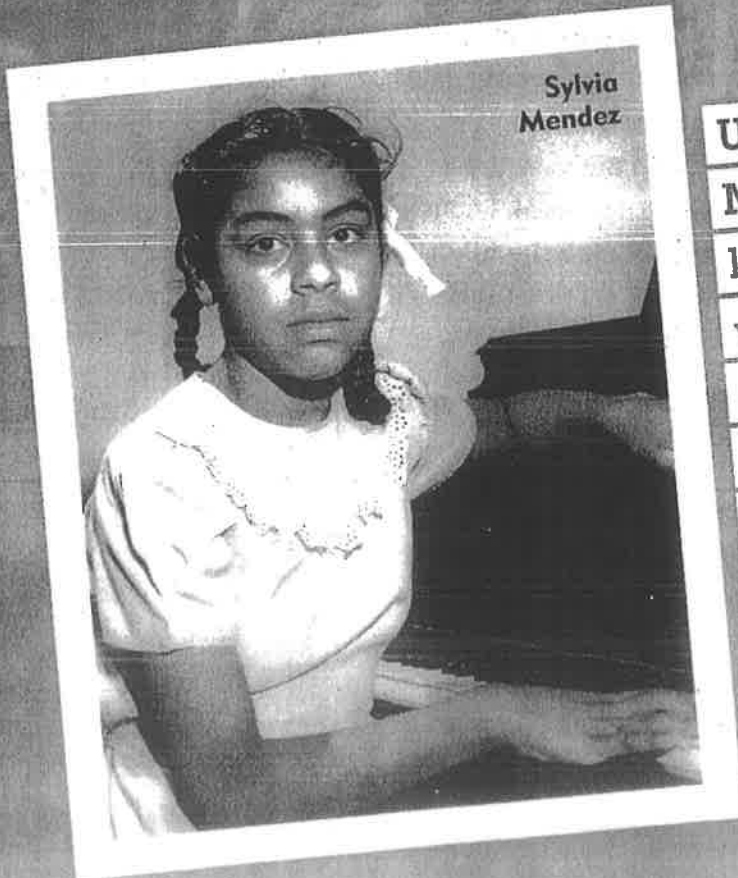


Readers
Theater
Play

THE FIGHT FOR WHAT'S RIGHT

WE SERVE
WHITE'S *only*
NO
SPANISH or MEXICANS



Sylvia
Mendez

Until the 1940s, many
Mexican-American
kids in California
weren't allowed to
go to school with white
kids. Eight-year-old
Sylvia Mendez helped
change that.

BY SPENCER KAYDEN

Turn the page
for the play →

CHARACTERS

Check the character you're going to read.

*Starred characters have larger speaking parts.

- *Narrators 1, 2, 3 (N1, N2, N3)
- *Sylvia Mendez, an 8-year-old girl
- Aunt Sally, Sylvia's aunt
- Secretary
- Papa, Sylvia's father
- *Mama, Sylvia's mother
- Miss Wilson, Sylvia's teacher
- Miguel, a classmate
- Jerome, Sylvia's little brother
- *Mr. Marcus, a lawyer
- Mr. Kent, head of schools
- Mrs. Hughes, an education expert

VOCABULARY

citizens: people who legally belong in a country and have the rights of that country

petition: written request that people sign to show that they want something to change

qualified: having the necessary skill or knowledge to do something

inferior: of less importance or value

discrimination: unfair treatment of a person or group of people

SCENE 1

N1: The year is 1944.

N2: Sylvia Mendez and her family have just moved to Westminster, California.

N3: Sylvia and her brother are playing with their cousins.

AUNT SALLY: Come! We're going to see your new school.

N1: They arrive at Westminster School, a large brick building with a playground.

N2: They go to the main office.

AUNT SALLY: I'm here to sign these children up for school.

N3: The secretary looks at Sylvia's cousins, who have light skin and light hair.

SECRETARY: Those two can sign up, but not the others.

AUNT SALLY: Excuse me?

N1: The secretary points at Sylvia and Jerome, who have dark skin and dark hair.

SECRETARY: They have to go to the Mexican school.

AUNT SALLY: But they are American. They speak English.

SECRETARY: That's the rule.

AUNT SALLY: There must be some mistake.

SCENE 2

N2: The next day, Papa is mad.

PAPA: I spoke to the principal. He says all Mexican kids have to go to Hoover Elementary.

MAMA: Why?

PAPA: He just kept saying, "That's how it's done here."

AUNT SALLY: Hoover is farther

THE MEXICAN SCHOOL

Mexican-American children like Sylvia Mendez were forced to attend Hoover Elementary. It was a crowded school known as "the Mexican School."

away and not a good school.

MAMA: This isn't fair. We are American **citizens**.

AUNT SALLY: What can we do?

PAPA: I'm not sure. But a good education is worth fighting for.

SCENE 3

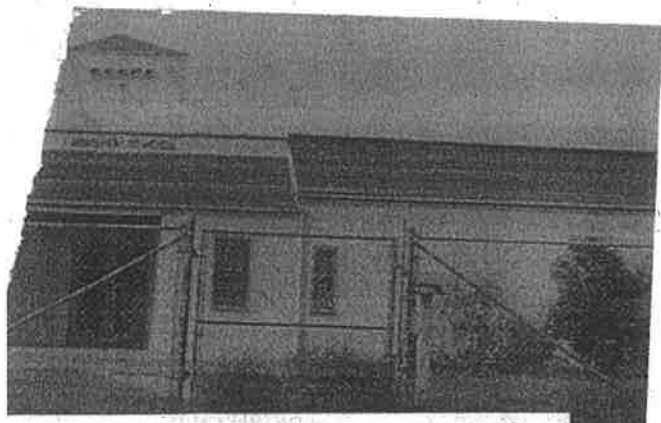
N3: Sylvia, Jerome, and their cousins start school at Hoover.

N1: Each morning, the school bus drops them off in front of Westminster School.

N2: Then Sylvia and the other Mexican-American kids walk many blocks to their school.

N3: They sit at wobbly desks in a crowded classroom.

MISS WILSON: Hi, class. Today the girls will learn to sew, and the boys will build shelves.



A BETTER LIFE
 Sylvia's parents moved the family to Westminster, California, to run their own vegetable farm. For many years, both had been treated unfairly because they were new to America. They wanted a better life for their children.

N1: Sylvia raises her hand.
SYLVIA: Miss Wilson, will we ever read books or learn math?
MISS WILSON: No. You don't need to know those things.
N2: At lunch, the children go outside.
N3: There is no playground.
N1: Sylvia sits eating an apple. Miguel stands over her.
MIGUEL: Your father is going to get everyone in trouble.
SYLVIA: How?
MIGUEL: He wants my father to sign a **petition** to send us to school with white kids.
SYLVIA: Everyone knows their school is better.
MIGUEL: My father could lose his job if he signs it.
SYLVIA: Well, it's not fair to

send us to a separate school.
MIGUEL: You think you're better than everyone else?
SYLVIA: No! I just want to learn what white kids learn.

SCENE 4

N2: Mama is getting the kids ready for school.
JEROME: Where is Papa?
MAMA: He is talking to other families about the court case.
JEROME: What's a court case?
MAMA: We think the school system is being unfair to Mexican kids. So we are going to talk to a judge about it.
SYLVIA: If we win the case, will we get to go to the nice school?
MAMA: Yes.
JEROME: What if the kids at

that school don't like us?
SYLVIA: Sometimes they call us names in the park.
MAMA: If they don't like you, it's because they don't know you.
N3: Jerome looks up at Mama.
MAMA: That's what prejudice is—when you decide you don't like people for no good reason.
JEROME: I don't like eating vegetables. Is that prejudice?
MAMA: No, papito, prejudice is about something like people's skin color or religion.
N1: Sylvia thinks about this.

SCENE 5

N2: The family goes to court.
N3: Papa's lawyer, Mr. Marcus, questions the head of schools.

