens the door to Dolores.

CESAR CHAVEZ

... Thank you for coming over, I know how busy you have been Dolores.

DOLORES

Cesar, as you know, the work for equality is never really done.

CESAR CHAVEZ

True. I've been thinking on this for a long time... Farm workers in this country will never have a union, never receive a fair wage for their work, unless you and I start it.

Dolores says nothing.

CESAR CHAVEZ

I think it's time we worked together to make it happen. I've spoken to Fred Ross and he gives his blessing.

Dolores just looks at him. He is confused by her silence.

CESAR CHAVEZ

You're quiet. You're never quiet. Well, what do you think?

DOLORES

(excited)

What do I think? What took you so long to ask me?

They stand and shake hands, smiling at each other.

CESAR CHAVEZ

We will need to start canvassing the Central Valley right away, you take the north half and I'll take the south half.

DOLORES

It will not be easy. The amount of farm workers in this state is enormous, and seasonal.

CESAR CHAVEZ

And the power of the growers is backed by the police, the courts, local and state laws, and the money of big corporations, the banks, even the utilities.

DOLORES

Then we better get started Amigo...

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE SIX

NARRATOR 2

"People tend to forget that the 1960s were the sexist dark ages, even in the Chicano movement... but Dolores was already way out in front. She was a woman, a Mexican American, a Chicana, cutting a swath of revolutionary action across the torpidity of the San Joaquin Valley." --Artist Luiz Valdez.

Lights rise on a vineyard in the Central Valley. MIGRANT FARM WORKERS pick grapes in the fields while some other Migrant Workers have stopped and gathered to hear Dolores speak.

There are SUPPORTERS behind her carrying signs reading 'HUELGA (STRIKE)' and 'UFW' (United Farm Workers).

Dolores stands on a wooden crate and speaks with a small megaphone.

DOLORES

Usted tiene derechos! (You have rights!) If we organize, working conditions can be better!

A FARMER enters from stage left, angry.

FARMER

(to Migrant Farm Workers)

Back to work! You don't have to listen to her! Do the work or no pay!

DOLORES

(to Migrant Farm Workers)

The law allows you to take time off for breaks and lunch! Organizar! (Organize!) Usted tiene derechos! (You have rights!)

Almost all of the Workers have now stopped working, listening to Dolores.

FARMER

(to Dolores)

Hey! You can't do that! They're just Farm Workers! You can't organize them, these people don't have any rights!

DOLORES

Yes they do, yes I can, and yes we can! Si se puede! (Yes we can!)

(chanting)

Si se puede! Si se puede! Si se puede!

FARMER

I won't stand for this any longer, you filthy Communist! Remember, you asked for this! Get them off my farm!

The Farmer signals off stage and suddenly POLICE OFFICERS enter from either side. They start arresting the Workers, tearing down their protest signs.

DOLORES

Viva La Causa! Viva La Causa! (The Struggle! The Struggle!)

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE SEVEN

NARRATOR

"As brothers [and sisters] in the fight for equality, I extend the hand of fellowship and good will..."

the fight for equality must be fought [...] in the urban slums, in the sweat shops, [...and in the} fields. Our separate struggles are really one; a struggle for freedom, for dignity, and for humanity..." -- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Lights rise on the Delano Grape Strike March to Sacramento. Dolores and Cesar walk at the front, both holding a banner that reads -- 'United Farm Workers'. Behind them others carry SIGNS reading 'THERE'S BLOOD ON THOSE GRAPES' and 'HUELGA!' and 'SI SE PUEDE!'.

UNITED FARM WORKER

There's blood on those grapes!

DOLORES

(leading the chant)

There's blood on those grapes!

MIGRANT FARM WORKERS

(echo)

There's blood on those grapes!

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE EIGHT

LITTLE DOLORES

"Growers dehumanize their workers. Why would you refuse to give workers a toilet? Because if you don't give them a toilet then they're not human beings. Why would you allow workers to be sprayed with pesticides? Growers view farmworkers as tools."

Lights rise on a meeting of the California Congressional Subcommittee on Migrant Labor, 1966.

Present in the room are Dolores, COMMITTEE MEMBERS, striking MIGRANT FARM WORKERS, SHERIFF LEROY GAYLEN, and ROBERT KENNEDY, former US Attorney General.

DOLORES

We are only asking for equal treatment under the law. These growers, together with the local law enforcement, are infringing on our rights to protest peacefully.

LEROY GAYLEN

If you want peace little lady, go back to picking fruit in the fields and this will all go away.

ROBERT KENNEDY

Sheriff Gaylen, can you explain the reason why you arrested so many picketers on the day in question?

LEROY GAYLEN

"If I have reason to believe that there's going to be a riot started, and somebody tells me that there's going to be trouble if you don't stop them, then it's my duty to stop them..."

ROBERT KENNEDY

"...And then you go out and arrest them?"

LEROY GAYLEN

"Absolutely."

ROBERT KENNEDY

"How can you go arrest somebody if they haven't violated the law?"

LEROY GAYLEN

"Well, they're ready to violate the law..."

The CROWD ERUPTS at this wrong comment.

ROBERT KENNEDY

"Can I suggest that in the interim period of time, the luncheon period of time, that the Sheriff and the District Attorney read the Constitution of the United States?"

The assembled WORKERS begin to
APPLAUD.

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE NINE

LITTLE DOLORES

"A couple of weeks ago, I saw a woman in a tomato field during a school day. She had three of her kids out there with her and when she saw me, she starting apologizing. She said, 'I had to take them out of school because we didn't have enough money to buy groceries.' They're out there every single day, little kids picking tomatoes with their hands too small to even cover the tomato.... "

Lights rise on negotiations over the Delano Grape Boycott. One side of the stage are the FARM WORKERS and Dolores, on the other side is the Farmer and other OWNERS.

FARMER

(irritated)

"Dolores Huerta is crazy. She's a violent woman, where women, especially Mexican women, are usually peaceful and pleasant. You can't live wrought up like she does and not be crazy."

DOLORES

Insulting me will not end our boycott. This negotiation is about the basic rights of the workers you employ. Access to water, to bathrooms, to be able to eat lunch every day without fear of losing their job.

ANGRY OWNER

But we pay prevailing wages!

DOLORES

The wages are immoral and you know it. You've pulled rifles on us, beat us with boards, even put me in jail for speaking out!

One FARM WORKER taps Dolores on the shoulder.

FARM WORKER

(pointing at Angry Owner)

Senora, Que dijo el? (What did he say?)

DOLORES

(to Farm Worker)

Dijo que paga un buen salario. (He said that he pays a good wage.)

FARMER

Hey, what are you telling him?

DOLORES

My speaking to the workers in Spanish is to keep them apprised at all times of what is going on in this meeting. If you don't like it, tapate tus oidos. (close your ears.)

FARMER

I don't even know what that means!

A third FARM OWNER stands up.

FARM OWNER

Well I for one am ready for this boycott to be over. *We lost the PR battle [gentlemen] and we paid for it.* Let's all get back to work. Give me that contract, I'm ready to sign.

Dolores extends a contract for him to sign. He signs on the dotted line.

DOLORES

Can we now end this boycott?

FARM OWNER

Si su puede. (Yes we can.)

Dolores and Farm Owner shake hands.

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE TEN

Lights rise on the White House State Room, during President Obama's first term.

*Title Card Narrator enters with
SIGN that reads -- WASHINGTON,
D.C., 2012.*

*Standing at the podium is
PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA and other
assorted guests. We enter into
the middle of the ceremony.*

PRESIDENT OBAMA

*"...This is the highest civilian honor this country can
bestow, [the Presidential Medal of Freedom], which is ironic,
because nobody sets out to win it... But that's exactly what
makes this award so special. Together, the honorees on this
stage, [...] have moved us with their words; they have
inspired us with their actions. They've enriched our lives
and they've changed our lives for the better..."*

Dolores stands up, moves next to
President Obama.

PRESIDENT OBAMA

*"Dolores Clara Fernandez Huerta. One of America's great
labor and civil rights icons, Dolores [...] has devoted her
life to advocating for marginalized communities. Alongside
Cesar Chavez, she co-founded the United Farm Workers of
America and fought to secure basic rights for migrant workers
and their families, helping save thousands from neglect and
abuse. Dolores Huerta has never lost faith in the power of
community organizing, and through the Dolores Huerta
Foundation, she continues to train and mentor new activists
to walk the streets into history."*

A MARINE SOLDIER hands President
Obama the Presidential Medal of
Freedom, the President puts it
around the neck of Dolores.

Applause from the assembled crowd.
She steps to the podium.

DOLORES

"Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world. Si, se puede!"

LIGHTS FADE TO
BLACK.

THE END