

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 1



Key Paragraph, p. 3

“La *frontera* is a word I often heard when I was a child living in *El Rancho Blanco*, a small village nestled on barren, dry hills several miles north of Guadalajara, Mexico. I heard it for the first time back in the late 1940’s when Papá and Mamá told me and Roberto, my older brother, that someday we would take a long trip north, cross *la frontera*, enter California, and leave our poverty behind” (p. 3).

Writing Task

Francisco was four years old at the time of this event. He describes the family’s beginnings in El Rancho Blanco prior to making the trip to California. What do you recall from that age? Everybody has a beginning, a time when they have vivid memories or feelings. When is your beginning? Who makes up your family? Where did your family begin? What travels have you made?

Write a 2-3 paragraph narrative that describes where you were born and what you remember from your early years. Use as much detail as you can to describe each memory. In your narrative explain why you think you were able to remember those memories and why they were significant to you.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 2



Key Paragraph, p. 13

“Si, Papá,’ I answered timidly. I was hurt and confused. Seeking comfort, I walked over to Roberto and whispered, ‘Someday, I will get to pick cotton with you, Papá, and Mamá. Then I won’t be left alone.’ Roberto put his arm around me and nodded his head” (p. 13).

Writing Task

Papá has just told Francisco his job is to take care of Trampita and that his actions could have gotten the family fired. Francisco is sad and disappointed; he really wants to be with his parents and older brother picking cotton. Have you ever wanted to do something but were told you were too young? Have you been left behind by older family members or friends?

Write 2-3 paragraphs explaining in detail about a time in your life that you wanted to do something, but were told you were too young. Within the paragraphs, describe the event, how old were you at time of the event, and explain how the event made you feel and what you learned from it.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 3



Key Paragraph, p. 16

“Mr. Sims walked me to my classroom. I liked it as soon as I saw it because, unlike our tent, it had wooden floors, electric lights, and heat. It felt cozy. He introduced me to my teacher, Miss Scalapino, who smiled, repeating my name, ‘Francisco.’ It was the only word I understood the whole time she and the principal talked. They repeated it each time they glanced at me. After he left, she showed me to my desk, which was at the end of the row of desks closest to the window. There were no other kids in the room yet” (p. 16).

Writing Task

Francisco first day of school was filled with fear, anxiety, and hope. He was happy to be at school because of the electricity, heat, and wooden floors. But he was deeply nervous when other students looked at him and found solace in looking at the butterfly in the jar and daydreaming about the possibility of helping his dad.

What do you remember about your first day of school? Where was the school? Who was your principal and first teacher? Did you know anyone in your class? What was the weather like? Did you feel excitement, anxiety, fear, or nervousness?

Thinking back to your first day of school, write a 2-3 paragraph narrative describing your first day of school. Use detail in your narrative to describe what you wore, what the classroom looked like, what your teacher was like, what items were in the classroom, what your classroom looked like, where you sat in the classroom, etc.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 4



Key Paragraph, p. 29-30

“Our trip to the dump was always an adventure. We waited until dusk, after the dump caretaker left, before raiding for treasures because we had no money to buy them. When he went home in the evenings, the caretaker locked the more valuable items, such as used clothing, car parts and broken lamps, in a makeshift shed. The larger pieces—mattresses, box springs, broken pieces of furniture—he left outside, leaning against the storehouse. Besides lumber, I collected the books, hoping to read them once I learned how. My favorites were the one with pictures” (p. 29-30).

Writing Task

Francisco describes going to the Tent City dump with his brother, Roberto, and salvaging materials to make their tent a better home. For Francisco and Roberto, it was an opportunity to find items that were treasures for them and trash for others.

When you were young what adventures did you go on with your friends or family? Where would you go? How old were you? Did you parents know about your adventures? What things would you do during your adventures? Did you find treasures in what others had discarded?

Write a 2-3 paragraph narrative describing details of your childhood adventures. In your description, analyze what made you so adventurous. Were you ever afraid? Where did you go and whom did you go with? Looking back now, would you describe those adventures as responsible? What did you learn or take from those adventures.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 5



Key Paragraph, p. 44

“‘I have something to tell you,’ Mamá said, teary-eyed as she took off his cloak. ‘When we took Torito to the hospital, the doctor told us my son would die because we had waited too long to take him there. He said it would take a miracle for him to live. I didn’t want to believe him,’ she continued, gaining strength as she talked. ‘But he was right. It took a miracle’” (p. 44).

Writing Task

Faith is a major theme in today’s reading. Mamá tells Francisco what the doctor had to say while Torito was in the hospital. She shared how the doctor gave him little chance to live and how it would be a miracle if he did. Mamá says although at first she didn’t want to believe him in reality it was a miracle. Mamá believes faith is the only thing that can save Torito.

Faith takes many forms – faith in one’s self, faith in others, etc. Identify a time in your life when faith played an important role. What did you have to have faith in? What was the situation where you were in need of faith?

Analyze the strong conviction that Mamá has on faith. Can you recall a time where you had to rely on faith to get you through a difficult time in your life? In 2-3 paragraphs, describe the events that led you to rely on faith to get you through an important event in your life. Describe how and why individuals could not help you alone. Describe to the reader what happened and what you learned from the experience.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 6



Key Paragraph, p. 50

"I picked up one last, small dying fish and took it to our next door neighbor who owned the goldfish. I knocked and knocked on the door until my hand hurt. No one was home. I placed the coffee can on the front steps and peered inside. The little grey fish looked up at me, rapidly opening and closing its mouth" (p. 50).

Writing Task

There is a story about an individual tossing starfish back into the sea. It can be found in a variety of places. Two links are:

www.muttcats.com/starfish.htm

www.members.aol.com/Cuttyhunk/Rose.html

In the story, the writer tells about making a difference. Students will discuss the story of the starfish, and then identify a time they made a difference in someone's life, or a time when someone made a difference in their life.

Write 2-3 paragraphs telling the reader about a specific time in your life when you made a difference, or when someone made a difference in your life. Use specific evidence and examples to support your claim.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 7



Key Paragraph, p. 56

“Searching for words to tell Mamá how I felt, I looked up at her. Her eyes were full of tears. Papá, 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 Mamá, saying, ‘*Feliz Navidad, vieja*’” (p. 56).

Writing Task

Mamá was so happy with getting the handkerchief as a Christmas present from Papá that she began to cry. Her show of emotion came out because she was not expecting any gift at all as the family was broke.

Have you ever given a gift that made the person receiving the gift so happy that they were brought to tears? Have you ever received a gift that caused you great joy, perhaps something you wanted badly but didn't really expect to get?

Write 2-3 paragraphs about an unexpected Christmas gift you either received or gave that made an impact. Use concrete details of the scene and people involved. Convey the person's thoughts and feelings through your descriptions.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 8



Key Paragraph, p. 57

"I, and the rest of my family, grew to love *El Perico*. I spent hours teaching him how to say "*periquito bonito*." His favorite pastime was walking back and forth across a thin, long wire that my mother sometimes used for hanging our clothes to dry..." (p. 57).

Writing Task

Francisco describes El Perico, a red, green, and yellow parrot, the amount of time he spent teaching the parrot, and how the entire family grew to love the little bird. Have you ever spent a great deal of time teaching or training a pet? What was the trick you worked so hard on? Did your entire family enjoy the pet, or was it primarily your pet?

Write 2-3 paragraphs about a pet you had, you have or would like to have. Using the Internet, describe what the pet looks like, what it eats, and how you would take care of it in the environment that you currently live in.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 9



Key Paragraph, p. 72

“Frustrated and disappointed, I walked over to Papá. 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” (p. 72).

Writing Task

Francisco tried proving to Papá he was ready for his own cotton sack, but after a few seconds of picking, his hands and feet were frozen. He then has to walk over to Papá and let him know that he was too cold. Roberto was braving the cold, and looking into Papá’s red watery eyes caused Francisco to feel great frustration and disappointment.

When have you wanted to prove to your parents you were old enough, big enough or ready to help out with a project? What activity has your family done but you couldn’t because you were too small or too young? When have you tried to prove to your parents or family you could do it and failed because they were right and you were not yet ready? How did you feel when this happened?

Write 2-3 paragraphs narrating a time when you wanted to prove to your parents that you were old enough, big enough, or ready to help out with a project? Explain in detail what you wanted and what you did to prove to your parents you were able to handle it. Be sure to include the item or event you wanted to do and what steps you took to try and get the item. Were you successful or were your parents correct in the cautiousness? Using details, relate the events to your reader and communicate how those events affected you.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 10



Key Paragraph, p. 83

“Mr. Lema was sitting at his desk correcting papers. When I entered he looked up at me and smiled. I felt better. I walked up to him and asked if he could help me with the new words. ‘Gladly,’ he said.

For the rest of the month I spent my lunch hours working on English with Mr. Lema, my best friend at school” (p. 83).

Writing Task

Mr. Lema was willing to help Francisco learn to read and offered to teach him how to play the trumpet. Francisco states that Mr. Lema was his best friend at the school in Fresno. Mr. Lema seems to understand Francisco as he did not make him read on page 82. But like a friend, Mr. Lema did want Francisco to grow as a reader, and thus helped Francisco at lunch to improve his reading.

Who in your life has helped you become better? Who knows what is best for you? What did this person do to help you? How did you become better and what did you learn about yourself?

Identify someone close to you, someone you would consider a best friend. Write 2-3 paragraphs describing the person and what they did for you to make you a better person. In your writing describe the things he/she did to guide you. Tell about the event and what you took from it. Give evidence and details of your improvement.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 11



Key Passage, p. 94

“What’s the matter, Panchito?’ He asked. ‘You’re moving too slow. You need to speed it up.’

‘I keep thinking about Gabriel,’ I answered.

‘What Diaz did was wrong, and someday he’ll pay for it, if not in this life, in the next one,’ he said. ‘Gabriel did what he had to do’” (p. 94).

Writing Prompt

There comes a time in everyone’s life that a tough decision has to be made. In this case, Gabriel had to decide between his pride and money. Responsibility is the active side of morality – doing what I should do. More specifically, doing the one thing I should be doing right now. One could argue that Gabriel did the right thing—he stood up for himself, took his family into consideration, and did the job—but still was fired. As stated by Papá in the above paragraph, those things sometimes happen when a person is doing what must be done.

Write 2-3 paragraphs identifying a time in your life when you had to do the right thing though it was tough to stand up either to the pressure of people or the authority you were disagreeing with. In your writing, convey a clear picture of the event. Use telling details to paint a vivid picture for the reader.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 12



Key Passage, p. 100

“When I walked in, I was amazed. I had never been inside a house before. The rug under my feet felt like a sack full of cotton. The living room warm and as big as the one-room cabin we lived in” (p. 100).

Writing Task

When Carl took Francisco home with him, it was his first time inside a house. The living room alone was as large as the cabin Francisco’s entire family was living in. He was amazed by the size of the house and feel of the rug.

When have you experienced amazement? Where were you that you had the same experience as Francisco? Was it inside or outside? Who was responsible for you being amazed? What feelings or emotions did you leave with?

Write 2-3 paragraphs describing your amazement; be sure to include details of where you were and who was with you. Explain the events that lead to your exposure of the opportunity. Use precise words and phrases, telling details and sensory language to convey a picture of the experience.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 13



Key Passage, p. 111

“Yes, but what about my *librito*. It’s gone, just like my pennies,’ I responded. After a long pause she said, ‘Do you know what was in your *librito*?’ ‘Yes,’ I answered, wondering why she asked. ‘Well... if you know what was in your *librito*, then it’s not all lost’” (p. 111).

Writing Task

In the above paragraph, Mamá convinces Francisco he still has his stories and ideas because of his memory. His stories are alive because he possesses the imagery and lessons from the events in his mind. Francisco eventually puts those stories down in a new *librito*, the book you are reading.

Like Francisco Jimenez, everybody has important stories from their lives to tell. Write a 2-3 paragraph narrative in which you share an important story you think reveals who you are as a person. Use precise words and phrases, using details and sensory language to convey a picture for the reader.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 14



Key Passage, p. 116

“Seeing this as a chance to persuade my father to leave Corcoran, and knowing I was anxious to return to Santa Maria, Mamá winked at me and said to Papá, “Roberto is right, Viejo. Let’s leave. Besides, the immigration may come around again. It’s safer living in Santa Maria” (p. 116).

Writing Task

Francisco wanted to leave Corcoran and go back to Santa Maria. But talking with Papá required timing; Mamá gave Francisco a wink saying that Roberto was right about going to Santa Maria. Is there a person in your family that is easier to approach when you have a problem or need help? How do you know it is a good time to talk to that individual?

In 2-3 narrative paragraphs, explain how you ask your parent(s) or guardian(s) for permission. Include an example of a time you really wanted to do something, go somewhere, buy something, or anything else you needed permission for. Describe how you knew the right time to ask.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Circuit, Day 15



Key Passage, p. 133

“The school day started out just right. In the morning, Mr. Milo returned the math exams to the class and asked us to rearrange our seats according to our scores. I sat in the first seat in the first row. This was definitely a good sign. I even looked forward to my recitation in Miss Ehlis’s class that afternoon” (p. 133).

Writing Task

In the above paragraph, the reader senses that things were looking good for the Jimenez family. It seemed that things were going their way. In the last paragraph, we find out that there is again another move. Given what we know about Francisco Jimenez, the ending of the autobiography does seem to fulfill the words he memorized from The Declaration of Independence. But, Francisco’s journey took great perseverance and hope.

Write the last 2 paragraphs in your autobiography to date. Tell the reader about the latest important event in your life, and share your hopes for the future. Describe your plans, where you going and what are looking forward to. Use telling details and sensory details to paint the last picture of your autobiography.

Character Based Literacy Program Lesson Plan

The Circuit, Final Writing Assignment



Unit: Responsibility Requires Action

Novel: *The Circuit* by Francisco Jimenez

Final Assignment: Autobiographical Essay

Task: Write an autobiographical essay.

Directions:

Over the past three weeks, you have read the novel *The Circuit* by Francisco Jimenez. In the book, Jimenez guides you through his early years as the son of migrant workers—a journey that took him from Mexico to different parts of California.

Using the writing prompts you kept over the three weeks, write an autobiography sharing a period of time in your life. You should use the section on Autobiographical Writing to guide you through this exercise.

Remember that one paragraph should flow into the next. In order to produce this effect, you may have to re-write some sentences or paragraphs from your daily snapshots. You may also need to add leading or unifying sentences at the beginning or end of paragraphs to aid your reader in following the direction of your essay.

- Type your essay. Use Times New Roman 12 pt. font, double spaced.
- Spell-check it
- Save it
- Print and trade with a peer. Edit each other's essay using the rubric discussed in class
- Revise your essay
- Save and print again. Use Times new Roman 12 pt. font, single space.

If you have a portfolio, place the final autobiographical writing inside the folder.