

Learning Targets

- Analyze multiple texts to identify key ideas.
- Synthesize information to make text-to-text connections.

Before Reading

1. How does work figure in your future? What has work to do with the dream and promise of American success?

During Reading

2. Analyze the poem using a reading strategy like TP-CASTT to direct your annotation in the margins.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Martín Espada is an award-winning poet who was born in 1957 in Brooklyn, N.Y. He has a law degree from Northeastern University and teaches creative writing at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst.

Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper

by Martín Espada

At sixteen, I worked after high school hours
at a printing plant
that manufactured legal pads:

Yellow paper

- 5 stacked seven feet high

and leaning

as I slipped cardboard

between the pages,

then brushed red glue

- 10 up and down the stack.

No gloves: fingertips required

for the perfection of paper,

smoothing the exact rectangle.

Sluggish by 9 PM, the hands

- 15 would slide along suddenly sharp paper,

and gather slits thinner than the crevices

of the skin, hidden.

Then the glue would sting,

hands oozing

LEARNING STRATEGIES:

Quickwrite, Read Aloud,
Graphic Organizer,
TP-CASTT, SOAPStone,
Marking the Text

My Notes

Working Toward the Dream

My Notes

- 20 till both palms burned
at the punchclock.
Ten years later, in law school,
I knew that every legal pad
was glued with the sting of hidden cuts,
- 25 that every open lawbook
was a pair of hands
upturned and burning.

After Reading

3. After reading the poem, “Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper,” complete the following chart.

“Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper”	
Choose a statement that reflects what the speaker learned from his work.	
Write out and create a visual of the last image of the poem.	
What do you think the title means?	
Write an interpretive statement about the speaker’s realization.	

During Reading

4. Analyze the interview “Roberto Acuña Talks About Farm Workers,” written by Studs Terkel, using a reading strategy like SOAPStone to guide your thinking.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Studs Terkel (1912–2008), famous Chicago radio broadcaster, interviewer, and writer, was born Louis Terkel in 1912 in New York. A Pulitzer Prize winner for his interviews and oral histories, Terkel has written more than two dozen books, but he is probably most famous for his oral histories.

Nonfiction

“Roberto Acuna Talks About Farm Workers”

from *Working*

by Studs Terkel

I walked out of the fields two years ago. I saw the need to change the California feudal system, to change the lives of farm workers, to make these huge corporations feel they're not above anybody. I am thirty-four years old and I try to organize for the United Farm Workers of America....

If you're picking lettuce, the thumbnails fall off 'cause they're banged on the box. Your hands get swollen. You can't slow down because the foreman sees you're so many boxes behind and you'd better get on. But people would help each other. If you're feeling bad that day, somebody who's feeling pretty good would help. Any people that are suffering have to stick together, whether they like it or not, whether they be black, brown, or pink....

I began to see how everything was so wrong. When growers can have an intricate watering system to irrigate their crops but they can't have running water inside the houses of workers. Veterinarians tend to the needs of domestic animals but they can't have medical care for the workers. They can have land subsidies¹ for the growers but they can't have adequate unemployment compensation for the workers. They treat him like a farm implement. In fact, they treat their implements better and their domestic animals better. They have heat and insulated² barns for the animals but the workers live in beat-up shacks with no heat at all.

Illness in the fields is 120 percent higher than the average rate for industry. It's mostly back trouble, rheumatism, and arthritis, because of the damp weather and the cold. Stoop labor is very hard on a person. Tuberculosis is high. And now because of the pesticides, we have many respiratory diseases.

The University of California at Davis had government experiments with pesticides and chemicals. They get a bigger crop each year. They haven't any regard as to what safety precautions are needed. In 1964 and '65, an airplane was spraying these chemicals on the fields. Spraying rigs they're called. Flying low, the wheels got tangled in the fence wire. The pilot got up, dusted himself off, and got a drink of water. He died of convulsions. The ambulance attendants got violently sick because of the pesticide he had on his person. A little girl was playing around a sprayer. She stuck her tongue on it. She died instantly.

These pesticides affect the farm worker through the lungs. He breathes it in. He gets no compensation. All they do is say he's sick. They don't investigate the cause.

There were times when I felt I couldn't take it anymore. It was 105 in the shade and I'd see endless rows of lettuce and I felt my back hurting.... I felt the frustration of not being able to get out of the fields. I was getting ready to jump any foreman who looked at me cross-eyed. But until two years ago, my world was still very small.

¹ **subsidy** (*n.*): a grant or sum of money

² **insulated** (*adj.*): protected from heat and/or cold

GRAMMAR & USAGE

Parallel Structure

Repeating a grammatical structure, even one as simple as an infinitive phrase, creates rhythm and emphasis through parallel structure. Notice that Roberto Acuna emphasizes his commitment with parallel infinitive phrases modifying *need*: “I saw the need to change the California feudal system, to change the lives of farm workers, to make these huge corporations feel they're not above anybody.”

My Notes

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Why does Acuna make the point that farm tools and farm animals are treated well by their owners?

Working Toward the Dream

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Why does Acuna resist joining the Union?

My Notes

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Work is clearly important to Acuna, but respect is equally important. How is respect for work and workers shown by employers?

I would read all these things in the papers about Cesar Chavez and I would denounce³ him because I still had that thing about becoming a first class patriotic citizen. In Mexicali⁴ they would pass out leaflets and I would throw 'em away. I never participated. The grape boycott didn't affect me much because I was in lettuce. It wasn't until Chavez came to Salinas⁵ where I was working in the fields, that I saw what a beautiful man he was. I went to this rally, I still intended to stay with the company. But something—I don't know—I was close to the workers. They couldn't speak English and wanted me to be their spokesman in favor of going on strike. I don't know—I just got caught up with it all, the beautiful feeling of solidarity.

You'd see the people on the picket lines at four in the morning, at the camp fires, heating up beans and coffee and tortillas. It gave me a sense of belonging. These were my own people and they wanted change. I knew this is what I was looking for. I just didn't know it before.

My mom had always wanted me to better myself. I wanted to better myself because of her. Now when the strikes started, I told her I was going to join the union and the whole movement. I told her I was going to work without pay. She said she was proud of me. (His eyes glisten. A long, long pause.) See, I told her I wanted to be with my people. If I were a company man, no one would like me anymore. I had to belong to somebody and this was it right here. She said, "I pushed you in your early years to try to better yourself and get a social position. But I see that's not the answer. I know I'll be proud of you."

All kinds of people are farm workers, not just Chicanos. Filipinos started the strike. We have Puerto Ricans and Appalachians too, Arabs, some Japanese, some Chinese. At one time they used us against each other. But now they can't and they're scared, the growers. They can organize conglomerates. Yet when we try organization to better our lives, they are afraid. Suffering people never dreamed it could be different. Cesar Chavez tells them this and they grasp the idea—and this is what scares the growers.

Now the machines are coming in. It takes skill to operate them. But anybody can be taught. We feel migrant workers should be given the chance. They got one for grapes. They got one for lettuce. They have cotton machines that took jobs away from thousands of farm workers. The people wind up in the ghettos of the cities, their culture, their families, their unity destroyed.

We're trying to stipulate⁶ it in our contract that the company will not use any machinery without the consent of the farm workers. So we can make sure the people being replaced by the machines will know how to operate the machines.

Working in the fields is not in itself a degrading job. It's hard, but if you're given regular hours, better pay, decent housing, unemployment, and medical compensation, pension plans—we have a very relaxed way of living. But growers don't recognize us as persons. That's the worst thing, the way they treat you. Like we have no brains. Now we see they have no brains. They have only a wallet in their head. The more you squeeze it the more they cry out.

WORD CONNECTIONS

Roots and Affixes

The Latin term *quid pro quo* means an equal exchange or substitution. For example, in a work situation, the employee receives wages, and the employer receives the work done. Whether the two are of equal value is sometimes a point of dispute.

³ **denounce** (v.): publicly declare to be wrong

⁴ **Mexicali** (mek' si kal' ē): Capital of the Mexican state of Baja California Norte

⁵ **Salinis** (sə lē'nəs): City in west central California

⁶ **stipulate** (v.): demand or specify a condition

If we had proper compensation we wouldn't have to be working seventeen hours a day and following the crops. We could stay in one area and it would give us roots. Being a migrant, it tears the family apart. You get in debt. You leave the area penniless. The children are the ones hurt the most. They go to school three months in one place and then on to another. No sooner do they make friends, they are uprooted again. Right here, your childhood is taken away. So when they grow up, they're looking for this childhood they have lost.

If people could see—in the winter, ice on the fields. We'd be on our knees all day long. We'd build fires and warm up real fast and go back onto the ice. We'd be picking watermelons in 105 degrees all day long. When people have melons or cucumber or carrots or lettuce, they don't know how they got on their table and the consequences to the people who picked it. If I had enough money, I would take busloads of people out to the fields and into the labor camps. Then they'd know how that fine salad got on their table.

After Reading

- 5. With a partner, review the text to determine Acuna's attitudes toward different types of workers. List the jobs in the essay and classify them into at least two categories.

Check Your Understanding

Writing Prompt: Compose an argumentative essay in which you develop a position on the difference between an immigrant's sense of opportunity and a citizen's sense of opportunity in this country. Also, discuss how the dream of a future is the same.

Synthesize your ideas on what the United States offers native-born citizens toward achieving their American Dream and what immigrants see as the promise of America. Be sure to:

- Write a thesis statement that clearly states your position.
- Choose an audience and address their knowledge needs, as well as concerns about immigration, values, and possible biases.
- Paraphrase, summarize, and use quotations to develop your claim fairly and thoroughly, acknowledging its strengths and limitations.
- Acknowledge potential counterclaims fairly and provide thorough evidence to refute them or to convince your audience that your claim is stronger.
- Provide an effective conclusion.

My Notes

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Why does Acuna want to "take busloads of people" out to the fields?" What is the connection between this idea and the realization Espada makes in "Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper?"
