The Circuit

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FRANCISCO JIMÉNEZ

Francisco Jiménez was born in 1943 in Tlaquepaque, Mexico. His family came to the United States illegally when he was four years old, and they worked as migrant laborers at various farms in California. Jiménez loved learning and yearned for an education, but he was only able to attend school sporadically, since he was expected to work in the fields during the busy times of the harvest. Still, he tried to teach himself as much as possible and studied during the short breaks he got while working in the fields. When Jiménez was in junior high school, immigration agents swept his school and caught him, and they deported his family back to Mexico. Jiménez documents these experiences from his early life in his autobiographical novel *The Circuit*. Jiménez's family later returned to the United States legally, and this time, they settled down in the town of Santa Maria, California. In high school, Jiménez did extremely well and won scholarships to attend Santa Clara University, where he got a BA in Spanish. He then went to Columbia University, where he got his PhD in Latin American literature. Jiménez went on to become a professor at Santa Clara University, where he won many awards for his teaching. In 1997, he published *The Circuit*, which won numerous awards, including the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for Fiction and the California Library Association's 10th Annual John and Patricia Beatty Award. Jiménez has written several other books, including an award-winning picture book for young children called *La Mariposa*. He also published three sequels to *The Circuit*, which document the later events of his life. Jiménez has a wife, Laura, and three children. He's currently a professor at Stanford University.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

After World War II, poverty and food shortages were common in Mexico, which led to many Mexican people trying to enter the United States—legally or illegally—in search of a better life. The governments of the United States and Mexico entered into an agreement called the Bracero Program, which allowed Mexican workers to legally enter the United States to work temporarily on farms. In *The Circuit*, Francisco and his family meet some of these workers, called *braceros*, while working on itinerant farms in California. However, *braceros* had to file extensive paperwork and were often denied admittance, which made this program unpopular. Many Mexican people kept entering the United States illegally, and this was encouraged by American farmers who needed the cheap labor and did not want to deal with the bureaucracy of the Bracero Program. However, anti-immigration sentiment began to grow, and immigration officials began to raid migrant camps and places of business. This led to the controversial Operation Wetback in 1954 (today, "wetback" is considered a racial slur), which aimed to mobilize surprise sweeps to deport undocumented Mexican immigrants, especially in California and Texas. Sometimes, even legal United States citizens were unintentionally deported. Border Patrol hired a vast force to work on Operation Wetback, and over a million people were deported in the very first year of the program. Jiménez (and Francisco in *The Circuit*) were likely deported under this program. Operation Wetback continued until 1962, when it was replaced by a more organized border control presence.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Circuit is the first in a series of four autobiographical novels by Francisco Jiménez. The other three—*Breaking Through*, *Reaching Out*, and *Taking Hold*—pick up Francisco's story from where *The Circuit* concludes and follow the successes and challenges he faced later in his life. Justin Torres's *We, the Animals* is another novel composed of linked short stories with a young protagonist, and it deals with some similar themes, including poverty and hardship, family dynamics, and racial discrimination. Ocean Vuong's novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, describes the protagonist's experiences with racial discrimination and poverty after he moves to the United States from Vietnam as a little boy. Like *The Circuit*, Vuong's novel is based on the author's personal experiences. *Dear America: Notes of an Undocumented Citizen* is a memoir by the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jose Antonia Vargas, in which he recounts living with the constant fear of being deported. This is similar to Jiménez's experience of living as an undocumented immigrant in the United States.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child
- **Where Written:** California
- **When Published:** 1997
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Autobiographical Novel; Short Story Collection
- **Setting:** California in the mid-20th century
- **Climax:** Francisco's family finally settles down in the town of Santa Maria, California
- **Antagonist:** Discrimination; poverty; immigration agents
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

The Jiménez School. The Jiménez family settled in Santa Maria, California when they returned to the United States legally after they were deported. Today, there is an elementary school in Santa Maria called the Roberto and Dr. Francisco Jiménez Elementary School, named after the author and his older brother who worked as janitors for the school district while they pursued their educations.

Almost Memoir. Jiménez calls *The Circuit* "autobiographical fiction" rather than memoir, because it is "approximately 90 percent fact and 10 percent fiction." However, the final scene of the novel—in which Francisco is picked up by immigration agents just as he is getting ready to recite the Declaration of Independence—happened exactly as he describes in the book.

PLOT SUMMARY

Francisco is a young boy living in a tiny Mexican village with his mother (Mamá), father (Papá), older brother Roberto, and little brother Trampita. The family works very hard but are poor, and they live in a tiny house without electricity or running water. Still, they are part of a warm community and enjoy attending church and spending time with extended family. Papá decides to move his family to California in search of a better life, and one day, they make the long journey to the United States-Mexico border and manage to slip undetected under the fence.

Their first few weeks in California are harsh, since Papá doesn't yet have work and barely has any money. They live in a tent and scrounge around in the woods for food. This sets the tone for their lives in California, which is often harsh, even after the family finds work as itinerant laborers. They work hard in the fields but are paid very little. They usually live in tents or in small, dilapidated cabins in labor camps. When Mamá and Papá have another baby, Torito, he nearly dies of a rare disease because they can't afford medicine and must borrow money to take him to the hospital.

The family also constantly move around for work, going to various farms depending on the season and the crop. Usually, they pick strawberries in Santa Maria in spring and summer, followed by picking grapes in various vineyards in early fall, and cotton in Corcoran in late fall and early winter. They repeat this year after year, and Francisco thinks of this ceaseless moving as a "circuit." Still, despite these struggles, the family takes consolation in their love and closeness. The family grows—Mamá and Papá have two more children, Rubén and Rorra—and they all have some happy moments together.

Francisco works in the fields alongside his parents and Roberto at the peak of each harvesting season, but when the season wanes, he gets to attend school. He initially struggles in school since he doesn't know any English and cannot comprehend anything that's being said to him. He has to repeat the first grade because of this, which he finds upsetting. However, Francisco is very interested in learning and is a very diligent student. He writes grammar rules and math facts in a little notepad that he carries everywhere with him, and even when he works in the fields, he often refers to these notes to study. Eventually, by the time he's in eighth grade at the novel's conclusion, Francisco is excellent at math and consistently scores the highest in his class in math tests. He also works hard on his English, even though he still struggles with it.

The entire family feels the strain of the constant moving. Francisco, especially, dislikes the constant disruption to his friendships and to his education, and he longs to settle down in one city. Eventually, when Francisco is in eighth grade, Papá is unable to work since he has a bad back. At this same time, immigration officials begin making surprise sweeps in the city of Corcoran, where Roberto is now working alone in the cotton fields. This makes the family nervous, since none of them except for Papá has papers or visas, and they decide to move to Santa Maria to escape the immigration checks. Francisco is very happy about this since he likes the city. In Santa Maria, it is clear to them that Papá can't work in the fields ever again, so Roberto decides to get a full-time job so they can settle there. He finds a job as a school janitor, and Francisco helps him with this work in the evenings. They are very happy that they don't have to move again.

At school, Francisco has an assignment to memorize a section from the Declaration of Independence. As he is memorizing the words that "all men are created equal" and that all people have the rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," immigration officers show up at his school and haul him away. The officers then set off to pick up Roberto too.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Francisco – Francisco is the protagonist and narrator of *The Circuit*. He is a little boy of around four at the beginning of the book and grows into a young teen by the novel's conclusion. Francisco's family illegally crosses the border into California from Mexico when Francisco is a young boy, and as undocumented immigrants in the United States who earn their living as migrant workers, their lives are mired in hardship and anxiety. This takes a toll on Francisco, as he longs to settle in one city so he can cultivate friendships and attend school without interruption. He attends school for only a few months in the year since he works alongside his family in the fields at the peak of the harvest season, and since his family moves around so much, he can never attend one school for more than a few months. He also struggles when he starts school as a first-grader, as he doesn't speak English. Despite these

challenges, Francisco tops his class in math as an eighth-grader, which is proof of his intelligence and determination. While Francisco struggles because of his family's poverty and their precarious position as undocumented immigrants, he is buoyed by the deep and enduring love they have for one another. Papá is a hard worker who does his best to support his family, while Mamá is warm, loving, and supportive. Francisco loves his four younger siblings, but he is especially close to his older brother, Roberto, who is very responsible and is a role model to Francisco. Toward the end of the novel, it seems like Francisco's life is finally improving since the family settles in one town and Francisco is excelling in school. However, at the novel's conclusion, immigration officials make a surprise sweep of Francisco's school and haul him away and set off to find Roberto, too, which completely topples the boys' lives and futures. By sharing his personal experiences in this autobiographical novel, author Francisco Jiménez wants his readers to understand what life is like for others in his situation, who are often ignored and dehumanized.

Roberto – Roberto is Francisco's older brother, and the two boys are very close. Even though Roberto is only four years older than Francisco, he is more responsible and mature, likely because he is forced to take on the role of being a provider (along with his parents) since the family needs the extra money. Roberto works in the fields and is a very hard worker. When Francisco works in the fields, too, he tries to work as well as Roberto but finds that he always falls short. Even when Roberto is only a young teen, he is already a quicker and better farm worker than Papá. Since the family depends on his work so much, Roberto attends school less frequently than even Francisco does. Though he is sad about this, he is never resentful towards his parents, who need his help, or towards his younger siblings, who get to go to school when he heads off to work. Since Roberto is older than Francisco, he is more aware of the family's problems, which is why he is eager to help his parents when he can. At the same time, he also empathizes with little Francisco whenever he gets scolded by his parents, since Roberto is still a child and therefore understands Francisco's feelings. At the end of the novel, Papá has a back injury and can no longer work in the fields, so Roberto gets a full-time job as a janitor to support the family. He and Francisco are also happy that the family can now settle in one town since they are tired of moving around as itinerant farm workers. Though Roberto's life seems to finally be taking a happy turn, this is destroyed by the immigration officers who come for Francisco and Roberto at the conclusion of the novel.

Papá – Papá is Francisco's father. He is the one who decides to move his family from Mexico to California in search of a better life, and he works unceasingly after they arrive in California to try and earn as much money as possible to keep his family afloat and happy. Papá cares deeply about his family, even though he is not outwardly affectionate. He is also a very caring partner to Mamá. As the chief breadwinner in the family, he is constantly worried about the family's precarious financial position. Since he is very stressed about this, he sometimes has episodes of extreme anger, like when he hits the family pet, El Perico, with a broom when the parrot is noisy and ends up killing it. Francisco seems to understand his father's emotional suffering even from a young age, and he prays for his father after this incident even though he is very upset with him. Papá pushes himself to work as hard as he can in the fields, and by the end of the book, he seems physically and emotionally broken by all the years of hard labor. He ends up with an injured back and finds it hard to even get out of bed. Papá's life shows how laborers like him are exploited by farmers and have no hope of a comfortable life, no matter how hard they work.

Mamá – Mamá is Francisco's mother. Like Papá, she works very hard, but unlike him, she also manages to retain her sense of humor and kindness. She does her best to contribute to the family's income by working hard in the fields alongside Papá, and when she can't do this because she is pregnant or has little children to care for, she earns money by cooking for some of the other laborers in their labor camps. Though she has little in the way of comfort or luxury—her most treasured possession is an old, dented cooking pot—she never complains. Mamá is the glue that holds the family together. She is always kind to her six children and is also supportive of them when they are upset. For instance, the family loses all their possessions in a house fire, but Mamá nevertheless understands Francisco's deep sorrow at losing his beloved notepad in the fire and doesn't trivialize his pain even though she herself has lost so much more. She takes the time to hold him and console him, and she gives him advice that makes him feel better. Mamá understands her children's frustration at constantly having to move around in search of work, and she is happy when they decide to settle in Santa Maria at the end of the novel. She is very proud of Roberto for getting a full-time job as a janitor to support the family.

Mr. Sims – Mr. Sims is the principal of the elementary school in Santa Maria, California, that Francisco and Roberto attend briefly. Although Mr. Sims seems to be a well-meaning man who does his best to help Francisco and Roberto, he lives a very different kind of life than they do, so his attempts to help them don't always work out since they are separated by race, language, and privilege. When Francisco is a first-grader at the elementary school, Mr. Sims sees him shivering without a coat at recess and gives him a coat from the lost-and-found bin. This kindness ends up landing Francisco in trouble since the boy who originally owned the coat beats up Francisco to get his coat back, and Francisco unfairly ends up being punished by his teacher for fighting a classmate. Francisco is also forced to return the coat, which he had come to treasure. Still, Francisco's family remembers Mr. Sims fondly because he does his best to help them, and when Roberto is looking for a full-

time job in Santa Maria many years later, he goes to Mr. Sims to ask for help in finding one. Even in this instance, Mr. Sims's first attempt at helping Roberto ends up causing him much disappointment because Mr. Sims sets up a job interview that doesn't quite work out. Finally, Mr. Sims himself steps in and offers him a job as a janitor at the school. Jiménez seems to be saying that he appreciates people like Mr. Sims who try to help out, but he also points out that there might be some missteps along the way when people who inhabit different worlds try to understand one another.

Mr. Lema – Mr. Lema is Francisco's sixth-grade teacher when Francisco briefly attends a school in Fresno, California. Mr. Lema makes a big impact on Francisco's life since he is very friendly and welcoming, and he helps Francisco with his English during their lunch breaks every day. Francisco grows quite attached to Mr. Lema and thinks of him as his "best friend at school." One day, Mr. Lema promises Francisco that he will teach him how to play the trumpet. Francisco is very excited about this, but when he goes home that afternoon, he sees that his family has packed their belongings and are ready to move to the next farm. Francisco is very disappointed. His short but meaningful friendship with Mr. Lema highlights that his family's constant moving is very disruptive to his education and to his happiness.

Miss Scalapino – Miss Scalapino is Francisco's first-grade teacher. Francisco doesn't speak English when he attends school as a first grader, so he is completely perplexed in her class since he doesn't understand a word of what Miss Scalapino says. When she catches him talking in Spanish to a classmate, she emphatically tells him, "NO!" This makes Francisco feel even more estranged from his classmates and he dreams of escaping from school. Though Miss Scalapino's methods are questionable, she seems to mean well and gives Francisco a prize for his art. Francisco is very proud of this, and it helps him feel like he can succeed in school after all.

Carlos – Carlos is an older boy who lives in the same labor camp as Francisco's family one spring. Francisco often plays kick-the-can with Carlos in the evenings, even though Francisco doesn't like him very much. Carlos is a bully who insists that Francisco and his siblings follow all of Carlos's rules, and he also excludes another little boy named Manuelito from the game, saying that Manuelito can't play well. Francisco meekly tries to protest against Carlos's rules, but he doesn't succeed. One day, when Francisco is working at the strawberry farm, he sees one of the braceros who works with him stand up to a labor contractor who bullies the bracero. Inspired by the bracero's actions, Francisco fights back more forcefully against Carlos, and Carlos ends up listening to him. Carlos's character shows that most bullies are cowards who are intimidated when someone else seems stronger than them. Francisco's encounter with him shows that Francisco will not allow himself to be bullied.

Mr. Diaz – Mr. Diaz is a labor contractor in Santa Maria, California, who arranges for braceros to work in the farms there. He treats one of the braceros named Gabriel very poorly. Francisco first hears Diaz ordering Gabriel around, and he then hears from Gabriel that Diaz is a cheat who charges him too much for room and board. One day, Diaz asks Gabriel to tie a plow around his waist and till the field. Gabriel refuses to do this since in Mexico, only farm animals do this kind of work. Diaz is furious and throws Gabriel to the ground and kicks him. When Gabriel angrily jumps to his feet and charges at him, Diaz is frightened and drives away. Francisco sees that Diaz is a bully, and inspired by seeing Gabriel fight back, Francisco, too, finds the courage to fight back against Carlos, an older boy who bullies Francisco. After this incident, Diaz fires Gabriel and Gabriel has to return to Mexico. Through the character of Diaz, Jiménez shows that many braceros struggled in the United States with unfair working conditions and labor contractors who mistreated and cheated them.

Gabriel – Gabriel is a bracero from Mexico who works on the strawberry farm with Francisco and his family one spring. Gabriel is young and hardworking, and Francisco comes to like him a lot. Gabriel's labor contractor, Mr. Diaz, charges him too much for his room and board and also treats him poorly. One day, Diaz insists that Gabriel must tie a plow around his waist to till a field. Gabriel refuses to do this, saying that only farm animals do this kind of work in Mexico. Diaz is furious when Gabriel doesn't obey him and pushes him to the ground and begins to kick him. Gabriel jumps up and charges at Diaz, but he doesn't hit him—he says that Diaz can't take away his dignity. Diaz looks frightened and drives away, and later, Francisco hears that Diaz fired Gabriel and sent him back to Mexico. Gabriel is poor, but he refuses to be pushed around, and Francisco finds this inspiring. He finds the courage to stand up against Carlos, an older boy who bullies him, after he witnesses Gabriel's bravery. Gabriel's character also shows readers that braceros in the United States had to deal with many problems like difficult working conditions and unfair employers.

Trampita – Trampita is Francisco's younger brother. When Francisco is around five years old, he is left to care for Trampita, who is a baby at this time, while Mamá, Papá, and Roberto go to work in the fields. Francisco doesn't like this arrangement and longs to be grown up enough to work in the fields, too. This situation also highlights the hard decisions the family has to make since Francisco's parents are forced to leave a baby in the care of a young child since they both have to work to earn money.

Torito – Torito is Francisco's younger brother. Torito is born when Francisco is a first-grader, and the whole family, including Francisco, adores the cheerful baby. Unfortunately, Torito becomes sick and his parents don't immediately take him to the doctor because they can't afford it. He becomes much sicker and when they finally rush him to the hospital, the doctor tells

Mamá that he most likely won't survive. The family prays together for Torito's health, and he ends up making a miraculous recovery.

Rorra – Rorra, Francisco's sister, is the youngest child in the family. When she is four years old, she steals two of Francisco's most precious pennies from his coin collection and uses them to buy gumballs. Francisco is furious at her, but Mamá helps him understand that Rorra is too young to understand how her actions hurt him and that people are always more important than money or things—in other words, his sister should mean more to him than his two pennies.

Carl – Carl is Francisco's best friend when the boys are classmates in the fifth grade. Both of them collect coins, and one day, Carl invites Francisco home to show him his coin collection. Francisco has never been inside a house before and he is awed by the size and comforts of Carl's home. When Carl says that he, too, would like to visit Francisco's house to see his coin collection, Francisco tells him his house is too far away and that he will bring his collection to school to show it to him. However, that same weekend, Francisco's family moves to another city to find work and he never sees Carl again. Francisco's interactions with Carl show that Francisco is becoming more self-conscious about his family's poverty as he grows older. After seeing Carl's home, he is embarrassed about the one-room cabin that his family lives in, which is why he makes an excuse to avoid inviting Carl over. Despite this self-consciousness, Francisco likes people and easily makes friends, but his family's constant moving makes it very difficult for him to hold on to his friends.

Arthur – Arthur is Francisco's classmate in the first grade. Arthur knows a little Spanish, so Francisco is happy in his company since he finally has someone he can talk to (at this point, Francisco doesn't speak English). However, their teacher, Miss Scalapino, happens to overhear them talking in Spanish one day, and she emphatically forbids it. Arthur begins avoiding Francisco whenever she is around.

Curtis – Curtis is one of Francisco's classmates in the first grade. He is the biggest kid in class and is the most popular. One day, Mr. Sims sees Francisco shivering on the playground and gives him a jacket from the lost-and-found box. This turns out to be a jacket that Curtis lost at the beginning of the year, and when he sees Francisco wearing it, he begins to fight him for it. Francisco is forced to give the jacket to him. Despite this misunderstanding between then, Francisco gives Curtis a drawing he made when Curtis says he likes it. Francisco's gesture of friendship is a testament of his kind and generous nature since he is willing to give away what little he has.

Miguelito – Francisco makes friends with Miguelito when the two boys live in the same labor camp in Corcoran. They walk to school together one day, and since they enjoy each other's company, they make plans to play the following day, too. However, Miguelito doesn't show up, and when Francisco goes to his cabin to look for him, he is heartbroken to see that Miguelito's family has already moved away. Their brief friendship highlights the impermanent, unstable nature of itinerant laborers' lives and shows how this can be a difficult and lonely way to live.

Manuelito – Manuelito is a little boy who lives in the same labor camp as Francisco one spring. Manuelito would like to play kick-the-can with the other boys, but Carlos, a bully, doesn't let him, saying that Manuelito can't play well. Francisco stands up for Manuelito and insists that Carlos let him play, which shows that Francisco is kind and fair.

Fito – Fito is Francisco's cousin who lives in Guadalajara, Mexico, and works in a tequila factory. Roberto is very impressed when he visits Fito and sees that he lives in a house with electricity and water. Since Roberto wants these things, too, he becomes unhappy with the way he and his family live in their little village. Fito symbolizes a better quality of life that Francisco's family aspires to, which inspires their move to California.

Ito – Ito is the Japanese sharecropper whom Francisco and his family work for at Sheehey Strawberry Farm in Santa Maria, California. Ito seems to be one of the better employers they have since he is the person who helps Papá apply for his green card which lets him live and work in the United States legally.

Chico – Chico lives next door to Francisco's family with his wife, Pilar, when Francisco's family lives in a garage near a vineyard where they pick grapes. Chico and Pilar are undocumented workers, just like Francisco and his family. They own a cat named Catarina that Francisco's pet parrot, El Perico, is very fond of.

Sullivan – Sullivan owns a vineyard that Francisco's family works in one summer. Mr. Sullivan lives in a large, fancy house, but he gives Francisco's family a dilapidated, old garage to live in. Sullivan's treatment of the family exemplifies how they were usually treated very poorly by the farmers they worked for since they were undocumented, itinerant laborers.

Mr. Patrini – Mr. Patrini owns a vineyard that Francisco's family works in one summer. Papá hears that Mr. Patrini gives his workers good living quarters, which is why he wants to work for him. Mr. Patrini gives the family a crumbling old house to live in, but Francisco's family is very excited about since it is the first house they have ever lived in.

Mrs. Martin – Mrs. Martin is Francisco's sixth grade teacher in Santa Maria, California. Francisco continues attending the sixth grade in her class after starting it in Mr. Lema's class in Fresno. Mrs. Martin loves English and teaches the class new words every day, which inspires Francisco to start keeping a notepad in which he writes these new words and their meanings.

Miss Ehlis – Miss Ehlis teaches Francisco English and social studies in the eighth grade. She gives the class an assignment to learn a section from the Declaration of Independence. As

Francisco prepares to recite this, immigration officers make a surprise sweep of his school, and Miss Ehlis sadly points out Francisco to them when they come looking for him.

El Perico – El Perico is Francisco's pet parrot. The summer after Francisco finishes fourth grade, his family gets the parrot from one of Papá's friends who smuggled the bird from Mexico. The whole family is very fond of El Perico; Francisco, especially, loves petting it and teaching it to speak. Papá, however, is very stressed that summer, and he gets irritated when the bird squawks noisily. One evening, when the bird makes a great deal of noise, Papá strikes it with a broom, killing El Perico. Francisco is heartbroken by this, but he forgives his father and prays for him.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Rubén – Rubén is Francisco's youngest brother.

Pilar – Pilar is Chico's wife.

Mr. Milo – Mr. Milo is Francisco's math teacher in the eighth grade. Francisco does extremely well in his classes and often scores the highest among his classmates in math tests.

Sharon Ito – Sharon Ito is Ito's daughter and Francisco's classmate in the eighth grade. She and Francisco usually compete for the top spot in Mr. Milo's math tests. Education puts Francisco on an equal footing with Sharon, who comes from a much more privileged background than he does.

TERMS

Bracero – *Bracero* means "manual laborer" in Spanish; in *The Circuit*, the term specifically refers to a worker who has come from Mexico to the United States to work as a farm laborer under the Bracero Program. The Bracero Program was a diplomatic agreement made in 1942 between Mexico and the United States, which allowed Mexican citizens to come into the U.S. temporarily to work on farms. The workers were guaranteed a minimum wage and decent living conditions in exchange for their labor. However, the Bracero Program had some flaws that made it unpopular. The farmers and laborers disliked the bureaucracy and extensive paperwork they had to file as part of the program, while the governments of Mexico and the United States believed that it led to an increase in illegal immigration since some *braceros* didn't return to their home country. In *The Circuit*, Jiménez shows that *braceros* were also mistreated and cheated by the labor contractors who arranged for their stay in the United States. Since the Bracero Program was riddled with problems, it was terminated in 1964.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

CHANGE AND INSTABILITY

The Circuit, a collection of autobiographical linked stories by Francisco Jiménez, follows the Jiménez family as they weather one big life change after another, starting with their move to California from Mexico in search of a better life. As itinerant farm laborers in California, young Francisco (the narrator) and his family are always on the move, going wherever they can find work. They feel the strain of this endless moving, since they are always unsettled and insecure. Indeed, the book suggests that this kind of constant change and insecurity is central to the immigrant experience and is a big part of what makes it so grueling. Dealing with change, Jiménez shows, is stressful, disappointing, and emotionally trying.

The biggest change that Francisco's family makes—deciding to move to the United States from Mexico—is destined to be difficult, as all changes are. Before the family leaves Mexico, they hope that their lives in California will be easier and more prosperous. However, as farm laborers, the conditions they live in are often worse than they were in Mexico. As soon as they get to California, they live in a tent and eat wild greens and animals that Francisco's father, Papá, hunts with a borrowed rifle. Furthermore, Francisco's older brother, Roberto, tells Francisco that he isn't even sure they're in California, which shows how disappointed he is in the reality of the place he'd been dreaming about. Roberto's initial reaction sets the tone for the family's life as immigrants in California, which is often disappointing and hard.

The novel shows that, for its immigrant characters, change can be hard to navigate—even when it is supposedly positive or something they actively wanted. While this includes their big decision to move to the United States, it also includes smaller events in their daily lives. For instance, in the story titled "Soledad," Francisco is too little to work in the fields, and he yearns to grow up quickly so he can work alongside his family. However, in a later story titled "Learning the Game," Francisco is upset on the last day of school before summer vacation because he will have to work in the fields with his family all summer. The work is hard, and he is now old enough that his family expects him to contribute, too. While this is the change he longed for as a little boy—to grow up and work with his family—Francisco is disappointed by it when it comes to pass.

Since Francisco's family are itinerant laborers, they must constantly move to new farms in search of work, and this begins to wear on them over the years. The novel's title, *The Circuit*, describes the unceasing moving the family does, from the strawberry farm in the summer, vineyards in the fall, and

cotton fields in the winter—and then all over again, the following year. They are exhausted by the new environments they have to constantly acclimate themselves to, but they do not have the option to stop—the nature of their work requires that they follow the demand for labor. By describing their lives as a "circuit," Jiménez draws his reader's attention to the winding, interminable nature of their constant moving. They are constantly wandering, on and on, in an endless loop—there's no hope of ceasing, since this is seemingly the only way they can earn a living.

The only way for Francisco's family to break out of "the circuit" seems to be for the children to get an education so they can find other jobs and work their way out of poverty. However, the constant moving disrupts their schooling, which dampens the chances for Francisco's family to gain stability and security. In the short story titled "The Circuit," readers can see the toll that this constant moving takes on Francisco's sense of security and on his education. When he starts attending sixth grade at a school in Fresno, Francisco meets a teacher named Mr. Lema who helps him with his English during their lunch hour every day. Francisco grows very attached to him: he thinks of Mr. Lema as his "best friend at school." However, just after a month at this school, Francisco's family moves again in search of work. This is especially painful for Francisco, since he has to leave behind a favorite teacher who made a huge difference to his learning. This experience, Jiménez shows, is a common one for migrant children. Indeed, every time Francisco feels settled or hopeful in the novel, he is uprooted and has to start over in a new place. This isn't just harmful for migrant children's sense of stability—it also dooms the family to poverty with no hope of breaking out of it, since they do not have the luxury of a steady education. This makes their situation especially devastating.

Since this novel is autobiographical, Jiménez uses his personal experience of living through this constant instability to convey the pain of the immigrant experience to readers who might judge immigrants harshly and blame them for their poverty. Jiménez shows that despite his family's work ethic and determination, their lives seemed doomed to instability and hardship. He has lived through the unsettling and emotionally tumultuous experience of being an immigrant, and he seems to be saying that as an immigrant, the grass is never really greener on the other side. Life is difficult and insecure no matter which side of the grass they land on.

IMMIGRANTS, DISCRIMINATION, AND INJUSTICE

Francisco, the narrator and protagonist of *The Circuit*, moves with his family to California from Mexico in search of a better life. They slip under the border fence and arrive as undocumented immigrants, and as a result, they live in constant fear that they might be caught and deported. Through their experiences, Jiménez shows that immigrants in the United States face discrimination from people as well as policy, and he argues that this leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and injustices.

In *The Circuit*, Francisco and his family are often discriminated against after they arrive in the United States—and Jiménez shows that these experiences are especially difficult for young immigrant children. When Francisco enters school as a first grader, he is perplexed by the experience, since he doesn't understand any English. Instead of trying to make him feel at ease, his teacher, Miss Scalapino, reprimands him when she overhears him speaking in Spanish to a classmate. Jiménez writes that "she said 'NO!' with body and soul. Her head turned left and right a hundred times a second and her index finger moved from side to side as fast as a windshield wiper on a rainy day." Miss Scalapino's emphatic reaction implies that she thinks there's something inherently wrong with Francisco's first language, and that it's not worthy of being accepted into the school. Teachers like her seem to have punished immigrant students like Francisco for their circumstances rather than trying to help them succeed. In a later story called "Moving Still," Francisco is an older student and has a much better grasp on the English language. Still, he is self-conscious about what he calls his "Mexican pronunciation." Although he can't hear it himself, he knows he has "a thick accent" because kids often tease him when he speaks English. When Francisco has the opportunity to earn extra credit in class by making a presentation, he declines because he is afraid his peers will mock his accent. His classmates' cruel reaction to his pronunciation makes him feel inferior and embarrassed.

Jiménez also shows that American policy discriminates against immigrants, since they are automatically excluded from the ideals and principles on which the United States is built. When Francisco is eventually arrested by immigration officers in "Moving Still," the book's final story, it happens at school while he is memorizing the Declaration of Independence. The actions of the officers are in contrast with the words that Francisco is learning—they certainly do not acknowledge that immigrants like Francisco "are created equal" and that they have "certain inalienable rights," among which are "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Since Jiménez draws the reader's attention to these words right before Francisco is hauled away by the immigration officials, he seemingly wants to highlight the hypocrisy of these words. After all, they do not apply to undocumented immigrants like Francisco, who are seen as less than human in the eyes of the law.

As a result of the constant discrimination that Francisco and his family face, they live in fear, and this leaves them open to further exploitation. Except for Francisco's father, who has a green card that permits him to live and work in the United States, the other members of Francisco's family don't have immigration papers or visas. So, they are afraid that if they make themselves conspicuous, they run the risk of being

identified and deported. As a result, they make a habit of lying low to avoid notice, and they do not speak out against any injustices they are forced to endure. For instance, Jiménez shows that farmers pay illegal immigrants like Francisco's family a pitiable wage for the amount of work they do. Farmers exploit the undocumented workers' fear and desperation for their own benefit, even though these laborers are crucial for their success. In another example, Francisco gets beaten up by another student when he's in first grade, and he's given detention even though he did nothing wrong. When he goes home and recounts this incident to his parents, they are "very upset but relieved that [Francisco] did not disrespect the teacher." They do not protest on his behalf or try to clear his name, since they do not want to draw attention to themselves. As a result, Francisco and his siblings, too, learn that they must endure their troubles quietly, which makes their entire family vulnerable to more injustice.

Jiménez shows that the American Dream—the idea that all people in the United States have an equal opportunity at success and stability—is unattainable for many immigrants. Instead, Francisco and his family suffer indignities and exploitation and are granted no rights, which shows that all people are certainly not "created equal" in the eyes of American law.

CHILDHOOD VS. ADULTHOOD

Francisco (the protagonist of *The Circuit*) and his family illegally cross the border from Mexico into California when Francisco is a young child, and he views the event as an exciting adventure. Through the course of the novel, Francisco grows into a teen who better understands the precariousness of his family's situation as undocumented immigrants. Like his father, whom he calls Papá, and his older brother, Roberto, Francisco begins to feel a gradual but deepening dissatisfaction with the constant hardships in their lives. Through this, the novel argues that growing up means gaining a clearer understanding of the world. This often comes with the knowledge that life isn't always easy or fair, especially for people like Francisco and his family, who lack social and economic power.

In the novel's early stories, Francisco is young and is often confused when he sees that his parents are worried or sad, because he cannot grasp the seriousness of the problems they face. For instance, in the short story "Soledad," Francisco is around five or six years old and hates being left behind when his parents and Roberto go to work in the cotton fields. To prove that he, too, is capable of the work, Francisco works hard one day to pick a pile of cotton while they are away in the fields. However, since he is disappointed with the small amount that he ends up with at the end of the day, he mixes some dirt in with the cotton to make the pile look bigger. When his father, Papá, sees it, he is amused at Francisco's effort and begins to add Francisco's cotton pile to his own—but Papá quickly turns angry when he sees that Francisco has mixed in dirt clods with the cotton. He says that Francisco should be ashamed of what he has done, since they could be fired for adding in dirt with the cotton. Papá's reaction hurts Francisco, but Francisco doesn't grasp the seriousness of the situation and the constant stress that the adults in the family deal with since their every little misstep could have dire consequences. Papá knows that a small error—like mixing dirt with the cotton—could mean the loss of income for the entire family, but Francisco is too young understand this.

As Francisco grows up, he is forced to deal with disappointment and loss, which teaches him that life is a constant process of overcoming challenges. His family frequently moves around in search of work, and this is very disruptive to Francisco's happiness and security. For instance, just as Francisco makes plans with a classmate named Carl to show him his coin collection, his family suddenly decides to move, and he ends up never seeing Carl again. Likewise, Francisco feels very attached to his sixth-grade teacher, Mr. Lema, who tutors him during their lunch breaks and promises to teach him to play the trumpet. However, even before their first trumpet lesson, Francisco's family moves once again, and Francisco doesn't even have the chance to say goodbye to Mr. Lema. Francisco's life is so unpredictable that he doesn't have the luxury of planning anything, since he never knows where the next day will take him. As he grows older, he becomes increasingly frustrated with this. In addition to losing touch with people who matter to him as a result of the constant moving, Francisco also deals with losing treasured items in the course of the novel: a beloved pet, his favorite notepad, his most precious coins from his coin collection. These losses teach him that difficulties are a part of life, and that a person has no choice but to deal with them with as much resilience as they can muster.

While Francisco is spared some hardships because of his age, this isn't the case for his Roberto and Papá, who bear the bulk of the family's worries and come close to being broken by the adversities they face. Roberto is four years older than Francisco, and as a result, he understands more about the family's situation than Francisco does—and as the oldest child, he often assumes a position of responsibility. Often, when Francisco and his younger siblings go to school, Roberto works in the fields, since he is a strong worker and the family needs the extra money. Roberto is very responsible and endures the hard work without complaint. However, toward the conclusion of the novel, when he is desperate to find a full-time job, Francisco sees Roberto cry as he gives in to his extreme disappointment and anxiety. Throughout the novel, Roberto has been calm and logical, and his emotional outburst at the end shows how the grueling, ceaseless hardships of his life have worn him down. Similarly, Papá, the family's chief breadwinner, is constantly anxious in the novel as he works himself to the

bone and worries about what the family's next source of income will be. As a result, he seems to have no time for humor and laughter, and he's always trying to numb physical pain aspirin and mental stress with cigarettes. By the end of the novel, he is so worn out from the constant hard labor that he can't even sit up in bed or drive a car.

The conclusion of the novel strikes a somber note, as Francisco is caught and taken away by immigration officials. This is especially poignant since Francisco's life finally seems to be turning around—the family has decided to settle down in one place instead of moving around, like he had always dreamed they would. But he ends up encountering the worst problem of his young life, which is being caught by the immigration authorities. Since the novel is autobiographical, meaning that Jiménez actually lived through these events, this conclusion emphasizes the notion that life is relentlessly harsh, especially for those who are socially disadvantaged.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

The world of *The Circuit* is filled with hardships, but the bright spots in the characters' otherwise melancholy lives are the connections they share with one another. The narrator, Francisco, and his family illegally cross the border from Mexico into California and make a living as itinerant laborers. Life is stressful for the family as they struggle to make ends meet, but their close, loving relationships with one another help to bolster them in the midst of hardship. Likewise, although they often face discrimination and downright cruelty out in the world, there are moments in which they are treated with kindness, which also help them to press on. Through this, Jiménez shows that human connection is crucial in these characters' lives, because it helps them stay resilient amid their trying circumstances.

Francisco's family is close-knit and caring, and they are united in the face of their troubles, which makes their difficult lives more bearable. Every family member in the household works hard and contributes to the family income. Even when Francisco's mother is pregnant and can't work in the fields, she makes money by cooking lunch and dinner for the other farm workers. From a young age, the children work alongside their parents in the fields, especially on weekends and during school vacations. In turn, the parents try to send the children to school whenever possible—sometimes, the children attend school even when money is tight, and their parents could use an extra hand in the fields. Their mutual concern makes them a strong unit since they face adversities together. In the story "To Have and to Hold," Francisco's little sister, Rorra, spends two of the oldest, most precious pennies from Francisco's penny collection on gumballs. Francisco is furious, but his mother asks him to calm down, saying that "Rorra is more important than the pennies." Her words embody the philosophy the family lives by—their love for each other trumps their worries about money.

As undocumented immigrants, the family often faces discrimination, but they also experience some surprising kindnesses from the community that make a big difference to their lives. For instance, when Francisco and his brother Roberto first get to California, they befriend a train conductor who slows the train down to wave to the boys since they wait by the tracks every day. One day, the conductor drops a bag of food for them, which they are very excited about. While the boys are initially disappointed that California isn't as wonderful as they imagined it would be, the conductor's kind gesture rekindles their hope that their lives might work out in this new place. In another example, Francisco's mother, Mamá, asks a butcher for bones and scraps, saying they are for the dog. In reality, she is using these scraps to make food for the family since they have no money to buy meat. The butcher seems to guess that this might be the case and ends up leaving a lot of meat on the bones. He never questions Mamá's story, since he doesn't want to embarrass her, and his kindness helps the family eat well. While these small acts of kindness are emotionally nourishing for the family and encourages them to press on, they also literally nourish the family with food and help them to survive their harsh conditions.

Francisco craves and appreciates human connection, and he constantly tries to build relationships with people around him since he recognizes the importance of these links with his fellow humans. When he first goes to school, he feels alienated from his classmates since he doesn't speak English. He gets into a fistfight with one of his classmates, Curtis, due to a misunderstanding that Francisco isn't able to clear up because of the language barrier. Still, he tries to bridge this rift by offering Curtis a drawing he made, showing that even at a young age, Francisco appreciates connection. Similarly, when he sees a solitary goldfish in his neighbor's house, he empathizes with the goldfish's loneliness and finds it a fish friend. To Francisco, who often feels cut off from his classmates by his cultural, linguistic, and economic differences, his life seems to feel like a fishbowl that separates him from them. His gesture shows that he, too, craves the companionship he gifts the fish.

As a sensitive and empathetic boy, Francisco values companionship because he sees it as a positive in a life that is often difficult. Just as having a fellow fish as a friend might make the goldfish less lonely, human connections help the characters to bear their difficulties. By extension, Jiménez seems to be telling his readers to build connections with one another, since this is the only way to survive hard times.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

CATERPILLARS AND BUTTERFLIES

The caterpillar, which turns into a butterfly, symbolizes Francisco's potential as a newcomer in the U.S. In the story "Inside Out," Francisco attends school for the first time, and he struggles because he doesn't understand any English. This makes Francisco feel ashamed and alienated from his English-speaking peers. He finds comfort in staring at a caterpillar that his teacher, Miss Scalapino, keeps in a glass jar in their classroom—Francisco seems to feel a connection with the caterpillar because they both have great potential that they haven't yet reached.

Later in the school year, Miss Scalapino gives Francisco a prize for a drawing he makes, and he is delighted. That same afternoon, he sees the butterfly emerging out of its cocoon in the glass jar: the caterpillar has undergone metamorphosis. This parallel suggests that the positive experience of winning a prize for his art helps Francisco break out of his symbolic cocoon and undergo a kind of metamorphosis himself. Much like the caterpillar in the jar, Francisco needed care and attention to fulfill his potential—without it, he would have continued feeling alienated and inferior at school. Miss Scalapino gives him the honor of releasing the butterfly into the world, and the butterfly's flight symbolizes that Francisco, too, now feels capable of success. His positive experience at school helps him to transform into a more confident student, just like the caterpillar transformed into the butterfly.

THE GOLDFISH

The solitary goldfish swimming in its bowl in the story "El Angel de Oro" symbolizes Francisco's own loneliness. In the story, the family has moved to Corcoran to find work in the cotton fields. Since it rains incessantly, Francisco and his siblings are often stuck inside their tiny cabin, which is like their own little fishbowl that keeps them separate from the outside world.

Francisco looks out the window at his neighbor's goldfish on these boring, rainy days. Mamá calls the fish *El Angel de Oro*, or "Golden Angel"—but despite the fish's beauty, Francisco pities it, because it is all alone. Like the goldfish, Francisco is lonely, since his family's constant moving makes it hard for him to make friends. Additionally, he feels different from his classmates at school because of the linguistic, cultural, and economic barriers between them—the other kids view him as a curiosity that's separate from them, much like Francisco stares at the fish in its bowl. The goldfish thus represents Francisco's own experience in the U.S.: he, like the fish, is a solitary creature who's aware of the world around him but unable to feel like he's a part of it.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Houghton Mifflin edition of *The Circuit* published in 1997.

Under the Wire Quotes

❝ When the train stopped in Mexicali, Papa told us to get off. "We're almost there," he said, looking at me. We left the station. Papa carried our dark brown suitcase. We followed behind him until we reached a barbed wire fence. According to Papa, this was *la frontera*. He pointed out that across the gray wire barricade was California, that famous place I had heard so much about. On both sides of the fence were armed guards dressed in green uniforms. Papa called them *la migra*, and explained that we had to cross the fence to the other side without being seen by them.

Related Characters: Papá (speaker), Francisco

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Francisco and his family are leaving their village in Mexico behind and are preparing to cross the U.S.-Mexico border—*la frontera*—into California. They have packed everything they own into their "dark brown suitcase," and the fact that they own so little highlights their poverty. Though they worked hard in their village, they own next to nothing and lacked even basic comforts like running water and electricity, which explains their desire to move to the United States in search of a better life.

Though the author, Francisco Jiménez, doesn't specify the year that Francisco's family crosses into the United States, readers can assume that it is supposed to be some time in the late 1940s, since this is when Jiménez's family came to California, and this novel is semiautobiographical. At this time, in the aftermath of World War II, there was rampant poverty in Mexico, with many people struggling for necessities like food and shelter. This caused a wave of immigration—both legal and illegal—into the United States, since people were tired of the hardships in their home country. Jiménez's family was part of this wave of immigrants who crossed into California, which Francisco describes here as "that famous place [he] had heard so much about." His family hopes that this life change will be a solution to their struggles with poverty and give them a chance at a better future.

However, there are clear signs in this passage that this change will come with its own set of challenges. The U.S.-Mexico border seems rather threatening, with its "barbed wire fence" and "armed guards" whose job it is to keep people like Francisco and his family out. By attempting to cross it, they are clearly taking a huge risk, since they might get arrested and imprisoned if caught. And beyond that, they're likely to face more subtle difficulties like discrimination, language barriers, or culture shock in the U.S. Since they are willing to take these risks anyway, they are clearly desperate for a better life and have no hope that they will find this in their home country. Papa seems focused on avoiding the immigration officers when they cross into the United States, but he doesn't yet seem to realize that this fear of being caught is something that the family will have to constantly deal with in their new home.

"I wonder where the train comes from," I said. [...]

"I think it comes from California."

"California!" I exclaimed. "This is California!"

"I am not so sure," he said. "Remember what..."

The familiar Noon Train whistle interrupted him. [...] The conductor slowed the train to a crawl, waved, and gently dropped a large brown bag in front of us as he went by. We picked it up and looked inside. It was full of oranges, apples, and candy.

"See, it does come from California!" Roberto exclaimed.

Related Characters: Roberto, Francisco (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

After Francisco and his family crosses the border into California, they end up unemployed and live in a borrowed tent. Here, Francisco and his brother Roberto watch trains at the tracks nearby to pass the time. In this passage, readers learn that Roberto doesn't quite believe that they are in California yet. Before they came to California, Roberto had very high hopes of what the place would be like—he'd assumed that the family would be immediately prosperous there, and that all their problems would be solved. However, the reality is that they are still struggling and are, in fact, even worse off than they were in Mexico.

Roberto is hugely disappointed by this and is unwilling to admit that their move to the United States has been a misadventure. Instead, he rationalizes that they aren't yet in California, which he still hopes is a land of happiness and prosperity that they might reach eventually.

Roberto thinks that the Noon Train and its friendly conductor might be coming from California. The conductor waves to the boys every day, and his kindness seems to have impressed Roberto, which is probably why he thinks that the train must be coming from a better place. On this afternoon, the train conductor drops off a bag of food for the boys, which Roberto interprets as a confirmation that the Noon Train must indeed be coming from California. While the reality is that the family is already in California, and that life is harsh here too, in Roberto's imagination, it is a land of plenty where everyone lives in comfort. Even though this is unrealistic, the train conductor's generosity does end up helping the boys' family at a time when they desperately need food and sustenance. It also helps them survive their difficult situation by giving them hope for the future, even though Roberto erroneously hopes that the family might soon end up in the "real" California that the Noon Train comes from.

Soledad Quotes

As usual, they left me alone in the car to take care of Trampita, my little brother, who was six months old. I hated being left by myself with him while they went off to pick cotton. As they walked further into the field, I climbed onto the roof of the car, stood on tiptoes, and watched them until I could no longer tell them apart from the other pickers. Once I lost sight of them, I felt pain in my chest, that same pain I always felt whenever they left Trampita and me alone. Sobbing, I climbed into the car and wrapped my arms around Trampita, who slept in the back seat.

Related Characters: Francisco (speaker), Mamá, Papá, Roberto, Trampita

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Francisco's parents and his older brother, Roberto, spend their days working in the cotton fields, leaving little Francisco to care for his infant brother, Trampita. Francisco is around five years old at this time, so he himself is very young, which explains his anguish when his family leaves

him alone with the baby. The title of the chapter is "Soledad," which translates to "loneliness"—and clearly, Francisco dislikes being left alone. He says that he "hate[s] being by [himself]," and his action of climbing onto the car's roof to watch his departing family shows how desperately he tries to cling to them until they are finally out of view. His loneliness is so potent that he feels it as a physical pain in his chest.

While the subject of this passage is Francisco's loneliness, Jiménez implies that the family is lonely too, in their new life in the United States. Francisco is left in charge of his infant brother while his parents go to work, and this situation is clearly not ideal—especially since Francisco himself is still young enough to need adult supervision and care. The family is too poor to afford childcare, and they do not know anyone in this new country who can help watch their young children. In Mexico, they were surrounded by extended family and a warm community. They came to the United States hoping that they would have a better life, but instead, they are faced with various challenges—including loneliness and isolation.

The final image in this passage is of Francisco hugging his baby brother for comfort, which suggests the solution to his sadness is finding love wherever he can. The novel emphasizes the idea that loving relationships and deep connections between people are essential for happiness and can help people get through tough times.

"You should be ashamed of yourself. We could be fired for this," he said. "Besides, your job is to take care of Trampita. Is that clear?" he continued, placing both hands on his belt buckle.

"*Si, Papa*," I answered timidly. I was hurt and confused.

Related Characters: Papá, Francisco (speaker), Roberto, Trampita

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Francisco wants to prove that he's old enough to work in the cotton fields with his family, so he picks some cotton while they're working and adds some dirt into the pile to make it look bigger. Francisco had expected Papa to be pleased with his work, so he's surprised by Papa's stern reaction. Mixing soil into the cotton is an innocent mistake, but it could have had disastrous consequences on their lives if Papa hadn't checked the pile of cotton before adding it to his own pile and taking it to the farmer. As an itinerant laborer and an undocumented immigrant, Papa is very aware of his precarious work situation—he knows that farmers consider workers like him to be dispensable, and that he can be easily replaced with another desperate immigrant. Papa understands that any small misstep—like turning in a pile of cotton that's full of dirt—could result in them losing their jobs.

As the chief breadwinner and family patriarch, Papa is always anxious about the family's financial security. Francisco, however, is a child who is most concerned about his own happiness and often does not understand the family's precarious situation. In this passage, he is intimidated by Papa's angry tone, but he doesn't quite realize how his little error could have had serious consequences. While Francisco wants to seem older so he can join his parents and Roberto as they work in the fields, he is clearly neither physically strong enough to pick a substantial amount of cotton nor emotionally mature enough to maintain the strict work ethic that the farmers expect them to have.

Inside Out Quotes

But when I spoke to Arthur in Spanish and Miss Scalapino heard me, she said "NO!" with body and soul. Her head turned left and right a hundred times a second and her index finger moved from side to side as fast as a windshield wiper on a rainy day. "English, English," she repeated. Arthur avoided me whenever she was around.

Related Characters: Miss Scalapino, Francisco (speaker), Arthur

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19-20

Explanation and Analysis

Francisco struggles in school because he doesn't know English, so he is glad to find that one classmate, Arthur, knows a little Spanish. Francisco enjoys chatting and playing with him at recess, but Miss Scalapino soon puts a stop to this when she overhears the boys speaking Spanish. Her reaction is so emphatic that it's almost comical—Francisco describes her as yelling the word "no" with "body and soul," and she shakes her head rapidly while wagging her finger like "a windshield wiper on a rainy day." With these colorful

descriptions, Francisco makes it clear that he thinks her reaction is ludicrous and a little frightening in its intensity—Arthur certainly seems to have been frightened by it, since he avoids Francisco after this. All that Francisco did was speak in Spanish, yet Miss Scalapino reacts like this is a crime.

As a child who knows no English at all, Francisco struggles in school and feels completely isolated from his peers since he can't communicate with them. Instead of being sensitive to his difficulties and helping Francisco through this transition, Miss Scalapino completely forbids him from speaking Spanish and conveys the message that speaking Spanish in school is wrong. Her attitude implies that she doesn't consider Spanish worthy of the classroom. Although it's certainly important that Francisco learn English, Miss Scalapino goes about this interaction the wrong way—she's sending the message that in her view, Spanish is inferior to English, which is discriminatory against Francisco's mother tongue.

In addition, Miss Scalapino speaks to Francisco with exaggerated signs and a loud voice, which suggests that she thinks he has trouble with his general comprehension just because he cannot understand English. This, too, is a form of discrimination, since knowledge of the English language has no correlation with intelligence, even though Miss Scalapino seems to think it does. Francisco is, in fact, a curious child and a quick learner. Her reaction indicates that despite Francisco's obvious intelligence, his teachers will continually underestimate him merely because he doesn't speak English.

❝ I did not understand what she said, but I heard her say my name as she held up a blue ribbon. She then picked up my drawing of the butterfly […] and held it up for everyone to see. She walked up to me and handed me the drawing and the silk blue ribbon that had a number one printed on it in gold. I knew then I had received first prize for my drawing. I was so proud I felt like bursting out of my skin. […]

That afternoon, during our free period, I went over to check on the caterpillar. I turned the jar around, trying to see the cocoon. It was beginning to crack open.

Related Characters: Francisco (speaker), Miss Scalapino

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 24-25

Explanation and Analysis

Toward the end of Francisco's first year in school, Miss Scalapino gives him a prize for his drawing of a butterfly. All through the school year, Francisco has felt out of place since he doesn't know English and cannot understand the teacher or communicate with his classmates. However, in this moment, he's overjoyed because he feels seen and appreciated for the first time at school.

Miss Scalapino's policies have sometimes seemed unnecessarily harsh—for instance, she forbids Francisco from speaking Spanish in school, and she punishes Francisco when she catches him fighting with another classmate, even though she cannot get Francisco's side of the story since she cannot communicate with him. Still, her heart seems to be in the right place, and she understands that Francisco would like to win a prize—and, by extension, her approval. She is certainly right, as this moment is very important to him. Her kind gesture has a huge impact on Francisco's life, since it's what makes him fall in love with school.

Francisco says that he's "so proud" at the moment he gets the prize that he feels like he is "bursting out of his skin." While this shows that he was overwhelmed by his excitement, it also links him with the caterpillar in the classroom that Francisco has always been very interested in. When he first started school, he took comfort in staring at the caterpillar whenever he felt lonely or embarrassed in school, probably because the caterpillar reminded him of his familiar life in the fields—and because Francisco felt like he didn't quite belong in the classroom, just like the caterpillar didn't.

However, when Miss Scalapino announces that Francisco has won a prize, he feels like he is "bursting out of his skin," like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. Francisco's metaphorical cocoon, too, is cracking open at this moment, suggesting that he has the potential to be a butterfly like the one in the picture he drew—that is, to reach his full potential. Sure enough, he observes the butterfly (formerly the caterpillar) in the classroom breaking out of its cocoon right after this moment. Just like the caterpillar, which had the hidden potential to transform into a butterfly, Francisco, too, has great academic potential—and this moment, when he is appreciated in school, spurs him to fulfill this.

Miracle in Tent City Quotes

❝ When I saw Mama and Papa without Torito, I panicked. "Is he dead?" I cried out. [...]

"No, he isn't," Mama snapped. "God won't let him. You'll see," she added in a harsh tone. Her face was flushed and her dark eyes were full of tears. I was surprised and puzzled. Why would she be angry at me?

Related Characters: Francisco (speaker), Papá, Mamá, Torito

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

When Francisco's baby brother Torito becomes very sick, Mama and Papa rush him to the hospital, even though they cannot really afford it. Francisco is very attached to Torito and is concerned about his health. Still, Francisco is a young child himself, and he doesn't understand that blurting out his fears about whether Torito is dead might cause Mama to worry more, since he is giving voice to her deepest fear. She is trying to repress this fear and hold out hope that Torito will make a full recovery, which is why she does not appreciate Francisco's question.

Mama is usually kind and patient with her children, so Francisco is taken aback by her anger, since he has never seen her this way—he is too young to notice that her anger comes from desperation and great sorrow. Mama's "dark eyes [are] full of tears," but Francisco cannot understand why. As a child, he is more concerned about why Mama is angry at him rather than trying to understand her pain. Even though Mama is dealing with the immense weight of knowing that her baby might die, she doesn't share this knowledge with Francisco—and in this way, she shows her love for him, since she doesn't want him to suffer like she does. So, even though this scene is filled with pain, it nevertheless highlights the family's love and concern for one another: Francisco's love for Torito, Mama's worry for Torito, as well as her desire to protect Francisco from sorrow for as long as possible.

Later in the chapter, after Torito returns home and makes a full recovery, Mama confesses to Francisco that the doctor in the hospital told them that Torito would most likely die, since Mama and Papa had brought him to the hospital too late. This is another reason she'd been so upset when Francisco asked her if Torito was dead—she had just heard the doctor deliver this harsh verdict and didn't want to believe it. The doctor's words seem like a cruel reprimand, given that Mama and Papa are not careless parents. The only reason they didn't take Torito to the hospital earlier was because they couldn't afford to, not because they weren't concerned about him or took his illness lightly. The doctor seems to have quickly assumed the worst about them, probably based on their poverty and inability to communicate in English.

El Angel de Oro Quotes

❝ I went around to the side of the cabin and peeked through the window. The cabin was completely empty. My heart sank into my stomach. Slowly I walked home, feeling a lump in my throat. I heard Miguelito's laugh in my head and thought about our game with the puddles. When I got home I stood by our window and stared at our neighbor's goldfish for the longest time.

Related Characters: Francisco (speaker), Miguelito

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Francisco makes friends with Miguelito, another boy who lives in the same labor camp in Corcoran—but after looking for Miguelito all day, he is disappointed to discover that Miguelito's family has unexpectedly moved out of the labor camp. As itinerant farm laborers, Francisco's family moves around a lot in search of work. As a result, Francisco doesn't have the opportunity to make friends since his family often moves before he can truly settle into a particular place. The fact that Miguelito's family picks up and moves without warning shows readers that this is an issue common to all itinerant laborers, many of whom are undocumented immigrants. While the adults make decisions based on practical financial considerations, their children are forced to move with them, which is disruptive to their academic and social lives.

In this passage, Francisco looks through windows several times. First, he looks into Miguelito's cabin from the outside, and he's devastated to find it empty. Then, he returns to his family's cabin and stares out a window sadly. It seems like Francisco on the outside looking in, or on the inside looking out—either way, he is separate from the world that he longs to be a part of, since he is lonely and socially isolated. The goldfish that he watches is a symbol of Francisco's

loneliness. Just like him, the fish is all alone in its bowl, and the bowl keeps it separate from the world. Because of this, Francisco feels a connection with the fish as it swims about in its bowl, all alone.

Christmas Gift Quotes

❝ We were leaving only three weeks after I had enrolled in the fourth grade for the first time that year. As we drove by the school I saw some kids I knew on the playground. I imagined myself playing with them with the ball I would get for Christmas. I waved to them but they did not see me.

Related Characters: Francisco (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 53-54

Explanation and Analysis

Since it is very rainy in Corcoran the year that Francisco is in fourth grade, Francisco's family moves away earlier than they normally would, since they can't pick cotton when it is raining. Their quick move leaves Francisco even more unsettled than he usually is, since he only gets to attend school for a few weeks. This shows how disruptive the family's constant moving is for Francisco, since he is yanked away before he can get used to a town or the school.

Francisco dreams of getting a ball for Christmas—a simple wish that most kids would take for granted—but Francisco's family is in a bad financial situation since the rain has prevented them from working, and he isn't sure that he will get what he wants. This passage shows that Francisco's desire for the ball isn't solely a material one. Instead, he hopes to use the ball to foster a connection with his peers—he "imagine[s] [himself] playing with them with the ball." Francisco feels disconnected from his classmates, since his family always moves around, and he leaves school before he gets to settle down and make friends. Also, as he gets older, he is becoming increasingly aware of the social and economic factors that make him different from his peers. Francisco hopes that the ball will help him to bridge these gaps by giving him opportunities to play and connect with other kids.

As Francisco and his family drive away, Francisco waves to his classmates, but "they [do] not see" him. This emphasizes how poor immigrants like Francisco and his family are often invisible to more privileged people. Most people are not even aware of the underprivileged and voiceless who live among them, since they are focused on their own lives. They do not notice or care about those who are unlike them, just as Francisco's peers overlook him.

❝ Searching for words to tell Mama how I felt, I looked up at her. Her eyes were full of tears. Papa, who was sitting next to her on the mattress, lifted its corner and pulled out from underneath the white embroidered handkerchief. He tenderly handed it to Mama, saying, "*Feliz Navidad, vieja.*"

Related Characters: Papá, Francisco (speaker), Mamá

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

On Christmas morning, Francisco does not get the ball he was hoping for—instead, he and his siblings get only a small bag of candy each. Francisco is very disappointed, but he feels reluctant to share his feelings with Mama because he sees senses her pain.

Mama is in tears because she loves her children and yearns to give them better Christmas presents to make them happy, but she and Papa don't have the money for this. Francisco is still very young—he is a fourth grader in this story—so he doesn't quite understand why she is sad, since he is more focused on his own sorrow and disappointment. Still, he seems to sense the cause of her sadness, which is why he finds it hard to articulate his own feelings to her—he is disappointed that he didn't get the ball he was hoping to get, but he also is worried about Mama's sadness. With this, Jiménez implies that Francisco's true Christmas gift is the love Mama has for him, which is infinitely more valuable than the ball he wanted.

Similarly, Papa's love for Mama shines through in this story. Back in Corcoran, Mama had admired a handkerchief that a Mexican couple was selling, and Papa secretly bought it for her back then. Now, he gives the handkerchief to her at an apt moment, when she is crying—a gesture that symbolizes Papa's desire to dry Mama's tears and bring her happiness. He lovingly wishes her a Merry Christmas, and this tender moment between them once again highlights the fact that, although the family might not have money for presents, they are enriched by their love for one another.

Death Forgiven Quotes

❝ [Papa] had been in a terrible mood the last few days because he was not sure where we would work now that the grape season was almost over. Covering his ears with his hands, he bolted to the corner of the garage, grabbed the broom, and swung with all his might at my friend who was perched on the wire. Red, green, and yellow feathers scattered everywhere. El Perico hit the dirt floor like a wet rag. Instantly Roberto, Mama, and I started wailing. My
father shouted at all of us to stop.

Related Characters: Francisco (speaker), Papá, Mamá, Roberto, El Perico

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

Francisco's pet parrot, El Perico, can be noisy at times—and Papa ends up killing the bird one evening when he becomes irritated with its racket. Papa seems to be increasingly stressed by the family's unstable life in the United States. They are constantly looking for work and shelter, and although they work very hard, they never make enough money to live comfortably. Additionally, they have nothing saved up since they earn so little, which is why Papa is anxious about finding their next source of income. If they don't have work, they have no money. This explains Papa's angst as the grape season comes to an end—he doesn't know where to move the family next.

While the constant moving and the financial instability the family lives with is taxing on all of them, it seems to weigh especially heavily on Papa, since he is the chief breadwinner—and as the patriarch, he is the one in charge of the family's decisions. This responsibility is a big burden and source of worry, especially as the family's financial situation has stayed the same over time, and Papa must always figure out their next step so they can stay afloat. Papa's anxiety manifests as anger, and his violence toward El Perico seems like an emotional breakdown. The bird's death, and the ensuing unhappiness this causes for everyone in the family, represents the high emotional price that Papa and the rest of the family pay as they struggle every day.

Despite the family's troubles, they love and support one another, which helps them endure their difficult lives. However, Papa's temper seems capable of driving a wedge between them. In this scene, he seems threatening and shows no guilt about killing the bird, despite seeing how sad the rest of the family is about this. Instead, he angrily "shout[s] at all of [them] to stop" crying. Perhaps Papa thinks his troubles are so immense that he has no sympathy left over for his family's sorrow about the dead bird. Still, the family's love and understanding are their strengths, and his anger and anxiety could compromise this.

Cotton Sack Quotes

❝ The pounding of the rain on the roof woke me several times during the night. Every time I opened my eyes, I saw the burning tip of Papa's cigarette glowing in the dark; other times I heard the rattle of his aspirin bottle. I did not mind the rain because it meant I could sleep in the next morning. The cotton would be too wet to pick. Because we got paid three cents a pound, most ranchers did not let us pick cotton when it was wet.

Related Characters: Francisco (speaker), Papá

Related Themes:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

Francisco's family is living in Corcoran, and Papa is eager to go to work and pick cotton the next day—but the rain upsets his plans. Most of the itinerant laborers who work on the cotton farms, like Francisco and his family, are undocumented immigrants. The farmers do not pay them very much for all the hard work they do, even though the farmers are dependent on their labor. Since these workers are poor and desperate for money and do not have the voice to fight for their rights, the farmers take advantage of them, confident that they will work even if the conditions are bad. If they refuse to work, they can be easily replaced by someone else who is more desperate for the work.

Papa knows that he needs the work, since the family has no savings, and they need a constant income to get by. Still, the cotton farmers don't let the workers pick cotton on rainy days, since they usually pay them by the weight of the cotton they pick—and wet cotton will weigh more. The farmers know that this will be very hard on workers who are dependent on daily wages, but they do not care enough to try and come up with a workable solution to this problem—even though workers like Papa would gladly pick cotton in the rain in order to earn money.

Francisco and Papa have very different reactions to the rain that night, which shows Francisco's youth and immaturity and Papa's increasing anxiety. Papa is so stressed out by the

thought that the rain might keep the family from working that he is unable to sleep all night. He smokes cigarettes to try to calm himself down and takes several aspirin to mitigate the physical symptoms of this stress. For Francisco, however, the rain means an opportunity to sleep in—and even though he witnesses Papa's anxiety, he is undeterred from his relief that it is raining, which means that he won't have to work the next day. As a child, he focuses on his personal comfort and isn't worried about the family's dire financial situation.

❝ I could not go on. Frustrated and disappointed, I walked over to Papa. He straightened up and looked down at me. His eyes were red and watery from the cold. Before I said anything, he looked at Roberto, who bravely kept on picking, and told me to go over to the fire. I knew then I had not yet earned my own cotton sack.

Related Characters: Papá, Francisco (speaker), Roberto

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Francisco thinks that he's old enough to get his own cotton sack when he works on the fields, but on Thanksgiving morning, he struggles to pick cotton in the freezing cold and gives up. Francisco is "frustrated and disappointed" in himself, since he wanted to use this opportunity to prove to Papa that he is a hard worker and deserves his own sack. However, this pales in comparison to Papa's disappointment in him. Even though Papa doesn't say much, his gestures convey his displeasure: he "straighten[s] up and look[s] down" at Francisco, an action intended to convey that he is looking down on Francisco because he doesn't approve of his decision to give up. This gesture makes it clear to Francisco that his father has lost respect for him.

The work is undoubtedly difficult. Papa, too, is struggling with the cold (his eyes are "red and watery"), and so is Roberto. However, Roberto "bravely [keeps] on picking," and Papa glances at Roberto working before he speaks to Francisco. With this, he seems to indicate that he appreciates Roberto's steadfastness. Papa tells Francisco to go over to the fire to warm himself, and though he does not say this angrily, Francisco gets his message loud and clear: Papa does not respect Francisco's decision to give up, considering it a weakness. In Papa's eyes, Francisco is still a child.

The Circuit Quotes

❝ As we drove home Papa 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. [...]

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.

Related Characters: Francisco (speaker), Papá, Roberto

Related Themes:

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of strawberry season, Papa, Roberto, and Francisco return home after their last day of work at the strawberry farm. Francisco observes that Papa and Roberto seem sad, tired, and worried as they drive home in silence. Now, they will need to embark on a quest to find another farm to work on and another place to live in, and this weighs on them. This anxiety is one that Papa has to deal with every few months, since the family depends on their daily wages and cannot afford to be out of work for more than a few days. Roberto and Francisco will have to get used to a new town, a new school, and new type of work harvesting different crops. All of them seem exhausted by these thoughts. The title of this chapter is "The Circuit," the same as that of the novel, and it signifies Francisco's family's wearisome, circuitous wandering as they try to eke out a living.

This moving wears on Francisco in particular, since he is faced with constant change and ends up feeling displaced every time the family moves again. However, it seems like his life stays disappointingly stagnant in one aspect: the hard work never ceases, and yet the family never has enough money. This realization hits him when he enters the house and sees all their belongings packed up, and it feels like a physical "weight" to him. The burden of their lifestyle is difficult for him to bear, and he needs to sit down to get his bearings, since he feels unable to carry on with their daily struggle.

> 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. [...] 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.

Related Characters: Francisco (speaker), Roberto

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

Francisco's family is in Fresno, harvesting grapes—and since the harvest season is waning, Francisco gets to start school. While most other children are begin school in September, Francisco misses the first two months of school every year, since he has to work in the fields. Additionally, he has to attend different schools in different towns every few months, depending on wherever his family finds work. Despite this constant disruption to his education, which not only affects his learning but also his social life, Francisco is excited to go to school. This shows that he loves learning and also emphasizes how hard farm labor is, since Francisco wakes up "savoring the thought of not going to work." He is a child who lives a hard life, as evidenced by his hands that are cracking and stained with fruit acids. Francisco rubs his hands together and sloughs this skin off, since he is done with farm labor for a while and his hands can heal again as he attends school.

Roberto, too, is still young—he is a teenager, but because he is the oldest child in the family, he takes on adult-like work and responsibilities. He understands that his parents need him to step up. Here, Francisco recognizes the tragedy of this, since Roberto, too, would like the life of other children his age, but his family can't afford to provide this to him. Even though Francisco is caught up in his happiness, his guilt and sympathy about Roberto's situation highlights the affection between the brothers.

> The rest of the month I spent my lunch 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 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 bumps. [...] 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 tell Papa and Mama the great news [...] but when I opened the door to our shack, I saw that everything we owned was neatly packed in cardboard boxes.

Related Characters: Mr. Lema, Francisco (speaker), Papá, Mamá, Miss Scalapino

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Lema, Francisco's sixth-grade teacher in Fresno, tutors Francisco every day during their lunch hour. Francisco is grateful for his help and feels very close to him. Despite Francisco's struggles, he and his family often encounter kindness from people in the community, and this helps them carry on. Mr. Lema is one such figure in Francisco's life: his generosity has a big impact on Francisco's academic success. As evidenced in this scene, Mr. Lema is also very respectful and knowledgeable about Francisco's culture—seemingly because Mr. Lema shares this same culture, as he may also be Latinx (the surname Lema is of Spanish origin). Since Francisco likes *corridos*, which are ballad-like songs set to music, Mr. Lema offers to teach him to play the trumpet, because it is an instrument often used in *corridos*. His acceptance of Francisco's culture is in stark contrast with Miss Scalapino's attitude earlier in the book, when she wouldn't even allow Francisco to speak in Spanish during recess.

However, Francisco's happiness in Mr. Lema's company is short-lived, as his family is once again ready to move, and Francisco is forced to leave another friend behind. The constant moving clearly takes a huge toll on Francisco. Mr. Lema was a big help to him academically, and Francisco will miss the opportunity to improve his English with Mr. Lema's help, since his family is moving again. This scene conveys how hugely disappointing these moves are, since Francisco is so excited to learn to play the trumpet and no longer can do so. Moving seem to suck excitement and anticipation out of his life—he cannot make any plans since his life is so

unstable, and he never knows where he will be the next day.

Learning the Game Quotes

❝ The *contratista* walked up to Gabriel and yelled in his face, "Well this isn't your country, idiot! You either do what I say or I'll have you fired!"

"Don't do that, please," Gabriel said. "I have a family to feed."

"I don't give a damn about your family!" the *contratista* replied, grabbing Gabriel by the shirt collar and pushing him. [...] As he hit the ground, the *contratista* kicked him in the side with the tip of his boot. Gabriel sprung up and, with both hands clenched, lunged at the *contratista*. White as a ghost, Diaz quickly jumped back. [...]

I felt scared. I had not seen men fight before. My mouth felt dry and my hands and legs began to shake.

Related Characters: Francisco, Gabriel, Mr. Diaz (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 91-92

Explanation and Analysis

The *conratista* (labor contractor), Mr. Diaz, asks Gabriel to tie a plow around his waist and till the fields, but Gabriel refuses, saying that only animals do this work in Mexico. Gabriel is a *bracero*, and Mr. Diaz is in charge of his room and board—but Diaz is also a bully who mistreats the *braceros* under his care.

The Bracero Program of the 1940s and 1950s was a way for Mexican farm workers to legally work in the United States, and it supposedly guaranteed that these workers would have access to fair wages and accommodation. However, Gabriel's experience shows readers that *braceros* like him were often exploited and mistreated by the people who arranged for their stay in the United States. Mr. Diaz seems to be intoxicated with power: to him, workers like Gabriel are barely human, and he expects unquestioning obedience from them. He is verbally and physically abusive, and it is obvious that working with him is very challenging. Yet, when Gabriel moves toward him threateningly—even though he doesn't fight him—Diaz is immediately frightened and "white as a ghost."

As Francisco grows older, he comes face to face with injustice like this. Even though his family has led a difficult life, Francisco has been sheltered by their love from the harshness of adult problems. Thus, when he faces a situation like this fight between Mr. Diaz and Gabriel, Francisco is frightened by what he sees. Still, by witnessing this scene, he learns about standing up against bullies and applies it to his own life—he "learns the game," as the story's title suggests, since he understands that bullies like Mr. Diaz are essentially cowards who are frightened when confronted or questioned.

To Have and to Hold Quotes

❝ [...] Carl said, "When can I come to your house and see your collection?" His question took me by surprise. I never thought he would want to visit me at our home. And after seeing his house, I was not sure I wanted him to see where I lived. [...]

After thinking of possible excuses, I finally said, "I live too far. I'll bring my collection to school." [...]

I never got the chance to show Carl my collection. That weekend we moved to Five Points, and I never saw my friend again.

Related Characters: Francisco, Carl (speaker), Mr. Lema

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

Francisco's friend Carl invites him home to see his coin collection, and Francisco is very impressed by the comfort and luxury of Carl's home. This also makes it obvious to Francisco that he leads a very different sort of life from most of his classmates. As he grows older, he becomes more aware of how his poverty and difficult lifestyle separate him from other children his age—and in this passage, for the first time, he is embarrassed by this difference. He is "not sure" that he wants Carl to come over to his house, because he has just seen how different Carl's house is from the one-room cabin that Francisco's family lives in. He suspects that Carl would be similarly shocked to see how Francisco lives.

Francisco promises Carl that he'll bring his coin collection to school to show it to him, but his family moves again that weekend, and Francisco's plans are ruined. Francisco's connection with Carl is very special to him, much like his friendship with Mr. Lema was earlier in the book. However, just as the friends make a plan, Francisco's family ends up moving, repeating the same pattern of friendships cut short. This shows that Francisco's family's constant moving is becoming increasingly disruptive to Francisco as he grows

older and craves stability and long-lasting friendships.

❝ I recalled the fire and placed my right hand over my shirt pocket. It was empty. Feeling a lump in my throat, I started thinking about Carl, my pennies, the house. Then, for a long time, I thought about my *librito* and what Mama said. I could see in my mind every word, every number, every rule, I had written in my note pad. I knew everything in it by heart. Mama was right. It was not all lost.

Related Characters: Francisco (speaker), Mamá, Carl

Related Themes:

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

After Francisco lost his precious *librito* ("notepad") and coin collection in a house fire, Mama consoled him by saying that his notepad wasn't really lost, because he still knew everything he wrote in it. Even though Francisco didn't quite believe her words earlier, now he recalls them when he feels his empty shirt pocket where he used to keep his notepad. This makes him think about all the things he recently lost, including "Carl, [his] pennies, the house." Francisco has lived through a lot of upheaval in his short life, and the house fire was especially devastating since it took away the two treasures—his coin collection and his notepad—that were his constant companions for some time and had seen him through life in different towns. This is why Francisco was especially shaken by this loss.

However, here Francisco recalls Mama's words and realizes that he really *does* have the notepad's contents safely in his mind—"every word, every number, every rule." The fire couldn't take away his knowledge and memories—they are his "to have and to hold," as the title of the chapter suggests. By extension, Francisco seems to realize that moving around and dealing with constant changes might result in the end of his friendships—like his friendship with Carl—but that he will always have his memories to cherish. The chapter ends on the optimistic note that "all is not lost," highlighting the idea that even through change and impermanence, memories can sustain people and make them resilient.

Moving Still Quotes

❝ Every Thursday Mr. Milo gave us a math quiz, and the following day he arranged our desks according to how well we did on the test. The student with the highest score had the honor of sitting in the front seat, first row. Sharon Ito, the daughter of the Japanese sharecropper for whom we picked strawberries during the summer, and I alternated taking the first seat, although she sat in it more often than I did.

Related Characters: Francisco (speaker), Sharon Ito, Mr. Milo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

After Francisco's family moves to Santa Maria, Francisco begins attending eighth grade at the local school. For years, Francisco's family has been working very hard at various farms around California, but they haven't been able to make enough money or save enough to last them through even one season of unemployment. To Francisco, it begins to seem like they have no way to break out of the repetitive "circuit" of their lives.

However, this passage implies that education might be a way out, and this is the only way that Francisco can hope to make more money and get a stable job. Already, because Francisco does well academically, he's on equal footing with Sharon Ito, his employer's daughter who comes from a very different socio-economic background than him. With this detail, Jiménez wants his readers to understand that education can be an equalizer, since it gives people equal opportunities for success and opens the door to financial stability.

Francisco is clearly an impressively intelligent and dedicated student. He deals with a lot of change and instability in his daily life, and he only gets to attend school sporadically since he also works in the fields during harvest season. Yet, despite all of this, he is one of the highest performers in his classroom. Jiménez is sending the message to his readers that undocumented immigrants do have a lot of potential, even though many educators might write them off because they struggle with English or attend school irregularly because of their personal situations.

> "Mr. Sims offered me the janitorial job at Main Street School," [Roberto] answered, grinning from ear to ear.

"It's a year-round job," Mama said, looking at Papa.

Being careful with his back, Papa stood up slowly and hugged her gently. He then turned to Roberto and said, "Education pays off, *mi'jo*. I am proud of you. Too bad your Mama and I didn't have the opportunity to go to school."

"But you've taught us a lot, Papa," I answered. I had not seen Papa that happy for weeks.

Related Characters: Papá, Mamá, Francisco, Roberto (speaker), Mr. Sims

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

In Santa Maria, Roberto gets a year-round job that will allow the family to settle down in one place instead of always moving to new farms to find work. This is a positive turning point for the family, since they have been on the move for so many years, and this will finally give them a chance to put down roots in one place. Francisco, especially, has struggled with the constant moving, and now he can finally live in Santa Maria, like he always hoped he would. For Papa, who is so worn out from the years of hard labor that he can't even get out of bed, this means that he will no longer have to stress out about which farm to move the family to next so they can find a job and a place to live—so this is a big relief for him, as well.

Even though Papa is happy and relieved at this turn of events, he also seems a little ashamed that *he* was unable to provide his family with this security—he says it is "too bad" that he and Mama don't have an education, which might have helped them make an easier life for their children. Francisco understands Papa's feelings and generously compliments him in order to make him feel better. His comment that Papa has taught them a lot, even though he's never gone to school, makes Papa very happy. This shows Francisco's kindness and the love and concern between the family members, which has kept them afloat as they've weathered many difficult situations over the years.

> I sat at my desk and went over the recitation in my mind one last time: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." I checked the text in my note pad to make sure I had not forgotten anything. It was perfect. [...]
>
> Miss Ehlis [...] was interrupted by a knock at the door. When she opened it, I could see Mr. Denevi, the principal, and a man standing behind him. The instant I saw the green uniform, I panicked. I wanted to run but my legs would not move.

Related Characters: Francisco (speaker), Miss Ehlis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 133-134

Explanation and Analysis

Francisco is working hard on a school assignment for which he is supposed to memorize a section from the Declaration of Independence. Just as he is ready to recite it, an immigration officer—the man in "the green uniform"—comes to his classroom, and Francisco immediately freezes with fear. Francisco instantly knows that he will be deported, and nothing will help him—neither his stellar academic record, nor the fact that the family seems to have finally caught a break after years of struggle, since Roberto has just found a year-round, higher-paying job. The immigration officer's presence signals that Francisco's life will change once again—he will be deported to a country he left a decade ago and barely remembers. This will certainly be the most challenging change he has faced yet in his young life.

The author, Francisco Jiménez, has called *The Circuit* an "autobiographical novel," since most of the incidents in it are taken from his life (though he did add some fictional details to strengthen the narrative). However, this final scene of the novel, in which Francisco is taken away by the immigration official just as he prepares to recite the words from the Declaration of Independence, occurred exactly as Jiménez wrote it. As he was hauled away by immigration officers all those years ago, the young Francisco Jiménez must have been acutely conscious of the falseness of the words he had just learned—as an undocumented immigrant in the United States, he certainly didn't have "inalienable rights" to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." In fact, he was treated in a dehumanizing way and did not have the right to protest against it. By ending the novel with this powerful scene, Jiménez wants to draw his readers' attention to the injustices and challenges that undocumented immigrant face—even if they are intelligent, hard-working, and law-abiding.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

UNDER THE WIRE

Francisco lives in a small village called El Rancho Blanco in Mexico. His parents often tell him and his older brother, Roberto, that they will someday cross *la frontera* (the U.S.-Mexico border) into California and leave their poverty and troubles behind. Roberto is excited at the prospect of leaving, since he is unhappy living in their village. He once visited their cousin Fito, who works in a tequila factory in Guadalajara and who has a house with floors, electricity, and water. Roberto, too, wants a life with these comforts.

The events of this novel begin in the late 1940s, a time when poverty and food shortages were rampant in Mexico. Because of this, many Mexican people wanted to move to the United States in search of a better life. Francisco's family has the same idea. In their village, they do not seem to have even the most basic comforts, which is why Roberto is impressed by Fito's life in Guadalajara. To readers, Fito's lifestyle might not seem very impressive—he merely has floors, electricity, water—but to Roberto, this represents the height of luxury, since his family has none of these things.

Francisco's favorite things about living in their village is hunting for chicken eggs, going to church, and listening to the stories his family tells after dinner every night. His uncle's family always visits, and they all chat as they sit around a fire. On one such night, Francisco's father, whom Francisco calls Papá, announces that they are about to make the long-awaited journey across *la frontera* to California.

*Roberto is older than Francisco, which makes him more aware that his family lacks comforts that others have. Francisco, however, is still a little child. He is probably around four years old here—*The Circuit *is a semiautobiographical novel, and the author, Francisco Jiménez, was four years old when his family crossed the border into California. At this young age, Francisco doesn't care about these comforts and instead takes pleasure in companionship at church and family get-togethers. Though Francisco's family struggles without material comforts in their village, they are surrounded by a warm community.*


A few days later, the family packs their belongings into a suitcase and takes a bus to Guadalajara. Then, they travel by train for two days and two nights. On the way, Roberto tells Francisco that in California, people "sweep money off the streets." Papá laughs at this, but he agrees that life there is certainly better than in Mexico.

The family manages to fit all their belongings into one suitcase, which shows readers how little they own and is a reminder of the family's poverty. Roberto is excited about their move and has a childish notion about how different their life in California will be—he believes that the transformation to their lives will be immediate and dramatic. His idea that California is so prosperous that money is thrown around like trash is somewhat humorous in its exaggerated optimism—and yet, it seems to be just an exaggerated version of Papá's own ideas about California. Papá, too, believes that California will be a solution to the family's troubles.


The family finally gets off the train at Mexicali. Papá points to guards in green uniforms stationed on both sides of a barbed wire fence. He explains that they have to cross the fence into California without being seen by the guards. At night, the family walks for miles, following the fence, and they finally crawl through a small hole to the other side. A woman whom Papá contacted earlier is waiting in her car to pick them up. She drops them off at a labor camp outside a strawberry farm, telling them that they'll find work there. After paying her, Papá has almost no money left.

The barbed wire fence and the threatening presence of the guards at the border emphasize the risks that the family is taking by attempting to cross the border. These ominous signs also suggest that the family will need to be constantly wary of these threats as undocumented immigrants. Francisco's parents are aware of these challenges, but since they choose to go ahead with their plan, readers can deduce that they must be desperate to leave. They also seem very certain that their lives will improve in California. However, the place they end up at—a labor camp—doesn't seem to be the promised land they dreamed of.

To Papá's disappointment, the foreman at the strawberry farm tells him that he won't have any work for him for at least two weeks, since the strawberries aren't ripe enough to be picked yet. The family doesn't have any money until then, so they live in a tent that the foreman loans them. They survive on wild greens from the woods and birds and rabbits that Papá hunts with a borrowed rifle.

As soon as the family arrives in California, they face financial hardship. This must be very disappointing for them after the hopes they came with. Still, they also experience kindness from the people around them, which helps the family survive their difficult first days in this new place.

To pass the time, Roberto and Francisco watch trains at the tracks nearby. Their favorite train comes every day at noon—it has a distinct whistle, and the conductor slows the train down to wave to the boys. One day, Francisco wonders aloud where the train might be coming from, and Roberto says that it probably comes from California. Francisco, surprised, points out that they are already in California—but Roberto says that he isn't sure about that.

Like Papá, Francisco and Roberto experience kindness from a stranger that makes their disappointing first days in California slightly better. However, the reality of their lives in California is so different from what Roberto imagined it would be that he doesn't even believe that they are actually in California. Roberto had imagined that their family would "sweep money off the streets," and instead, they're living in a tent and scavenging for food. While Roberto looked forward to the move, he ends up being disappointed by it.

Just then, the train comes around the corner. The conductor slows the train down and drops a brown bag full of fruit and candy. Roberto and Francisco are delighted, and Roberto says that this proves the train *does* come from California.

The train conductor's kindness not only raises the boys' spirits but also gives the family some much-needed food at a time when they really need it. The kindness of strangers helps the family survive their harsh conditions. Roberto, who doesn't quite believe that the family is in California (since it is so different from what he imagined it would be), concludes that the train must be coming from the prosperous place that he dreamed of.

SOLEDAD

When Papá, Mamá, and Roberto, go to work in the fields picking cotton, they leave Francisco behind in the car with his little brother, Trampita, who is just six months old. Francisco hates this, and one morning, he cries after they leave. Later, when Trampita wakes up, cold and hungry, Francisco gives him his bottle and wraps him up in a blanket.

Francisco, who is only around four or five years old in this story, oversees his infant brother's care while the rest of the family goes to work. This shows how hard-pressed the family is for money, and also shows how lonely they are in the United States, since they have no friends or family to help them with childcare. Still, Francisco seems to be doing a reasonably good job of caring for his baby brother, which shows that even at a young age, Francisco is a responsible and loving brother to his siblings.

Hours later, Francisco sees his parents and Roberto heading back toward the car for their lunch break. They spread a blanket on the ground and eat together while Mamá nurses Trampita. Papá eats quickly because he doesn't want to lose any time from work—but Roberto and Francisco eat as slowly as they can, because they don't want this time to end.

Though Francisco and Trampita are separated from the rest of the family for much of the day, they all come together whenever possible. The communal scene of them eating together suggests warmth and love. While Papá seems stressed and can't wait to get back to work so he can earn more money, Roberto and Francisco are still children who don't share his sense of responsibility and would rather spend time with each other.

After lunch, Francisco's family returns to the field to work. Francisco decides that he will try and pick some cotton himself, to prove to Papá that he, too, is capable of the work. He desperately wants to join his family on the fields, so that he won't be left alone with Trampita. Francisco heads to the cotton plants nearest to the car and tries to pick some cotton bolls. The shells scratch his hands, making them bleed, and he struggles to reach the bolls that are too high up. By the end of the day, Francisco has only managed to pick a disappointingly small pile of cotton, so he mixes some dirt in it to make the pile look bigger.

Francisco is a little child, but he yearns to be treated as older and more mature. However, he quickly discovers that he is protected from many hardships because he is a child. The sharp shells of the cotton bolls represent the difficulties that Papá, Mamá, and Roberto deal with every day while Francisco—for the time being, at least—is safe from them. His hands are unbruised, which shows that he doesn't yet understand how harsh their world of manual labor is.

At dusk, Francisco's family returns from the fields, and Mamá immediately asks Francisco how Trampita is doing. She discovers that the baby has soiled himself, dropped his bottle, and cried himself to sleep—Francisco was so busy picking cotton that he forgot all about Trampita. Mamá is angry that Francisco neglected the baby, but when Francisco proudly shows her the pile of cotton he picked, Papá can't help but smile.

Mamá leaves her infant in Francisco's care when she goes to work, and she is clearly stressed out by this arrangement. Francisco, however, doesn't understand her feelings or the seriousness of the responsibility he is entrusted with—as a child, he is most concerned about his own happiness.

However, Papá becomes angry when he sees the dirt clods that Francisco mixed in with the cotton, and he tells Francisco that they could all get fired for doing something like this. He tells Francisco that he should focus on taking care of Trampita. Francisco is hurt; he whispers to Roberto that someday, he, too, will be able to go work in the fields with them. Roberto nods and puts his arm around Francisco.

Since Francisco is still very young, he doesn't understand the serious consequences his family might have to face because of even a minor lapse in the quality of their work. As undocumented immigrants, they work very hard but are paid little, and the farmers they work for consider them to be easily replaceable. Papá is too mired in these worries to have any sympathy for Francisco's hopeful attempt to impress him. However, Roberto, who is a child himself even though his circumstances have forced him to grow up too quickly, understands Francisco's feelings.

INSIDE OUT

When Francisco asks Roberto about his first year at school, Roberto says that he was hit with a ruler because he didn't follow directions. He says that he couldn't understand what the teacher was saying, since he didn't know any English. Roberto sounds angry as he says this, and Francisco wishes he hadn't asked him. However, Roberto is the only one in the family who has attended school, so Francisco has no one else to ask.

Francisco is excited about starting school, but Roberto's descriptions dampen his enthusiasm; Roberto had unpleasant experiences at school because of his unfamiliarity with English, and Francisco likely doesn't speak English either. Roberto's experience shows that immigrant children are at a disadvantage at school, and that they are even punished for things they can't control.

It's January, and the family has finished working in the cotton fields and has come to the "Tent City" owned by Sheehey Strawberry Farms near Santa Maria. Francisco is to attend first grade starting Monday, and he's excited but also nervous. He doesn't know any English, and Roberto's stories scare him.

Francisco's family moves around a lot since they are itinerant laborers and follow the harvest. This means that Francisco and his siblings must constantly get used to new places and new accommodations—and now, he has another big life change coming his way as he is starting school.

On Monday morning, Roberto accompanies Francisco to meet the school principal, Mr. Sims, and helps enroll Francisco in the first grade. Mr. Sims then walks Francisco to his classroom and introduces him to his teacher, Miss Scalapino. Mr. Sims and Miss Scalapino say a lot of things to Francisco, but he doesn't understand a word. He quietly sits down at the desk that Miss Scalapino leads him to, and he's happy to see that he has a book, a pencil, and crayons in his desk. Francisco notices a **caterpillar** in a jar on a shelf right next to his desk, and he thinks that it looks just like the ones he's seen in the fields.

Since Francisco's parents are busy at work and also don't speak any English, Roberto takes on the responsibility of enrolling Francisco in school. Even though he is only four years older than Francisco, Roberto behaves like an adult, since his parents depend on him to help them out. While Francisco feels completely disoriented in his classroom since he doesn't understand a word of English, he likes looking at the caterpillar because it reminds him of the fields and farms that he is familiar with. The caterpillar also represents unrealized potential, as it may or may not transform into a butterfly depending on how well it's cared for. In this way, the insect is a symbolic parallel to Francisco, an intelligent little boy who needs patience and compassion to reach his potential in school.

When the other kids come into the classroom, some of them giggle when they spot Francisco. This embarrasses him, and he stares at the **caterpillar** to feel better. All day, Francisco doesn't understand a word that Miss Scalapino says. He tries to pay close attention anyway, but he ends up with a headache. This happens every day, and finally, Francisco learns to pretend that he's listening—even when he's daydreaming about "flying out of the classroom and over the fields."

The other children's reaction to Francisco shows that he looks different from them—perhaps because of his race, and because he comes from poverty and probably wears worn-down clothing. Francisco is sensitive to this early discrimination and takes refuge in staring at the caterpillar, since the creature is familiar and comforting while everything else is different in this new world. Like Francisco, the caterpillar is a creature that doesn't belong in a classroom. He longs to "fly" to his old life of "the fields," since he is more at home in that environment—just like the caterpillar belongs outside and will return there once it has become a butterfly.


Francisco slowly learns some of his classmates' names. Curtis is one of the most popular kids, and he's also pretty big. Since Francisco is the smallest in class and doesn't know any English, he's always picked last when the kids form teams. One of the kids Francisco likes best is Arthur, who knows a little Spanish. However, Miss Scalapino overhears Francisco speaking Spanish once and reprimands him. After this, Arthur avoids Francisco whenever Miss Scalapino is around.

Francisco feels cut off from his classmates since he doesn't know English—and, as a result, they exclude him. This is a difficult position for anyone to be in, and it is especially hard for a young child. Instead of empathizing with his predicament, however, Miss Scalapino widens the rift between Francisco and his classmates by refusing to allow him to speak Spanish in school. Her behavior sends the message that speaking in Spanish is wrong, while English is the only language that is good enough for school—an attitude that demeans Francisco's mother tongue.

At recess, Francisco often stays in the classroom with the **caterpillar**. He looks through a picture book about caterpillars and butterflies, and although he enjoys the pictures, he is also very curious about what the words say. Francisco looks at the words so intensely and so often that he can recall their exact shape, even though he can't read them.

Attending school is a big change in Francisco's life, so he clings to the caterpillar whenever possible, since the creature reminds him of the fields that he is familiar with. Francisco is fascinated by the book about butterflies, and his curiosity and eagerness for knowledge suggest that he has the potential to excel in school. Jiménez uses the metaphor of the caterpillar transforming into a butterfly to parallel Francisco's own academic journey.

One cold morning, Francisco is shivering in the playground without a coat. Mr. Sims notices and takes Francisco to the office, where Mr. Sims gives him a green coat from a box of used clothes. Francisco is excited about this, and his parents are happy when he shows it to them that evening. However, the next day at school, Curtis spots him wearing the coat and starts fighting him. He yells something at Francisco, but Francisco can't understand what he is saying. Finally, Miss Scalapino breaks up the fight. Later, Arthur explains to Francisco that Curtis had said that the jacket was his, and that he'd lost it at the beginning of the year.

While Mr. Sims means well and intends to help Francisco, his gesture ends up causing Francisco a lot of trouble. Jiménez is showing readers that people in Francisco's situation—those without a voice or any social clout—often end up being victims of discrimination and injustice. In this instance, Curtis quickly assumes the worst of Francisco and thinks that he stole the jacket. Francisco is completely innocent, but he lacks the language skills to explain himself.


Miss Scalapino tells Francisco and Curtis that as a punishment for fighting, they will have to sit on a bench during recess for the rest of the week. Francisco is also forced to give the coat to Curtis. Francisco is so embarrassed by these events that he lays his head down on his desk and pretends to be asleep for the rest of the school day. When the kids go out for recess, Francisco checks on the **caterpillar** and discovers that it has spun a cocoon around itself. Francisco strokes it gently and thinks that it must be sleeping peacefully.

Miss Scalapino punishes Francisco for no fault of his, and since Francisco doesn't know any English, he is unable to defend himself. Even worse, Miss Scalapino forces Francisco to return the coat to Curtis, even though Francisco treasures it, since it is the only coat he has. This upsets and humiliates Francisco, and he seems to wish that he, too, could retreat from the chaos of school and sleep—just like the caterpillar is safe and isolated in its cocoon.

When Francisco tells his parents about the fight at school, they are "very upset but relieved that [he] did not disrespect the teacher." Francisco struggles to go back to school after this incident. However, things slowly get better. With time, he even picks up some English words.

Francisco's parents' reaction highlights the insecurity and fear that undocumented immigrants live with, which makes them fearful about protesting any injustices they face. They do not want to draw attention to themselves or ruffle anyone's feathers. Though Mamá and Papá understand that the situation at school was unfair to Francisco and are upset by this, they are also happy that Francisco did not "disrespect the teacher," even though Miss Scalapino disrespected Francisco.

Toward the end of the school year, Miss Scalapino makes an announcement in class and says Francisco's name. In one hand, she holds up a drawing of a **butterfly** that Francisco made, and in the other, a blue ribbon that has the number one printed on it. Francisco understands that his art has won a prize, and he's so proud that he feels like he's "bursting out of his skin."

Despite all of Miss Scalapino's blunders with regard to Francisco, she does seem to mean well and understand that winning a prize for his art will mean a lot to Francisco. She is certainly right about this—it is the turning point in Francisco's academic life, since he feels appreciated and successful for the first time at school. Jiménez uses the words "bursting out of his skin" to describe Francisco's sense of pride, which suggests that this is the moment in which Francisco undergoes a kind of metamorphosis and begins to realize his potential. This symbolically connects to his drawing of the butterfly, as the caterpillar in Francisco's classroom will similarly transform into a butterfly and burst out of its cocoon.

That afternoon, Francisco notices that the cocoon in the jar next to his desk is cracking open, and he calls his classmates over to look. The children are excited to watch the **butterfly** emerging. Later, Miss Scalapino takes the jar to the playground. Francisco's classmates crowd around her and he can barely see what she is doing. However, she calls Francisco up front to open the lid of the jar, since he was the one who spotted the butterfly first. They all watch as the butterfly flies into the air.

The caterpillar (now a butterfly) in the jar mirrors Francisco's emotions: on the day when Francisco feels celebratory and happy, the butterfly emerges from its cocoon. When Francisco is once again sidelined by his more assertive classmates, Miss Scalapino takes special care to call him up front to open the jar, which seems to imply that Francisco's days of existing in the shadows are now behind him. The butterfly flies free, symbolizing that Francisco, too, now feels triumphant and joyful.

After school, Curtis points to Francisco's drawing and says something that Francisco doesn't understand. Arthur translates that Curtis really likes Francisco's drawing of the **butterfly**. Francisco says, "It's yours," and gives it to Curtis.

Francisco's final gesture highlights his generosity. When Curtis spotted Francisco wearing his coat, he fought him to get it back, even though he already had a new coat and didn't really need his old one. Francisco, on the other hand, is generous and gives away his artwork to Curtis, even though it is one of the few things he owns. Francisco's background of scarcity and hardship perhaps makes him more empathetic and generous than others.

MIRACLE IN TENT CITY

Francisco and his family live in Tent City, which isn't a city at all—it is, in fact, the name of a labor camp owned by Sheehey Strawberry Farms. Tent City doesn't even have an address, though it's just outside the city of Santa Maria. The strawberry farm is run by Japanese sharecroppers and harvested by the laborers who live in Tent City. Most of Tent City's residents have crossed the border from Mexico illegally, just like Francisco's family. All of its residents are Mexican.

When Francisco's family lived in Mexico, they dreamed that they would have a better life in America. However, the reality is that their living conditions as itinerant farm workers in California are often worse than the conditions in Mexico. When they work at the strawberry farm, they live in a tent in a labor camp filled with other Mexican immigrants. And while this labor force is very important to the farmers, they treat the laborers poorly and pay them very little. The farmers take advantage of the fact that immigrants like Francisco's family are desperate for work and afraid of deportation, since most of them are undocumented.

Mamá is expecting a baby, so she doesn't join Papá as he works in the strawberry fields. Instead, to make money, she cooks breakfast and lunch for 20 farm workers. On weekends and during summer vacation, Roberto and Francisco help her with the cooking and washing up.

Even though Francisco's family goes through some hard times, they survive because of their love for one another. They are united against their troubles and help one another without hesitation—even Francisco, who is only a first grader, willingly pitches in.

To prepare for the baby, Mamá asks Papá to pile dirt around the bottom of the tent, so that snakes can't enter. Roberto and Francisco go to the city dump every day to look for discarded lumber that Papá can use to build a floor for the tent before the baby is born. They have to sneak into the dump after the caretaker leaves, and one day, they almost get caught. Roberto and Francisco are nervous after this, but they return anyway, and they even find a wooden box to use as a crib for the baby.

The details of the family's living quarters—the dirt floor of the tent, the danger of snakes entering their home, an old wooden box for a crib—highlight the extreme poverty that the family is suffering through. Yet the entire family finds solutions to these problems together as they prepare their home for the new baby, which shows their strength as a family.

When the baby, Torito, is born, Francisco and his siblings are excited to meet him—especially since they've worked hard to prepare for him. Torito is a cheerful baby, and they all love him. Meanwhile, Miss Scalapino tells Francisco that he has to repeat first grade since he doesn't know English, and Francisco is upset by this news. Still, playing with Torito helps him forget his troubles for a while.

Despite their limited resources, the family is delighted to share their affections and few possessions with a new family member, which highlights how close-knit and loving they are. When Francisco gets bad news from school, he takes refuge in Torito's company, which shows how his strong relationship with his family helps him stay resilient to face the challenges that come his way.

When Torito is two months old, he falls ill: he gets a fever and an upset stomach. Francisco washes his soiled diapers, and Mamá bathes Torito in cool water to try to bring his fever down. In the evenings, the family prays to the Virgin of Guadalupe for Torito's health, but he seems to be getting worse. One night, as the family is praying, Torito's body stiffens, and he stops breathing. Mamá picks him up and begins praying fervently for his life; to everyone's relief, he slowly starts breathing again.

The family is united as they do their best to help Torito when he is sick, with even little Francisco chipping in to wash the baby's soiled diapers. The family also prays together for Torito's recovery, and their prayers seem to work a miracle, as they think that this is what helps bring Torito back from the brink of death.

The next day, Mamá is exhausted and worried, and Roberto and Francisco help her cook for the farm workers while she also watches Torito. That night, there's blood in Torito's diaper, and Papá says that they'll take him to the hospital if he doesn't get better soon. Mamá points out that they don't have the money for this, but Papá says that they can borrow the money.

When Mamá is preoccupied with caring for Torito, Roberto and Francisco step in to help her with her chores, once again showing that even the young members of the family understand that they are united in the face of troubles. However, Mamá and Papá end up with the bulk of the anxiety, since they grasp the seriousness of Torito's illness. Mamá and Papá know that he needs better medical care that they cannot provide him with, since they do not have the money for it.

Later that night, Torito begins moaning and then suddenly goes quiet. He stops breathing, and his eyes roll back into his head. Papá and Mamá rush him to the hospital. They return later without the baby, and Francisco immediately asks them if Torito is dead. Papá replies that Torito is alive, and Mamá angrily says that she's sure that he will make a full recovery. Francisco finds it hard to sleep that night, and he cannot understand why Mamá sounded angry. He can hear her crying in her bed, while Papá smokes through the night.

Francisco does not understand that his forthright question about whether Torito is dead would be abrasive and hurtful to Mamá. She is terrified that Torito might die and is upset to hear these words spoken aloud, which is why she responds angrily to Francisco. Since Mamá is rarely angry, Francisco doesn't understand what he did to upset her. As a child, his awareness of other people's feelings is limited, since he is focused on his own emotions.

The following morning, after Papá and Mamá leave in the car, Francisco and Roberto pray for Torito. When Mamá returns, she tells them that Torito has a rare disease that might be infectious, which is why his siblings can't go see him. She says he'll probably be home soon, but Francisco suspects that she isn't telling them the whole truth.

Since Francisco and Roberto can no longer do anything to help Torito, they pray for his health. Mamá seems to be shielding Francisco and Roberto from the severity of Torito's illness—and this, too, is an act of love, since she wants to spare her children the very pain and worry that she is experiencing.

When Papá comes back from working in the fields, he looks very worried, but no one speaks about Torito. After dinner, Papá and Mamá immediately go to the hospital. When they return, they still don't have Torito with them, which disappoints Roberto and Francisco. They tell the children that they have made a promise to Santo Niño de Atocha that they'll pray to him every day for a year if Torito gets well. Papá pins a worn-looking card of little Jesus of Atocha on the tent's wall. On the card, the baby Jesus wears a blue cloak, a brown cape, and leather sandals.

It seems like Mamá and Papá are shielding their other children from the severity of Torito's illness. As adults, they must bear the full weight of it. They promise Santo Niño de Atocha (an image of Jesus Christ as a child) that they will pray to him for a whole year if Torito is cured. This is a promise that will take dedication and devotion, and it shows their strength as a family as they come together to fulfill it.

That night, Francisco dreams of the baby Jesus from the card. In his dream, Jesus comes to him carrying a basket. Lots of white **butterflies** fly out of the basket and carry Francisco to a green field. There, he finds Torito lying in the grass, dressed in the same outfit as the baby Jesus. The next day, he tells Mamá about this dream, and she decides to make the same outfit for Torito. She cuts up one of her dresses to make the blue cloak and works all afternoon sewing it. She takes it to the hospital that evening.

Francisco is so affected by his brother's illness that he even dreams of it. Since butterflies are a symbol of positive transformation, Francisco's dream seems to imply that Torito will recover. And because the family prays together to Jesus of Atocha, who then appears in Francisco's dream to indicate that Torito will be well, it seems like the family's prayers will work.

Later that night, Francisco's parents return from the hospital with Torito. He looks skinny and tired, and he's wrapped in the blue cloak. Mamá says that Torito is still sick, and that they should continue praying for him. The family keeps their promise and prays to Santo Niño de Atocha for a full year. Mamá keeps Torito dressed in the blue cloak the whole time, except for when she washes it.

Francisco's dream seems to be a positive sign, and indeed, Torito comes home soon after. The family keeps their promise to pray together to Santo Niño de Atocha for a full year, which shows the extent of their religious devotion and also their determination to do all they can to help Torito recover.

One year later, Torito is completely healthy, and Mamá finally takes the cloak off. She confesses to Francisco that the doctor in the hospital had said that Torito would die because she and Papá had waited too long to take him there. The doctor had said it would "take a miracle for him to live." Mamá says that she didn't want to believe him, but that he turned out to be right—it did take a miracle.

It turns out that the doctor at the hospital hadn't expected Torito to survive. He seems to have blamed Mamá and Papá for bringing Torito to the hospital too late, which must have been hard for them to hear, since the only reason they avoided taking him in for so long was because they didn't have the money for it. This also explains why Mamá had been angry when Francisco had asked her if Torito had died when she returned from the hospital—the doctor had just told her that Torito would most likely not survive, and Mamá must have been devastated to hear this. However, it seems like the family's love and devotion pulls Torito back from the brink of death.

EL ANGEL DE ORO

After the strawberry season, Francisco's family moves to Fowler to pick grapes. Then, they move on to Corcoran to pick cotton. It's especially rainy that year at Corcoran. All the farm workers live in a row of small cabins beside a creek. Francisco's family is crowded into their tiny quarters, and they're running out of things to do in the rainy weather. Bored, Francisco stares out the window at a **goldfish** in a bowl that their neighbor keeps in his cabin. Mamá likes the fish, too—she calls it *el Angel de Oro*, or "Golden Angel."

The family has moved a lot in the space of a few months as they follow the harvest of various crops. They must constantly acclimate themselves to different homes and different cities, different type of work at new farms, and new teachers and classmates at school. The solitary goldfish in Francisco's neighbor's house seems like a reflection of Francisco himself since he, too, is trapped in a small space and is looking out at the rest of the world, just like the fish is.

Papá is very worried, since he and the rest of the farm workers can't pick cotton until the rains stop. The farmers pay the workers by the weight of the cotton they've picked—and since cotton will absorb the rainwater and weigh more, they don't allow them to work when it is raining. Papá tells the family that if the rains don't stop, they'll have to leave Corcoran and find work elsewhere.

These details emphasize the harshness of life for itinerant farm workers, most of whom are undocumented immigrants. Even though the farmers are dependent on their work, they do not make any allowances for the workers themselves. It seems like the workers wouldn't mind picking cotton in the rain since they are desperate to earn money, but they do not have this option since it's not as profitable for the farmers.

Francisco's school is just a mile away from the labor camp where Francisco lives with his family, and as he walks there, he meets Miguelito, a boy who lives in the same labor camp and who is two years older than Francisco. Miguelito accompanies Francisco to the school office and translates some of the principal's questions into Spanish for him. After school, the boys meet on the playground and walk home together. The path is muddy and full of puddles, which Francisco and Miguelito jump over, pretending that they're giants stepping over lakes. When Francisco slips and falls in one, the boys can't stop laughing.

While Papá worries about money and work, Francisco is unconcerned about these matters since he is a child. He takes pleasure in friendship and laughter, which is a rare treat for him, since his family is constantly moving around. Kids like Francisco and Miguelito, whose parents are itinerant workers, don't often get the chance to make friends.

When Francisco gets home, the family cabin is quiet, and he watches the **goldfish** in his neighbor's house, wondering if it ever gets lonely. Later that evening, Francisco plays with Miguelito by the creek. Miguelito finds two long branches that he says they can make into fishing poles. He says that they can finish making them the next day, after school.

Again, the goldfish seems to parallel Francisco's own state of mind: he feels cut off from the world and lonely, just as he imagines the fish does. His sudden and joyful friendship with Miguelito is an antidote to Francisco's loneliness.

The following morning, Francisco can't wait to walk to school with Miguelito and play with him in the afternoon. However, he doesn't find him, so he walks to school alone—and Miguelito isn't at school either. After school, Francisco goes to Miguelito's cabin and knocks on the door, and he's heartbroken to find it empty: Miguelito's family has moved out. Later that night, Francisco's family returns—they've have been driving around all day, looking for work.

Jiménez shows that constant moving and instability are aspects of all migrant workers' lives. The rainy weather in Corcoran has made it difficult for the workers to survive there, since they cannot pick cotton when it rains. Miguelito's family probably gave up and moved away. Since Francisco and Miguelito had made plans to meet the following day, readers see how this constant moving takes its toll on children and their friendships—they are powerless as their families move them around.

The rain that night is so heavy that it causes the creek to flood. Days later, it finally stops raining, and when the water around the cabins starts to dry up, Francisco finds that the puddles are full of fish. The fish in the smaller puddles are dying. Francisco fills an empty can with water, picks up the fish that are still alive, and dumps them into the creek. He works for hours, until he's exhausted and realizes that he can't save all the fish. Francisco hopes it'll rain again, but the sun is now bright, and the puddles are drying up too quickly.

Francisco is very tenderhearted. Ideally, he would like to save all the fish, but he realizes that this is impossible—and in this way, Francisco seems to be growing up and coming to terms with the harshness of life. Still, he hopes that the rains will return so the fish can survive, even though he knows that his own family is struggling without work and money because of the incessant rains. In this instance, his compassion is generous but impractical.

The last fish that Francisco rescues is a tiny gray one. He takes the can with the fish in it to his neighbor's house and knocks on the door, but no one is home. Francisco leaves the fish on his neighbor's doorstep. The next morning, he's happy to see that the gray fish is peacefully swimming alongside the **goldfish**.

Francisco's gesture of giving the goldfish a friend mirrors his own desire for friendship. He finds it hard to make friends because his family is constantly moving around, but he values friendship—and he misses his friend Miguelito. Since Francisco cannot have his friend back, he takes comfort in the fact that the lonely goldfish now has a companion. Perhaps this gives him hope that he, too, might have a friend one day.

CHRISTMAS GIFT

Just before Christmas, Papá decides to move away from Corcoran to look for work. Most of the other laborers have left already, since there's more work on other farms—but Papá has stayed on at Corcoran, since he feels that he owes the farmer as much for giving his family free accommodation.

While the farmers treat undocumented workers like Papá rather poorly by paying them very little and not allowing them to work when it rains, Papá nevertheless does his part to treat the cotton farmer fairly, which shows that he is a man of honor .

Although the family will be moving for the third time this year, Francisco is happy to leave. It's been very rainy at Corcoran, and the family has often had to look for other work, since they can't pick cotton in the rain. They're short on money, so they drive into town to look in the dumpsters behind grocery stores for spoiling fruits and vegetables that they can bring home to eat. Mamá asks a butcher for free scraps, saying they're for the dog. But Francisco suspects that the butcher knows the truth, because he starts leaving more and more meat on the bones.

Francisco usually dislikes moving, since it means he'll have to get used to a new place all over again. However, he's looking forward to moving away from Corcoran, which shows how hard things are for the family here. They seem to be on the verge of starvation. Luckily, they encounter some kindness from a butcher in the community, which helps Mamá put food on the table.

While Francisco's family is packing to leave Corcoran, a young Mexican couple knocks on their door, and Papá invites them inside. The young man apologetically asks Papá for help, saying that he hasn't been able to get any work because of the rain, and that his wife is pregnant. He tries to sell Papá a leather wallet, but Papá refuses, explaining that he doesn't have money either. Francisco is worried when he hears Papá say this. Francisco wants a ball for Christmas, and he doesn't think he'll get one if his family is broke.

While Francisco's family is struggling, there are others who are even worse off than them. Even though Papá does not buy anything from the young man, he nevertheless treats the couple kindly by inviting them inside his home. The adults are preoccupied with their financial worries, but Francisco worries that he might not get the red ball he wants for Christmas. While his worry is not as serious as the adults' worries about food for their families, it is still heartbreaking since it seems like such a small wish to fulfill.

However, the young man is desperate for money and tries to sell the wallet for just 25 cents. When Papá still refuses, the man tries to sell an embroidered white handkerchief for 10 cents, saying that his wife embroidered it herself. Papá apologizes but refuses to buy anything. Mamá says that the handkerchief is beautiful, and she reaches out to touch the young pregnant woman on her shoulder and says, "May God bless you."

Papá and Mamá are clearly in a bad financial position since they are unable to spare even a few cents. The young couple, too, seem to be in a desperate position as they are trying to sell all the treasures they have, which are not really very valuable at all. Still, even though Papá and Mamá can't help the young couple, they are very kind to them.

Just after this, Francisco and his family leave, heading north. As they're driving out, Francisco spots some of his fourth-grade classmates on the school playground. He dreams of playing with them with the red ball that he hopes he'll get for Christmas. Francisco waves to the kids, but they do not see him.

Even though Francisco was eager to leave Corcoran, it seems like he will miss his classmates. However, they do not see him when he waves at them, which suggests that people like Francisco and his family—undocumented immigrants, the poor—are overlooked by most people.


When the family arrives in their new town, they ask around at several places and finally find work at another cotton farm. The farmer gives them a tent to live in, so they spread some cardboard on the floor and then place their mattress on the cardboard. Mamá, Papá, Roberto, Francisco, Trampita, Torito, and Rubén (Mamá and Papá's newborn baby) all sleep on the mattress together, huddled against the cold.

The family leaves Corcoran hoping to find a better situation, but they struggle to find work and end up living in a tent. In Corcoran, they at least had a cabin to live in. This change turns out to be a disappointing one, just like the family's initial move from Mexico ended up being disappointing.

As Christmas approaches, Francisco becomes increasingly anxious. On Christmas Eve, he can barely contain his nervous excitement. After dinner, the children listen to Mamá tell them the story of Jesus's birth, but Francisco can hardly pay attention because he's thinking of the ball that he's hoping to get the next day.

While the family is struggling with their living conditions and the lack of money, Francisco focuses on the red ball he wants for Christmas. He doesn't seem as concerned with the larger issues, which shows that, as a child, he is focused on his own happiness and desires.

Late at night, after Mamá thinks the children are asleep, she gets up from bed to wrap their presents. Francisco secretly watches her through a hole in his blanket, and although he can't see the presents, he notices her tired face and sees that she's crying as she works.

Despite the serious worries that Mamá is facing, she also seems heartbroken because she is unable to give the children better presents. This is evidence of her deep love for them, since she understands their desires and would like to make them happy.

Early the next morning, Francisco and his siblings rush to the presents that Mamá left by their shoes. They are disappointed to see that each of them only got a bag of candy. Francisco sees that Mamá's eyes are full of tears. Just then, Papá produces the white embroidered handkerchief that Mamá admired in Corcoran and gives it to Mamá, wishing her a Merry Christmas.

Francisco does not get the ball he was dreaming of. This is very disappointing, but although he seems too young to recognize this, Mamá's love for her children is evident in her tears—she is heartbroken that she cannot give them better gifts. Papá's gift to Mamá (the embroidered handkerchief) seems to signify that he would like to dry her eyes and keep her happy. With this, Jiménez suggests that the love the family shares is a true gift.


DEATH FORGIVEN

Francisco's family keeps a pet parrot named El Perico, and Francisco says that the parrot will meet "a tragic ending." One of Papá's friends smuggled the bird into California from Mexico. It wanders around freely in the garage that the family is living in while they work harvesting grapes in a vineyard. The whole family loves El Perico, and they make sure to keep the garage door closed so that the bird won't fly away.

Francisco and his family always have room in their hearts for more creatures to love. Even though they have very little, they happily share whatever they have. And, like them, El Perico is from Mexico, which probably reminds them of home.

Francisco teaches El Perico to say *periquito bonito*, which means "beautiful little parrot." It enjoys perching on Francisco's finger and snuggling against him. El Perico is also very fond of a cat, Catarina, that belongs to Chico and Pilar, an undocumented couple that lives next door. The cat and the parrot even eat from the same plate.

Despite the constant moving and harsh conditions that Francisco and his family live through, they have still managed to form a warm community with their neighbors and pets. This once again emphasizes how loving relationships can help people feel grounded and content, even amid trying circumstances.

If Chico and Pilar come to visit without Catarina, El Perico becomes agitated and shrieks loudly. Papá finds this very annoying, especially when he's tired after a long day of work. Recently, Papá has been very stressed, because he isn't sure where the family will go once the grape season is over. One evening, Chico and Pilar come over without Catarina, and Papá flies into a rage when El Perico begins to shriek. He strikes the bird with a broom.

While the rest of the family enjoys El Perico's every action, Papá does not. As the family's chief breadwinner, Papá is very anxious about how he will keep the family fed and sheltered. He endures this constant stress since all their jobs are temporary, and he must always be on the lookout for their next source of income. As a result of his worries, Papá is becoming increasingly short-tempered and is bothered by the bird's noise.

El Perico's colorful feathers scatter everywhere, and the bird falls to the floor. Roberto, Francisco, and Mamá begin to cry, and Papá yells at them to stop. Francisco notices blood dribbling out of the bird's beak and he is devastated. He runs out of the garage and heads to a storage shed nearby. The whole time, Francisco feels like the commotion coming from the tent is chasing him, and he wants get away from it—or to simply die.

Papá ends up killing the bird, which he probably didn't intend to do. Still, he is too irritated with the chaos caused by the bird to care very much that he killed it, or that his family is heartbroken by the bird's death. In this way, Papá's sorrows seem to make him immune to others' suffering. Francisco, especially, is heartbroken by the bird's death. Papá's cruel action seems to worsen the chaos and insecurity that the family deals with every day, and Francisco wants to escape from their difficulties.

When Francisco reaches the storage shed, he shuts the door behind him, and it's immediately dark and quiet. He prays for El Perico, and he also prays for his father. The next day, Roberto, Francisco, and Trampita dig a grave for El Perico and bury him. Francisco visits the grave every day, until the family moves back to Corcoran two weeks later to pick cotton.

While Papá is so preoccupied by his worries that he doesn't have room in his heart for anyone else's sorrows, Francisco is generous by comparison. Even though he is devastated by El Perico's death, he also seems to understand his Papá's troubles and includes him in his prayers, which shows how much he loves his father. Soon, Francisco moves on from mourning El Perico as the family moves once again.

COTTON SACK

Francisco's family drives to Corcoran to find work in the cotton fields. They stop at three different farms to ask for work before they finally find employment and a one-room cabin to live in at the fourth farm. After dinner, Papá gets the sacks ready for picking cotton—he has a 12-foot-long sack for himself and slightly smaller ones for Mamá and for Roberto. Francisco is upset that he doesn't have his own sack, but Papá says that he's still too little for one.

Francisco's family never knows when or where they will be employed next, which is a constant source of stress for them. Papá, especially, is always worried about this, since he is the family's primary breadwinner, and he is very grateful when they do find work. He enthusiastically prepares for the next day's labor, which shows how eager he is to work and make money for the family.

Papá mends his sack and then tries it out, tying it around his waist and pretending to bend and pick cotton. He asks Mamá to try hers out too. As the sack trails behind her, she begins to laugh, saying that it looks like a fancy wedding dress. Francisco and Roberto laugh too, but Papá is not amused. The family goes to bed on their one mattress, snuggling to keep warm on the cold night. Papá keeps his aspirin and cigarettes close to him.

The responsibility—and the anxiety—of earning money for the family is chiefly Papá's. This is why he is always very stressed out and sees no humor in their situation. Meanwhile, Mamá, Roberto, and Francisco take things a little more lightly, since they follow Papá's lead with regard to work.

It rains heavily that night, which wakes Francisco several times. Every time he wakes up, he sees the glowing red tip of Papá's cigarette or hears the rattle of the aspirin bottle. Francisco doesn't mind the rain, because this means he can sleep in the next morning. The cotton farmers don't allow the laborers to pick cotton on rainy days since the cotton would be too wet to pick. The farmers pay the workers for the cotton by weight, and the cotton weighs more when it is rain-soaked.

Francisco and Papá have very different reactions to the rain. To Francisco, the rain means that he gets to sleep in the next morning and skip work, and he appreciates this. Papá, however, gets increasingly worried as the rain gets heavier, since he knows that no work means no money. Francisco is a child and is unconcerned about the family finances—his primary concern is his own comfort and well-being.

Francisco wakes up late the next morning. Papá is red-eyed and upset, and he curses the rain. Mamá makes tortillas and beans for breakfast, and after eating, the children quietly play games and tell stories while Papá takes a nap. Mamá says that he isn't feeling well. The rain finally stops on Friday, and by then, Papá's aspirin is all gone, and a pile of cigarette butts litters his side of the mattress.

While Francisco enjoys his chance to sleep in, Papá becomes increasingly distressed by the rain. In the morning, it is clear to the family that Papá has been worrying all night and hasn't slept at all. Even the young children play quietly in their tiny cabin to give him a chance to catch up on his sleep, which shows how they come together as a family to help one another out. Papá smokes cigarettes to relax, and his continual use of aspirin suggests that he's suffering from physical pain as well.

Early on Saturday morning, the labor contractor drives around the row of cabins in his truck, honking loudly to let the laborers know that the cotton is ready to be picked. To Francisco, this means that he has to go to work too, since he doesn't have school that day. Papá, who usually hates noise, perks up at the sound of the contractor's horn. The family quickly gets ready and piles into their car that Papá affectionately calls the *Carcachita*, which means "old car." They follow the contractor's truck as he drives to the cotton field.

Once again, Francisco and Papá have different reactions to the opportunity to return to work. Francisco is disappointed that it happens to be a weekend—he might have been able to avoid going to work if it was a school day, but since it is a Saturday, he has to work in the fields with his family. Papá, on the other hand, is energized and excited by the opportunity to go to work. He has been fretting about the fact that they can't work and earn money, and he is happy that they can finally do so.

When they reach the field, Papá, Mamá, Roberto, and Francisco get out. Trampita stays behind in the car to take care of the youngest children—Torito, Rubén, and Rorra (their newborn sister). Papá says that it's a good crop, and he warns Francisco that cotton bolls are like roses—they're pretty, but they can hurt because they're sharp. The contractor quickly checks the cotton to make sure it's completely dry, and he then gives the laborers the signal to get to work.

At the beginning of the novel, Francisco had to take care of Trampita while his parents and Roberto went to work in the cotton fields. Back then, Francisco couldn't wait to be old enough to join them and pick cotton with them. Now that he is old enough to work in the fields, however, he isn't eager to do it. Even though he'd yearned for this change—to grow up and work—he is not excited about it when it comes to pass.

All the workers except Francisco have their own sacks and their own rows to work in. Francisco first helps Mamá, going ahead of her and leaving a pile of picked cotton on the ground for her to gather and add to her bag. Francisco then does the same for Papá. He doesn't need to help Roberto, since Roberto works really fast. When Mamá's sack becomes too heavy for her to drag around, Roberto and Francisco take it over to the weigh station to be emptied. Roberto carries the front, while Francisco helps him by lifting the end off of the ground. The sack is very heavy, so they take breaks as they walk the quarter mile to the weigh station.

Even though Francisco is old enough to work in the fields, he is still too young to have his own sack for picking cotton, since he cannot work as fast as the others. He feels this difference keenly and seems to think it is a badge of honor to have his own sack. Still, Francisco works hard and assists his parents in the field. Even though he wasn't excited about it going to work when he woke up in the morning, he understands that it's important for the family and does his part to contribute.

The contractor at the weigh station compliments Roberto, saying he is very strong for a young boy, and he asks him how old he is. Roberto says that he's almost 15. The contractor weighs the sack and writes "90" in a notebook, next to Francisco's family's last name. Roberto then climbs the trailer and empties the sack into it. Papá carries his own sack to the weigh station, but Roberto empties it for him, since Papá has a bad back. At the end of the day, the contractor gives Papá $18—the family has picked 600 pounds of cotton. Papá is pleased.

Even though Roberto is only four years older than Francisco, he is not only much stronger but also more emotionally mature than him. Since Roberto is the oldest child in the family, his parents entrust him with a lot of responsibility and work. This seems to have forced Roberto to grow up quickly in order to meet their expectations of him.

By the middle of November, all the cotton in the field has been picked. The contractor tells Papá that the family can continue to live in the cabin until the second picking, or *la bola*, which will be in two or three weeks. *La bola* is hard, messy work, since everything left on the plants has to be harvested—including leaves, cotton bulbs, and shells. The contractor tells the family that they can find work on other farms until *la bola*.

No matter how hard the family works, their periods of relative financial security are always very short. The seasons change, and after they harvest the fields, they need to make plans to move on. After the second picking, they will need to pack up once again to find work somewhere else.

On the days it doesn't rain, Papá, Mamá, and Roberto drive off to find work in other fields. Francisco and Trampita get to go to school on weekdays, and they work in the fields on holidays and weekends. On Thanksgiving morning, Papá, Roberto, and Francisco drive out to find a field to work in. Francisco is determined to prove to his father that he deserves to get his own sack. Most of the fields have already been harvested, and on that cold morning, the leftover cotton fibers are frozen.

Even though the labor contractor lets the family live in the cabin while they wait for the second picking, they do not have any work on the farm until then, which means that the laborers cannot pick cotton to earn money. This is why the family drives out to seek whatever work they can. They need the money, and everyone—even young Trampita—contributes to this effort.

Papá drives toward some smoke that he spots in the distance, and they find some laborers huddled around a fire. Papá asks the foreman for work, and the foreman tells them they can start anytime but advises them to wait until it warms up, like the other laborers are doing. Papá tells Francisco and Roberto that they can wait around the fire—but Papá decides to get started, and Roberto goes with him. Francisco thinks that this is a good opportunity to prove that he's worthy of getting his own sack, so he follows Papá and Roberto into the field.

Papá, as usual, is serious about working as much as possible to earn money when he has the opportunity, which is why he begins working right away on this freezing morning. Roberto is very responsible and is physically stronger than even Papá, which is why he joins in. Francisco decides to join them to prove that he, too, is strong and grown-up. But Unlike Papá and Roberto, who work hard to provide for the family, Francisco only wants to work to impress them.

Francisco starts picking in Papá's row to help him— but in seconds, Francisco's fingers are numb, and the skin on his hands turns purple. He feels the urge to urinate, and he relieves himself on his hands to try to warm them up. However, Francisco's hands have several cuts from the sharp cotton pods, and the salt from his urine makes them burn like fire. Right after, the urine freezes on his hands and they feel like ice. Francisco can't work anymore, so he disappointedly walks over to Papá. Papá "straighten[s] up and look[s] down" at him and tells him to go over to the fire. Roberto, meanwhile, is still bravely working. Francisco understands that he hasn't yet earned his own sack.

Francisco is taken aback when he discovers how difficult it is to work in the freezing cold, and he ends up making a series of bad decisions that worsen his situation. Clearly, he isn't yet physically or emotionally strong enough to have his own cotton sack. While he is very disappointed when he realizes this, Papá, too, seems disappointed in him—he "look[s] down" on Francisco when he tells him to go the fire, which implies that Papá disapproves of him.

THE CIRCUIT

Francisco's family is now working at a strawberry farm, and the peak of the strawberry season has already passed. The farm workers—most of them braceros—are not picking as many strawberries as they had picked in June and July. As the end of August approaches, the strawberry crop diminishes further, and the *braceros* slowly disappear. On the last day of work, Ito, the Japanese strawberry sharecropper, yells in his broken Spanish for the workers to go home. Francisco thinks that he has waited for these words "for twelve hours a day, every day," all summer. However, he's saddened by the thought that he won't hear them again.

Francisco's family has moved once again, and the season's change seems to mimic the constant changes that the family experiences. The braceros, *too, are temporary workers, and their departure emphasizes the changes that surround them. Francisco has been working on the strawberry farm all summer, waiting for each grueling day to be done—the workers work for 12 hours straight, which must be very hard. Yet, after the season is done and Ito sends the workers home at the end of the last day, Francisco is sad because he his family will have to move again to find work.*

As they drive home, Papá and Roberto are silent. At home, Francisco sees that all their belongings have been packed up, ready for them to go to the next farm where they can find work. He suddenly feels the weight of all the hard work they've done over the past few months, and he sits down on a box to get his bearings. That night, Francisco can't sleep because he's worried about their move to Fresno; he thinks about how much he hates the constant moving.

The constant change seems to be wearing everybody down. While Francisco is upset about the unceasing hard work and the constant moving, Papá must also be worried about where they will find work next. The work they do is temporary, and he must look for their next source of income.

Papá wakes everyone up very early the next morning. Francisco's little siblings—Trampita, Torito, Rubén, and Rorra—are excited. To them, the move is an adventure. The family eats a quick breakfast, and then Papá goes out to start the car and warm up the engine. He's very proud of the old car that he calls the *Carcachita*, Papá bought it in a used car lot in Santa Rosa and spent a lot of time looking at many other cars before deciding on this one. He'd found a blue necktie in the backseat, so he decided that the previous owner must have been an important man.

As Francisco grows older, he is becoming more aware of the family's precarious financial situation, and he craves stability. However, his younger siblings are still unaware of these troubles, and they enjoy the novelty of moving to a new place every few months.

Francisco and Roberto load their four boxes into the car, and Papá ties their mattress to the roof. Mamá carefully carries her cooking pot, which is full of cooked beans, and Papá helps her to gently place it on the floor behind the front seat. Then, the family piles in, and they're on their way. Francisco feels a lump in his throat as he turns to look back at their shack one last time.

The family has worked so hard for so long, and they have very little to show for it—everything they own fits into four cardboard boxes. When they came to the United States from Mexico, they had big dreams—but the reality of their lives has turned out to be very different, as they struggle with poverty and insecurity. Yet the scene of the family working together to pack up and leave is filled with warmth, which suggests that they are happy with one another despite their troubles.

At sunset, the family reaches Fresno. They come to a labor camp, and Mamá goes to talk to the foreman, since Papá doesn't know English. The foreman says that he doesn't need more workers but advises her to try at Sullivan's farm down the road. Sullivan lives in a big house with a white fence, surrounded by rose bushes. He tells Mamá that he'll give them work, and that the family can live in an old garage all season. Mamá is very excited about this, even though the garage is dilapidated: earthworms crawl around the dirt floor, and termites have eaten holes into the walls.

While Papá is the main breadwinner and makes big decisions for the family, he does not know any English, which hampers his dealings with the outside world. This detail highlights the fact that many immigrants never quite feel comfortable in their new country because of linguistic and cultural differences. This scene also sets up the contrast between the farmer's lavish home and the dilapidated quarters he offers Francisco's family. The true tragedy in this situation is that Mamá is actually excited to live here, since it is better than the tents they usually live in.

That night, the family works to make the garage more habitable. They sweep away the worms and the dirt, and Papá fills in the holes in the walls. After breakfast the next morning, Papá, Roberto, and Francisco head to the vineyard to pick grapes. By nine o' clock, it is already 100 degrees, and Francisco is covered in sweat. He takes a big drink of water, though Roberto cautions him against doing this, and Francisco immediately doubles over because he feels sick to his stomach. He stays very still on the ground until he slowly begins to feel better.

Despite the terrible state of their living quarters, the family works together to improve it; it seems they always succeed in working together to find solutions to their hardships. In this way, the family's love and cooperation help them to survive their difficulties. Meanwhile, in the fields, Francisco struggles with the heat and hard work, since he has less experience than Roberto and Papá. As Francisco grows older and does more work in the fields, he comes to understand how hard the labor is. As a young boy, he dreamed of working in the fields—but now, he understands that he was lucky to avoid it.

At two o' clock, they take a break to each lunch, and Francisco still feels a little dizzy. Papá counts the boxes of grapes they've picked. Suddenly, Papá shouts a warning when he spots the school bus. Francisco and Roberto run away and hide in the vineyards until the bus drives away—they don't want to get into trouble for not going to school.

Due to their poverty, Francisco and Roberto must work in the fields to contribute to the family's income. They can attend school only sporadically, and this academic instability is another change that they must constantly deal with.

It gets even hotter in the afternoon, and as Francisco continues working, he feels like the day will never end. Finally, they stop once it's too dark to work anymore. Papá counts the boxes of grapes they picked and sees that they've earned $15. The next morning, when Francisco wakes up, he feels like he can't move—he feels like this for several days, until his body gets used to the work.

The hard work that the family does doesn't seem to yield them much money. This is the reason they struggle so much: their wages don't match the amount of work they do. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be a solution to this problem, since the farmers will continue to exploit undocumented workers, who don't have any alternatives for employment.

Francisco goes back to school in November, when the grape season ends. He's starting sixth grade for the first time, which he's excited about; he's also happy that he doesn't have to go to work anymore. However, Francisco feels guilty about this, because Roberto won't go to school until the cotton season ends in February. Francisco tries not to look at Roberto at all that morning, and he's relieved when Roberto and Papá head off to work at six o' clock.

As the younger sibling, Francisco still has some advantages over Roberto, who barely gets to attend school at all. Francisco understands the unfairness of this situation, which makes him feel guilty. Clearly, Roberto, too, would prefer to go to school rather than work in the fields, but he doesn't have this option.

At eight, Francisco stands by the side of the road and excitedly waits for the school bus. But when he sits alone at the very back of the bus, he feels nervous. At school, Francisco walks to the office, and when a woman there speaks to him in English, he is "startled" because he "had not heard English for months." He struggles to find the English words to say that he wants to enroll in the sixth grade.

While Francisco has been looking forward to going to school, he feels a little shaky when he gets there. Like all changes, this one will take some getting used to, especially since Francisco has been out of school for a few months. He hasn't spoken in English for a long time, and his struggle with the language shows how disruptive the family's constant moving is to Francisco's life and education.

The woman from the school office leads Francisco to his classroom. The teacher, Mr. Lema, greets Francisco and introduces him to the class. Francisco is so nervous that he wishes he was with Papá and Roberto in the fields instead. This morning, the class is continuing reading a story they started earlier. Mr. Lema gives Francisco a copy of the English book and asks him to turn to page 125, which makes Francisco feel dizzy. When Mr. Lema asks Francisco if he'd like to read too, Francisco's eyes begin to water because he is so stressed. Mr. Lema kindly tells him that he can read later.

Francisco's reaction to school highlights how hard it is for him to adapt to this environment, even though it is a change he has been looking forward to. Previously, in the fields, he felt dizzy when he was working hard in the heat. Now, in the classroom, he feels the same way when he struggles with a difficult task. It seems like Francisco struggles in both places since he has to constantly shift between them, and as a result, doesn't feel like he belongs in either environment. Since he has been out of school for so long, he is behind on his English and reading and has to struggle to catch up with his classmates.

At recess, Francisco takes the book to the bathroom and tries to read it. He struggles with many words. When he goes back to the classroom, Mr. Lema smiles at him, which makes him feel better. He asks Mr. Lema if he'll help him with the difficult words, and Mr. Lema immediately agrees. For the rest of the month, Francisco spends his lunch and recess with Mr. Lema, who tutors him in English. Francisco thinks of him as his "best friend at school."

Mr. Lema's kindness makes a huge difference to Francisco. When Francisco is feeling insecure and nervous in school, Mr. Lema's kind smile makes him feel welcome and invites Francisco to ask for help. Mr. Lema is more than willing to help Francisco with his reading, and he even sacrifices his lunch break every day to do so. Francisco is very grateful for this and grows attached to Mr. Lema.

One afternoon, Mr. Lema takes Francisco to the music room at school. Francisco tells him that he likes *corridos*. Mr. Lema offers to teach him to play the trumpet, which is one of the main instruments used in *corridos*. Francisco is very excited about this, and he can't wait to go home and tell his family the news. However, when he gets home from school that day, he finds that his family has packed all their belongings in cardboard boxes—they're ready to move again.

Corridos is a style of ballad-like music that's popular in Mexico. Mr. Lema's offer to teach Francisco the trumpet because it is used in corridos *shows that he knows and respects this kind of music. Francisco is very happy in school because of Mr. Lema's help and acceptance, but the family soon has to move on to their next job, and Francisco has to leave. This story highlights how disruptive this constant moving is to Francisco's social life and academics.*

LEARNING THE GAME

Francisco is upset because it's the last day of seventh grade before summer vacation. His classmates, on the other hand, are excited—for them, summer means trips and camps and fun. However, Francisco will have to work in the fields all summer. As he heads home in the school bus, he uses a notepad to count down the days until he can start school again. It's now the middle of June, and he won't be in school again until November, after the strawberry and cotton seasons. Francisco gets a headache as he counts 132 days.

As Francisco gets older, he becomes more aware of how different his life is compared to the lives of other children his age. As an undocumented immigrant and itinerant farm worker, Francisco deals with a lot of problems that most seventh graders don't even think about. Here, it seems like Francisco would love to attend school without disruption, but this isn't an option for him. In addition, he'll be in a new school when he resumes in November, since the family will have moved again for work.

When Francisco gets home, he takes some of Papá's aspirin and lies down. Then, Francisco's neighbor Carlos calls him from outside, asking him to come and play kick-the-can. Francisco likes the game, but he doesn't enjoy playing with Carlos, who is older than him and a bully. Still, Francisco goes out to play, because he wants to forget about the long summer ahead. His younger brothers Torito, Trampita, and Rubén join him.

Francisco faces problems that seem too heavy for such a young child, and in an attempt to forget them, he turns to playing games with other children. This shows that he is still a young at heart, even though he is burdened with adult-like worries.

Carlos never lets another little boy named Manuelito play with them, so Manuelito quietly hangs around on the fringes of the game. Francisco tries to convince Carlos to let Manuelito play, but Carlos refuses, giving Francisco a dirty look. As Francisco becomes engrossed in the game, he forgets his worries.

Francisco knows what it is like to be excluded, since he experiences this all the time at school. As a young child, he didn't know any English, so he couldn't even communicate with his classmates—and as he grows older, he understands how different his life is from his peers' privileged lives. This is why he tries to speak up for Manuelito, but Carlos, who is older and a bully, refuses to listen to Francisco. This shows that it isn't easy to speak up for equality and justice.

Early the next morning, Francisco watches Roberto get ready for work and sadly remembers that it's a workday for him too. At the strawberry farm, a black truck pulls up behind Papá's car. The driver of the truck, Mr. Diaz, who is a labor contractor, orders the man riding in the bed of the truck to get down. Papá explains to Francisco that Mr. Diaz runs the bracero camp for the strawberry farm, and his passenger must be one of the *braceros*.

Francisco immediately notices that Mr. Diaz doesn't treat the bracero *with respect, since he speaks to him in a bossy manner and makes the man ride in the bed of the truck even though there are just the two of the them in the truck.*

Ito, the sharecropper, introduces Gabriel, the bracero, to the other workers. Gabriel seems to be barely older than Roberto. His clothes are faded, and his face is weather-worn. Gabriel seems nervous, but he relaxes when the other workers greet him in Spanish. Ito asks Papá to show Gabriel how to pick strawberries, since he's never done this work before. Gabriel learns quickly.

Gabriel is clearly nervous in this new country. The other laborers from Mexico treat him kindly, including Papá, who even teaches him the work. This once again emphasizes the importance of forming relationships and finding a reliable community when trying to navigate new situations.

At noon, Papá invites Gabriel to join them for lunch. Gabriel pulls out a mayonnaise sandwich and two jelly sandwiches from his brown paper bag, and he complains that Diaz gives them this meal for lunch every day. Francisco offers him one of his taquitos, and Gabriel gives him a jelly sandwich in return.

Diaz is the one who has arranged for Gabriel to work in the United States, and Gabriel seems to be unhappy with this arrangement. Francisco and his family are very friendly and welcoming to Gabriel, which shows how kind and hospitable they are even in the midst of their poverty and troubles.

Gabriel tells them that he has three children, and he says that he misses them a lot since he hasn't seen them in months. He tells Papá that Papá is lucky, since he gets to go home to his family every day. Gabriel says that he manages to send his family in Mexico a few dollars every month. He'd like to send them more, but after paying Diaz for his room and board, Gabriel has barely any money left. He looks angry as he says that Diaz is a crook.

As a bracero, *Gabriel spends months away from his family in Mexico while he works on farms in the United States, which must be very difficult and lonely for him. To make matters worse, Diaz seems to be an unfair employer. Under the Bracero Program,* braceros *were supposed to get fair wages and good living conditions, but Diaz seems to be exploiting the* braceros *he has sponsored.*

That evening, and for some days after, Francisco is very tired and goes straight to bed after dinner. After a few days, however, he gets used to the farm work and begins playing kick-the-can again. The game is always the same—they always play by Carlos's rules, and Carlos never allows Manuelito to play.

Francisco witnesses how Diaz bullies Gabriel at work—and on the playground, he sees the same dynamic between Carlos and Manuelito. As he grows older, he notices that there are always those who enjoy bullying and mistreating others.

At work, Francisco picks strawberries for 12 hours every day. He doesn't enjoy the work, but he does like chatting with Gabriel. One day, Ito sends Francisco and Gabriel to work for another sharecropper who needs extra help. Diaz is at this farm, and he immediately begins calling out orders to them. He wants Gabriel to tie a plow around his waist and till the furrows. Gabriel refuses to do this, saying that in Mexico, only animals do this kind of work.

Francisco and Gabriel are both living through situations they dislike, but they find comfort in friendship. The connections that the characters share with one another help them to bear their hardships. Diaz is very bossy and treats the workers without respect. While Gabriel usually silently tolerates Diaz's mistreatment, he draws the line at being treated like an animal.

Diaz walks up to Gabriel and yells at him, calling him an idiot and saying that this isn't his country. He threatens to fire Gabriel if he refuses to do the work. Gabriel pleads with him, saying that he has a family to take care of, but Diaz throws Gabriel to the ground and kicks him with the hard tip of his boot. Gabriel gets up and lunges at Diaz, and Diaz immediately looks nervous and steps back. Gabriel doesn't hit him. Diaz jumps in his truck and drives away.

Diaz becomes very upset when Gabriel disobeys him, and he ends up treating Gabriel very poorly—even beating him up—which proves that he truly is an abusive bully. This is one example of how immigrants like Gabriel are exploited and abused. However, when Gabriel moves threateningly toward him, Diaz is immediately afraid, showing that he is actually a coward.

Francisco is very scared—he's never seen grown men fight before. Gabriel tells him that Diaz is a coward. He says that Diaz can cheat him out of his money and even fire him, but that he can't take his dignity. As Francisco works on the fields, he thinks of the morning's events and feels disturbed by them.

As Francisco gets older, he becomes more aware of the flaws in the world and in the people around him, and he finds this disconcerting. This experience will, perhaps, give Francisco more insight to why Papá (who has likely been witnessing behavior like this for years as he's worked in the fields) is constantly anxious and stressed out.

That evening, Francisco goes up to Manuelito and insists that he, too, must join in the game of kick-the-can. Carlos protests, but Francisco refuses to play if Manuelito can't. This Carlos, so he trips Francisco and pushes him down. Francisco yells at him, saying that Carlos can push him around but that he can't force him to play. Francisco walks away from the game, and Trampita, Torito, Rubén, and Manuelito follow him. Carlos is left alone with the can. After some time, he calls out that Manuelito can play too.

After witnessing how Gabriel stood up for himself against Diaz, Francisco feels emboldened to stand up to Carlos. Francisco understands that Carlos is bullying all of them—especially Manuelito—and that this behavior must not be ignored or tolerated, because it is unfair and abusive. Francisco is kindhearted and empathizes with those around him because of his own struggles to fit in, so he has always disliked Carlos's behavior.

The next morning, Ito tells Francisco that Diaz fired Gabriel and sent him back to Mexico. Francisco is upset and can't focus on his work. Papá helps him get through the day by picking strawberries for him. That evening, Francisco doesn't feel like playing but relents when Manuelito invites him. Francisco and Carlos are pitted against each other, and Francisco kicks the can so hard that it flies high and lands in the garbage. This is the last time he ever plays this game.

Francisco is disappointed that Gabriel was punished for speaking up against Diaz. To Francisco, it probably seems like nothing good came of Gabriel's gesture, and Francisco struggles to deal with the unfairness of the situation. As he grows older, he becomes more aware of how the world is often unfair to the poor and voiceless, like Gabriel. This is a harsh truth for him to learn at this young age. Earlier, Francisco found solace in playing childish games, which helped him to forget his problems. At the end of the story, however, he kicks the can into the trash and never plays the game again, which implies that Francisco now understands that he can't retreat from the harshness of the adult world.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD

As always, after the strawberry season is done, Papá decides to go to the San Joaquin Valley to pick grapes. He doesn't want to stay in Sullivan's old garage again, so this time, the family heads to a town called Orosi. Papá has heard that a farmer there named Mr. Patrini provides good living quarters for his workers.

Once again, the family is on the move, looking for work. This time, they are heading to a town they have never been to before, since Papá has heard that they might find comfortable living quarters there. This seems like an echo of Papá's initial plan to move to California from Mexico in search of a better life—and given how disappointing their big move was, this foreshadows more disappointment in the family's future.

On the drive to Orosi, Francisco holds on tight to his two treasures: a blue notepad, and his penny collection that he keeps in a white cardboard box. It's September, and school has started again—though Francisco won't be attending until the end of the grape season in November. As they drive past the school that Francisco attended in Santa Maria, he wonders what Orosi will be like.

Francisco's life is always in flux as his family moves around in search of work—he will have to first work in a new farm and then attend a new school. His treasures seem to provide him with some stability in the face of all this change, which is why he is clinging onto them.

Francisco opens the white box and admires his collection of pennies; his two favorites are a 1910 Lincoln Head and an 1865 Indian Head. Papá gave him the 1910 Lincoln Head, which was the coin that inspired Francisco to start his collection. Papá told him that the coin was made the same year that Papá was born. Papá told Francisco that if he keeps saving pennies, he'll have a treasure one day.

To Francisco, the 1910 Lincoln Head is special not only because it is old and rare, but also because Papá gave it to him and because it was made in Papá's birth year. The sentimental element of the coin, rather than the monetary value or novelty, is what makes it precious.

Francisco got the 1865 Indian Head from Carl, one of his fifth-grade classmates in Corcoran. The boys became the best of friends when they discovered their common interest in coin-collecting. One day, Carl invited Francisco to his house to show him his coin collection. Francisco had never been inside a house before, and he was amazed at the comfort and luxury that Carl lived in. Carl's living room was as big as Francisco's family's entire cabin. Carl had his own room, his own bed, and a closet full of clothes—all of which Francisco found very impressive.

In the same way, the 1865 Indian Head is very precious to Francisco because his best friend gave it to him; Francisco's treasures are valuable to him because they remind him of people he loves. Meanwhile, as Francisco grows older, he is also becoming more aware of his own poverty and how this separates him from his peers.


Carl told Francisco that he'd also like to visit Francisco's house to see his coin collection. But Francisco didn't want Carl to see how he lived, so he told him that his house was really far from school and that he'd bring his collection to school to show it to him instead. However, Francisco's family ended up moving away that weekend, and he never saw Carl again.

Francisco is not only more aware of his own poverty, but he also knows that other people who don't belong to his world—like Carl—would be shocked to see how he and his family live. With age, he is becoming embarrassed about his family's living situation. Again, Francisco's family ends up abruptly moving away, and his friendship with Carl is cut short. Carl and Francisco had made plans—as Francisco did in earlier chapters with Mr. Lema and Miguelito—but Francisco's life is too unpredictable for him to carry them out. The constant moving clearly takes a toll on Francisco's social life and sense of stability.


In the car, on the way to Orosi, Papá says that he's sure the family is going to like it there. Francisco writes the word "Orosi" on his notepad and splits the word into two parts: "Oro" and "si." He thinks that *oro* means gold in Spanish and that *sí* means yes, so Papá is right that it will be a good place to live in. Francisco thinks that when he first found the notepad in the city dump, it was almost new—but now, its cover is beginning to fade.

As Francisco gets older, he struggles to reconcile himself with his poverty, since he is becoming more aware of the comfortable lifestyles that most of his classmates have. As a result, he is hopeful that the family will make more money so that he, too, can have comfort and stability in his life—this is why he thinks that "Orosi" (which he translates to mean wealth or prosperity) will be a good place for them.

Francisco had first started using the notepad when he was in Mrs. Martin's sixth grade class in Santa Maria. The family moved there from Fresno, where Francisco had started sixth grade in Mr. Lema's class. Mrs. Martin put up a new English word on the board every morning, and the student who found the word first in the dictionary got a point. Though Francisco never got a point, he began writing down the words and their definitions to memorize them. Even after he left the class, he continued to write words, grammar rules, and math facts in the notepad and memorize them as he worked in the fields. He still takes the notepad with him everywhere.

As the family moves around, Francisco attends various schools for a few months each. As a result of this constant disruption, he struggles academically—especially with English, since he doesn't speak or write it outside of school. Although Mr. Lema went out of his way to help Francisco with his English, Francisco wasn't able to spend enough time with him to learn, since his family moved once again. Francisco's experiences seem to have taught him that only he can help himself, and his notepad is proof of his increasing self-sufficiency as well as his determination to learn.

Francisco's family finally arrives at Orosi, and Mr. Patrini, the owner of the vineyard, shows them the old, two-storied wooden house they'll be living in. He warns them not to use the second floor, because the floors are unstable. The family unpacks their belongings on the first floor, which has two rooms plus a kitchen. As Francisco is putting away his penny collection, his little sister, Rorra, asks him if she can have a coin. He refuses, saying that these are special coins, and Rorra stomps away angrily. That night, as Francisco goes to sleep, he's excited that his family is living in a house.

Papá had heard that Mr. Patrini gives his workers good living quarters and he turns out to be right: the family gets to live in a house for the first time in their lives. Francisco is excited about this, even though the house is so old that it is literally falling apart. This house is very different from Carl's, which is the only other house that Francisco has been in. Still, it is an improvement from their usual living quarters.

Before sunrise the next morning, Papá, Roberto, Francisco, and Trampita go to pick grapes for Mr. Patrini. Though Francisco takes his notepad with him, it's too hot and the work is too hard for him to learn anything. Soon, he's covered in sweat, and he leaves the notepad in the car because he doesn't want to ruin it.

As Francisco's younger siblings grow older, they, too, begin to work in the fields and contribute to the family's income. The work is hard, even for an older child like Francisco, so it must be especially hard for Trampita.

Mamá and Rorra went to the grocery store when Francisco was at work, and Francisco looks through the change Mamá got to try to find old pennies for his collection. He finds one from 1939, and Mamá lets him have it. When Francisco takes it to the coin box to add to his collection, he finds that his two special coins, which he'd kept wrapped in cotton, are missing. Francisco rushes to the kitchen, shouting about his missing coins. Rorra hides behind Mamá. Francisco asks Rorra if she took his coins, but she just silently offers him two red gumballs. Francisco angrily says that he doesn't want her candy, and Rorra begins to cry.

Francisco's two most precious pennies were very valuable to him—not only because they were old, but also because they had sentimental value. They conjured up memories of the people who gave Francisco the coins, which was very valuable to him. However, Rorra is too young to understand all this; to her, a piece of candy is more precious than an old coin.

Mamá tells Francisco to calm down, and she gently asks Rorra if she took Francisco's coins. Rorra nods. Mamá asks her what she did with them, and Rorra points to the gumballs. Francisco understands that she has used his precious coins to put in the gumball machine at the store, and he's devastated. He stalks out of the kitchen, sits on the front steps of the house, and cries.

Even though Francisco is older than Rorra and is often tasked with adult-like work and worries, his heartbreaking reaction when he realizes that his precious coins are gone reminds readers that he is still a child.

Mamá follows Francisco out and kindly tells him that she understands how upset he is, but that he must remember that Rorra is only four years old. Mamá tells him a story about a smart and rich ant who saves up her pennies and marries a little mouse. The mouse and the ant are very happy together, but then the ant dies suddenly, leaving the mouse alone. He's sad and lonely despite all the money he has. Mamá says that, similarly, Rorra is more important and valuable than pennies. This story helps Francisco to calm down a little.

While Mamá understands Francisco's sorrow, she also points out that Rorra is too young to understand the weight of her misdeed. To Francisco, the coins meant more because of the memories he associated with them. Mamá's story helps him see even more clearly that people and human connections are always more precious than material objects or money.

Mamá helps Francisco wrap his notepad in wax paper to keep it clean and dry when he is working in the fields. The next day, Francisco memorizes some spellings as he picks grapes, and this makes the work more bearable. On the way home, Papá stops at a gas station to buy some kerosene for the stove. When Roberto unloads it from the car, he tells Francisco to go ask Papá about it, since it smells like gasoline rather than kerosene. However, Papá is busy fixing a broken wall, and he says that it must just be cheap kerosene.

Most kids Francisco's age wouldn't find spellings to be a fun activity. However, Francisco misses the routine of attending school every day, since his family's moving constantly upends his life. He is keenly aware of how he is behind his classmates in his academics despite being intelligent and hard-working, and he wants to close this gap. To him, memorizing his spellings seems enjoyable when compared to the back-breaking drudgery of farm work.

Mamá is getting ready to cook beans for dinner, and she lights the stove after Roberto fills it. It erupts into flames, setting the kitchen curtains on fire. Roberto tries to put the flames out with some soapy water from the sink, but this only makes things worse, and the fire spreads quickly around the kitchen. Papá yells for everyone to get out of the house, and he rushes back into the flames to get their money box. The children and Mamá wait in the yard until Papá finally emerges, coughing, with the box in his hand.

Throughout the novel, Francisco's family often realizes that life does not live up to their hopes and expectations. They had moved to the United States with big dreams, but they're largely disappointed by their lives of poverty and constant struggle. Similarly, they moved to Orosi dreaming of a better home, and this, too, turns tragic. Their lives are so precarious—balancing temporary jobs, poverty, and their status as undocumented workers—that every event has the potential to tip the balance into disaster.

Just then, Francisco realizes that his precious notepad is inside, and he tries to rush into the burning house to save it. Roberto restrains him, and Papá yells at Francisco to stop. By the time the firefighters arrive, the whole house has burned to the ground. Papá says that they'll have to sleep in the barn until he finds them another place to stay.

Even in this moment of calamity, when Francisco seems to temporarily lose all rationality and the family loses the few items they own, they still watch out for one another. This is a testament to how valuable their relationships with one another are to them, as these bonds provide comfort even in the midst of tragedy.

Francisco cries as he watches the last of the fire, so Mamá holds him and says that she's happy they're all safe. Francisco says his notebook is gone, just like his pennies. Mamá says that he already knows all the information from the notepad, so it's not lost. A few days later, the family moves into a labor camp owned by Mr. Patrini, and Francisco returns to picking grapes. As he works, he tries to recall the words he'd written in his notepad. He realizes that he remembers everything he wrote down, and that Mamá was right—"It [is] not all lost."

Mamá must be devastated about how much the family lost in the fire, especially since they're poor and can't easily replace their necessities. Still, she focuses on the fact that the family is safe, and she even takes the time to console Francisco about his notepad. This emphasizes the depth of her kindness and understanding for one another. Once again, Mamá's message is that things and money do not matter as much as people do, and Francisco realizes that she is right—the notepad might be gone, but his knowledge is his own forever. He feels hopeful when he realizes this.

MOVING STILL

Papá has a bad back, and lately he spends all day lying down. He's no longer able to pick cotton, and he worries that the family won't have enough money saved at the end of cotton season to carry them through the winter. Roberto is the only one working in the fields every day. Mamá stays home to take care of Papá, Rorra, and Rubén. Torito, Trampita, and Francisco go to school on weekdays and work in the fields on weekends and holidays.

Throughout the novel, Papá has been pushing himself to work as hard as he possibly can, since he understands how crucial his earnings are for the family. As a result of this unceasing labor, he seems physically broken and incapable of working anymore. While Papá takes a step back from work, he seems to have passed the baton of responsibilities and work to Roberto, his eldest son. The younger children, on the other hand, seem comparatively sheltered from these worries, since they still get to attend school on weekdays.

One day, as soon as Francisco returns from school, Papá worriedly asks him if he is all right, saying that *la migra* (immigration officers) made a sweep through the camp that day. Papá was worried that they might check the school, too. Francisco is very nervous when he hears this, so Mamá comes over and hugs him.

As undocumented immigrants, Francisco's family always faces the looming threat that they might be deported to a country they left a decade ago, which the children barely recall. In this way, undocumented immigrants never really get to put down roots—even if they've been residents of their new country for many years, but they're constantly at risk of being arrested and deported.

Francisco remembers that when the family lived in Tent City, Santa Maria, immigration agents had made a sudden sweep of their camp. Armed men in green uniforms quickly jumped out of vans and looked for undocumented workers. Some of the workers ran into the wilderness to try to escape, but many were caught. Luckily, Ito had already helped Papá get a green card, and after checking this, the immigration officials didn't ask for Francisco's or Trampita's papers—this was fortunate, since they had none. Mamá and Roberto had gone to buy groceries, so they missed the raid. They didn't have visas or papers either.

While most of the undocumented workers at Tent City were hardworking farm laborers, just like Francisco's family, the armed immigration officers who suddenly sprang up on them and hounded them treated them like criminals. This incident was so frightening to young Francisco that he seems to be scarred by it.

The evening after the immigration officials raid the camp, Papá tells Roberto and Francisco that they can't tell anyone they were born in Mexico. Papá says that even their best friends might turn them in. Francisco is supposed to say that he was born in Colton, California.

In a desperate attempt to stay safe in the United States, undocumented immigrants like Francisco's family resort to lies to cover up their true origins—and they also live in constant fear that even their closest friends might betray them. Their lives are stressful and insecure.

That evening, Papá is very sad because he isn't able to work and make money due to his bad back, nor can he protect his family from the immigration officials who threaten their future. Papá checks the family's savings and says that they might not be able to make it through the winter unless he's well enough to work. Roberto consoles Papá by telling him that he and Francisco will work instead.

Papá, as the family's chief breadwinner and patriarch, considers himself to be responsible for the family's safety and happiness. However, due to Papá's bad back, Roberto and Francisco step in to fill his role. Though they are young—they are only teenagers—they already take on a big share of the work and the worries. As the oldest child, Roberto in particular seems to have had no childhood, since he always has taken on mature responsibilities because his family has depended on his help.

Mamá agrees with Roberto and says that they should leave Corcoran and head to Santa Maria right away, especially since the immigration officials might come around again. Papá agrees and says that they should go to Bonetti Ranch in Santa Maria. Most of the inhabitants of the barracks in Bonetti Ranch are Mexican laborers who have become citizens or who have immigration papers like Papá, so it's relatively safe from immigration raids.

Once again, the family needs to move, but this time it is because they hope this will keep them safe from immigration raids. It seems like they are always moving to different places in search of a better life and more stability, but this has eluded them so far.


Francisco is very excited to be returning to Santa Maria, and he's the first one to wake up the next morning. Roberto and Trampita are excited too, and Francisco imagines that this is how other kids must feel when they talk about going on vacation. The family packs their belongings into the car, and they set off. Papá can't drive because of his bad back, so Roberto is driving. Francisco keeps poking him and telling him to go faster, since he's so impatient to get to Santa Maria. Papá laughs and says that the last thing they need right now is to get a speeding ticket, since that will get them in trouble with the immigration officials.

Roberto, Francisco, and Trampita are the three oldest children in the family, and they are the ones who are most excited about returning to Santa Maria, since it is a city they know well and return to every year. It seems like they crave stability and familiarity as they grow older. This scene also illustrates how undocumented immigrants live in constant fear and danger—a small lapse like speeding on the freeway can have a huge impact on their lives by leading to their deportation.


As they get closer to Santa Maria, Francisco becomes even more excited, since he knows where they're going to live for the next several months. He's also looking forward to reconnecting with his classmates from school—he hopes they'll remember him, since he hasn't seen them since June. Francisco begins to cheer loudly as they cross the bridge into town, and Mamá and Papá laugh at him. Francisco points out the landmarks in town that he remembers, like the school and the gas station.

Santa Maria is a city that Francisco is familiar with, since the family spends a few months of every year here while they pick strawberries at the Sheehey Farm. Francisco's joy at returning to this city shows how much he craves stability and familiarity in his life—he is truly exhausted by the constant moving and the new places and schools he constantly has to get used to.

As Roberto turns into Bonetti Ranch, Francisco sees that nothing has changed from the previous year. They're greeted by the stray dogs that sleep under the dwellings, and Roberto swerves to avoid potholes. The barracks are in disrepair, as usual. The family rents out the same barrack they lived in the previous year, and they begin fixing it up to make it more habitable. They have electricity and running water, even though they can't drink the water since it smells bad. They buy drinking water from the gas station.

Even though the barracks at Bonetti Ranch certainly aren't comfortable or clean, Francisco loves living here anyway, because it is unchanged from the previous year. Francisco really appreciates his surroundings staying the same, since it gives him a sense of stability amid constant change.

The following week, Francisco and his siblings enroll in school. Francisco is now in eighth grade, and Roberto is in 10th. Trampita and Torito resume elementary school. Francisco doesn't feel nervous about returning to school, since he knows most of his classmates from the previous year. Most of the kids have grown a lot, but Francisco hasn't—he's one of the smallest kids in class.

Again, Francisco is pleased to be in a familiar place among familiar people. He feels very secure in Santa Maria compared to the times when he had to attend new schools in unfamiliar cities.

Francisco enjoys math and is very good at it. His math and science teacher, Mr. Milo, gives the class a test every Thursday, and the student who scores highest has the honor of sitting up front for the rest of the week. Either Francisco or Sharon Ito, the sharecropper Ito's daughter, always end up winning this spot. Miss Ehlis teaches the class English and social studies. English is Miss Ehlis's favorite subject, and Francisco still struggles with it.

Francisco gets to attend school only for a few months a year, since he has to work in the farms during harvest season. As a result, he struggles with English, since the only time he gets to practice it is when he is at school. However, he is excellent at math, which shows his natural aptitude and intelligence. He constantly practices math and memorizes math facts even when he works in the fields, and this seems to be paying off. Francisco's success shows that education can be an equalizer: Francisco and Sharon Ito come from very different economic backgrounds, yet Francisco's academic excellence puts him on the same footing as her. It seems like a good education can pave the way to a bright future for Francisco.

Meanwhile, Papá's back isn't improving, and he's getting increasingly frustrated about it. One day, Mamá takes Roberto and Francisco aside and tells them that Papá will most likely be unable to work in the fields anymore. They will have to think of some other ways to make money. Roberto says that he's been thinking of getting a job in town, which might be a good solution to their problem. Francisco loves this idea, since it will mean that they won't have to move anymore. Roberto says that he'll ask Mr. Sims, the elementary school principal, for help finding a job.

If the family no longer has to earn their living as itinerant farm workers, they will be able to settle down in Santa Maria. Thus, if Roberto succeeds in finding a job, it will mean that the family will finally have the stability that Francisco craves.

Mr. Sims agrees to keep an ear out for a job for Roberto. In the meanwhile, Roberto and Francisco work in the fields after school and on the weekends. Some days later, Mr. Sims reaches out with a potential job for Roberto and sets him up with an interview with the owner of a shoe store. On the morning of the interview, Roberto tells Francisco that he really hopes he gets the job, because he's tired of moving around so much. Francisco agrees—he feels the same way. Roberto says that if they don't get deported, he'd like to settle down in Santa Maria. Francisco likes the town too.

Mr. Sims, the elementary school principal who gave Francisco a coat when he was a first grader, seems to be a kind man whom Roberto trusts will help them and also not report them to immigration officials. Mr. Sims's compassion has the power to change the lives of the whole family. And yet, the threat of being deported always looms over their lives, since Roberto's plans include the caveat "if they don't get deported." Even when happiness and security seem to be within their grasp, anxiety still hounds them.


After the job interview, Roberto is in a foul mood. He tells Francisco that the interview wasn't for a job at the shoe store—it was for him to mow the owner's lawn once a week. The money from this will certainly not be enough for the family. Francisco is furious to hear this, and Roberto cries in disappointment. However, he says that he'll go back to Mr. Sims and ask him for help finding another job. Roberto throws his arm around Francisco and tells him that everything will work out.

Despite his youth, Roberto has been patient and stoic throughout this novel, even in the face of anxiety and grueling work. However, he breaks down and cries for the first time in this passage, which shows how disappointed he is that he is unable to find a job that will give the family security. So much of the family's future depends on Roberto, and he is feeling the pressure. Earlier, Papá was the main breadwinner, and the stress of this role affected his physical and mental health—now, Roberto is in that same position.

On Monday at school, Miss Ehlis passes out copies of the Declaration of Independence to Francisco's class, saying that she'd like them to memorize a section of it. She says that students who'd like extra credit should recite it in front of the class, but that others can recite it to her privately. Francisco wants the extra credit but is too embarrassed about his accent—his classmates laugh at his "Mexican pronunciation," and he worries that the whole class will laugh if he recites it in front of them. So, his only option is to recite it privately to Miss Ehlis.

Francisco's classmates probably don't realize how much of an impact their jokes about Francisco's "Mexican pronunciation" have on him, but he finds this very hurtful and is embarrassed by his accent. This even holds him back academically, since he is missing out on the opportunity to earn extra credit. This seems especially unfair since his accent is in no way a reflection of his academic capabilities.

After school, Francisco finds Roberto waiting at home with some good news: Mr. Sims has offered him a janitorial job at the elementary school. Mamá proudly announces that it is a year-round job. Papá says that getting an education certainly has its advantages, and that he and Mamá unfortunately didn't have the opportunity to go to school. Francisco tells him that he's nevertheless taught them a lot, and Papá looks happy.

Mr. Sims comes through and helps Roberto out with a job offer, which shows how he is willing to go out of his way to help the family. His kindness has a huge impact on their lives. Papá is proud of his son but also seems to regret his own illiteracy. Francisco thinks that Papá is being harsh on himself and kindly compliments him, which shows Francisco's compassion.

After dinner, Francisco begins learning the section from the Declaration of Independence that Miss Ehlis wants the class to memorize. The first line of the section is, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal…." Francisco looks up the words he doesn't know in the dictionary, and he decides to learn one sentence a day so that he'll know it very well by Friday.

Francisco is very hard-working and plans out his work carefully. This makes it seem doubly unfair that he cannot get extra credit for this assignment, since he works very hard yet faces discrimination from his classmates because of his accent.

On Wednesday, Roberto picks up Francisco from school in the car, so that Francisco can help him clean the elementary school. The first room they clean is the same one that was Miss Scalapino's first grade classroom, and it brings back many memories for Francisco. As Francisco works, he memorizes more lines from the Declaration of Independence. These lines speak of how all people have "certain inalienable rights," which include "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

As Francisco cleans Miss Scalapino's first-grade classroom, Jimenez reminds readers of how much Francisco has changed and grown since then. As a first grader, he didn't know any English and had to repeat the first grade—but now, he is one of the highest performers in his class. Despite the many challenges Francisco faces as an undocumented immigrant, his determination and intelligence help him push through. It seems like a meaningful coincidence that he is memorizing the section about "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" from the Declaration of Independence at this time since his life in the U.S.—especially the education he's receiving here—seems to be opening up many opportunities for him.

By Friday, Francisco has successfully memorized the entire section from the Declaration of Independence that Miss Ehlis has assigned to the class. He struggles to pronounce the word "inalienable," so he practices saying it several times on his way to school. The morning starts out well, with Francisco scoring highest in his class in a math test and getting to sit in the coveted seat at the front of the class. After lunch, Francisco once again recites the entire section from the Declaration of Independence to himself and feels confident that he knows it well. He takes a seat in Miss Ehlis's class and waits for the recitation to begin.

Francisco is self-conscious about his pronunciation since his classmates mock his accent, which is why he practices certain words several times. In order to overcome his struggles with English, he works very hard and rehearses. In this way, it seems that immigrant children like Francisco have to work twice as hard as their peers, since they face discrimination and ridicule merely for their race or nationality.

As Miss Ehlis is taking attendance, the principal enters the classroom, accompanied by a man in a green uniform. Francisco feels panicky when he sees the man and wants to run, but he feels frozen to his seat. Miss Ehlis accompanies the immigration officer to Francisco's desk and, places her hand on his shoulder and says, "This is him.'" Francisco gets up and accompanies the man to his car, which is marked "Border Patrol." They head to Roberto's school to pick him up too.

Francisco seems to be on the verge of academic success and personal happiness when his life is upturned. The threat of deportation has always hovered over him and his family, and it is heartbreaking that he has to once again endure a huge life change just when his family was getting ready to settle down in one place, like he had always dreamed they would. As undocumented immigrants, Francisco and his family seem destined to lives of instability and poverty with no way out. The words from the Declaration of Independence that speak of equality and the rights of all people to "liberty" and "happiness" do not seem to apply to people like them.

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