

The Circuit

Francisco Jiménez

Have you ever moved to a new home? Did it make you feel sad to leave your old home and your old friends behind? Panchito, a young migrant farm worker in Francisco Jiménez's story "The Circuit" has to move often. Migrant worker families can never live too long in one place. They must go wherever the work is. They find jobs picking fruit, harvesting crops, or doing manual labor.

As the story opens, Panchito and his family are getting ready to move again.



It was that time of year again. Ito, the strawberry sharecropper¹ 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*,² were not picking as many boxes as they had during the months of June and July.



By the end of August, there are no more strawberries left to pick. Panchito's family will have to look for work somewhere else. Panchito has gotten to like Ito and is sad because he will never see him again. As they drive home, Panchito's older brother Roberto and Papá are silent.



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

TAKE NOTES

Activate Prior Knowledge

Constant change makes life difficult for Panchito. Describe an unexpected change you have faced.

Literary Analysis

The **theme** of a story is its central idea. Read the bracketed passage. It gives clues to the theme of "The Circuit." Underline the words that might suggest the theme. What theme do you think the words suggest?

Reading Check

Why does Panchito's family have to move often? Circle the answer.

1. **sharecropper** (SHER krahp er) *n.* one who works for a share of the crop.
2. **braceros** (brah SER ohs) *n.* migrant Mexican farm workers who harvest crops.

TAKE NOTES

Literary Analysis

Why do you think Panchito has tears in his eyes?

A story's **theme** is its central idea. What do Panchito's tears have to do with the theme?

Reading Skill

A **conclusion** is a decision you make based on details in a story. Underline details about the family's new home in the bracketed passage. What can you conclude about the family?

Reading Check

Who asks whether help is needed at the labor camp? Circle the answer. Then, underline the reason why.

on a box. The thought of having to move to Fresno³ 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.



Before dawn, Papá wakes the family. Panchito's little brothers and sisters scream with excitement about the move.

After breakfast, Panchito and Roberto carry boxes out to the car. Papá ties the mattress to the top of the car roof. Mamá brings out her favorite pot filled with beans. Papá places it on the floor behind the front seat. Finally, everything is packed and the whole family is in the car.



As we drove away I felt a lump in my throat. I turned around and looked at our little shack for the last time.



After driving all day, the family arrives at a labor camp near Fresno. Mamá asks if help is needed since Papá cannot speak English.



"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."



Mr. Sullivan tells the family he can use them for the whole season. They can live in an old garage with no windows and a roof full of holes.



3. Fresno (FREZ noh) *n.* city in central California.

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.



The family settles in for the night. After breakfast the next morning, Papá, Roberto, and Panchito head for the vineyard to pick grapes.



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.



Panchito drinks too much water and gets sick to his stomach. He drops to his knees and stays still on the ground until he starts to feel better. Later, while they are eating lunch, a schoolbus passes by. Papá tells Roberto and Panchito to run and hide in the vineyard. He doesn't want them to get into trouble for not going to school. They work all afternoon until the sun goes down and it gets too dark to see the grapes. The next morning Panchito can hardly move and his body aches all over. This goes on until his muscles get 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

Read Fluently

A *prepositional phrase* is a group of words that includes a preposition. A preposition shows the relation, or *position*, of a noun or pronoun to another word. Prepositions include *to*, *under*, *from*, *on*, and *in*, to name a few. Underline the prepositional phrases in the bracketed paragraph.

Reading Skill

What **conclusion** can you draw in the underlined sentence about why the family works so late?

Reading Check

Underline the text that explains why Papá wants the boys to hide.

Vocabulary Development

kerosene (KER uh seen) *n.* an oil used for burning in heaters and lamps
savoring (SAY ver ing) *v.* enjoying with appreciation

TAKE NOTES

Literary Analysis

Do you think that Panchito has ever enrolled at a new school before? Explain.

How does this relate to the **theme**?

Reading Skill

Panchito is nervous when Mr. Lema introduces him to the class. What **conclusion** do you draw from Panchito's feelings?

Reading Check

What does Panchito do to learn English? Circle the text that tells what he does.

thought of not going to work and of starting sixth grade for the first time that year.



Panchito joins Papá and Roberto at breakfast. He cannot look Roberto in the eye. He knows Roberto has to pick cotton instead of going to school. At eight o'clock Panchito climbs on the schoolbus.

Panchito feels very nervous when he arrives at the school. He has no books like the other children. He goes to the principal's office and is startled when she speaks to him in English. At first, he wants to speak in Spanish, but he finally manages to tell her in English that he wants to enroll in school. Soon, he is taken to the sixth-grade 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.



Mr. Lema gives the class an assignment for their reading hour. He hands Panchito an English book and asks him to read on page 125. When Panchito opens to that page, he cannot begin to read. His mouth is dry and his eyes begin to water. Mr. Lema kindly tells Panchito that he can read later. Panchito gets angry at himself for not reading.

During recess, Panchito tries to read the book in the restroom. He finds many words he does not know. Panchito goes back to the classroom and asks Mr. Lema to help him. "Gladly," says the teacher.

Mr. Lema continues to help Panchito during lunch hour and becomes his best friend.

One day they visit the music room. Mr. Lema asks Panchito if he likes music

and begins to play a trumpet. The sound of the trumpet gives Panchito *goose bumps*. Mr. Lema asks him if he would like to learn to play it.



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 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.

TAKE NOTES

Stop to Reflect

Do you think that Mr. Lema is a good teacher? Explain.

Reading Check

What does the narrator find when he gets home from school? Underline the text that tells you.

The Circuit

1. **Respond:** What do you admire about Panchito? Why?

2. **Infer:** It is difficult for Panchito to make friends in new places. Why do you think Panchito calls Mr. Lema his “best friend at school”?

3. **Reading Skill:** A **conclusion** is a decision you make based on the details in a story. Complete this chart to **draw conclusions** about what happens in the story.

Question	Details That Answer Question	Conclusion
Why does Panchito work so much?		
Why are the family's belongings packed in boxes?		

4. **Literary Analysis:** How does the title of this story connect to its **theme**?

Writing: Character Description

Write a **description** of a character from “The Circuit.” Answer the following questions to gather details for your description.

- What quality do you find most interesting about your character?

- How does this character get along with other characters?

- What challenges does this character face?

Use your answers to write your description.

Listening and Speaking: Interview

With a partner, prepare for an **interview** about migrant worker life. On another sheet of paper, write a series of questions and answers to develop the interview. Use the following topics as guides.

1. Questions about the migrant worker’s name, age, or family
2. Questions about where the worker works and what he or she does
3. Questions about the worker’s education