

Lesson 6

Who Was Dennis Chavez?

What Do You Know?

“Who Was Dennis Chavez?” is about a boy who came from New Mexico. He worked hard to help his family. He followed his dream and became something most people thought was impossible.



Answer the following questions.

1. Have you ever studied when you did not have to study? _____

What did you study, and what did you learn? _____

2. Do you think it would be easier to learn something from a book or to have someone teach you? _____

Why? _____

Write complete sentences to answer the following questions.

3. If you could learn to do something today just by reading a book, what would you want to learn? _____

Why? _____


Read “Who Was Dennis Chavez?” Find out why this man’s name can be seen all over New Mexico.



Who Was Dennis Chavez?

If you drive around towns in New Mexico, you might see the same name over and over. The name is Dennis Chavez. There are schools and roads with his name on them. As you drive around, you might start to ask, “Who was Dennis Chavez?”

In 1902 people who worked in the Albuquerque, New Mexico, library might have asked questions about



Dennis Chavez too. Their questions might have been, “Who is that young man? Why does he come to the library so often? What is he studying?”


Dennis Chavez was a Hispanic American. He was born in 1888 in a small New Mexico town. His mother and father were hard-working farmers. They were poor and wanted their children to have better lives than they did. For that to happen, Mr. and Mrs. Chavez knew they would have to move the family to Albuquerque. They thought there would be more work there. Dennis was seven years old when his family made the move.

But it was still hard for Mr. and Mrs. Chavez to make enough money for their family. So even though Dennis did well in school, he had to leave school when he was 13 years old. He had to go to work to help make money for his family.

At first Dennis worked in a grocery store. But he kept studying on his own. That is why he was always in the library.

Dennis read about many things in the library. If you had looked over his shoulder, you would have often found him studying American history. His love of America and its history was deep.

Dennis read a lot by and about Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson’s words made Dennis think a lot about American government. The more Dennis read, the more he thought the government could help poor people, like his family, as they worked hard to make better lives.



It was through reading in the library that he learned to be a surveyor. A surveyor measures land before houses or roads are built on it. Dennis then worked for the city of Albuquerque as a surveyor.

The people who worked at the library watched Dennis Chavez over the years. They knew he worked hard to make up for not finishing school. They knew he was studying so much because he wanted to make a better life for himself. He wanted to make a better life for poor people like his family.

The library workers must have been very happy when Dennis's hard work and studying led him to good work. But even these people were surprised when Dennis acted on a dream. He wanted to be a lawyer.

It takes many years of schooling to be a lawyer. First you must go to college. Then after you finish college, you must go to law school. It takes a lot of hard work to get into law school.

Dennis Chavez did not go to college. He did not even go to high school. Instead he just kept studying by himself in the library. And by 1916 he was studying to get into law school. It worked. Dennis not only got into law school, he got into one of the best law schools in the United States. By 1920 Dennis was a lawyer.

By now, Dennis made enough money that his family did not have to worry. But Dennis wanted to do more. He thought poor families could have better lives if they had a chance to work hard as he had. Dennis knew he could go to Washington, D.C., and work to give poor



people in New Mexico that chance. He wanted to make America an even better country.

Dennis Chavez had another dream. He wanted to be elected to the United States Senate. He worked long hours to make this dream come true. In 1934 the people of New Mexico sent him to Washington, D.C., as a United States senator. Dennis Chavez was the first Hispanic American elected to the United States Senate.

In the Senate, Dennis used all he had learned about history and government to make life better for poor people. He did so well that the people of New Mexico elected him to the Senate time after time over the next 27 years.

Now you know why you see the name Dennis Chavez all over New Mexico and why the people of New Mexico will never forget him.

What Did You Find?

Write your answers on the lines below.

1. Dennis Chavez was born in a small town in _____.
2. The Chavez family moved to _____ when Dennis was seven.
3. In 1902 people who worked in the _____ in Albuquerque, New Mexico, often saw Dennis because he spent so much time there.
4. When Dennis was _____ years old he had to leave school to help his family.
5. At first Dennis worked in a _____.
6. Dennis always found time to _____ on his own.
7. Dennis read a lot about _____.
8. Thomas Jefferson's words made Dennis think a lot about American _____.
9. The more Dennis read about government, the more he wanted to help _____ people.

Match the words on the right with the words on the left below. Write the correct letter on each line.

- | | | |
|-------|---------------|---------------------|
| _____ | 10. first job | a. became a senator |
| _____ | 11. 1920 | b. became a lawyer |
| _____ | 12. 1934 | c. grocery store |

Sequence

When you tell what happened first in a story, what happened next, and what happened last, you are telling the *sequence* of events.

Read the following sentences from “Who Was Dennis Chavez?” Think about what happened first, next, and last.

Even though Dennis did well in school, he had to leave school when he was 13 years old. He had to go to work to help make money for his family. At first Dennis worked in a grocery store. But he kept studying on his own.

First: Dennis did well in school.

Next: Dennis had to leave school.

Last: He worked at a grocery store.

Read the following sentences from “Who Was Dennis Chavez?” Write what happened first, next, and last in the blanks.

Dennis Chavez had another dream. He wanted to be elected to the United States Senate. He worked long hours to make this dream come true. In 1934 the people of New Mexico sent him to Washington, D.C., as a United States senator. Dennis Chavez was the first Hispanic American elected to the United States Senate.

1. What happened first? _____
2. What happened next? _____
3. What happened last? _____

Writing Using Sequence

Think about the story “Who Was Dennis Chavez?”
Put the following events in order by completing each sentence with a phrase from the box below.

to help his family
a lawyer
a United States senator
study hard
a surveyor
in New Mexico in 1888

1. What happened first?

Dennis Chavez was born _____.

2. What happened next?

He had to leave school _____.

3. What happened next?

He continued to _____.

4. What happened next?

He learned to become _____.

5. What happened next?

He studied hard to become _____.

6. What happened last?

In 1934 his dream came true, and he became _____.