



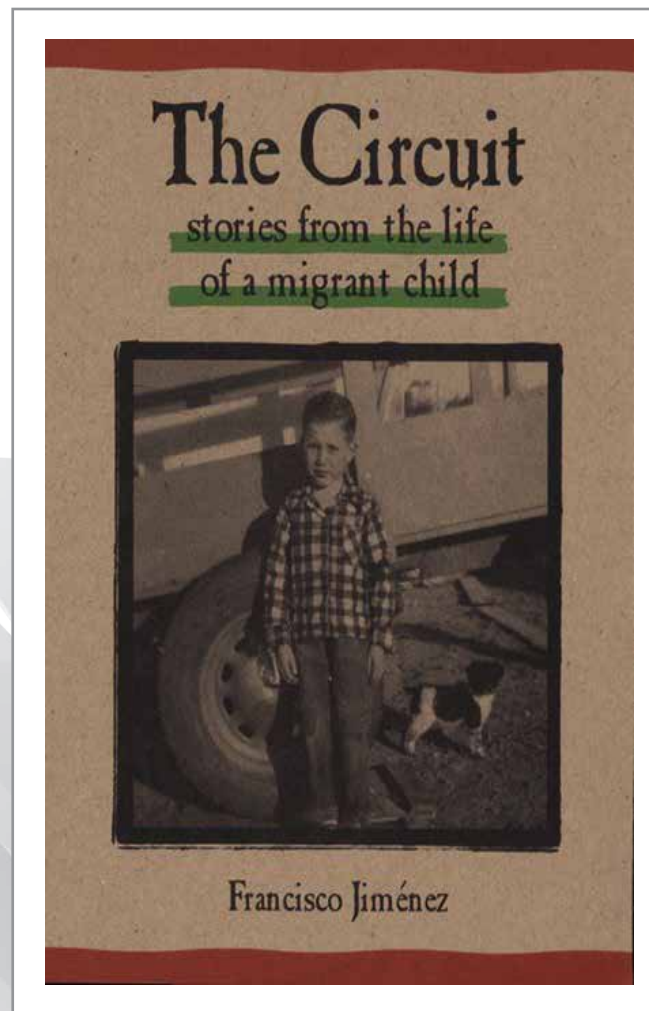
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Circuit

Francisco Jimenez



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Circuit

Francisco Jimenez

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Critical Thinking

Identifying characteristics, predicting, cause/effect, compare/contrast, evaluating, sequencing

Vocabulary

Synonyms/antonyms, definitions, Spanish vocabulary

Writing

Poetry, *corridos*, letters, journal entries, book reviews

Comprehension

Main idea, recalling, summarizing, deduction

Literary Elements

Metaphors, similes, theme, plot, characterization

Across the Curriculum

Art—cover design, symbolism, photography;
Language—Spanish;
Science—metamorphoses;
Psychology—dreams;
History—migration, César Chávez, Dolores Huerta, Declaration of Independence, Mexican-American culture

Genre: autobiography

Setting: California and Mexico, mid-20th century

Point of View: first person

Themes: perseverance, poverty, faith, family, dignity, loyalty, search for permanence, coming of age

Conflict: person vs. society, person vs. nature, person vs. person

Style: narrative

Tone: serious, reflective

Summary

In this largely autobiographical work, Francisco Jiménez reflects upon his life as a young migrant child in California in the 1940s and 1950s. Francisco's family travels from one farming community to another seeking work and a place to live. The ever-growing family struggles to survive against harsh weather, discrimination, and abject poverty. The absence of permanent schooling, friendships, or sense of belonging burdens the entire family and diminishes its quality of life. The stories intertwine to present a picture of struggle and perseverance, heartbreak and love, victory and defeat.

About the Author

Francisco Jiménez illegally immigrated to the United States with his family when he was four years old. His father soon found work on a California farm. Thus began the family's long, hard years as migrant workers. When Francisco was in junior high, immigration officials caught up with the Jiménez family and deported Francisco and his brother back to Mexico. However, a Japanese sharecropper for whom the Jiménez family had once worked offered to sponsor and obtain visas for the family. The Jiménezes soon moved back to the United States. After many years of toiling in the fields, Francisco's father experienced such back pain severe enough that he could no longer work. Francisco's brother, Roberto, then began working as a janitor at the high school in Santa Maria. Finally able to attend school full-time, Francisco thrived. He was elected studentbody president at his high school, earned a 3.7 gradepoint average, and obtained scholarships to Santa Clara University. In his junior year, he became a U.S. citizen. He is now a professor at Santa Clara University and teaches courses in language, Latin-American culture, and literature. He and his wife, Laura, have three children.

Background Information

The immigration of Mexican workers to the United States dates back to the 1850s. Initially, Mexicans came to America to work on the Mexican-American railroad line. However, the increase in fruit production in California, which began around 1850, encouraged many to travel to California for work. Mexican immigration to California increased in the years following the Mexican Revolution (1910), when the Mexican government was hard-pressed to supply employment for its people. World War I created an even greater need for immigrant workers when so much of the American labor force was fighting overseas. By the 1920s, three quarters of the California field laborers were either Mexican or Mexican American.

The working and living conditions of the Mexican immigrants were less than satisfactory. Pressure from workers led the Mexican government to sign an agreement with the United States

that guaranteed them basic rights. Workers, in turn, had to sign a contract upon entering the United States. Until 1924, there was no notion of an “illegal alien.” In that year, the U.S. Border Patrol was created and undocumented workers became fugitives. Discrimination against the Mexican workers increased during the Depression years as white Americans fleeing to California in search of work complained that Mexican workers were robbing them of jobs. White farm owners encouraged the state government to introduce repatriation plans that forced many Mexicans back to Mexico despite their many years of significant contribution to the American economy.

However, World War II created a huge need for Mexican workers. The resulting enormous immigration of Mexican workers, encouraged by the American government, led to the Bracero Program in which the U.S. Department of Agriculture was responsible for recruiting, contracting, transporting, feeding, and lodging the temporary farm workers.

Much of the controversy surrounding migrant workers continues to this day. Crusaders such as César Chávez and Dolores Huerta fought for migrant workers’ rights in the 1960s and brought many issues to national attention. However, disagreement over migrant workers’ rights and civil liberties persists. Furthermore, many migrant workers continue to live in the same miserable conditions described in *The Circuit*.

Characters

Francisco (Panchito)—narrator; the second oldest in a family of migrant workers

Papá—Francisco’s father

Mamá—Francisco’s mother

Roberto—Francisco’s older brother; eventually becomes the family’s breadwinner

Trampita, Torrito, Rubén, Rorra—Francisco’s younger siblings

Miss Scalapino—Francisco’s first-grade teacher in Santa Maria

Mr. Sims—principal of a school in Santa Maria; helps Roberto find a job as a janitor

Curtis, Miguelito, Carl—children in the various schools who are, very briefly, Francisco’s friends

Ito—strawberry sharecropper

Mr. Lema—Francisco’s sixth-grade teacher; offers to teach Francisco to play the trumpet

Carlos—bully at the camp playground; refuses to let Manuelito play kick-the-can

Mr. Díaz—contractor who treats Gabriel cruelly

Gabriel—worker who stands up to Mr. Díaz’s inhumane treatment and loses his job

Miss Ehlis—Francisco’s eighth-grade teacher

Learning the Game—Moving Still

Francisco becomes angry that Carlos won't allow Manuelito to play kick-the-can with the other children. However, he does not find the courage to speak on Manuelito's behalf until he witnesses an injustice shown towards Gabriel, a fellow field worker. Gabriel's courageous response gives Francisco the courage to insist that Carlos allow Manuelito to play. Francisco makes a friend at school who shares his passion for collecting coins. The friendship ends when Francisco moves yet again. Francisco becomes determined to improve his English by recording words in a notepad. Francisco loses his two most valuable pennies when his little sister uses them to buy gumballs. Later, Francisco loses the notepad when gasoline, mistaken for kerosene, ignites a fire in their house. Both losses teach Francisco important life lessons. The family moves back to Santa María. Papá suffers too much back pain to work in the fields, so Roberto volunteers to find work that will support the family and allow them to live year-round in one place. The school principal, Mr. Sims, helps Roberto find a janitorial job at the school. Meanwhile, Francisco finally assumes the life of a normal student, achieving considerable academic success. However, their worlds come crashing down when the Border Patrol takes both Francisco and Roberto into custody.

Vocabulary

leech
 swaggered
 trough
 sheepishly
 evoked
 barracks
 sulphur
 endowed
 inalienable
 deriving

Discussion Questions

1. How do Francisco's feelings about the last day of school differ from his classmates? (*Francisco dreads the last day of school because it means he must return to work in the fields.*)
2. Díaz says to Gabriel, "Here, tie this around your waist. I want you to till the furrows" (p. 91). Why do you think Gabriel refuses to tie the rope around his waist and pull the plow? (*He will not give up the one thing that means the most to him—his dignity. He is not willing to sacrifice his humanity, nor will he allow himself to be treated like an animal.*)
3. Why does Francisco finally insist that Manuelito be allowed to play kick-the-can? (*Gabriel's act of rebellion gives him the courage to stand up for what he knows is right.*)

Spanish Vocabulary

huaraches (Mexican sandals)
taquitos (small Mexican tacos)
sin verguenza (person without shame)
huerquito (little boy, kid)
hacendados (landowners)
campesinos (farm workers)
abuelito/a (grandfather/mother)
librito (booklet)
La Llorano (legendary woman who wept for her children)
 "¡Ay, Dios mío!" ("Ah, my God!")
 "No seas tonto." ("Don't be silly.")

4. Why doesn't Francisco ever play kick-the-can again? (*Answers will vary. Suggestion: Francisco will forever associate the game with the inhumane treatment of Gabriel. In a sense, Francisco's childhood, as represented by the game, ends when disillusionment sets in.*)
5. Why doesn't Francisco invite Carl to his home to view his penny collection? (*Francisco is ashamed of his poor living conditions.*)
6. What personality traits does the notepad demonstrate in Francisco? (*Answers will vary. Suggestions: It demonstrates his determination and willingness to grow, to educate himself. It also shows his desire to belong among the other children.*)
7. After Francisco discovers that Rorra has stolen his penny collection, what does Mamá tell Francisco? What lesson does he learn from this? (*Family is more important than anything. We must forgive for the sake of family.*)
8. Why don't Mamá and Papá seem overly upset about the fire? (*Answers will vary. Suggestions: They had few valued possessions, so there is little sense of loss. Everyone survived the fire, and that is what matters to them. Also, they are accustomed to life's hardships; this is just one more setback.*)
9. Why is the family excited to return to Santa María? (*It is the closest thing to home. It is where they have spent the most time.*)
10. Francisco asks Roberto, "Do you ever wonder what we'll be doing ten or twenty years from now?" (p. 126). Why do you think this is the first time you have heard the boys imagining their future? (*Answers will vary. Suggestions: Up until now, the boys couldn't afford to dream. Life looked like a never-ending continuum of moving from place to place with no opportunity to build a good life.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Much of Francisco's knowledge of family and Mexican history stems from the *corridos* he has heard. *Corridos* are similar to folk ballads and tell stories in song form. *Corridos* remain one of the strongest artistic expressions of Mexican culture. Visit the following site to listen to *corridos* and discover how they are written: <http://www.corridos.org> (Web site active at time of publication.). After visiting the site, write an original *corrido* about an event in your own life or an event from *The Circuit*.
2. Complete the Cause and Effects Map on page 25 of this guide, describing three events from the chapter titled *To Have and to Hold*.
3. Memorize the same lines from the Declaration of Independence that Francisco was required to memorize. Recite them in class.
4. Francisco says, "...you've taught us a lot, Papá" (p. 130). What has Papá taught his children? Answer this question in a journal entry, and reference specific examples from the book.

Word Map

Directions: In groups of 3 or 4, fill out one branch of the word map at a time, with each student writing a different part of the map. Complete word maps for at least 5 of the 8 vocabulary words provided by the teacher.

The diagram is a word map with a central box labeled "WORD" containing a horizontal line. Four surrounding boxes are connected to the central box:

- Synonyms:** A box with three horizontal lines for writing.
- Antonyms:** A box with three horizontal lines for writing.
- Definition in your own words:** A box with three horizontal lines for writing.
- Used in a sentence:** A box with three horizontal lines for writing.