



The Circuit

Written by Francisco Jiménez

Illustrated by Celia Jacobs

Grades 6-8

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Reading Guide by Stephanie Johnson, Southland Council of Teachers of English

Discussion Questions

1. Read the three dedications at the start of the book. To whom is this book dedicated? As you read this book, consider how those dedications might resonate throughout the story.
2. *La frontera*. Those are the first two words of this book. What does *la frontera* mean? Does it sound like any English word or words you might know? How is it described in the first chapter and in the glossary near the end of the book?
3. How old is the narrator in the first chapter, “Under the Wire”? How do the pictures of Francisco change from the first chapter to the closing chapter, “Moving Still”? What changes do you see?
4. What time period is the story set in? As you read, what details in the words and illustrations convey the time in which it takes place?
5. As the story unfolds, consider: what challenges does Francisco, his family, and other migrant families encounter throughout the book?
6. Amidst so many daunting challenges, what qualities and actions help Francisco and his family to survive and keep moving forward together?
7. Notice the many animals depicted in the pictures and words, such as Catarina the cat and Perico the parrot in the chapter “Death Forgiven”, the goldfish and little grey fish in “El Ángel de Oro”, the stray dogs in “Moving Still”, and the caterpillar/butterfly in “Inside Out.” What can we learn about young Francisco from his descriptions of, and his interactions with, these animals?
8. Look at the picture panel at the bottom of page 36 in the chapter “Inside Out.” What do the speech balloons show? Have you ever experienced a conversation where you felt as Francisco does?



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9. In the chapter “Inside Out” Francisco says: “It was easier when Miss Scalapino read to the class from a book with illustrations. I would make up my own stories in Spanish based on the pictures.” Later, as he looks at a picture book, he says, “I tried to figure out the words by looking at the pictures.” At the end of the chapter, he wins first place for his drawing of a butterfly and gives it to a classmate who recently bullied him. Through these scenes, what does the author convey about how he learned the English language?

10. This memoir shares several of Francisco’s experiences with teachers at several different schools: Miss Scalapino (“Inside Out”), Mr. Lema (“The Circuit”), Miss Martin (“To Have and To Hold”), Mr. Milo, and Miss Ehlis (“Moving Still”). Consider the words and actions of each of those teachers, as well as those of Mr. Sims, the principal. What stands out most about the actions of each of those teachers? How did each teacher help young Francisco grow? What can we learn from Francisco’s recollections of his experiences with each of those teachers?

EXPLORE

Beyond This Book

1. In addition to the original 1997 book *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child* from which this graphic novel was adapted, Francisco’s story continues through three sequels-- *Breaking Through*, *Reaching Out*, *Taking Hold* (all are available in Spanish under the titles *Cajas de cartón*, *Senderos fronterizos*, *Más allá de mí*, and *Pasos firmes*) --plus two picture books, *The Christmas Gift/El regalo de Navidad* and *La Mariposa*, both based on chapters from *The Circuit*.

2. Among many other honors, Francisco Jiménez has been recognized as a Pura Belpré award-winning author. Two books to help you explore and learn more are:

[Planting Stories: The Life of Librarian and Storyteller Pura Belpré](#)
by Anika Aldamuy Denise and Paola Escobar (2019)

[Pura's Cuentos: How Pura Belpré Reshaped Libraries with Her Stories](#)
by Annette Bay Pimentel and Magaly Morales (2021)

3. *The Circuit* is a memoir: a narrative, written from the first-person perspective of the author, about important parts of his life. A memoir can feature personal memories and reflections. What experiences from your own life might you share in a memoir? What colors might best convey your memories?

