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# The Circuit: Stories From The Life Of A Migrant Child



## Synopsis

After dark in a Mexican border town, a father holds open a hole in a wire fence as his wife and two small boys crawl through. So begins life in the United States for many people every day. And so begins this collection of twelve autobiographical stories by Santa Clara University professor Francisco Jimenez, who at the age of four illegally crossed the border with his family in 1947. "The Circuit," the story of young Panchito and his trumpet, is one of the most widely anthologized stories in Chicano literature. At long last, Jimenez offers more about the wise, sensitive little boy who has grown into a role model for subsequent generations of immigrants. These independent but intertwined stories follow the family through their circuit, from picking cotton and strawberries to topping carrots--and back again--over a number of years. As it moves from one labor camp to the next, the little family of four grows into ten. Impermanence and poverty define their lives. But with faith, hope, and back-breaking work, the family endures. "A jewel of a book"--Rolando Hinojosa-Smith "These stories are so realistic they choke the heart."--Rudolfo Anaya

## Book Information

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Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Ethnic Studies

Age Range: 10 - 13 years

Grade Level: 5 - 8

## Customer Reviews

Gr 6 Up-Francisco Jimenez was born in Mexico, entered California illegally as a very young child,

and spent his boyhood alternating between migrant farm work and the classroom. This collection of autobiographical short stories was written years later, when Jimenez had become an established professor at Santa Clara University (CA), but they give immediate access to the feelings of the growing boy. Adrian Vargas reads in a lightly accented English, offering a voice that is evidently that of the full grown man remembering, rather than that of the youth he remembers. Each story is simple, direct, and redolent with the smells of the earth, the sounds of the ever-changing home with its growing number of siblings, and the amazing experiences each new schoolroom offers. The frustrations range from those specific to poverty and migrancy, including the inability to follow up on promises made by a good teacher because the family moves on the day the offer of trumpet lessons has been proffered, through the universal experience of an older brother saddled with an ignorant younger sibling who insensitively feeds his prized penny collection into the grocery store's gumball machine. Jimenez and Vargas both maintain a leisurely pace appropriate to storytelling that can reach a wide audience, giving the images constructed from words time to bloom in the audience's mind before wrapping each tale in a tight, often surprising, close. Highly recommended for both pleasure listening and for classroom use and discussion. Francisca Goldsmith, Berkeley Public Library, CA Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

." . . [a] moving book . . . "The Circuit beautifully captures the rhythms of everyday life and the dreams and aspirations of a migrant family. Jimenez writes credibly in the voice of his young protagonist. Pancho is a compelling and memorable character, at the emotional center of a book that will appeal to both adult and teenage readers." Jimenez's exquisite autobiographical short story The Circuit is widely anthologized. . . . Like Steinbeck's classic "Grapes of Wrath," Jimenez's stories combine stark social realism with heartrending personal drama. An assortment of stories that remain independent, yet they intertwine . . . "Jimenez wrote the story in an honest and delightful voice. It's a wonderful representation of a culture that exists in the U.S. but is foreign to most Americans. There are moments of wonder . . . Francisco Jimenez is a master craftsman of words, with a simple yet crystalline style . . . "The Circuit" speaks intimately of migrant life in the western United States a life that might be known by its politics or sociology but here is given a human face. . . . "The Circuit" beautifully captures the rhythms of everyday life and the dreams and aspirations of a migrant family. Jimenez writes credibly in the voice of his young protagonist. Pancho is a compelling and memorable character, at the emotional center of a book that will appeal to both adult and teenage readers. . . . "The Circuit" beautifully captures the rhythms of everyday life and the dreams and aspirations of a migrant family.

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I was asked to read this book for school. I wasn't feeling terribly excited to do so. I just have a hard time reading books for school, especially when they are not what I would normally read. However, I started reading this book and I finished half of it in one sitting, going well over and above what was assigned reading. I finished the book in two goes. It was engaging and interesting. This book was powerful and insightful and really helped me to understand the plight of the migrant worker and his family, especially the children of migrant workers. I am planning to buy the other books in the series even though they are not assigned to me, just to understand how this remarkable man came from nothing to a college professor in his life. I was very happy with this book.

This is a collection of short stories based on real life. Mr. Jimenez was born in Mexico, and came to California as a young boy with his parents. They were undocumented workers. Eventually he became not only a citizen, but a professor at Santa Clara University in California. These stories, based on his own life, and the lives of his friends and relatives, give an immediate entrance into the world of the migrant worker. How hard it was to make a living, how difficult to attend school, to make friends, to become educated. How impossible to keep promises made. This is a collection of compelling stories, that will make you laugh, and make you cry. It tells about the people who pick the lettuce in the salad you just ate, the cotton in that tee-shirt you're wearing, the oranges in your juicer. If you've never thought about who picks those cherries you're eating right now, this book will

give you those thoughts. It is a delightful book, filled with love, tenderness, compassion, and passion. This book will introduce you to the people who work the fields, cook our meals, wait our tables, who go unnoticed unless it is politically expedient to see them. O. Henry wrote "Gift of the Magi" which is marvelous; Dr. Jimenez wrote "Christmas Gift" which will be the Star in your night! It is now August, and Christmas is a few days down the calendar, but now is the time to start buying those stocking stuffers, and this is certainly one you want get as many copies as you need for all those stockings you need to stuff!

I have read this book multiple times, since I have used it as a read-aloud for intermediate students as well as in book groups with adult ESL students. I love how the books grow in sophistication with Panchito, who wrote the books as an adult, using notebooks he kept as a young man, as well as his memory. This book, the first, is very simply written, and the second, about his high school years, grows more explicit about the barriers he faced as a boy from a migrant-worker family. The third and fourth books deal with his time at Santa Clara University, and his graduate time at Columbia in New York. As a frequent reader of the series, and particularly this book, I can state that I have never grown tired of the story, from Panchito's memories of the train trip to Tijuana to crawl under a fence to be met by a coyote who would take the family to the fruit fields, to his first day at school in a time before bilingual education, to his growth in conscience and social awareness, to the family's eventual deportation. These are great books, especially in this time when empathy for "economic refugees" seems in short supply in our nation's political life.

The trials of this little boy and his family were often heart-rending. Their work ethic in satisfying their employers and overseers as well as trying to create decent living conditions in deplorable conditions was inspiring. After reading his story, I felt great sadness for the people who travel from place to place to make a bare living and find the lives of the children especially horrendous. They lacked a sufficient education, friendships, and normality in their lives. Jimenez has written several other books that I am especially interested in reading.

I read this book as required summer reading with little to no expectations. The reviews from my older classmates about this book had been mostly negative, so I wasn't very thrilled going into this read. After finishing the book I have a POV of my own that is very different from my classmates. I enjoy how the story is told in many different short stories each with their own meaning and relevance in the author's life. I enjoy how, this book may not be directly related to me and my story it

gives me a mere glance into someone else's world that I didn't even know existed. In conclusion this story is one of triumph and heartbreak that culminates in a true masterpiece.

I loved and hated *The Circuit*. I loved reading the words that were so clear I could see the movie in my head. At the same time I hated reading about the suffering of my people. I am honored to have read your words and am so proud of you for all you've accomplished. Incidentally, my daughter is a junior at Santa Clara.

I loved reading this book by Francisco Jimenez. He does a great job of showing the life of the migrant workers through the perspective of a child growing up and going to school in California. His story is genuine and simple and easy to follow. As a future educator I think this is a great book that can bring the hispanic culture to the classroom. I come from a hispanic culture/migrant worker family and I was able to relate to the story. I think that schools need more stories like these so that the students feel part of the classroom. I think it would be great if the students' culture be part of the classroom. I think that if someone wants to be more informed about the migrant population this is the book for you!

True life stories growing up as the child of migrant workers . Told in a journal like fashion . Gave me some insight as to how my father and siblings spent there summers for 5 years .

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