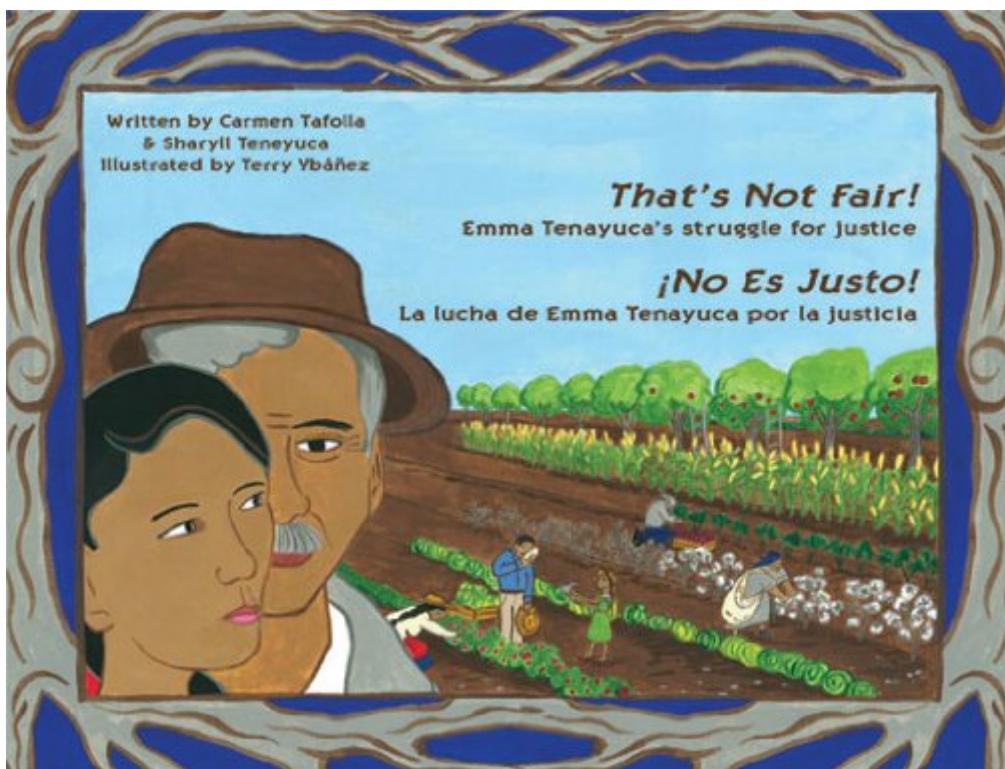


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# That's Not Fair! / ¡No Es Justo!: Emma Tenayuca's Struggle For Justice/La Lucha De Emma Tenayuca Por La Justicia



## Synopsis

A vivid depiction of the early injustices encountered by a young Mexican-American girl in San Antonio in the 1920's, this book tells the true story of Emma Tenayuca. Emma learns to care deeply about poverty and hunger during a time when many Mexican Americans were starving to death and working unreasonably long hours at slave wages in the city's pecan-shelling factories. Through astute perception, caring, and personal action, Emma begins to get involved and eventually, at the age of 21, leads 12,000 workers in the first significant historical action in the Mexican-American struggle for justice. Emma Tenayuca's story serves as a model for young and old alike about courage, compassion, and the role everyone can play in making the world fairer. Una representación vívida de las injusticias con las que se encuentra una joven mexicano-americana en San Antonio en las décadas de 1920 y 1930, este libro cuenta la historia verdadera de Emma Tenayuca. Emma aprende a preocuparse por la pobreza y el hambre durante una época cuando muchos mexicano-americanos se morían de inanición y trabajaban horas excesivamente largas por sueldos exigüos en las fábricas de pacana. A través de percepción perspicaz, un buen corazón y acción personal, Emma empieza a involucrarse y al final, a los 21 años, lleva a 12.000 trabajadores a tomar acción por la primera vez en la historia de la lucha mexicano-americana por la justicia. El relato de Emma Tenayuca sirve de modelo para tanto los jóvenes como los adultos sobre el valor, la compasión y el papel que puede desempeñar quienquiera en hacer más justo el mundo.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An excellent text for beginning a discussion about justice in the elementary classroom.

I bought 3 copies of That's Not Fair! for the children of my family and friends. One friend told me that her 2 daughters asked to have their mother re-read it that night. Also, another friend told me her children enjoyed it and liked looking at the drawings. I bought a 4th copy for myself, and I enjoyed it too. It's a great book for children and adults.

I really enjoyed this book. It is a great story that should be shared with all children. I purchased an extra copy to donate to our cultural center library in memory of a recently deceased family member.

This compelling tale, best for grades 2-6, recounts the biographical story of Emma Tenayuca, a young, Mexican-American activist. This book is an excellent contribution to our effort to diversify the immigrant narrative, as it exposes not only the initial hardships of immigrating to the U.S., but also the myriad of injustices and human rights abuses that have existed and still do exist for Mexican-Americans upon arrival in the U.S. Emma Tenayuca, from a very young age, recognizes the importance of education and the unfairness of the society around her. Her sympathetic viewpoint, coupled with a focused desire to redress wrongs, leads her to become a pioneer for Mexican-American rights in the U.S. The illustrations nicely complement the themes of the story, the rights of Mexican-American laborers and pecan-shellers, and reinforce Emma's bold agency throughout. In a review of the book, Beverly Slapin of De Colores: The Raza Experience in Books for Children, comments upon the illustrations: "Ybáez's full-bleed double-spread illustrations, rendered in watercolor and pen-and-ink on a palette of bold, flat colors with bright highlights, are reminiscent of traditional Mexican murals. While Emma's red sweater on almost every page focuses the reader's attention on the subject, the pecan trees and branches that frame each illustration focus the reader's attention on the

issue.Indeed, the illustrations, as you can see in the image to the right, subtly show images of trees (the border) and pecans (the illustration on the back wall), reminding readers of the issues at hand. This story, though inspired by real events, reads as a picture book with bright, kid-friendly illustrations. In contrast, the last page of the book provides non-fiction, historical information about Tenayuca, as well as black and white photos of her in the midst of civic engagement. This tale is also written by Emma Tenayuca's niece as well as one of her friends, adding a layer of intimacy to the biographical telling.Tenayuca was born in 1916 in San Antonio, Texas. She was one of eleven children and at a young age she was sent to live with her grandparents. As readers will see throughout the story, Emma's grandfather played a very important part in both her personal life, and in her community activism. According to the synopsis at the back of this book, Tenayuca's feats of activism marked the beginning of a long history of civil rights movements: Historians regard this action as the beginning of the Mexican-American struggle for civil rights and justice.The story starts in the year 1925, when Emma is 9 years old. As Emma walks on her way to school, she passes other communities of Mexican-Americans and she is struck by the scarcity of their food and clothes. While Emma is moved by the instances of extreme poverty all around her, she also feels discouraged by her inability to help; the food she offers the children on the street will quickly run out, and once again they will be in need. However, when Emma decides to teach her young neighbor how to read, she realizes, this would last her forever.While exposing readers to the history of poverty and human rights abuses that Mexican-American workers suffered here in the United States, this story also emphasizes the importance of education in a move towards civil rights.Emma's attention is focused especially on the rights of the pecan shellers, or nueceros, who worked long hours and developed a variety of health conditions from an unsafe and unhealthy factory environment: She saw so many people go to work when it was still dark and not come home again until late at night. Many worked so many hours that they were coughing and sick, and still they did not earn enough to feed their children.Many of the nueceros were women and children.As the story progresses, Emma teaches the nueceros how to organize and resist. A review by De Colores contributes to the biographical information presented by the book:"By the time she was 16, young Emma had already been jailed several times. I never thought in terms of fear," she later said, "I thought in terms of justice." A brilliant orator, activist and educator at a time when Mexican and Mexican American women were not expected to speak out, Emma became known as "La Pasionaria," and took on one battle after another. In 1938, Emma was asked to lead the strike of some 12,000 pecan shellers, most of them Mexican women; and in fewer than two months,

they forced the factory owners to raise their pay. This historic victory was the first significant win for Mexican American workers in the struggle for political and economic justice."Emma Tenayuca is an important figure in the history of Mexican-American rights and of the U.S. overall. Yet, she is still one of the lesser-known labor rights figures. For teachers looking to diversify their classroom texts, this book would be a perfect way to complicate students' understanding of immigrants, women's rights, and the history of labor rights in the U.S. This book could surely inspire a lesson plan on history, social movements and civil rights, while focusing on lesser-known biographies. The book offers students another valuable lesson through the relationship Emma shares with her grandfather. When Emma speaks with him about the horrible injustices that she witnesses, he tells her, "Sometimes things are not fair. But still, each one of us can usually do something about it, even if it's just a little thing." This is an important message for young readers who may be struggling with a growing awareness of hardship and injustice: you can always help, even if it is just a little bit. This wonderful story has received an abundance of great reviews and we are adding our voice to the choir. Emma Tenayuca's biography provides a perfect way to teach kids about the history of Mexican-Americans in the United States, as well as values of education, activism, and social and justice. For access to the full review and additional resources, check out our Vamos a Leer blog at [teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.com](http://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.com)

This picture book tells the true story of Emma Tenayuca, who at the age of 21 led thousands of Mexican-American pecan shellers in a successful strike. The authors focus on Emma's childhood and her awakening empathy with Mexican-American laborers. Emma was not born poor: she attended school in San Antonio, Texas, and had enough clothes and food. Yet she encountered children who could not learn to read because they were working as farm laborers. She saw kids who didn't have enough to eat, and not enough clothes to keep them warm. Even as a schoolgirl, Emma taught a friend to read, and gave food and clothing to children in need. As a teenager, she began to give speeches about the injustices suffered by Mexican-American laborers. In 1938, she led 12,000 pecan shellers in a two-month strike that resulted in higher wages. Because it focuses mostly on Emma's childhood, this book will appeal to kids in the lower elementary grades. Kids may not understand the concept of labor unions, but they do understand fairness, and that's what this book emphasizes. The pictures are colorful, simple, and appealing. The text is printed in both English and Spanish. I have included this book in my online Gender Equality Bookstore.

Truly wonderful book! My first and second grade students really "got it" today as I shared the

amazing story of Emma Tenayuca during library storytime. More people need to know Emma's story. None of the teachers of my mostly Hispanic, Houston TX school were familiar with Emma.

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