

The Circuit

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1: This chapter is about a Mexican family's decision to cross the border without documentation in order to find a better life.

Chapter 2: In this chapter, Francisco decides to try and pick cotton like the rest of the family instead of taking care of his baby brother.

Chapter 3: In this chapter, Francisco describes his first experience going to school without knowing English and we learn that he likes nature, likes to draw, and has a very large heart.

Chapter 4: In this chapter, Francisco's new brother is born, contracts a deadly disease, but miraculously survives.

Chapter 5: In this chapter, Francisco makes a friend, but loses him when he moves away, and we see more evidence of Francisco's kindness as he tries to save some fish.

Chapter 6: In this chapter, Francisco and his siblings are very excited about Christmas, but he gets a bag of candy, not the ball he was hoping for; however, his father manages to buy his mother a hand embroidered handkerchief from a poor couple for his mother.

Chapter 7: In this chapter, Francisco forgives his father for killing the family pet, a parrot, in a fit of rage.

Chapter 8: This chapter describes the family's preparations for another season of picking cotton and Francisco's disappointment that he has not yet earned his own sack.

Chapter 9: After moving again at the end of strawberry season, Francisco enrolls himself in 6th grade, meets a sympathetic teacher who offers to teach him to play the trumpet, and then, heartbreakingly, has to move again after just a few months.

Chapter 10: Francisco learns the meaning of dignity and he learns to stand up to a neighborhood bully by observing a worker named Gabriel who stands up to an abusive boss.

Chapter 11: Francisco loses his two treasures: his penny collection and his word notebook, one to his sister's theft and the other to a gasoline fire in their home.

Chapter 12: The family moves back to Santa Maria and Roberto gets a job as a school janitor, but just when the family's fortunes seem to be improving, immigration officials raid Francisco's school and take him away.

Chapter Dictations

Dictation {Everyone writes it. Three volunteers write theirs on the board. They keep handing over the pen to another to make any corrections, until I say there are no more corrections. Then I ask the other questions.}

Chapter 2

“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?”

1. Who is speaking?
2. Who is being spoken to?
3. Who is “we”?
4. What is “this”?
5. Who is Trampita?

Chapter 3

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.

1. Who is Arthur?
2. Who is Miss Scalapino?
3. What is she saying no to?
4. Why is she saying no?
5. Do you agree with her?
6. Why did Arthur avoid Francisco when Miss Scalapino was around?
7. Why did Francisco like to hang around Arthur?

Chapter 4

“But we don’t have any money,” Mama responded, sobbing and looking sadly at Torito. “We’ll borrow, or...something,” Papa said, putting his right arm around Mama’s shoulder. Papa was about to continue when Dona Maria, our next door neighbor, interrupted him. “Can I come in?” she asked, poking her head in the entrance to our tent.

1. What is the money for?
2. Who is Torito?
3. Why is Mama sobbing?
4. Who can Papa borrow money from?
5. Who is Dona Maria?
6. Why did she come over?
7. Was she able to help?

Chapter 5

I went around to the side of the cabin and peaked through the window. The cabin was completely empty. My heart sank into my stomach. Slowly I walked home, feeling a lump in my throat.

1. Whose cabin was this?
2. Why was it empty?
3. Why did they move?
4. Why did Francisco’s heart sink?
5. Have you ever felt a lump in your throat?
6. Why did Francisco like the fish so much?

Chapter 6

“Perhaps you could give us fifty cents for this? Look, it’s pure leather; almost brand new,” he said, handing it to Papa. Shaking his head, Pap replied sympathetically, “I am sorry. I wish I could, but we’re broke too.” When I heard Papa say, “we’re broke too,” I panicked.

1. Who is speaking?
2. What is he trying to sell?
3. Why is he trying to sell it?
4. Why did Francisco panic?
5. Why was Mama crying when she wrapped the gifts?
6. What do you think of the butcher?

Chapter 7

I threw the garage door open and darted out, running as fast as I could toward a storage shed that was about half a mile away. The shouting, screaming, and crying from our home chased me. I wanted to escape, to die. I finally reached the shed, dragged myself in, and closed the door behind me. It was dark and quiet. I fell to my knees and prayed and prayed for *El Perico*. Then I prayed for my father.

1. Why did Francisco run from the house?
2. Why did he pray for El Porico?
3. Who was El Perico?
4. Why did he pray for his father?
5. Why did his father kill the bird?
6. Have you ever lost your temper?

Chapter 8

“What’s so funny?” asked Papa.

“This is the prettiest wedding dress I have ever seen,” she answered, holding her stomach to ease the pain from laughing so much. Giggling, Roberto and I looked at Papa, who was not amused.

1. What is Mama laughing at?
2. Why isn’t papa laughing?
3. What does this family do on Thanksgiving?
4. Why does Francisco want his own sack?
5. Why does Papa decide Francisco is not ready?
6. Who is Rorra?

Chapter 9

The sound gave me goose bumps. I knew that sound. “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.”

1. What was the sound?
2. Who is Francisco speaking to?
3. Why do you think Mr. Lema wanted to teach Francisco how to play music?
4. What did the cardboard boxes represent to Francisco?
5. What was this family’s living situation like in this chapter?
6. Why did Francisco and Roberto have to hide from the school bus in September and October?
7. Why did Francisco feel bad for Roberto?

Chapter 10

“You’re lucky. You get to see them every day,” Gabriel said. “I haven’t seen mine for months.” He continued, as though thinking out loud. “I didn’t want to leave them, but I had no choice. We have to eat, you know. I send them a few dollars every month for food and things. I’d like to send them more, but after I pay Diaz for room and board and transportation, little is left.”

1. Who is Gabriel?
2. Who is Diaz?
3. Who is Gabriel talking about?
4. Why does Francisco enjoy playing kick-the-can?
5. Why did Gabriel get fired?
6. What did Papa mean when he said, “Gabriel did what he had to do?”
7. How are Carlos and Diaz similar?
8. How are Francisco and Gabriel similar?

Chapter 11

When my sister nodded again, my heart dropped to my stomach. I felt my face on fire. Everything blurred. I stormed out of the house, slammed the door behind me, sat on the front stairs, and cried. Seconds later, Mama came out and sat beside me. “I know how disappointed you are, but your sister is only four years old,” she said tenderly.

1. What had Rorra done?
2. Why did Francisco’s heart drop to his stomach?
3. What was Mama trying to do?
4. Why was Francisco unwilling to have Carl come to his house?
5. Have you ever collected anything?
6. What caused the fire?
7. How did Francisco use his notebook?

8. How do you learn new words?
9. How does Mama comfort Francisco about the loss of his notebook?
10. What do you think of Mama's advice to Francisco about the loss of his two treasures?

Chapter 12

“You have to be careful,” he warned us, waving his index finger at Roberto and me. “You can’t tell a soul you were born in Mexico. You can’t trust anyone, not even your best friends. If they know, they can turn you in.” I had heard those words so many times, I had memorized them.

1. Who is speaking?
2. Why is he warning Francisco and Roberto?
3. What are the living conditions like for Francisco's family in Santa Maria?
4. What subject does Francisco excel in at school?
5. Why does Roberto need a full time job?
6. What is Francisco trying to memorize for school?
7. What is ironic about the last scene in the book?