

Handout:

South L.A. Student Speaks Out On Gun Violence

#commonsensegunlaws
#nationalwalkoutday
#iwillmarch #blm
#goodkidsmadcity #nomore
#backgroundchecks #neveragain
#wefightback
#townhallforourlives
#gunsafety #nomoresilence #notonemore
#marchforourlives
#endgunviolence
#voteforourlives
#weneedchange #MSDstrong #armmewith
#enough #enoughisenough
#takeaction #neveragainMSD
#justthebeginning #guncontrolnow
#vote
#blacklivesmatter
#bethechange
#april20walkout

Edna Chavez, Her Neighborhood

Edna Chavez is a 17-year-old senior at Manual Arts High School in South Los Angeles. She is a youth leader who spoke at the March for Our Lives on March 24, 2018. She is Latina and a survivor of gun violence. Ask for a show of hands of students who have seen/heard her speak either in person or online.

Ask what students know about the area Edna is from, called South Los Angeles. Elicit and explain that South Los Angeles (formerly known as South Central) is a region south of the 10 freeway in Los Angeles, that is comprised of 25 neighborhoods. The area gained national attention in 1965 and again in 1992 for the racial tensions that erupted into rebellion and violence at both times.

In 1965, the Watts Rebellion, also known as the Watts riots, broke out in the predominantly black Watts neighborhood of South L.A. Racial tensions reached a breaking point after two white policemen pulled over a black motorist suspected of drunk driving. A crowd gathered to watch what they saw as yet another racially motivated arrest, in a neighborhood where profiling was the norm. After years of economic and political isolation, frustration and anger spilled over into the unrest and violence that, within five days, would spread to encompass a 50-mile area of South L.A. The violence left 34 dead, 1,032 injured, and close to 4,000 arrested and caused \$40 million of property destruction.

Twenty seven years later, in 1992, South L.A. still mostly poor, isolated and targeted disproportionately by police violence, erupted again after a jury acquitted three white and one Mexican-American police officers in the brutal beating of black motorist Rodney King. The beating, captured on amateur videotape, was the first of its kind to go viral in the pre-internet age. It sparked a national debate about police brutality and, at the intersection where King was beat up, ignited South Central's racial tensions once more.

Outrage fueled the fiery protests that spread to encompass 32 miles, from the Hollywood Hills to Long Beach. More than 10,000 national guard troops were brought in over the next five days. The violence that came to be known in the mainstream as the LA riots, resulted in more than 50 deaths, around 10,000 arrests, and more than \$1 billion in property damage.

Edna Lizbeth Chavez Speaks at the Washington March for our Lives

At Community Coalition, we organize high school students to develop their leadership skills in order to push for educational justice in our communities. That's why I got involved. I wanted to impact policies and make sure our voices are heard.

I am a youth leader. I am a survivor. I have lived in South L.A. my entire life and have lost many loved ones to gun violence. This is normal, normal to the point that I have learned to duck from bullets before I learned how to red.

My brother, he was in high school when he passed away. It was a day like any other day, sunset going down on South Central. You hear pops, thinking they're fireworks. They weren't pops. You see the melanin on your brother's skin turn gray. Ricardo was his name.

I lost more than my brother that day. I lost my hero. I also lost my mother, my sister and myself to that trauma and that anxiety.

If the bullet did not kill me, that anxiety and that trauma will. I carry that trauma everywhere I go. I carry it with me in schools, in class, walking home and visiting loved ones.

I am not alone in this experience.

For decades, my community of South Los Angeles has become accustomed to this violence.

It is normal to see candles. It is normal to see posters. It is normal to see balloons. It is normal to see flowers honoring the lives of black and brown youth that have lost their lives to a bullet.

How can we cope with it, when our school district has its own police department? Instead of making black and brown students feel safe, they continue to profile and criminalize us.

We should have a department specializing in restorative justice. We need to tackle the root causes of the issues we face, and come to an understanding on how to resolve them.

I am here to honor the Florida students that lost their lives and to stand with the Parkland students. I am here, today, to honor Ricardo. I am here today to honor Stephon Clark. I am here today to uplift my South L.A. community!

Enough is enough.

Question: How many more children have to die so that this problem is finally acknowledged?

Policymakers, listen up. Arming teachers will not work! More security in our schools does not work!

Zero-tolerance policies do not work!

They make us feel like criminals. We should feel empowered and supported in our schools.

Instead of funding these policies, fund mentorship programs, mental health resources, paid internship and job opportunities. My brother, like many others, would have benefited from this. So let's make it happen.

It's important to work with people that are impacted by these issues.

We need to focus on changing the conditions that foster violence and trauma. And that's how we will transform our communities and uplift our voices.

This has not, and shall not, stop us. It has only empowered us.

Mi nombre, my name, is Edna Lizbeth Chávez. Remember my name. Remember these faces. Remember us and how we're making a change. *La lucha sigue* [the fight continues] *Gracias y bendiciones* [thank you and blessings].