



## About the Author



### Francisco Jiménez

(b. 1943) was born in Mexico and came to the United States with his family when he was four years old. The family settled in California and became migrant workers. Although he could not go to school before the harvest ended, Jiménez studied in the fields. His hard work paid off as he went on to become an outstanding teacher and award-winning writer.

## Tool Kit

First-Read Guide and Model Annotation

## STANDARDS

### Reading Literature

By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

# The Circuit

## Concept Vocabulary

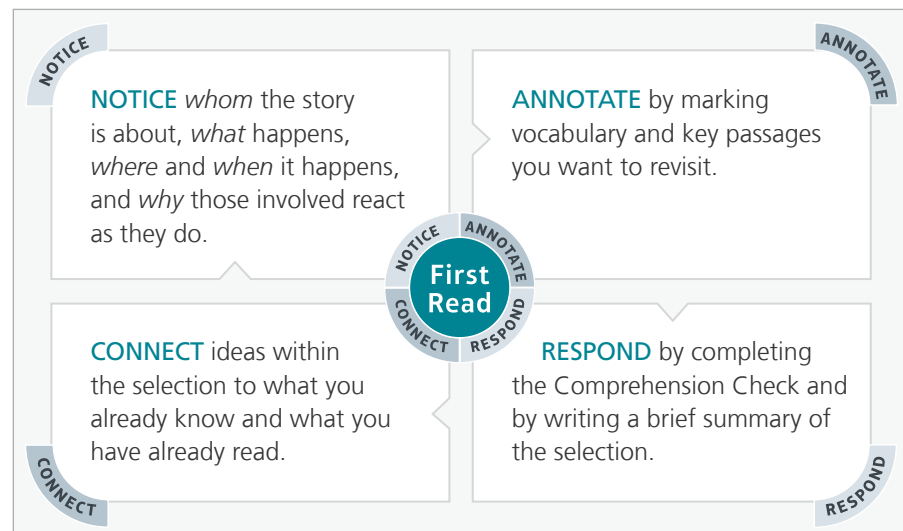
You will encounter the following words as you read “The Circuit.” Before reading, note how familiar you are with each word. Then, rank the words in order from most familiar (1) to least familiar (6).

| WORD             | YOUR RANKING |
|------------------|--------------|
| thoroughly       |              |
| wearily          |              |
| instinctively    |              |
| enthusiastically |              |
| hesitantly       |              |
| understandingly  |              |

After completing your first read, come back to the concept vocabulary and review your rankings. Mark any changes to your original rankings.

## First Read FICTION

Apply these strategies as you conduct your first read. You will have an opportunity to complete the close-read notes after your first read.



# The Circuit

Francisco Jiménez

## BACKGROUND

This selection is from *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child*, a collection of autobiographical short stories by Francisco Jiménez. In this story, the narrator, Panchito, tells of his difficult early years as part of a family of migrant farm workers. To him, life consisted of constant moving and work, with school wedged in around harvesting jobs. The “circuit” in the title refers to the path migrant workers take every year to find jobs.

SCAN FOR  
MULTIMEDIA



<sup>1</sup> **I**t was that time of year again. Ito, the strawberry sharecropper,<sup>1</sup> did not smile. It was natural. The peak of the strawberry season was over and the last few days the workers, most of them braceros,<sup>2</sup> were not picking as many boxes as they had during the months of June and July.

<sup>2</sup> As the last days of August disappeared, so did the number of braceros. Sunday, only one—the best picker—came to work. I liked him. Sometimes we talked during our half-hour lunch break. That is how I found out he was from Jalisco, the same state in Mexico my family was from. That Sunday was the last time I saw him.

<sup>3</sup> When the sun had tired and sunk behind the mountains, Ito signaled us that it was time to go home. “*Ya esora*,”<sup>3</sup> he yelled in his broken Spanish. Those were the words I waited for twelve hours a day, every day, seven days a week, week after week. And the thought of not hearing them again saddened me.

1. **sharecropper** (SHAIR krop uhr) *n.* one who works for a share of a crop; tenant farmer.

2. **braceros** (bruh SAIR ohs) *n.* migrant Mexican farm laborers who harvest crops.

3. **Ya esora** (yah ehs AW rah) Spanish for “It’s time.” (*Ya es hora.*)

## NOTES

**thoroughly** (THUR oh lee)  
adv. completely; entirely

- 4 As we drove home Papá did not say a word. With both hands on the wheel, he stared at the dirt road. My older brother, Roberto, was also silent. He leaned his head back and closed his eyes. Once in a while he cleared from his throat the dust that blew in from outside.
- 5 Yes, it was that time of year. When I opened the front door to the shack, I stopped. Everything we owned was neatly packed in cardboard boxes. Suddenly I felt even more the weight of hours, days, weeks, and months of work. I sat down on a box. The thought of having to move to Fresno<sup>4</sup> and knowing what was in store for me there brought tears to my eyes.
- 6 That night I could not sleep. I lay in bed thinking about how much I hated this move.
- 7 A little before five o'clock in the morning, Papá woke everyone up. A few minutes later, the yelling and screaming of my little brothers and sisters, for whom the move was a great adventure, broke the silence of dawn. Shortly, the barking of the dogs accompanied them.
- 8 While we packed the breakfast dishes, Papá went outside to start the "Carcanchita."<sup>5</sup> That was the name Papá gave his old '38 black Plymouth. He bought it in a used-car lot in Santa Rosa in the Winter of 1949. Papá was very proud of his little jalopy. He had a right to be proud of it. He spent a lot of time looking at other cars before buying this one. When he finally chose the Carcanchita, he checked it **thoroughly** before driving it out of the car lot. He examined every inch of the car. He listened to the motor, tilting his head from side to side like a parrot, trying to detect any noises that spelled car trouble. After being satisfied with the looks and sounds of the car, Papá then insisted on knowing who the original owner was. He never did find out from the car salesman, but he bought the car anyway. Papá figured the original owner must have been an important man because behind the rear seat of the car he found a blue necktie.
- 9 Papá parked the car out in front and left the motor running. "Listo,"<sup>6</sup> he yelled. Without saying a word Roberto and I began to carry the boxes out to the car. Roberto carried the two big boxes and I carried the two smaller ones. Papá then threw the mattress on top of the car roof and tied it with ropes to the front and rear bumpers.
- 10 Everything was packed except Mamá's pot. It was an old large galvanized<sup>7</sup> pot she had picked up at an army surplus store in Santa Maria. The pot had many dents and nicks, and the

4. **Fresno** (FREHZ noh) *n.* city in central California.

5. **Carcanchita** (kahr kahn CHEE tah) affectionate name for the car.

6. **Listo** (LEES toh) Spanish for "Ready."

7. **galvanized** (GAL vuh nyzd) *adj.* coated with zinc to prevent rusting.



more dents and nicks it acquired the more Mamá liked it. “*Mi olla*,”<sup>8</sup> she used to say proudly.

- 11 I held the front door open as Mamá carefully carried out her pot by both handles, making sure not to spill the cooked beans. When she got to the car, Papá reached out to help her with it. Roberto opened the rear car door and Papá gently placed it on the floor behind the front seat. All of us then climbed in. Papá sighed, wiped the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve, and said **wearily**: “*Es todo*.”<sup>9</sup>
- 12 As we drove away, I felt a lump in my throat. I turned around and looked at our little shack for the last time.
- 13 At sunset we drove into a labor camp near Fresno. Since Papá did not speak English, Mamá asked the camp foreman if he needed any more workers. “We don’t need no more,” said the foreman, scratching his head. “Check with Sullivan down the road. Can’t miss him. He lives in a big white house with a fence around it.”
- 14 When we got there, Mamá walked up to the house. She went through a white gate, past a row of rose bushes, up the stairs to the front door. She rang the doorbell. The porch light went on and a tall husky man came out. They exchanged a few words. After the man went in, Mamá clasped her hands and hurried back to the car. “We have work! Mr. Sullivan said we can stay there the whole season,” she said, gasping and pointing to an old garage near the stables.
- 15 The garage was worn out by the years. It had no windows. The walls, eaten by termites, strained to support the roof full of holes. The dirt floor, populated by earth worms, looked like a gray road map.
- 16 That night, by the light of a kerosene lamp, we unpacked and cleaned our new home. Roberto swept away the loose dirt, leaving the hard ground. Papá plugged the holes in the walls with old newspapers and tin can tops. Mamá fed my little brothers and sisters. Papá and Roberto then brought in the mattress and placed it on the far corner of the garage. “Mamá, you and the little ones sleep on the mattress. Roberto, Panchito, and I will sleep outside under the trees,” Papá said.
- 17 Early next morning Mr. Sullivan showed us where his crop was, and after breakfast, Papá, Roberto, and I headed for the vineyard to pick.
- 18 Around nine o’clock the temperature had risen to almost one hundred degrees. I was completely soaked in sweat and my mouth felt as if I had been chewing on a handkerchief. I walked over to the end of the row, picked up the jug of water we had

8. **Mi olla** (mee OH yah) Spanish for “My pot.”

9. **Es todo** (ehs TOH thoh) Spanish for “That’s everything.”

## NOTES

**wearily** (WIHR uh lee) *adv.* in a tired manner

## CLOSE READ

**ANNOTATE:** Mark the words and phrases in paragraph 15 that the describe the garage.

**QUESTION:** What effect do these words create?

**CONCLUDE:** What can you conclude about the lives of migrant workers from this passage?

**instinctively** (ihn STIHNGK tihv lee) *adv.* done automatically, without thinking

### CLOSE READ

**ANNOTATE:** Mark the verbs in paragraph 20 that describe the actions of the sun, mountains and valley, and vines.

**QUESTION:** Why has the author chosen verbs that make nonhuman things seem human?

**CONCLUDE:** Would the text be as effective if the author had made different choices?

brought, and began drinking. “Don’t drink too much; you’ll get sick,” Roberto shouted. No sooner had he said that than I felt sick to my stomach. I dropped to my knees and let the jug roll off my hands. I remained motionless with my eyes glued on the hot sandy ground. All I could hear was the drone of insects. Slowly I began to recover. I poured water over my face and neck and watched the dirty water run down my arms to the ground.

19 I still felt dizzy when we took a break to eat lunch. It was past two o’clock and we sat underneath a large walnut tree that was on the side of the road. While we ate, Papá jotted down the number of boxes we had picked. Roberto drew designs on the ground with a stick. Suddenly I noticed Papá’s face turn pale as he looked down the road. “Here comes the school bus,” he whispered loudly in alarm. **Instinctively**, Roberto and I ran and hid in the vineyards. We did not want to get in trouble for not going to school. The neatly dressed boys about my age got off. They carried books under their arms. After they crossed the street, the bus drove away. Roberto and I came out from hiding and joined Papá. “*Tienen que tener cuidado*,”<sup>10</sup> he warned us.

20 After lunch we went back to work. The sun kept beating down. The buzzing insects, the wet sweat, and the hot dry dust made the afternoon seem to last forever. Finally the mountains around the valley reached out and swallowed the sun. Within an hour it was too dark to continue picking. The vines blanketed the grapes, making it difficult to see the bunches. “*Vamonos*,”<sup>11</sup> said Papá, signaling to us that it was time to quit work. Papá then took out a pencil and began to figure out how much we had earned our first day. He wrote down numbers, crossed some out, wrote down some more. “*Quince*,”<sup>12</sup> he murmured.

21 When we arrived home, we took a cold shower underneath a water hose. We then sat down to eat dinner around some wooden crates that served as a table. Mamá had cooked a special meal for us. We had rice and tortillas with “*carne con chile*,”<sup>13</sup> my favorite dish.

22 The next morning I could hardly move. My body ached all over. I felt little control over my arms and legs. This feeling went on every morning for days until my muscles finally got used to the work.

23 It was Monday, the first week of November. The grape season was over and I could now go to school. I woke up early that morning and lay in bed, looking at the stars and savoring the

10. ***Tienen que tener cuidado*** (tee EHN ehn kay tehn EHR kwee THAH thoh) Spanish for “You have to be careful.”

11. ***Vámonos*** (VAH moh nohs) Spanish for “Let’s go.”

12. ***Quince*** (KEEN say) Spanish for “Fifteen.”

13. ***“carne con chile”*** (KAHR nay kuhn CHIHL ay) dish of ground meat, hot peppers, beans, and tomatoes.

thought of not going to work and of starting sixth grade for the first time that year. Since I could not sleep, I decided to get up and join Papá and Roberto at breakfast. I sat at the table across from Roberto, but I kept my head down. I did not want to look up and face him. I knew he was sad. He was not going to school today. He was not going tomorrow, or next week, or next month. He would not go until the cotton season was over, and that was sometime in February. I rubbed my hands together and watched the dry, acid stained skin fall to the floor in little rolls.

24 When Papá and Roberto left for work, I felt relief. I walked to the top of a small grade next to the shack and watched the Carcanchita disappear in the distance in a cloud of dust. Two hours later, around eight o'clock, I stood by the side of the road waiting for school bus number twenty. When it arrived I climbed in. Everyone was busy either talking or yelling. I sat in an empty seat in the back.

25 When the bus stopped in front of the school, I felt very nervous. I looked out the bus window and saw boys and girls carrying books under their arms. I put my hands in my pant pockets and walked to the principal's office. When I entered I heard a woman's voice say: "May I help you?" I was startled. I had not heard English for months. For a few seconds I remained speechless. I looked at the lady who waited for an answer. My first instinct was to answer her in Spanish, but I held back. Finally, after struggling for English words, I managed to tell her that I wanted to enroll in the sixth grade. After answering many questions, I was led to the classroom.

26 Mr. Lema, the sixth grade teacher, greeted me and assigned me a desk. He then introduced me to the class. I was so nervous and scared at that moment when everyone's eyes were on me that I wished I were with Papá and Roberto picking cotton. After taking roll, Mr. Lema gave the class the assignment for the first hour. "The first thing we have to do this morning is finish reading the story we began yesterday," he said **enthusiastically**. He walked up to me, handed me an English book, and asked me to read. "We are on page 125," he said politely. When I heard this, I felt my blood rush to my head; I felt dizzy. "Would you like to read?" he asked **hesitantly**. I opened the book to page 125. My mouth was dry. My eyes began to water. I could not begin. "You can read later," Mr. Lema said **understandingly**.

27 For the rest of the reading period I kept getting angrier and angrier at myself. I should have read, I thought to myself.

**"Finally, after struggling for English words, I managed to tell her that I wanted to enroll in the sixth grade."**

**enthusiastically** (ehn thoo zee AS tihk lee) *adv.* with eager interest

**hesitantly** (HEHZ uh tuhnt lee) *adv.* in an unsure or cautious way

**understandingly** (uhn duhr STAN dihng lee) *adv.* in a knowing way; kindly


- 28 During recess I went into the rest room and opened my English book to page 125. I began to read in a low voice, pretending I was in class. There were many words I did not know. I closed the book and headed back to the classroom.
- 29 Mr. Lema was sitting at his desk correcting papers. When I entered he looked up at me and smiled. I felt better. I walked up to him and asked if he could help me with the new words. "Gladly," he said.
- 30 The rest of the month I spent my lunch hours working on English with Mr. Lema, my best friend at school.
- 31 One Friday during lunch hour Mr. Lema asked me to take a walk with him to the music room. "Do you like music?" he asked me as we entered the building. "Yes, I like *corridos*,"<sup>14</sup> I answered. He then picked up a trumpet, blew on it, and handed it to me. The sound gave me goose bumps. I knew that sound. I had heard it in many corridos. "How would you like to learn how to play it?" he asked. He must have read my face because before I could answer, he added: "I'll teach you how to play it during our lunch hours."
- 32 That day I could hardly wait to tell Papá and Mamá the great news. As I got off the bus, my little brothers and sisters ran up to meet me. They were yelling and screaming. I thought they were happy to see me, but when I opened the door to our shack, I saw that everything we owned was neatly packed in cardboard boxes. 🐼

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14. *corridos* (koh REE thohs) *n.* ballads.

## Comprehension Check

Complete the following items after you finish your first read.

1. What kind of work does Panchito's family do?
2. Why does the family move at the beginning of the story?
3. Why does Papá warn his sons that the school bus is coming when they are picking grapes?
4. Who befriends Panchito at school?
5.  **Notebook** Write a brief summary of "The Circuit" to confirm your understanding of the story.

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## RESEARCH

**Research to Clarify** Choose at least one unfamiliar detail from the text. Briefly research that detail. In what way does the information you learned shed light on an aspect of the story?