

Beth Daly

NEH The Immigrant Experience in California through Literature and Theatre

July 2017

Draft Unit Plan for

Creating a student-generated performance script of *The Circuit* by Francisco Jimenez

The following is a draft of a ten-week unit plan to be used with either a Drama or English class to create a performance script from a literary text. Attached to the end of the lesson plan are the Writing Prep Worksheet and a sample scene based on Chapter 1 (Under the Wire).

Part 1: First Reading

Students read and analyze *The Circuit* by Francisco Jimenez. Through a mixture of in-class and at home readings, students should have a general understanding of the major themes and events of the book and be able to provide detailed descriptions of the main characters. Students will create a Resource Map with boxes for:

- Mama
- Papa
- Roberto
- Panchito/Francisco
- People in Panchito's life
- Timeline of events
- Conflicts
- Big Ideas

As we read through the book, students will fill in the resource maps with quotes from the book that give a deeper understanding of the people/events, or students can fill in the boxes with their own ideas/analysis. The Resource Map is a graphic organizer of notes from the students' reading.

Part 2: Character Analysis

Students will be divided into 5 groups. Each group is given a character to work with: Mama, Papa, Roberto, Panchito or The rest of the family (Trampita, Torito, Ruben and Rorra). Students will be given butcher paper and asked to create an outline of a body. This will become their Body Map. On their character's body outline, they need to incorporate the following (in a creative and aesthetically pleasing way):

- Five significant quotes (either descriptions of the character, or a quote that gives the reader a deeper understanding of the character)
- Images of objects that are important or significant to the character
- Clothing that would be appropriate to the character
- Words/Phrases that the character uses
- This character's greatest dream (What does he/she want most in life?)
- This character's greatest fear

This posters will be hung around the room, and will serve to provide direction as we begin to craft a script from the story.

Part 3: Second Reading – Big Ideas

Students will be broken into groups of 3 or 4. Each group will be responsible for working with one chapter (maybe more, depending on class size) from *The Circuit*.

Before they begin work in their groups, we will go through the process with Chapter 1 (Under the Wire) together. We will first remind ourselves what happened in Chapter 1, and if necessary, re-read the

chapter. Then, we will work through the Scene Writing Prep Worksheet as a class. Students will pay attention to Characters, Main Events, Setting and Big Ideas.

Students will now re-read their particular chapters and fill out the worksheets for their particular chapter.

Part 4: Writing the scenes

Before reading the theatrical version of Chapter 1, we will discuss what parts need to be included, and what things we can take out (if any). We will discuss various ways to stage things that might seem to be difficult to stage (such as a train) and perhaps even try improvising some scenes (such as the crossing the border scene). After we have discussed possible ways of staging the scene, we will read the sample scene.

Students will now get to work on writing their own theatrical versions of their chapter. Using Chapter 1 as a guide, they will try to create a scene that incorporates the characters and important events and themes from their chapter. They will work on focusing on images and dialogues that help to tell the story.

Part 5: Feedback and Revision

After students have completed a first draft of their scene, they will meet with another group and each group will read their scene for their partner group and provide feedback about their partner's scene. Feedback will be given in written form, and will include positive comments and areas for improvement. Groups will return to their first drafts, and work to create a final draft which will be shared with the entire class.

Theatrical Adaptation of The Circuit

Scene 1: Under the Wire

The curtain rises on the family (Mama, Papa, Roberto and Panchito) sitting at the dinner table in El Rancho Blanco. Mama brings out a large dish with a serving spoon, and serves each of the boys, but there is not much food left for her and Papa.

Mama: I'm sorry, there's not much left. I thought there was more in the bag, but we are out.

Papa (*trying to make the best of a bad situation*): I know these are lean times now, but someday soon, we will take a long trip north, we will cross la frontera, we'll head straight into California and we'll leave all this poverty behind.

Panchito: Really, Papa?

Mama: Ernesto, please.....

Roberto: When, Papa? When? Can we leave this week?

Papa: Not yet, but soon. Once we cross la frontera, we'll make a good living in California, I promise.

Roberto (*excited*): I want to leave today! I'm so tired of everything here. I want to be in a place like Cousin Fito - - he's got a two-bedroom house - -

Fito enters stage left

Fito AND Roberto: with electricity AND a well.

Roberto runs stage left to join Fito

Fito: Roberto, life here is so much better. I don't have to get up at four in the morning to milk those five cows by hand.

Roberto: And you don't have to carry the milk on a horse to the road.

Fito: And I don't have to go to the river for water because I have a well!

Roberto: And you don't have to sleep on the dirt floor

Fito: Or use just a candle for light! Life doesn't have to be this way, Roberto! (*He gestures towards the family as he walks off.*)

Roberto (*walking slowly back to his family*): The only thing I like about this place anymore is hunting for chicken eggs and going to church on Sundays.

(As Mama, Papa, and Roberto begin to clear away the table and chairs and dishes)

Panchito: I like those things too, but what I like the most is stories. And here is the story of how we came to make the long-awaited trip across la frontera.

Papa: Familia - - guess where we are going?

ALL: California!

Papa: I have the tickets! We are taking the train: Ferrocarriles Nacionales de Mexico. Come on, everyone!

The family grabs their suitcases and crowds together. We watch them see the train arrive. The family climbs aboard and takes their seats. Panchito stands to look out the window and the train jerks and shudders and makes loud sounds like hundreds of milk cans crashing. Panchito loses his balance, but Papa catches him.

Papa: Sit, sit.

The boys sit across from each other, swinging their legs to the movement of the train. They both have big excited grins on their faces. We see the family try to sleep and get comfortable. They eat. Time goes by, different poses of excitement and boredom. The train slows to a stop.

Panchito: Is this California?

Papa: No, mijo, we're not there yet. We have many more hours to go. *(Papa closes his eyes to sleep)*

Panchito (to Roberto): What's California like?

Roberto: I don't know, but Fito told me:

Fito enters stage left

Fito: people there sweep money off the streets.

Papa (wakes up, laughing): Where did Fito get that idea?

Roberto: From Cantinflas. He said Cantinflas said it in a movie.

Papa: Cantinflas was joking. But it's true that life is better there.

Mama: I hope so. Dios lo quiero.

(The train begins to slow down again)

Panchito: Is this it?

Papa: Otra vez la burra al trigo! I'll tell you when we get there.

Mama: Be patient, Panchito. We'll get there soon.

We see the family mark time again on the train. Boredom is setting in and the boys just want to be there. Finally...

Papa: We're getting off. We're almost there!

The family grab their suitcases and disembark from the train. They walk across the stage as a barbed wire fence rolls across the stage, separating the family from the audience. There are guards on both sides of the fence in green uniforms.

Papa: This is la frontera. *(He points through the barbed wire).* That is California, the famous place you have heard so much about. Those men are la migra. *(in a whisper)* We must cross the fence to the other side without being seen by them.

Panchito: So late that night, we walk.

Roberto: And walk.

Mama: And walk.

Papa looks around to make sure no one is watching, and heads toward the fence. Papa makes a small hole larger, and the entire family crawls through the hole. A woman enters from offstage.

Woman: Come quickly. I will take you to the camp.

The family piles into her truck

Papa: We drive all night.

Woman: This is the place I told you about. Here you'll find work picking strawberries. The foreman will be here in the morning. You'll have to sleep out here tonight.

Papa pays the woman and as she drives away,

Papa: We have only seven dollars left.

The family makes a place to sleep in the dirt under a tree and they have just drifted off when a train whistle wakes them up.

Lupe: Hello! You must be our new workers! I'm Lupe, this is our foreman, Joe.

They shake hands

Joe: Buenos dias. *(Hands Papa the tent.)* You're lucky. This is the last tent we have.

As they put up the tent,

Papa: When can we start work?

Joe: In two weeks.

Papa: That can't be! We were told we'd find work right away.

Joe: I'm sorry, the strawberries won't be ready to pick until then. *(Joe shrugs his shoulders and walks away)*

Mama: We'll manage, Viejo. Once work starts, we'll be fine.

Panchito: During the next two weeks,

Mama: I cooked outside on a makeshift stove using rocks and a comal Dona Lupe had given me.

Roberto: We ate wild verdolagas and rabbit and birds

Papa: that I hunted with a rifle I borrowed from a neighbor.

Panchito: To pass the time, Roberto and I watched the trains go by behind the labor camp.

Roberto: We crawled underneath a barbed wire fence to get a closer look as they passed by several times a day.

Panchito: Our favorite train was the

Train Whistle blows

Panchito AND Roberto: Noon train!

Roberto: We would get there early and run on the rails

Panchito: Or sit to feel them vibrate when a train approached.

Roberto: We could recognize the conductor

Train whistle blows

Panchito: He would slow the train every time it went by and wave at us.

As they wave

Panchito AND Roberto: We wave back.

Panchito: One day, as we wait for the train, Roberto doesn't feel like playing.

Roberto sits on the rails

Panchito: I wonder where the train comes from. Do you know, Roberto?

Roberto: I've been wondering too. I think it comes from California.

Panchito: California! This is California!

Roberto: I'm not so sure. Remember what....

Train whistle interrupts. The boys step back and wave and the train whistles by as a large brown bag gets thrown from the conductor's window. The boys scramble to open it up and it is full of oranges and apples and candy.

Roberto: See, it does come from California!

The boys run after the train off stage, shouting and waving until it disappears in the distance.