



## CAELI English Language Arts (ELA) Environmental Superhero Snapshot: Quinn Cataldi

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### Ninth Grade Snapshot: Labor History and Community Agency in the Midst of the Climate Crisis

Mr. Cataldi teaches ninth grade English at Grant Union High School in North Sacramento. In his cannery history and Chicano literature unit, Mr. Cataldi's multilingual students learn about the legacy of colonial systems that influence communities, collective action, and sustainability through culturally relevant texts, including the play *Watsonville*, by Cherrie Moraga. While addressing English language arts standards, Mr. Cataldi's students learn about the intersections of Chicano labor movements and social and environmental justice, specifically the ways in which the exploitation of the land and people are intertwined with legacies of colonialism. Students are then empowered to identify and write about equitable solutions that address systemic issues such as the climate crisis ([UDL Consideration 7.2](#)).

The unit begins with the essential question: What can we do to find our agency in the midst of the climate crisis, and what can we learn from local labor history as a model for our work? Prior to reading *Watsonville*, Mr. Cataldi's students build prior knowledge by unpacking a variety of culturally and locally relevant texts, including oral interviews, expository texts, a photo essay, canned food company advertisement videos, speeches, and a Campbell's cartoon that places the responsibility of workplace safety solely on the cannery workers ([UDL Consideration 1.2](#)). Students are asked to analyze a series of cannery food advertisements based on the speaker, occasion, audience, and purpose. They spend time reading and annotating expository texts that connect the climate crisis to working conditions, and Mr. Cataldi also utilizes these texts to teach students research strategies, skills for matching claims to evidence, and how to cite and create an annotated bibliography.

The central text of Mr. Cataldi's unit, *Watsonville*, by Cherrie Moraga, is a play written in both English and Spanish that depicts a fictionalized version of the 1985 cannery strike at Watsonville Canning and Richard A. Shaw Frozen Foods and centers the actions of a group of Chincana women pushing back against systemic oppression. The characters in the play come from myriad backgrounds, including queer workers, parents, Indigenous people, as well as workers of varying legal statuses ([UDL Consideration 2.3](#)). While students read the play, Mr. Cataldi is explicit about teaching close reading and annotation strategies, and he unpacks historical events and conditions such as the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake that killed sixty-three people in the Bay Area and the realities of working on a cannery assembly line.

At the end of the unit, students apply to the climate crisis what they've learned about collective action, all while utilizing their research, annotation, claims/evidence, and citation skills ([UDL Consideration 3.4](#)). The final project asks students to choose a specific problem related to climate change, research how various groups are trying to address the problem, and then advocate for a solution ([UDL Consideration 7.1](#)). Students then present their research to the class. Topics include supporting immigrant communities, providing health food options in the community, preparing a changing workforce, improving mental and physical health of the community, and adapting to climate change.

While climate advocacy is often focused on "parts per million" (measurement of carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere), Mr. Cataldi's unit asks students to draw upon Central California's rich history of labor organizing to think about how members of their local community can respond with agency to real environmental and social issues. The unit explicitly helps students understand the interconnectedness of systems of both oppression and justice, and the authenticity and relevance of the topics and texts he has curated ultimately translates to a high level of student engagement in reading, writing, listening, and speaking standards.

Framework Highlights	Lesson Details
<b><a href="#">UDL Consideration 7.2</a>: Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity</b>	The activities in this unit are culturally and socially relevant, feature authentic learning outcomes, and foster the use of imagination to solve real problems.
<b><a href="#">EP&amp;C Principle 2B</a>: People Influence Natural Systems</b> Methods used to extract, harvest, transport, and consume natural resources influence the geographic extent, composition, biological diversity, and viability of natural systems.	The activities in this unit require students to investigate an environmental problem created by human activity as well as the process of restoring and revitalizing living systems.

**CA CSS for ELA/Literacy:**

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3.** Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6.** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1.a.** Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish

the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

**Related CA Next Generation Science Standards:**

- **HS-ETS1-3 Engineering Design.** Evaluate a solution to a complex real-world problem based on prioritized criteria and trade-offs that account for a range of constraints, including cost, safety, reliability, and aesthetics as well as possible social, cultural, and environmental impacts.

**Environmental Principles & Concepts**

- **Principle 2A.** Direct and indirect changes to natural systems due to the growth of human populations and their consumption rates influence the geographic extent, composition, biological diversity, and viability of natural systems.
- **Principle 2B.** Methods used to extract, harvest, transport, and consume natural resources influence the geographic extent, composition, biological diversity, and viability of natural systems.

**Sources:**

Study Guide: [“Watsonville: Some Place Not Here by Cherrie Moraga”](#) by John Epperson and Shira Goldeen in collaboration with Milagro Theater (2018)

Lesson Plan: [Still Sun-Mad: Lesson Plan on Farmworkers and Climate Justice](#) by Belén Moreno (2023)

Photo Essay: [“A Cooperative Farm’s Long Path to Liberation for Farmworkers”](#) by David Bacon (2023)

Oral Interview with Sacramento Cannery Organizer Ruben Reyes: [“Oral History with Ruben Reyes”](#) (1983)

Cartoon: Campbell’s [“Accidents”](#) (from Campbell’s company magazine)

Radio Story: [“Teen Farmworker’s Heat Death Sparks Outcry”](#) by Sasha Khokha, *National Public Radio* (2008)