



# Charlie's Cilantro Crop

BY COOPER OVERHOLTZER

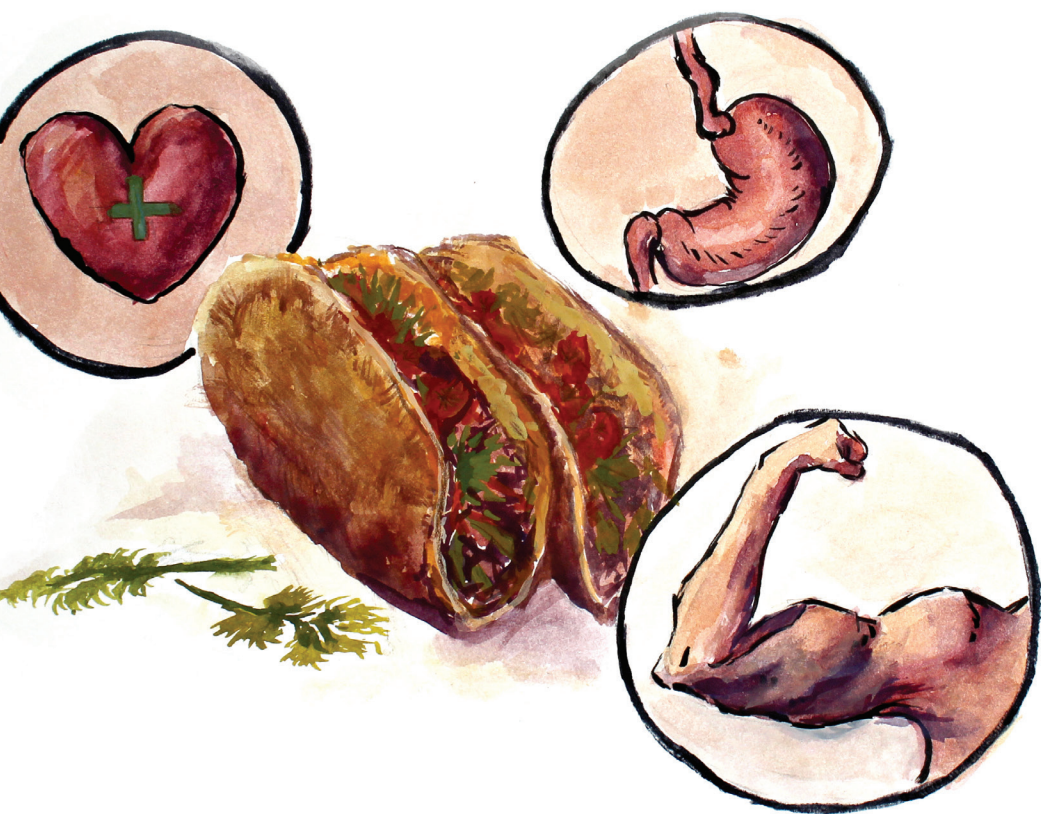
7th GRADE STATE WINNER

Gratton School | Rexann Casteel, Teacher  
STANISLAUS COUNTY

Illustrated by: Sheldon High School

It was springtime along the Central Coast of California and twelve-year-old Charlie was very excited! His father Matt, who farmed many fruits and vegetables, had just told him that he could be in charge of the cilantro crop this year. Charlie had grown up helping his father on the farm, so he felt like he had what it took to manage the cilantro.





Charlie was glad that his dad had chosen cilantro for him since it was one of his favorite toppings on his most liked food...tacos! He had even recently been studying cilantro in school. He learned that it has many health benefits such as supporting your muscles, strengthening your bones, boosting your immunity, and helping your digestive system.





One of the things that Charlie already knew was that cilantro grew and was harvested best in the spring and late fall. He also knew that after sowing the seeds, cilantro was harvested in about three to four weeks.



The spring crops had already been harvested, so Charlie would soon be planting the fall crop. California had been through many dry seasons so getting sufficient water for the plants was always a concern. By the time midsummer heat had arrived, their well went dry. Charlie and his father were forced to have a deeper well dug so they could get the water they needed for their crops to survive. Once the well was dug, they planted their fall crops and gave them plenty of water.





Later that summer as Charlie ate his breakfast, he could hear the local news anchor conversing about the wildfires that were tearing through the state. Although he knew they were out of harm's way he felt bad thinking about the people that lived in those areas.

As Charlie harvested his cilantro later that day, he couldn't believe how big his crop was after getting the water it needed. He wondered how he would be able to sell it all.

That night as he was boxing up his cilantro, a food truck rumbled in the drive. It was the Towering Taco Food Truck that was owned by Jose, who just happened to be the dad of Charlie's friend Rico.



Jose had come by to pick up his weekly order of fresh onions, tomatoes, peppers, and cilantro. As Charlie loaded up his order, Jose talked to Matt about many things including the wildfires.





Jose told Matt how he planned to take his food truck up to the fires the next day to feed the firefighters and the people that had lost their homes. Charlie quickly spoke up and told Jose that he would be glad to donate any of the cilantro that he needed. Jose gladly took Charlie up on his offer and invited Charlie to come along with them to help serve the tacos.

Early the next morning, Charlie hopped into the food truck and they eagerly drove off to help the victims of the fire. As they drew closer to their destination, they could see the hazy sky and smell smoke in the air. All around them was the devastating sight of burnt trees, homes, and buildings.





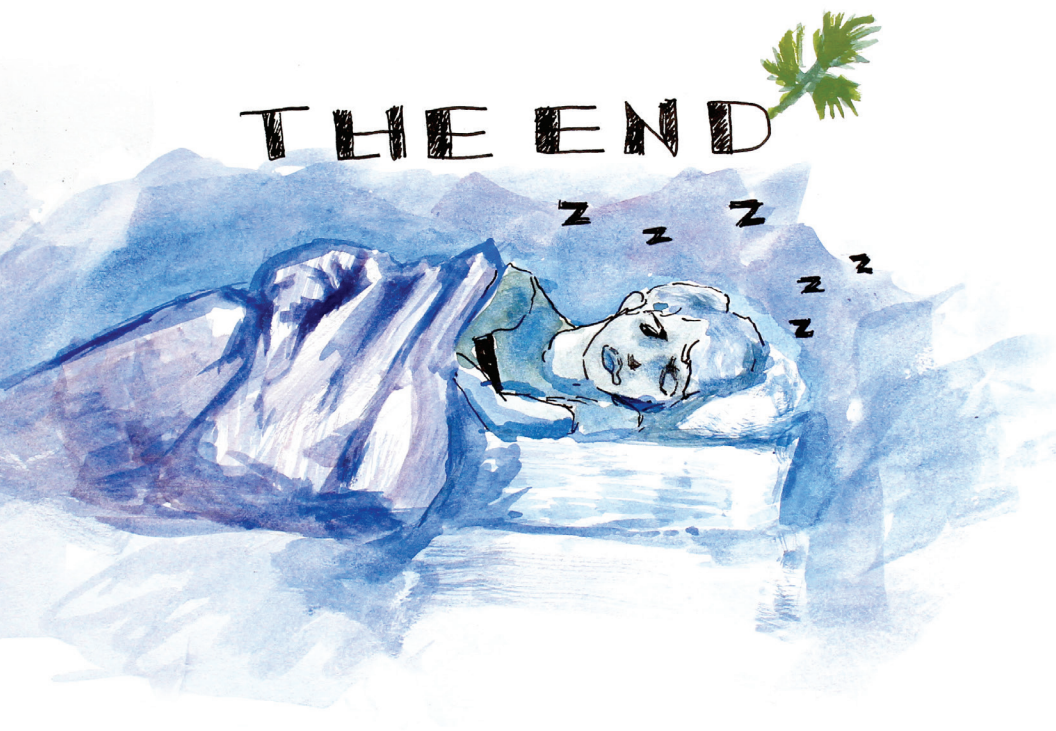
When they reached the community center that was still standing, fire trucks, weary firemen, and people with discouraged faces lit up when they saw a food truck pulling in. Once they parked, Charlie and Rico got out and opened the side doors. They went back and turned on the gas as Jose got all the supplies ready, pulled down his giant skillet, and started quickly cooking.

When the food was ready, Jose organized an assembly line where he scooped the meat onto the taco, Rico dumped on the salsa and onions, and Charlie topped it with his fresh cilantro and handed it out the window to the people. In just a few minutes the line stretched further than Charlie could see and almost everyone had a smile on their face.





By the time they finished serving everyone, they were almost out of food, and the sun was starting to go down. Before they left, they were thanked many times by the victims of the fire and were praised by the firefighters. They left with an empty truck and full hearts for the good deed they had done. When Charlie left for home, the thought of how his little cilantro patch had helped make a difference for so many hungry people that day, and he went to sleep with a smile on his face.





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Cooper Overholtzer

13 years old

Cilantro or kiwi, that was the question. While looking through a stack of vegetable flashcards, those commodities caught Cooper's eye and served as the initial inspiration for a story topic. Ultimately, he decided to write about the herb and created *Charlie's Cilantro Crop*, a story weaving together California agriculture, current events, and kind-heartedness.

The writing process included several drafts before the wildfire and drought themes were included. His favorite aspect of writing was learning lots of new facts. Cooper hopes that readers learn, as he did in writing the story, that helping and supporting others is important.

Cooper is most looking forward to meeting the illustrators of his story and being a published author.



## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

### Yver Lois A. Sanico

*Sheldon High School*

*Theresa Nguyen & Deborah George, Art Teachers*

Sheldon High Senior Yver Sanico knew very little about the process of growing cilantro on California's Central Coast, so he turned to Google Earth. Seeing images of the story setting served as the initial inspiration for his illustrations in *Charlie's Cilantro Crop*. Yver also researched the type of clothing firefighters, who appear in the story, wear, down to the specific color combinations for the story's specific time and region. After thorough research, it was time to start sketching, finalizing color combinations for characters and landscapes, and begin his favorite part, painting. Utilizing watercolors, gouache, pencils, a bit of ink and graphite, his goal was to create images similar to the style of Calvin and Hobbes illustrations. While he thoroughly enjoyed seeing his research and hard work materialize into a final product (one in which he learned the importance of time management and sticking to a strict schedule as an illustrator), his ultimate hope is that his illustrations make people happy.