

Lesson 6

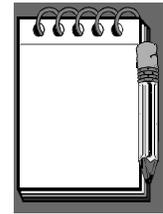
“The Circuit”

Materials Needed:

- ▣ journal
- ✎ pen or pencil
- computer

Journal Entry

Do you have to move often? How do you feel about moving? What are the hardest things to leave? To what do you look forward at the new location? Think about this and write for ten minutes.

**About the Author: Francisco Jiménez**

Francisco Jiménez was born in 1943 in San Pedro Tlaquepaque, Jalisco, Mexico. He moved as a very young child to Santa Maria, California, where his parents were migrant workers. At age six he joined his parents, brothers and sisters following the migrant circuit. The long hours of work in the fields and the constant movement from town to town as well as his inability to speak English made school hard for him. He failed first grade. Some authorities even declared him mentally retarded, but he persevered and mastered his second language.

When he was in junior high school, Jiménez was taken out of the classroom by an immigration officer and sent back to Mexico as an illegal alien. Still, he was very determined; he returned and became an American citizen. His excellent academic record and an attentive guidance counselor got him scholarships to the University of Santa Clara. He eventually earned his Master of Arts (MA) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees in Spanish and Latin American Literature. He has become a distinguished scholar, teacher, editor, and the author of several textbooks. “The Circuit” is based on the author’s childhood experiences.

Vocabulary



Words to help you with your reading:

Word	Definition
braceros	strong arms, manual labor
ya esora (ya es la hora)	broken Spanish for <i>it's time, it's the hour</i>
listo	ready
mi olla	my pot
es todo	that's all
tienen que tener cuidado	we have to be careful
vámonos	let's go
quince	fifteen
carne con chile	meat with chili
corridos	Mexican country music style
jalopy	old car
goose bumps	bumps on the skin caused by cold, fear, or excitement

Add words to your vocabulary. Make a list of words and definitions in your Journal.

Word	Definition	Example
instinctive	knowing without being given a reason	<i>“Instinctively, Roberto and I ran and hid in the vineyards.”</i>
enroll	enlist, insert a name in a roll	<i>“Finally, after struggling for English words, I managed to tell her that I wanted to enroll in the sixth grade.”</i>
enthusiastic	with great happiness	<i>“‘The first thing we have to do this morning is finish reading the story we began yesterday,’ he said enthusiastically.”</i>

Reading Assignment

Read the story “The Circuit.” Panchito is the nickname of the narrator, and Roberto is his brother. “Carcachita” is the name the narrator’s father gave his jalopy. The *foreman* is a person in charge of the work.

The Circuit

by Francisco Jiménez

It was that time of year again. Ito, the strawberry sharecropper, 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, were not picking as many boxes as they had during the months of June and July.

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.

When the sun had tired and sunk behind the mountains, Ito signaled us that it was time to go home. “Ya esora,” 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.

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.

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 and knowing what was in store for me there brought tears to my eyes.

That night I could not sleep. I lay in bed thinking about how much I hated this move.

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.

While we packed the breakfast dishes, Papá went outside to start the “Carcachita.” 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 “Carcachita,” 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.

Papá parked the car out in front and left the motor running. “Listo,” 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.

Everything was packed except Mamá’s pot. It was an old large galvanized pot she had picked up at an army surplus store in

10 Santa María the year I was born. The pot had many dents and nicks, and the more dents and nicks it acquired the more Mamá liked it. “Mi olla,” she used to say proudly.

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
11 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 off his forehead with his sleeve, and said wearily: “Es todo.”

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.

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
13 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.”

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
14 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.

The garage was worn out by the years. It had no windows. The walls, eaten by
15 termites, strained to support the roof full of holes. The dirt floor, populated by earth worms, looked like a gray road map.

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
16 tin can tops. Mamá fed my little brothers and sisters. Papá and Roberto then brought in the mattress and placed it in the far corner of the garage. “Mamá, you and the little ones sleep on the mattress. Robert, Panchito, and I will sleep outside under the trees,” Papá said.

Early next morning Mr. Sullivan
17 showed us where his crop was, and after breakfast, Papá, Roberto, and I headed for the vineyard to pick.

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 brought, and began drinking. “Don’t drink
18 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.

I still felt a little 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
19 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” he warned us.

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.
 20 The vines blanketed the grapes, making it difficult to see the bunches. “Vámonos,” 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,” he murmured.

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

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

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 thought of not going to work and of starting sixth grade for the first time that year. Since I could not sleep,
 23 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.

When Papá and Roberto left for work, I felt relief. I walked to the top of a small
 24 grade next to the shack and watched the “Carcachita” 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
 25 I climbed in. Everyone was busy either talking or yelling. I sat in an empty seat in the back.

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
 26 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.

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.
 27 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.

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

During recess I went into the restroom and opened my English book to page 125.
29 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.

Mr. Lema was sitting at his desk correcting papers. When I entered he looked up at me and smiled. I felt better. I
30 walked up to him and asked if he could help me with the new words. “Gladly,” he said.

The rest of the month I spent my lunch
31 hours working on English with Mr. Lema, my best friend at school.

One Friday during lunch hour Mr. Lema asked me to take a walk with him to
32 the music room. “Do you like music?” he asked me as we entered the building.

“Yes, I like corridos,” I answered. He then picked up a trumpet, blew on it and handed it to me. The sound gave me goose
33 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.”

That day I could hardly wait to get home to tell Papá and Mamá the great news. As I got off the bus, my little
34 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.

Reading Comprehension

Answer the questions in complete sentences except multiple choice questions.

1. Identify the signal that the family was moving.

2. Discuss how the narrator feels about moving. What details support this?

3. Explain why Mama, instead of Papa, talked with the foreman.

4. Describe the garage where the family was to stay.

_____ 5. Why did the narrator and his brother hide in the vineyards?

- a. They did not want to go to school.
- b. They were afraid they would get in trouble for not going to school.
- c. They wanted to work in the fields.

6. Why could the narrator go to school in November, but not his brother, Roberto?

7. Explain how Mr. Lema treats the narrator.

8. What does the narrator particularly look forward to doing on his lunch hour?

Reader Response

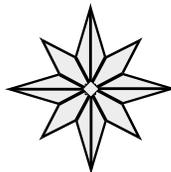
There are hints in the story that the narrator will not be defeated by the family’s mobility.

1. Identify the responsibilities the narrator accepts at his young age.

2. Assess the narrator’s attitude toward learning. What details lead you to believe this?

3. Describe the details that show you the narrator has the ability to adapt.

4. Have you ever experienced a situation similar to that of the narrator? Explain what you might have in common with the narrator.



End of Lesson 6