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The Circuit: Stories From The Life Of A Migrant Child



Synopsis

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

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 880L (What's this?)

Paperback: 134 pages

Publisher: University of New Mexico Press; 1st edition (October 1, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0826317979

ISBN-13: 978-0826317971

Product Dimensions: 4.8 x 0.4 x 7.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars See all reviews (130 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #5,735 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories > Hispanic & Latino #15 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Short Story Collections #15 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Ethnic Studies

Age Range: 10 - 13 years

Grade Level: 5 - 8

Customer Reviews

This is a book that is suitable for all ages. Jimenez manages to describe his childhood in a manner that captivates the reader. I could not put the book down once I began reading. Do not think that just

because these events happened long ago, that migrant families do not experience some of the same horrors today, for they do. I teach ESL to adult migrant workers and after reading this book I have an even greater respect for these hard working individuals. The farms and ranches of California could not exist as they do today without migrants who do the back breaking work in the fields. Most evenings at class my students (both men and women) come in directly from the fields, their eyes bloodshot, their hands rough and calloused, their backs bowed over. But they come eager to learn English so they can get a better job, or so they can help their children have a better education. An admirable people and Jimenez's book provides insight into their difficult working and living conditions.

I bought *The Circuit* because I am working with the children of Mexican migrant families this summer. As I read, I imagined the kids in my class experiencing the difficulties described by Jimenez, especially the poor living conditions. Yet the stories are not written as complaints. The hopeful spirit of the struggling family members really comes through, and moved me to tears more than once. Reading *The Circuit* has helped me to better understand and appreciate my young migrant friends. I'm passing my copy around so that my friends and family can see why I care about those kids so much!

This book is a great place to start if you are interested in learning about the life of someone less privileged than yourself. Perhaps it will help you appreciate the simple pleasures in life and everything that you've got. When you reach the end of the book, you'll be glad Jimenez wrote a sequel (*Breaking Through*). Written in a language that is accessible to everyone from grade school to adulthood, Jimenez doesn't exaggerate details or go into a lot of long descriptions. It's simply his memories of his childhood in a migrant family. As all memories go, the book does not flow smoothly from chapter to chapter, but rather gives you snapshots of his life, so take it for what it is and don't worry about the chronology. As a teacher, this book really helped me appreciate the lives and struggles of many of my students (who lead lives similar to Jimenez in his childhood).

The short stories in this collection bear compelling witness to the strength and vitality of the human spirit under the most inhumane circumstances. This inspiring tribute to the humanity of poor migrant workers tells the right story at the right time in this country, when immigrants, documented or not, are shamelessly scapegoated by politicians of every stripe. The powerful impact of these deceptively simple stories may be credited to their autobiographical character, the purity of the

prose, and the strength of the images. In reading this book you will experience the untapped wealth of humanity that works our fields, sews our clothes, waits our tables. You will also be completely engaged by twelve wonderful stories. For me, Dr. Jimenez' "Christmas Gift" tops O. Henry's "Gift of the Magi" for the best Christmas story ever -- and it's the perfect size for a stocking stuffer! Steve Privett,S.J.[SPrivett@mailers.scu.edu] Santa Clara, California

A collection of interrelated stories based on the author's experience as an illegal immigrant from Mexico in the late 1940s, working with his family as a migrant laborer. Exposes hardships without being didactic. Ambiguous. Makes me feel what it would be like to be poor in a country where I didn't speak the language. A nice companion to books like Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry or Out of the Dust. Ages 10+

The Circuit, one of my favorite books, is written by Francisco Jimenez. The Circuit is about a family that lived in El Rancho Blanco, Guadalajara. Francisco and his family moved to the United States crossing the border illegally. When they get to the United States in California they look for work and they work in the fields picking cotton. Francisco's family is always hiding from the border patrol which they call it "la migra." As they go on they move to different places. The reason I read this story is because it held my interest , because I wondered how it would be crossing the border illegally. Also, because some of the story reminds me about when I got here from Mexico. I really recommend this book. It's exciting and it taught me to eat all my food and not throw it away because Francisco's family didn't have anything to eat sometimes. I would give this book a ten, and I really loved it a lot and I think you should try it.

Francisco Jimenez doesn't preach, he doesn't tell, he doesn't demand that you change your views about the migrant population in the US; he does tell a story of a migrant family with more tenderness than I have read anywhere. He doesn't rely on dramatic anecdotes to relay his point, but rather allows the realistic simplicity of the stories to speak for themselves. Doing so makes the stories all the more meaningful, as the reader never feels like he is being told exaggerated accounts of a migrant child's life.

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