



Heroes of Progress: Norman Borlaug

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Lesson Overview

Featured article: *Heroes of Progress, Pt. 1: Norman Borlaug* by Alexander C.R. Hammond

Featured video: *Norman Borlaug: The Father of the Green Revolution Heroes of Progress Ep. 1*

"Norman Borlaug's work undeniably changed the world for the better, and in saving approximately one billion lives, he truly deserves to be our first *Hero of Progress*," Alexander C.R. Hammond writes, summing up the enormous achievements of a man who revolutionized agriculture in the 20th century.

In this lesson, you'll explore the life of Norman Borlaug, Ph.D. using text and video and consider the lessons we can apply from his story to our own lives and to current world problems.



Warm-up

(Can be done in groups or breakout rooms if hybrid/virtual)

What is a famine? What causes famine? How often does famine occur?

What episodes of famine do you know of? See how many examples you can come up with from history. Are there any famines occurring in the world today? If you can't think of any famines or have never heard of famine before, why do you think that is?

How are famine and natural disasters related? How do human actions sometimes cause famine? How do we prevent famine?

Questions for reading, writing, and discussion

Read the [article](#) and [watch the video](#), then answer the following questions:

- The article and video say that Borlaug became 'obsessed' with developing better crops. What do you think motivated Borlaug to pursue this passion? What personal qualities did Borlaug have that helped him achieve his goals despite many setbacks?
- What were some of the characteristics of Borlaug's new type of wheat? Name at least three specific characteristics. How did each of those characteristics improve outcomes for farmers?
- What were some of the obstacles that Borlaug faced as he tried to take his new type of wheat from Mexico to India and Pakistan? What problems did he encounter in India and Pakistan? Give at least three examples of obstacles from the article or video.
- **Make connections:** What connections can you make between Borlaug's work and your own daily experience? How have Borlaug's discoveries affected your life?
- **Think about long-term impacts:** The results of Borlaug's work are breathtaking. How has Borlaug's 'Green Revolution' impacted societies in Mexico, Asia, and Africa?
- **Key Concept:** Famine occurred frequently throughout history but has decreased dramatically in the last 50 years. What important lessons can we apply from Borlaug's life experience to current world challenges? What civic, educational, and government institutions helped spread the adoption of the new types of crops?

Note: Although the number and severity of famines have decreased in recent years, this fact in no way underplays the dire situation faced by millions who still face food insecurity. The suffering of those people deserves our urgent attention and action.

Extension Activity/Homework

Examine the graphs on this page: [Famine-Our World in Data](#). Choose one graph and answer these questions about it:

- What's going on in the graph?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- In addition to higher crop yields, what other factors do you think could be contributing to the decreasing number of deaths due to famine since the 1960s?

Students could produce their answers in a number of ways, including by posting on an online discussion board or Jamboard, in an interactive journal, or in a conversation with the teacher and/or their class.