

Breaking Through Study Guide

Breaking Through by Francisco Jiménez

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Summary

"Breaking Through" is a non-fiction book comprised of a series of anecdotes. The book is about the author, Francisco Jimenez, and his experience as a Mexican immigrant in the United States. Each chapter is a different anecdote, and the entire book is told in the past tense as Francisco remembered his experiences from childhood and adolescence.

When Francisco and his family first came to the United States in the 1940s from Mexico, only Francisco's father was a legal immigrant since he had a work visa from a strawberry farmer named Ito. Francisco, his mother, and his older brother Roberto were illegal immigrants. Francisco's younger siblings, Trampita, Torito, Rorro, and Ruben, were all legal immigrants. Before they were deported, the Jimenez family traveled to different tent labor camps depending on where there was work. Mostly, they followed the crop seasons since Papa worked in the fields.

When Francisco was about 14 years old he and his family were deported back to Mexico, but only for a short while as they got their documentation in order. While they waited to be able to return to the U.S., all eight members of the Jimenez family - six children, Mama, and Papa - stayed in a hotel room within a few blocks of the border. After their applications were complete and everyone could return legally to the U.S., only Francisco and Roberto went so they could earn enough money to afford to bring the rest of the family. Their younger siblings and parents stayed with Papa's sister in Guadalajara, Mexico, until Roberto and Francisco could send enough money over time to bring everyone over.

As Francisco and Roberto lived on their own they became more interested in American culture. Francisco paid attention to what his peers liked, which was rock 'n' roll and dancing, and so worked hard to learn both. He and Roberto went to dances at the local Veterans Memorial building on Saturday nights. Sometimes, too, they would go to American movies together, something they had never done with their family.

The rest of Francisco's family returned from Mexico and their life resumed as usual. Francisco and Roberto were still allowed to go to dances on Saturday nights, but that they were only allowed one night out a week so if they wanted to do anything else, they couldn't go to the dance. They worked for a cleaning company owned by a man named Mike Nevell during the week and sometimes in the fields for Ito on Sundays, so Papa wanted them ready to work, since the family depended on their income.

Papa was often in a bad mood because he suffered from severe back pain, which meant his ability to work in the fields was not consistent. He hated not being able to provide for his family, and so his mood didn't change too often. Mama encouraged Francisco in whatever he wanted to do, which was usually something related to school.

During high school, Francisco worked hard at all his classes, but especially English and typing class because they were the two he had the hardest time keeping up with. For typing class in ninth grade, he fortunately came across an old typewriter at one of the



law offices he cleaned. He practiced and got much better, ultimately getting a good grade in the class. For English class, Francisco worked closely with the teacher to correct his mistakes. He also practiced reading more, and wrote some of the poems and vocabulary lists he needed to memorize on a card he kept in his pocket so he could study while working.

For extracurricular activities, Francisco was president of the Spanish club, a member of the Squires club, and participated in the Junior Scandals, a variety show put on by students. He enjoyed the time with his peers, especially after Roberto left the house when he got married. Roberto and Francisco were best friends, so when Roberto left Francisco was sad and needed a distraction.

At the beginning of his senior year, Francisco came down with mononucleosis, a viral illness that made him so exhausted he couldn't work or go to school. Trampita, Roberto, and Mama covered for Francisco while he recovered. Francisco took the advice of his mother and prayed for healing, and four weeks later felt almost back to normal.

Francisco also worked closely with his guidance counselors to make sure he had the right classes to set him up for the future. He wanted to be a teacher. His first guidance counselor, Mr. Kinkade, helped him take the right courses, and his second counselor, Mr. Penney, helped set him up with scholarships, a federal loan, and applying to Santa Clara University. Mr. Penney also suggested a field trip to a local college so Francisco could get the feel for what it'd be like. Francisco took the opportunity and looked forward to going to college, even though he knew he'd miss his family.

Francisco was accepted into Santa Clara University. He worked for part of the summer leading up to his leaving, until Trampita completely took over Francisco's cleaning job with Mr. Nevell's company. The entire family, minus Roberto and his wife and newborn, traveled from their home in Santa Maria to Santa Clara University. As Francisco drove, he was proud of himself for breaking through barriers of language, academic challenges, and cultural differences in order to make a better future for himself. He hated moving around when he was a child, but this was one move - from home to college - that he didn't mind making.

The author includes an Author's Note at the conclusion of the book in order to notify the reader that to write "Breaking Through," he relied heavily on stories from his living family members. Also, that any conversations where Francisco could not remember the exact wording, he filled in the dialogue.



Chapters 1 - 5

Summary

Chapter 1 is titled "Forced Out," and is an introduction to Francisco Jimenez, the author, and his family. The story is told in past tense as Francisco Jimenez, the author, remembered his experiences from his childhood and adolescence.

Francisco begins his story in the late 1940s when he, his parents, and his older brother Roberto left their home in Mexico so they could cross the border into the United States, hoping to leave a life of poverty behind. They crossed the barbed-wire fence border illegally as Francisco's father, named Papa in the story, warned his family to not be seen or caught by la migra, the immigration officers. The family worked together to dig a hole under the fence so they could wiggle under the fence to the other side.

After Francisco's family was safely in the U.S., they were initially taken to a tent labor camp on the outskirts of Guadalupe. From then on, they traveled from place to place throughout California, following the crop seasons. Francisco didn't like moving around because he liked being able to go to school, which he couldn't do on a consistent basis. Even when the family stayed in one place for an extended period of time, there were seasons when Francisco had to help his father work in the fields instead of going to school.

In 1957, the family settled in Bonetti Ranch where they had lived on and off in Army barracks for the previous few years. Robert had an after-school job cleaning at a local school, Papa worked in the fields still, and Francisco helped thin lettuce and pick carrots after school and on weekends. By this time, Francisco had four more siblings, brothers Trampita, Torito, and Ruben, and a sister Rorra.

Later that year, immigration officers came to Francisco's school on the day he was supposed to recite to the class the Declaration of Independence. He had worked hard to memorize the text and was silently practicing when the principal and a man in a green uniform came for Francisco. With Francisco in the back of the patrol car, the officer then retrieved Roberto from his school. The officer took Roberto and Francisco to their Bonetti Ranch home, where the rest of their family was standing outside in front of a larger Border Patrol van.

The Jimenez family was taken to the immigration headquarters in San Luis Obispo. Mama, Roberto, and Francisco were the only members of the family who were in the country illegally. The immigration officers gave them the option of just those three going back to Mexico and the rest staying, but Mama and Papa did not want to split up the family. The officers agreed to let the family stay a few more days and to deport from the Nogales, Arizona, immigration office.



Mama held great hope, at least in front of her children, that they would return to Mexico. Papa was less hopeful. The family packed a few of their belongings from their home at the Army barracks and took a bus to the immigration office. Every member of the family was sad to be leaving the U.S., and became even more so as they saw the countryside go by on the 20-hour bus ride to Nogales.

The family stayed at a cheap motel just a few blocks from the border. Mama and Papa slept on the mattress on the floor, and the children slept on the box spring. Mama bought food from street vendors each day, and she and Papa continued going to the immigration office to check on her, Roberto's and Francisco's petition for visas. The process included a medical examination in the U.S., which they all passed. Roberto helped Mama read the forms required to be filled out for each person getting the exam.

After what Francisco describes as several days, Mama, Roberto and Francisco were approved for immigrant visas. Papa and Mama decided that Roberto and Francisco should go back to Santa Maria, because Roberto's janitor job was the only sure income the family had. The rest of the family went to Guadalajara and stayed with Papa's sister Chana. Francisco accompanying Roberto was Mama's idea, but Papa readily agreed.

The family checked out of the motel in the evening so they wouldn't have to pay for another night. When they got to the immigration office, Mama bought two tickets to Santa Maria for Roberto and Francisco, and bought five tickets to Guadalajara for the rest of the family.

Roberto and Francisco arrived in Santa Maria with no problem. They returned to the Army barracks at Bonetti Ranch where they lived before. They did not like being away from their family, but they hoped it wouldn't be for a long time.

In Chapter 2, titled "Home Alone," Roberto and Francisco - nicknamed Panchito - lived on their own at Bonetti Ranch. Francisco thought about what he missed about his family not being there, like the sound of Papa's morning routine and Mama rolling her pipe to make tortillas. They kept the house clean and did the chores they felt were necessary to keep the house neat.

Francisco returned to El Camino Junior High School, and Roberto tried returning to his janitorial job at Santa Maria High School. When Roberto picked up Francisco from school, he told his younger brother that he was fired from his janitor job because he had missed too many weeks of work.

To earn money, Roberto and Francisco picked carrots and thinned lettuce in the fields. To eat, the two had scrambled eggs or Cream of Wheat for breakfast, baloney sandwiches for lunch, and for dinner switched off between canned ravioli with either canned peas or canned corn, and sometimes chicken noodle soup. For dessert, they had either a peanut butter and jelly sandwich or vanilla ice cream.

Roberto started working at a hamburger and ice cream shop near the high school on his lunch hour. The owner of the shop, Mary O'Neill, invited Francisco and Roberto to



dinner at a restaurant. They were nervous because they had never been to a restaurant, but they followed her lead so they would know they were behaving properly.

One day after school, Roberto reported that he got his job back at Main Street High School as a janitor. Francisco was able to accompany Roberto and help him, so they no longer had to work in the fields after school. At the end of every two weeks, Roberto sent the leftover money from his paycheck - after buying groceries and other necessities for him and Francisco - to his family in Chana. One evening, the boys returned home to discover that their house had been broken in to and their cash was stolen. From then on, they hid the cash inside a bust of Jesus Christ they had found at the public dump.

Chapter 3 is titled "Stepping Out" and is about Francisco and Roberto trying to step out of their comfort zone and do different things and meet new people. Francisco writes about how lonely he felt every time he and Roberto returned in the evenings from work. He missed his big family and all the noise, and he missed Mama's cooking and Papa's pride when he told stories of Mexico from when he was young. Francisco also felt lonely at school. He was noticed in math class because he was oftentimes the best in the class, but he wanted more.

To make friends, Francisco paid close attention to what his classmates did and talked about. He decided he like music and dancing, which is what the girls talked about, more than sports and cars, which is what the boys discussed. He learned about dances at the Veterans Memorial Building. Francisco didn't understand the titles of the rock 'n' roll songs until he started to understand the genre of music.

Francisco and Roberto began listening to Elvis Presley - Francisco's favorite - and Little Richard. At school, Francisco suggested to his recess group that to entertain the class, he could lip sync to an Elvis song. They laughed at him, but ultimately agreed. When it was his group's turn to perform, the class was entertained by and impressed with Francisco's lip sync performance.

Francisco and Roberto began going to the Saturday night dances at the Veterans Memorial. At the first dance, they only listened to the songs and watched other dance. At home, the boys learned the songs and practiced dancing so they would be prepared for the dances. Francisco writes about how he became friends with more people in his school, especially after he started going to the dances.

One of Francisco's new friends was Peggy Dossen. Peggy was Francisco's regular dance partner and made kind gestures toward Francisco and gave him her phone number. Francisco borrowed his neighbor's phone to call her, but it was a short conversation because Francisco whispered into the receiver and Peggy said she couldn't go to the dance because she had to babysit. The next time Francisco saw Peggy at school, she asked him to walk her home. He did, and told Roberto he'd meet him at work in a little while.

At Peggy's house, she invited Francisco up to her room even though he was obviously uncomfortable with that. Francisco told her it was getting late and he had to go,



especially after Peggy's dog Skippy started barking at him and pulling at his pant leg. From then on, Peggy avoided Francisco.

Roberto and Francisco continued going to the dances, but not as often. Sometimes they went to the movie theater and saw American movies. Before, when Francisco's entire family was together, they would go to see Mexican westerns at the theater because they were Papa's favorite. However, Francisco liked American movies because they helped to improve his English and gave him something to talk about with his classmates.

In Chapter 4, titled "Together Again," Francisco and Roberto were reunited with the rest of their family. They spruced up the house by redoing the kitchen floor, painting the kitchen, and putting plastic flowers in a planter Roberto built in shop class. They didn't know exactly what day the family was coming, so each day when they left for school and work the boys would leave the home perfectly clean.

Mama, Papa, and the rest of Francisco's siblings arrived on a Sunday evening. Mama and Papa were proud of Roberto and Francisco for keeping such a clean house and making it look so nice. The family members exchanged stories of their time in their respective places. Papa reported that it was difficult at times in Mexico because his sister's family didn't have much, but they appreciated the money Roberto and Francisco sent because it helped with groceries. Trampita reported that he was hit by a bus, though he was healed by the time the family got to California.

Papa's back was better by the time they got to California. He reported that he went to a woman who told Papa that he had been hexed and that's why his back was hurting. Papa visited her at her home, which had a dirt floor and no electricity. She performed a ritual on him and when he awoke, his face was in a pool of vomit, which apparently cured the hex. That night, Francisco thanked God for bringing his family back together and he slept with his new bust of Jesus Christ under his pillow.

Chapter 5 is titled "Back to the Fields" because Francisco was ordered by his father to return to picking strawberries, since picking yielded money while helping Roberto did not. While he worked in the fields, Francisco sometimes daydreamed about the dances and played rock 'n' roll tunes in his head. Other times he read a notecard he kept in his pocket of things he needed to know for school.

On the weekends, Roberto joined Francisco and their father in the fields. The boys listened to their father and other workers tell stories of Mexico while they were on their half-hour lunch break. Papa told the boys and the others about how in 1926 he joined the Cristero Revolt. He was 16 years old at the time and had wounded his knee and been thrown in jail for being part of the revolt.

Papa talked about becoming a strawberry sharecropper and not having to work for anyone else. Papa didn't want to leave Ito because it was he who helped Papa and his family get to America, but Papa also wanted to be independent. He continued working for Ito Monday through Saturday, but on Sundays he worked his own three-acre sharecropping field.



Francisco writes about how difficult the sharecropping work was, because they had to buy all the tools and do the bulk of the work. He, Papa, and Trampita worked after supper until dusk on the days he worked for Ito, and morning until night on Sundays. Francisco and Trampita tired easily, but they did not complain and kept working, for they did not want to disappoint their father. On Sundays, Robert and Mama joined the others in the fields, and Torito cared for Ruben and Rorra.

The Jimenez family started to see their hard work pay off when white flowers began to sprout. They picked the few strawberries that had grown gently so that nothing was ruined. However, there were several plants that had nothing sprouted. Francisco's father hired a chemical company to fumigate the fields, as the plants had become infected and would not grow unless treated.

The chemicals used to fumigate the fields didn't work, and the plants continued to die. Papa grew angry and was unhappy with everything and everyone, according to Francisco. His foul mood impacted Roberto and Francisco's ability to go to the dances at the Veterans Memorial, also known as the Vets. Papa felt that Francisco was disrespectful in asking for his answer before Papa was ready to give it, and so he only let Roberto go. Francisco was angry with himself and with his father, but he knew he wouldn't talk back again.

Analysis

The beginning of Francisco's story is paramount to understanding Francisco and his family's actions throughout the rest of "Breaking Through." The title of the first chapter sets the tone; by using the phrase 'forced out', the author lets the reader know that he and his family wanted to stay in America and did everything they could to do so. The phrase also incites the feeling of a power struggle between the forces-that-be and Francisco's family, which, even though the Jimenez family never had a dramatic encounter with the immigration officers outside of the one described, still existed; any illegal immigrant in any country was - and is - always at the mercy of the government if ever caught.

Francisco described his life leading up to and including deportation in greater detail than any other anecdote in his memoir, which suggests to the reader that the experience had a significant impact in shaping his character. In the Author's Note at the end of the book Francisco mentions that he filled in dialogue where he couldn't remember exact details. The first chapter has little dialogue and is mostly Francisco's description of events, which suggests a clear memory and a significant life-impact, likely the most impactful of all his experiences.

The title of the book and the first couple chapters can be seen as relating to Francisco's experience of being an illegal immigrant who is eventually deported, but is then accepted back into the United States within days after his father goes through the necessary steps. "Breaking Through" refers to the barriers one breaks through in order to achieve measurable success. The reader can see Papa's commitment to keeping his



family in America, no matter the obstacles he faced. Papa's family joined him in the commitment and put all their effort forward when necessary to make sure it was possible.

Chapter 1 is more about the Jimenez family than it is about just Francisco. The ensuing chapters (from Chapter 2 and moving forward) focus on Francisco. The author wrote the anecdotes in chronological order, and his stories following becoming a legal immigrant begin when he is in junior high. At that point, even though all members of the Jimenez family were legal immigrants, there was not enough money to keep them all in the states. Papa's decision to keep Roberto and Francisco in Santa Maria so they could work and send money back to the family was one of necessity; the Jimenez family are a tight-knit group, and it was likely a difficult decision. However, since they were used to working hard to meet their basic necessities, nobody complained.

Francisco and Roberto enjoyed a certain amount of freedom living on their own. The two maintained a standard of living that their parents would approve of, but they also worked to find their own identities and the interests that would set their place within their peer group. The freedom to figure out what they liked and who they wanted to be would have been much more difficult had their parents been present, since there would have been an entirely different set of expectations from Mama and Papa.

When Mama, Papa, and the rest of the Jimenez siblings returned, the family was happy to be together again. There is no mention of Francisco missing his time with just Roberto, but he probably did; the two were best friends and Francisco seemed most joyful when he and Roberto were doing something together, be it working or something of leisure. Also, once Papa returned, Francisco had to go back to working in the fields for Mr. Ito, which was Francisco's least favorite job.

Francisco's joy was also diminished because of Papa's sour mood. Though Francisco seemed to understand why Papa was miserable, it was hard on him to have a father who was fairly non-communicative and usually in a bad mood. The author doesn't go into much depth in regards to his feelings, though his actions indicate fear and exasperation at Papa's anger and pessimism. Francisco was a happy boy, and he didn't like it when the attitude around him was negative, hence his back-talk to Papa.

It's important for the reader to understand Papa. Even though the book is about Francisco and his immigration experience, Papa's actions and attitudes contributed to Francisco's experience. Papa experienced rejection time and time again in regards to his work: the crops were inconsistent, he invested in strawberry sharecropping and it was a disaster, and his back pain grew progressively worse, taking away his ability to work. Papa was downtrodden, and as such, set a tone of discouragement for his family.

Vocabulary

barren, immigration, migrant, dilapidated, jalopy, amebiasis, bracero, sharecroppers



Chapters 6 - 10

Summary

Chapter 6 is titled "Saint Christopher Medal." Francisco's family lost the three acres of strawberries due to infected fields; therefore, his father's depressed mood got worse with time. Francisco, however, was happy to not have to work in the fields anymore. Francisco cared very much about school and his academic performance. He worked hard to be in the first seat in math, which was reserved for the top of the class. He received a 99% on his exam on the United States Constitution. He had the hardest time in Science class, but he ended up receiving an A+ on his final report of the solar system for writing a creative journal chronicling fictional adventures with factual information about space and the solar system.

Francisco graduated from junior high. The night of Francisco's graduation, Papa gave him a Saint Christopher medal that he used to wear around his neck. The gesture meant a lot to Francisco because his father had always worn it. Roberto was the only family member to attend Francisco's graduation, and though Francisco seemed to appreciate it, he still pictured his parents in the audience as he sat on stage.

In Chapter 7, titled "Summer Skirmishes," Francisco writes about the summer between his eighth grade and ninth grade years. During the day he worked with Papa picking strawberries for Ito while Roberto worked full-time as a janitor for the Santa Maria school district. Francisco missed working with Roberto during the week, but got to work with him on the weekends when Roberto joined Francisco and Papa at the strawberry fields.

On the weekends, Roberto and Francisco competed for who could pick the most strawberries. Roberto usually won, and Papa sometimes filled Francisco's bucket with his strawberries to give him a chance against Roberto. Once, Francisco started a strawberry war with Roberto. They were able to hide it from Papa, but not Mama since she had to wash their clothes. They thought they hid it from Ito, but when Ito visited Francisco's house that night to pay the men for their work he commented that Francisco had a good arm.

On weekdays after work during the summer, Roberto and Francisco often went to the city dump. There, Francisco picked up an old copy of Dr. Doolittle, but he had trouble reading it no matter how long or hard he tried. Sometimes his younger brothers played games outside, but Francisco didn't join them because one of the neighborhood kids who played was a bully who wouldn't let Francisco's friend Manuelito play. Sometimes, Francisco and Trampita watched tadpoles and little fish in a reservoir near their home. They had an idea to catch the fish and sell them, and so they created a stand using materials they found at the dump. However, when they came back from catching fish, Carlos and his two friends had stolen the stand.



Before the end of the summer, Papa tried cutting Francisco's hair with hair clippers he had found at the dump. It didn't go well, but Francisco didn't say anything to his father so as to not disrespect him. Until his hair grew back and for the rest of the summer, Francisco wore his cap most of the time and skipped going to dances at the Vets.

In Chapter 8, titled "Becoming a Saint," Francisco started Freshman year of high school. He was more excited than he'd ever been before. He carefully chose his outfit for the first day and took a longer-than-usual bath to get rid of the strawberry stains on his hands. The morning of his first day he got up extra early to get ready. He wore his Saint Christopher medal outside of his shirt. The only thing that dampened his mood was the fact that his father was in a bad mood and didn't say anything encouraging about his first day of school.

At school, Francisco met with his guidance counselor before starting his classes. He told the counselor that he wanted to be a teacher. The counselor told him that he would have to go to college to be a teacher, and Francisco wondered to himself if that's why his father said that only rich people become teachers. The counselor told Francisco about scholarships and what classes he'd have to take, and when he left the counselor's office he was more encouraged than ever about school and about his future.

Francisco liked his classes but knew he would have to work hard to stay on top of his grades. He worried about his typing class because of being told he would have to practice outside of class, but he enjoyed his other classes. His math class and teacher were most inspiring; Francisco decided to write double-digit multiplication problems on a card that he could study while he worked after school and on the weekends.

In Chapter 9, titled "If the Shoe Fits," Francisco tells of how he thought P.E. would be the easiest class to pass, but it ended up being the hardest. P.E. had strict rules about what they could wear to class: students had to wear red shorts, a white t-shirt, and white tennis shoes. Francisco was doing okay until one morning when Francisco was running late. He was already flustered when he got to P.E., but then upon arriving at P.E. found his sneakers to be missing. He lost five points each day he had the wrong shoes. After a few days his younger siblings found him shoes at the dump and eventually he bought new tennis shoes, but he still ended up with a C at the mid-term.

In Chapter 10, titled "A Promotion," Papa's depression got worse and so did his back pain. He wasn't able to work and was embarrassed to not be paying the rent for their home on time. Roberto got a second job cleaning for a man named Mike Nevell, and because Francisco was always with Roberto, Mike let Francisco help.

Roberto and Francisco cleaned for Mike on weekends. They would drive to Mike's house, pick up the keys and the cleaning truck, and then go to work. One Saturday night when they returned the keys and truck, Mike invited the boys in to meet his wife.

During their visit, Mike told Roberto and Francisco that he was getting older and would like for Francisco to take over most of his work. He offered Francisco a deal that if



Francisco would clean the places he was already cleaning as well as a few more, Mike would pay him one dollar an hour. Francisco was proud to accept the offer.

Francisco and Roberto were proud to tell Papa their news of the cleaning job. Papa was in a good mood, but when Francisco and Roberto stayed out too late on a Saturday night, Papa yelled at them. Francisco talked back to Papa, so he was yelled at more than Roberto.

Francisco enjoyed his new cleaning job. One of the offices left cookies for him. He saw the sign a couple days in a row that read "HELP YOURSELF," but it wasn't until the office workers wrote "JANITOR, PLEASE HELP YOURSELF" that Francisco took any. When Francisco finished his cleaning after school, he studied until Roberto picked him up.

Analysis

Chapters 6-10 take place from junior high graduation and into high school. Francisco is happy to be growing up, especially as his role in the family changes a little bit when he no longer has to work in the fields. That lasted a short time, since he had to go back to working for Mr. Ito in the summer, but at least it didn't interfere with his academics. Missing school and not being able to focus on his schoolwork was stressful for Francisco, since that seemed to be his top priority from a young age. The reader can see how much he cares for school and his future by his excitement for the first day of high school, as well as the care he takes in getting himself ready.

Francisco's summer activities outside of work let the reader know what else Francisco cared about aside from his schoolwork, and that was time with his brother Roberto or his younger brother Trampita, and perusing the city dump. Francisco seemed to consider Roberto his best friend, so it's natural that he missed their quality time while they worked separate jobs. His time with Trampita was likely special to him, as well, even if it's not noted. Trampita almost died when he was a baby while Roberto and Francisco were watching him, and so Francisco held a special place in his heart for his little brother. Also, Francisco did carry with him a great sense of responsibility in helping to care for the family, so his feelings toward Trampita were likely protective as well as favorable.

Francisco's interest in perusing the city dump is important to note. The Jimenez family was poor in monetary resources; going to the store to buy something new was out of the question if it wasn't an absolute necessity. Instead of complaining about their situation, Francisco and his brothers were creative in finding items that were new to them. Their resourcefulness helped carry them through high school as they found a job for Francisco by asking for it, Francisco got a typewriter to practice his typing by asking for it, and he achieved high grades because he asked for help when he needed it.

Francisco's shoe dilemma is a good example of him working through obstacles that other American boys his age could also go through. Francisco chose the anecdotes he



wanted to include in "Breaking Through," and the theme throughout is breaking through obstacles to achieve success. Having one's possessions stolen would certainly fluster anyone, and so it's good for the reader to see that even though Francisco knew he was different than his peers, he also had experiences that could have belonged to anyone else. Events like having his shoes stolen normalized his teenage years.

Francisco's opportunity to clean for Mr. Nevell seemed to be a turning point for him and his family. Not only did it give the Jimenez family a steady source of income, but it was a job that Roberto and Francisco got on their own, simply by asking for it. Even though they had asked for their father, the fact that Mr. Nevell gave it to them and eventually expanded their roles was a mark of independence for both boys, but especially Francisco. He had to prove himself to Mr. Nevell to even get paid in the first place, and then he ended up with his own offices to clean. The reader can see Francisco's persistence, strong work ethic, and maturity as he learned handle an increasing amount of work.

The reader should note that the fact that it took Francisco a special, personalized note before he took any cookies, meaning that he never felt entitled to anything, and he acted as though an authority figure was always right next to him. Francisco did his work, expecting nothing but his salary in return.

Even though Papa's depression got worse during this period, and Mama had to tend to Papa even more, Francisco's parents were likely proud of Francisco. He was a hard-working, no-complaining young man who sought out new experiences both for income and for pleasure. He stuck with what he knew, stayed out of trouble, and was a team player. Mama and Papa's pride may not have been vocalized, but Papa's gift of a Saint Christopher medal and Mama's constant encouragement and kind words showed their pride.

Vocabulary

corridor, skirmish, taquito, reservoir, barren, upholstery, chamois



Chapters 11 - 15

Summary

Chapter 11 is titled "Typing Machine" and is an anecdote about Francisco and his typing class during his Freshman year of high school. His speed had improved but not his accuracy. He knew he needed to practice but wasn't sure how he was going to do that. One Wednesday evening he was cleaning a law office as part of his job under Mike Nevell when he spotted an old typewriter in the corner of one of the rooms. He started to practice on it until one of the office workers appeared. Francisco decided to ask the man if he would sell Francisco the typewriter. The man offered to give it to him, but Francisco thought his father wouldn't like Francisco being given something for free. The man told Francisco he could have the typewriter if he put in a new ribbon and paid five dollars. Francisco practiced on the typewriter at night, enough so that his grade greatly improved.

In Chapter 12, titled "Making Connections," Francisco writes about English class. Francisco felt that he worked the hardest in English as compared to the rest of his classes, but it remained his worst grade toward the end of his Freshman year. He worked hard to memorize the spelling and vocabulary lists, and the poems, that his teacher, Miss Audrey Bell, assigned each week. Francisco's worst skill in English class was his writing. He tried to improve each assignment based on the notes from the previous one, but he still felt stuck a lot of the time.

Francisco's best writing grade was for a story he wrote about his brother almost dying; they were living in a tent at a labor camp during the time they were in the United States illegally when Roberto and Francisco were left in charge of Trampita, who was only a few months old at the time. Mama and Papa went to work at an apple cannery over night. Some time during the night, Trampita rolled off their mattress and out of the tent, being exposed to the cold for an extended amount of time. Not only that, but Trampita's bulging belly button had ruptured from him crying so hard.

Miss Bell was impressed with Francisco's story. She made corrections on his paper and told him he could turn it in again the next day. When he worked on it at home, his mother became interested and had him read the story to her. At the end of the story, Mama was in tears.

The next day, Miss Bell suggested Francisco read "The Grapes of Wrath" by John Steinbeck. It was difficult for him to read because he had to look up a lot of the words used in the novel, but he could relate to the story because the family in the novel went through some of the same experiences Francisco and his family went through. He even skipped a school dance so he could continue reading the book. Francisco kept thinking about the book even after he finished it, and he received a good grade on his report card. However, Francisco writes that the lessons he learned from the book were more important than his success on the book report.



Chapter 13 is titled "Broken Heart" and is about Francisco feeling brokenhearted when his older brother stopped spending as much time with him in favor of spending it with his first girlfriend. Francisco didn't have a lot of close friends, especially since Papa let him and Roberto go out only once a week. They usually chose to go to the school dances on Friday or Saturday nights.

The school dances were the same as the dances at the Vets, where the boys and girls stood on opposite sides of the room. However, Francisco was not afraid to dance with the girls because dancing was one of his favorite things to do. Roberto wasn't afraid, either, and at one of the dances Francisco saw Roberto standing with a girl, then slow dancing with her. Francisco saw Roberto and the girl, Susan, together at school, too. Roberto told Francisco one morning on their way to school that he asked Susan to the movies the following Saturday night, which angered Francisco because that meant he wouldn't be going to the dance. Francisco was so upset that he didn't go to the dance.

Roberto and Susan ended up going steady for a little while. Francisco liked seeing his brother happy, but was still upset that they weren't going to dances together anymore. Eventually, Susan and Roberto broke up because Susan's parents didn't want their daughter dating a Mexican. Roberto was so discouraged that he didn't date for a long time after he and Susan broke up. As Roberto was telling Francisco the story of Susan's parents, Francisco realized that was probably the reason Peggy had stopped being his friend a few years back.

In chapter 14, "Behind the Wheel," Francisco writes of learning to drive. At the end of his sophomore year of high school, Francisco learned how to drive the Santa Maria Window Cleaners van from Roberto. It took him a lot of practice sessions to learn, but the practice with Roberto helped him pass his written test with a hundred percent. He barely passed his driving test, mainly because of having trouble parallel parking.

After Francisco had his driver's license, he most often drove his parents' DeSoto, but he was embarrassed of it. Trampita and Torito even hid in the back so their friends wouldn't see that they were riding in it. He would beg Roberto to let him drive the Buick that Roberto usually drove, but Roberto told Francisco 'no' most of the time. Once, Francisco got mad at Roberto for not letting him drive the Buick, but their father then yelled at Francisco for taking an angry tone with his older brother.

Francisco stopped riding to school with Roberto when Mike Nevell asked him to start cleaning the Western Union in the mornings before school. After the job, Francisco drove on side streets in the DeSoto so his classmates wouldn't see him. He even parked the car several blocks away from the school, behind the county fairgrounds, so nobody would see the car. Roberto saw him one day, and the next offered to help Francisco clean the Western Union office so they could ride together to school in the Buick.

In Chapter 15, titled "Turning a Page," Francisco writes about how he went to see his counselor, Mr. Kinkade, at the beginning of his junior year. Mr. Kinkade congratulated Francisco on working so hard because all of his grades from sophomore year were



good except for driver's education. Because of his good grades, Francisco made the California Scholarship Federation. While they discussed Francisco's future, Francisco asked Mr. Kinkade what was the difference between high school and college. Mr. Kinkade told him that question could be answered by visiting a local college.

Francisco went on a field trip to Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo. He was the first one on the bus that day and he sat near the front with two friends he met in the Squires Club. During the tour, Francisco didn't understand everything that was being said about college, such as majors, semesters, and units, but he liked the campus and the idea of being at college. Toward the end of the tour they were in a dorm building and a student left behind a history book. Francisco picked it up and to his surprise, he could read the text. Being able to read the history textbook gave Francisco hope and confidence for being able to go to college. He left the tour excited for a future at college but sad to have to leave home because of going to college.

Analysis

Francisco's anecdotes continue through his high school experiences, and they continue to show Francisco's perseverance and the opportunities he received to better himself and/or set himself up for success. The stories align with his purpose of the book, which is to show himself breaking through barriers in order to achieve success. A simple opportunity such as a new typewriter made a huge difference to Francisco, since it meant he could practice and subsequently raise his grade.

The same is true for the opportunity he received with Miss Bell to redo his writing. Not every student was afforded that opportunity, but his teacher saw that he was trying his best and that he wanted badly to succeed. She rewarded his zealous approach to his education with a second chance, which is what Francisco needed for that situation. However, he likely would not have been offered that opportunity for a second chance if his character were that of entitlement or laziness; it was Francisco's hard work that rewarded him with opportunities.

The first time Francisco experienced a broken heart was not with a girl, but with a change in his quality time with Roberto, which tells the reader how important family is to Francisco. Most adolescent boys experience their first heartbreak with a girl, so the fact that Francisco was so sad about missing time with his brother is significant. Francisco wasn't like his male peers; his interests were in music and dancing as opposed to sports and cars. Similarly, as other boys his age likely preferred to spend time with their peers, especially ones of the opposite sex, Francisco just wanted to be with his family.

Francisco's attitude toward the car situation in his family was the only time that Francisco seemed embarrassed of his family's place in life, though it seemed to have more to do with the type of car than his family's financial state. His embarrassment likely fueled his hard work, because the harder he worked the more money the family could save, and eventually get a new vehicle. Francisco didn't need additional motivation for



the family to get a new car, but it didn't hurt, either. However, it may be that more than a new car he wanted quality time with Roberto, which is what he got instead of a new car.

Chapter 15 is significant as it describes when Francisco first saw a world outside of his own that he actually wanted to enter. When he was younger and worked in the labor camps, going back and forth between attending school and working full-time, he may have seen other places than his little world, but none that could be incredibly appealing. This time, Francisco was able to see a place where his future could be propelled into something great. He could see his dreams become reality.

Francisco's struggle between being excited for college and sad to leave home was to be expected, especially since Francisco was so close with his family. It would've been difficult for Francisco to think about not seeing his brothers and sister every day, and to not have his mother's daily encouragement. It's unclear if Francisco felt any regret about the potential to leave home and, therefore, not be able to bring in money for the family, but the weight of that responsibility likely played a factor in his sadness.

Vocabulary

accuracy, wrath, tamale, anticipating, revising, barrack



Chapters 16 - 20

Summary

Chapter 16 is titled "Los Santitos," which means "The Saints." In this chapter, Francisco writes about his involvement with school and extracurricular activities. During his junior year, Francisco joined the Squires Club, for which he helped keep order in the lunch line and stop students from littering. He also joined the Spanish club. The leader of the club was Mr. Osterveen, one of the Spanish teachers. Even though Mr. Osterveen was from New York City, he had lived in Mexico and because of that, Francisco liked him. Francisco felt at home when Mr. Osterveen spoke Spanish.

Francisco was elected president of the Spanish Club. He also came up with the name "Los Santitos," which he thought was appropriate because it went well with Santa Maria, the name of his high school. The Spanish club wanted to do a Thanksgiving fiesta as their first activity, but there wasn't time. Instead of doing a Christmas fiesta, Francisco suggested collecting canned food to give to poor families during Christmas. The school's donations ended up going to the Salvation Army. The chapter concludes with Francisco's memory of how his mother told him what a wonderful Christmas it was going to be because the Salvation Army brought a box of food to Francisco's family.

Chapter 17 is about Francisco's interest in the 1960 presidential election, and as such is titled "Choosing Sides." He was inspired by his U.S. History teacher Miss Kellog. One of Francisco's assignments was to ask his parents who they liked for the election. Francisco's father was in a bad mood but Mama convinced him to tell Francisco what he thought of politics, which was that the rich people run things and the poor people think they have a vote, but they don't really. Mama said she liked Senator John F. Kennedy because he said he would like to help the poor people. Because of his mother's answer and explanation, Francisco chose John F. Kennedy and the Democratic Party.

The next class assignment was to watch the Presidential debates, which Francisco couldn't do because he worked. He couldn't participate in the class discussions about the debate, but he listened very closely. To complete the final assignment of a scrapbook with all the newspaper articles about the campaign published in the local newspaper, he saved the discarded newspaper from his workplace and saved it throughout the semester. At the end of the semester he put the articles together into the assigned scrapbook.

Some of the articles Francisco read mentioned that some people didn't want Kennedy voted into the Presidency because he was Catholic. Francisco mentioned that to his family, and Roberto's response was that some people didn't like Mexicans, either. Francisco thought Roberto might have been thinking of Susan when he said that. Mama's response was that some people are blinded by the devil, who plants evil thoughts in people's heads. Papa's response was that people are ignorant. Francisco



insisted to his family that he was not ashamed to be Mexican, and even though he had been told he could hide it if he wanted to, he never wanted to.

In Chapter 18, Francisco writes about his participation in a school event called Junior Scandals, also the title of the chapter. The event was a type of variety show where people could put on any kind of performance they wanted. The point was to be sarcastic and have some fun, but Francisco felt most comfortable singing a Spanish song he knew by heart, a song called "Cielito Lindo." Francisco was confused by his classmate Marvin who tried telling him that it was just for fun, even though the word 'scandal' meant something bad.

For the show, Francisco's friend George asked if he could play guitar while Francisco sang. They practiced together, and even though Francisco got a bit of stage fright at first, ultimately he sang the song to the liking of the entire audience. After the show and after the audience left, the performers cleared the stage of all props, played rock 'n' roll, and danced. Francisco heard "Cielito Lindo" in his mind for many days after the show.

Chapter 19 is titled "Running for Office," and it is an anecdote about when Francisco was challenged and then encouraged to run for student body office. At first he didn't want to, but when one of his friends told him it would look good on his college applications, he agreed. The friend who encouraged him was Paul Takagi, a boy he hadn't met until Paul introduced himself to Francisco the day after Junior Scandals. Paul was impressed with Francisco's performance, and the two became fast friends. Francisco told Paul he'd have his decision about running for the student body office when school resumed after Easter break.

Over Easter break, Francisco spent his time reading Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass", memorizing a poem for English, and keeping up on current events for his history class. Francisco was disheartened with the civil rights movement because of how hard the black people had to fight to have the same rights as the white people.

When school resumed, an old friend, Manuelito Martinez, asked Francisco if he was really running for student body president. Francisco was upset with Paul because at that point, Francisco hadn't made his decision about whether or not he was going to run. Manuelito told Francisco he should do it because everyone at Bonetti Ranch would be proud. He thought about his decision during P.E. class.

Francisco had lunch with Paul that day and tried to pretend he didn't have an answer about whether or not he was going to run for student body president. Paul played along about his decision to run for treasurer. The two signed each others' petitions required for running for office. Over the following couple days, Paul and Francisco created election posters together at Paul's church. They also studied together until Francisco had to go to work. Paul returned to school to hang up the posters, since Francisco would work until late that night. During the campaign, Francisco was often late getting home because he would finish his homework at the building where he cleaned before he would go home. Papa got mad at him every time, but Mama explained it to Papa every time and so Francisco didn't get into trouble.



As part of the election process, Francisco had to give a speech in front of his classmates. Most of the other candidates did something memorable, for example, one candidate rode into the auditorium on a tricycle. Francisco was very nervous, and so his entire speech was, "I am a man of few words. Please vote for me," plus the school motto, "Enter to Learn, Go Forth to Serve." He added "If you elect me I will go forth to serve all of you." Paul then played on the piano the first parts of "Cielito Lindo" and "When the Saints Go Marching In." Francisco won student body president and his friend Paul was voted in as treasurer.

Francisco was excited about being elected student body president, but unfortunately his father was hurt the same day. Papa's finger was cut off in a sawing accident when he and Torito were cutting wood in the shed. Torito felt guilty because he thought it was his fault. The entire family went to the hospital to support Papa, whose spirits were more downcast than ever. Francisco tried cheering his father up with news of being student body president, but Papa said he didn't really know what that meant. Francisco left the hospital and went to work, but he was emotionally exhausted.

In Chapter 20, Francisco writes about the changes that happened for his family toward the end of Francisco's time in high school. The chapter is titled "A New Life" because Roberto brings home a girlfriend, Darlene, whom he had been dating for more than a year before bringing her home.

Roberto was very nervous to have Darlene meet his parents. The interaction was tense, mostly because Papa didn't speak any English. When Roberto asked for his parents' blessing, Papa started to react but Mama tempered him and answered "yes" for the both of them.

Roberto moved out of the house to live with his new wife, but that meant that Francisco's family lost Roberto's income. Roberto got another job to help, but couldn't do that for more than one month since he was taking classes at a local community college. Roberto also had to use his money for Darlene's medical bills; she was pregnant. Francisco increased his hours with Santa Maria Window Cleaners, and Torito and Trampita began picking strawberries for Mr. Ito. With time, Francisco became more and more exhausted. One particular night, Francisco went into the bathroom where he was working. He dropped to his knees, buried his face in his hands, and cried.

Analysis

Francisco's involvement in extracurricular activities couldn't have been all-together easy. Not only would the clubs have cut into his homework and/or work time, but it would just be more for him to balance with all of his other responsibilities. Mama and Papa didn't seem to have a problem with Francisco's extracurricular involvement, but probably because it didn't interfere with his job that brought the family money. The extracurricular activities didn't seem to interfere with his grades, either, which was probably another reason he involved himself.



Francisco also likely involved himself in extracurricular activities because he liked to fit in with his peers, and being in clubs with people who liked the same things he liked would certainly gain him some friends. The reader should note that even though belonging was important to Francisco, he never stepped outside of what he thought was right in order to do so, unless he did and just didn't write such experiences in "Breaking Through."

Francisco's interest in after-school clubs was similar to his interest in politics in that his interests were broadening, which would be important for succeeding in college. The same goes for his involvement in the Junior Scandals. The experiences Francisco gained during these high school years was paramount to his success; if they weren't, he wouldn't have written about them. As he learned about politics, he gained knowledge of America and what it might take for him to succeed in the United States. As he involved himself with after-school clubs and school-wide shows, he socialized himself more and more with his peers, American-izing himself so that he understood more nuances of the culture.

Understanding more about the American culture was important to Francisco, but it was not more important than being unashamed of his Mexican heritage. Though he was forced by Papa to lie about where he was born, Francisco was not afraid to say that his parents and ancestors were Mexican. Francisco wanted to know as much as he could about the country in which he was living, but not at the expense of his own Mexican identity.

The two identities - Mexican-born, American-raised - collided when he was to give a speech about being student body president. It may be that the two languages got stuck since he was so nervous. A similar event - where Roberto got so nervous he couldn't speak well - happened again at a later date, and that time he kept having dreams where he delivered the speech perfectly but in Spanish. Sometimes, anxiety may put a multi-lingual brain back to its home language, which can fluster a person who is trying to speak in a language that is not his or her first.

Francisco's experience as it relates to Roberto moving out was to be expected. His first experience with missing Roberto happened long ago when Francisco had to work in the fields alone with his father while Roberto worked a different job, and then it happened again when Roberto dated Susan. The two considered each other their best friends, and so when one was missing the other felt like something was missing. Having one's older sibling leave home for either school or marriage is a typical American experience, but it was one that hit Francisco hard.

Francisco's heartbreak at his brother moving out may have had something to do with his exhaustion. Sadness can be a tiring emotion. Also, since Roberto could no longer earn money for the family, Francisco felt even more pressure to bring home a decent income. Not only was his body exhausted from physically working, but he was emotionally exhausted from the weight of the responsibility.

Vocabulary

squires, eminent, wealthy, scrapbook, scandals, shadowboxed, gangly, segregation



Chapters 21 - 25, Author's Note

Summary

Chapter 21 is titled "A Test of Faith" and is about Francisco's bout with mononucleosis at the beginning of his senior year of high school. On the first day of school, Francisco woke up and was in so much pain that he could barely move from his bed. He called his mother into his room. She thought that it might be fatigue and so she told Francisco to stay in bed; she and Trampita took care of cleaning the Western Union office.

The following day Francisco went to the doctor, who told Francisco that he had mononucleosis, or mono as it is often known. The remedy was to get plenty of rest, eat well, and drink a lot of water. Francisco stayed in bed for one week but then returned to school and work - with Trampita's help - because he could not stand to miss any more time than he already had. At work there were no consequences because Mama, Roberto, and Trampita had covered for him. At school, the assistant principal was annoyed with Francisco for missing the welcome he was supposed to give the Freshman. However, the assistant principal, Mr. Muse, lightened up when Francisco told him he couldn't call to let the school know because his family didn't have a phone.

Each day Francisco worked and went to school but grew increasingly tired as the days wore on. He told Mama there was no use, that he would probably never get better because maybe there was a curse on him like Papa always said was on himself. Mama told Francisco to not talk like that but to have faith. Francisco began praying every day, and about four weeks later he felt much better. He was a little sad because he couldn't study with Paul Takagi anymore, since Paul had a job at his church, but he was happy to be almost back to normal. He went back to his duties as student body president, even though he was frustrated that most students did not seem to want to participate in student government.

Chapter 22 is titled "A Fumble," as it has to do with something Francisco considers a big blunder of his high school years. He was invited to have luncheon with the local Rotary Club, an event for which he had to wear a coat and tie. Mama took him shopping and they found one in their price range that fit well.

The afternoon of the luncheon Francisco arrived to Mr. Muse's office on time. They walked across the street to the Santa Maria Inn where the luncheon was being held. Francisco observed attendees laughing with each other and at the jokes of a man who seemed to have authority among the group. After dessert, the president of the Rotary Club asked the people whom he announced to stand, and that was to include Francisco. When Francisco heard his name, he quickly stood up and sat back down, nervous to be pointed out in front of a crowd. However, the man asked Francisco to go up to the microphone and say something to the luncheon attendees. Francisco was so nervous that he spoke Spanish and English. He was embarrassed and considered his luncheon attendance a huge mistake. For a long time after the luncheon, Francisco



dreamed about the event, always wanting to wake up so the dream could be over, with the exception of one time he dreamed he gave the speech flawlessly in Spanish.

Chapter 23 is called "A Breakthrough" and it is about how Francisco came to receive his college scholarships, on which he heavily relied since his family wouldn't be able to pay any money toward his tuition. During the second semester of his senior year in high school, Francisco was sad listening to his classmates talk about where they were going to college in the fall, since he knew he wouldn't be able to go. His counselor, now Mr. Penney, told Francisco that he would be eligible for scholarships and so he should apply; Mr. Penney had compiled a list of scholarships and put together a packet of the applications.

Francisco couldn't automatically say 'yes' to Mr. Penney, even though he wanted to; he had to talk to his parents, since going to college would mean not working and bringing in an income to help support his family. When he asked his parents, Papa said the family had to think about it before deciding. Francisco got upset and asked what there was to think about, since this was his only chance to go to college. Papa got so upset at Francisco's back-talk that he slapped Francisco across the face. Mama explained to Francisco that it's hard on Papa to have to think about another son leaving.

Two days later, when Francisco returned home from work, Mama told him that Papa agreed to let Francisco apply for the scholarships so that he might be able to go to college. When Francisco thanked her for convincing Papa, Mama told him he should thank God and Mr. Osterveen, the Spanish teacher, who had visited Francisco's parents to explain what a great kid Francisco was and why he deserved to go to college. Francisco thanked Mama and then quietly thanked Papa, since Papa was barely awake or well at that time.

Francisco handed in the scholarship applications on Monday. Mr. Penney suggested he apply to the University of Santa Clara. The deadline to apply had passed but Mr. Penney asked for a favor from one of his friends in admissions. Mr. Penney told Francisco he would like Santa Clara because it's a small school.

Part of applying to Santa Clara was taking the SAT. Francisco was nervous leading up to the exam, during the exam, and still after the exam. His score was just below 900, which Mr. Penney said was better than he had expected.

Chapter 24 is "Graduation Day," and it is about the day Francisco graduated from high school. He had been accepted into Santa Clara but was nervous about the tuition. Mr. Penney helped him apply for federal financial aid in case his scholarships didn't cover the entire tuition. Francisco nervously awaited his scholarship letter. When the letter came in the mail, Mama held it out for him knowing he had been waiting for it. Francisco's scholarships totaled

\$1,000, which was the amount he needed after federal aid in order to pay his first year's tuition.



Papa was still upset that Francisco would be going away to college, but the rest of Francisco's family was happy for him. On his graduation day, Francisco worked leading up to the ceremony but Roberto, Trampita, and Torito helped him so that the work would get done faster and he could get to his graduation on time. He begged his parents to attend the graduation; they hadn't gone to Roberto's and even though Roberto understood why, Francisco knew it hurt Roberto deeply. Papa was in a bad mood, but gave in and went, wearing Francisco's nice shirt and tie. Seeing his parents in the audience meant a lot to Francisco.

The final chapter, titled "Still Moving" is about Francisco's move away from home when he goes to college. The summer after his graduation, Francisco continued working all of his same jobs, with his younger brothers helping. Trampita took over Francisco's cleaning assignments, since Mr. Nevell trusted him just the same. Roberto and Darlene had a baby girl and named her Jackie; Mama and Papa doted on her and talked about her with pride. Francisco and his brothers joked about who was her favorite uncle.

Francisco counted down the days until he got to leave for college by marking them on a calendar. He looked forward to hot showers on campus, especially after taking a cold bath in the aluminum tub in his family's shed. When the day finally arrived, he said goodbye to Roberto, Darlene, and Jackie, crying as he did so. As Mama, Papa, and Francisco's younger siblings prepared for the 250-mile trip, Mama brought out new clothes for Francisco. She had saved a little money each week from their grocery budget and bought Francisco clothes during J.C. Penney's back-to-school sale. He appreciated her generosity.

Trampita came home just before Francisco and the others left. Francisco thanked Trampita for taking over his job, but Trampita said the pleasure was all his since he got to keep the car. Papa was upset the morning they took Francisco to college. He was in a very bad mood, but went with everyone else to Santa Clara, anyway. Torito, Ruben, and Rorra slept in the back seat with Mama, and Papa and Trampita were in the front seat with Francisco. As Francisco left Santa Maria, he felt a sense of accomplishment for getting as far as he did. He also felt like this time, moving wasn't so bad. Before, he would have to move and would miss school and do work he didn't want to do. Now, he was headed to college.

The Author's Note section at the end of "Breaking Through" lets the reader know that in order to gather information for the book, Francisco Jimenez relied heavily on stories from his memory and from his living family members. He meant for "Breaking Through" to be a collection of stories of his adolescence in order to voice his experience which is like so many other children and young adults. In this section, Francisco tells the reader that if he could not remember the exact words of a conversation, he filled in words that fit with what was being discussed.



Analysis

Francisco's bout with mono was a clear indication that he was working harder than his body could handle. He did because he felt a great weight of responsibility, especially after Roberto left. By then, Francisco was bringing in more income than any other family member. His father's response should not be a surprise, either. Though Papa cared for his children and wanted good for them, he was also hardened and embittered by the life he felt forced to live. When he and Mama chose to move their family to the U.S. he wanted a better life for them. Having to rely on his sons for a meager income that barely meets their needs was likely far from Papa's dream.

Francisco's unwillingness to heal completely from his mono before getting back to work and school is another testament to his work ethic, and also to how seriously he took his commitment to helping his family. Though he could have gotten sicker by going to work and school when he was so exhausted, Francisco pushed through his weakness and did what he could to keep helping the family.

Mama's attitude when Francisco was sick should also have been expected, since her usual response related to faith. Her suggestion to Francisco to pray about his illness so that he would get better was par for the course of Mama's faith that God would heal him. Francisco's choice to take her suggestion showed how much he trusted his mother, but also how desperate he was. Francisco believed and had faith that Jesus watched over people's lives, but there was not another circumstance where he prayed for something specific.

The last three chapters about Francisco breaking through his final barriers at high school and making it to college were the culmination of his junior high and high school experiences. Francisco worked hard from the time he could help his father to contribute to his family, help his parents and his siblings, and get his best grades. His hard work set him up for a successful future. Though the reader does not know from "Breaking Through" how Francisco's life went in and beyond his college years, simply getting to college via scholarships and a federal loan were enough of a success for Francisco at that time. His hard work had paid off.

Mama and Papa were proud of Francisco, though it was easier for Mama to show her pride than it was for Papa. Mama could easily show her pride because she was a woman who focused on the good things in life. For Papa, he was full of resentment that his sons could work harder than him, as well as shame for not being able to provide for his family. Thus, Papa's resistance to attending Francisco's graduation was more about him than it was about Francisco. Papa's eventual acquiescence to attending graduation showed that he did truly care for his second-oldest son, and that when made comfortable, he was more likely to participate.

The Author's Note at the end of the memoir is important to the reader, as it clarifies questions the reader may have had while reading Francisco's anecdotes. For example, the reader may have wondered how Francisco remembered so much dialogue, since the author was quite a bit older when he wrote the book as he was in his stories. The



Author's Note is also likely a disclaimer, so that the author wouldn't feel as though he was lying to his audience.

Vocabulary

mononucleosis, receding, delegate, haggard, procession

Important People

Francisco Jimenez

Francisco Jimenez is the author of "Breaking Through." In the anecdotes Francisco recalls throughout the book, he is the main subject. Toward the beginning of the novel, Francisco's age is between 4 and 14 years old, when he and most of his family were in the United States illegally. Most of the memoirs, however, are written from Francisco's perspective as a teenager, after he and the rest of his family became legal immigrants.

Francisco's character is evident through his stories. He was hard-working throughout his adolescence, working before and after school, as well as keeping up his grades and participating in extracurricular activities. In his adolescent years, Francisco was intentional about respecting his parents and never letting down his family, hence the hard work to bring in extra income. He rarely asked for anything outside of the basic necessities, and only did so when it was absolutely required of him by someone else, usually a school function.

Francisco doesn't speak of his exhaustion until the anecdotes toward the end of the book, but the reader can see it building. While going to school full-time, Francisco worked in the strawberry fields with his father after work and on weekends as a young adolescent. Eventually he got his own job with a cleaning company, but that was just during the week; he still worked in the fields on Saturdays. Francisco's seemingly endless energy likely came from two sources: the fact that he was young and able to do the work, and out of loyalty and obligation to his family.

The reader might note that Francisco doesn't address a personal relationship with his father, only with his mother. It is clear that in his household, his father was meant to be obeyed above all else. Though Francisco was frustrated by this often, he respected his father enough that when Papa gifted a Saint Christopher medal to Francisco, it meant a great deal to Francisco.

Francisco's pride in being Mexican is also shown throughout his anecdotes. He defends his nationality if he feels it's threatened, and refuses to acknowledge that he is American. He does, however, obey his father's rule of saying that he was born in the United States.

Francisco's purpose for writing "Breaking Through," as he writes in the Author's Note, is to help children and young adults who might experience similar situations as he did, and who are waiting to break through barriers of some kind in order to reach their full potential. His overall message is one of hope and perseverance, which are two elements found in most of his stories throughout the memoir.



Roberto Jimenez

Roberto Jimenez was Francisco's older brother and best friend. The two did everything they could together, to include riding to school, working after school, working in the fields on Saturdays, and going to dances both at the Veterans Memorial and school.

Roberto, like Francisco, demonstrated a high sense of loyalty to his family. He worked just as much as Francisco, and even after he got married for awhile to continue contributing to the family income. Even though he was stretched thin, Roberto jumped in again to help when Francisco got sick with mono. His priorities lie with his family, and there is not one story Francisco tells that shows any less from Roberto.

Francisco writes about Roberto dating two different girls, Susan and Darlene. With Susan, Roberto attached to her immediately and began doing activities with her instead of with Francisco. Though Roberto's actions made Francisco sad, they didn't seem to bother Roberto. It seems that in Roberto's mind, if his affections went toward a girl, spending time with her was how he showed it. With Darlene, Francisco doesn't mention how Roberto spent his time, only that he told Francisco of his feelings right away as opposed to waiting about a year to tell his parents. Roberto's actions suggest that he wanted to share his happiness with his brother/best friend, and also that he wanted to be sure of her before he brought her home to meet his parents.

Roberto and Francisco have a couple conversations about being Mexican and whether or not they should hide that fact. Roberto never acts ashamed to be Mexican, but he doesn't act like it's his only identity, either. Whereas Francisco made it a point to declare his nationality, Roberto seemed more content with just going about his business, Mexican heritage notwithstanding.

Mama

Mama is Francisco and Roberto's mother. Other than Roberto, she plays the largest part in Francisco's life. In all of Francisco's stories, Mama encouraged Francisco and the rest of her children; she seemed to believe that even though they were strapped for money and resources, their hard work and imagination could do wonders.

Mama was a faithful woman. She prayed aloud from time to time, and she encouraged Francisco to pray when he wanted something or when life got particularly difficult. She believed in God's power to heal and bring about change, and she was never shy about her beliefs.

Mama was also incredibly resourceful. Francisco's family didn't have a phone, found clothes and shoes - and probably more - at the dump, and still found a way to make fresh food for her family every day, and buy Francisco new clothes for college by saving a little out of the grocery fund each week. Along with her resourcefulness came a strong work ethic; when Trampita was a baby, she worked overnights with Papa at an apple cannery.



Francisco and Roberto likely learned how to work hard from Mama, since she worked more than Papa given his poor physical health. Mama never disrespected her husband, nor did she appear spiteful that Papa was often in a bad mood and/or could not work.

Papa

Papa was the authoritative figure in Francisco's life. He was direct, demanded respect from his children, and was rarely in a good mood. Papa held the emotional weight of caring for his family, but was unable to physically do so because of an ailing back.

Papa spent most of Francisco's adolescence in a depressed state. When he wasn't working, he was usually in his bedroom. If he was out of his bedroom, he seemed to be either smoking or complaining about something. Because of his inability to work, he expected his sons to pick up the slack so the family would have some income. He taught his children to never turn down work. He had no problem with moving his family if it was necessary to make ends meet.

When Papa could work, he was not afraid of it being difficult or strenuous. He worked as much as he could for Mr. Ito in the strawberry fields. Also, when the family was deported in 1957, Papa worked quickly and tirelessly to get all documentation required so they could return to the U.S.

Papa's role in Francisco's life was mainly to give permission as to whether or not he could do something, for example go to a dance or apply for college. Mama often was a voice of reason that helped curb some of Papa's anger, but she was often the only one who could calm him down. Papa was a proud man, and it seemed to be his pride which ruled his life, as Francisco writes it.

Mr. Penney

Mr. Penney was Francisco's senior guidance counselor in high school. Though he is only present in two chapters, he played a major role in helping Francisco get into college. Not only did he compile scholarship applications that Francisco was eligible for, but he called in a favor at the University of Santa Clara for the college application deadline to be extended specifically for Francisco.

Mr. Penney's confidence in Francisco, though sometimes shown under a gruff exterior, was evident through his actions. He likely had many other students on his caseload, but he took the time to help Francisco get into a position where a future different than his parents' was possible.



Trampita

Francisco and Roberto have four younger siblings. They are, in order of age from oldest to youngest: Trampita, Torito, Ruben and Rorra. The three youngest are mentioned here and there, but only Trampita is mentioned throughout the book.

When Trampita was a baby, he rolled out of the tent where Francisco's family lived and almost froze to death. Francisco and Roberto were in charge of him, as their parents were working an overnight shift at the time, and the event stuck with Francisco through high school; he wrote about it for his English class.

Trampita was just as much of a hard worker as his brothers and parents. As soon as he could, he began helping Francisco clean before and after school. He did such a good job that when it came time for Francisco to go away to college, he took over completely because Mr. Nevell, the owner of the cleaning company, trusted him.

As the oldest brother at home after both of his older brothers have moved out of the home, Trampita likely picked up a lot of the income-bearing responsibility after Francisco went to college. Though Francisco doesn't write about it, as the memoir ends on Francisco's drive to the University of Santa Clara, the pattern of Roberto and Francisco suggests the same path for Trampita.

Mr. Kinkade

Mr. Kinkade was Francisco's first guidance counselor in high school. He was honest and direct with Francisco, and willing to answer any questions Francisco had about high school or his classes. He listened earnestly to what Francisco wanted to do with his time, and so changed his wood shop class to typing class, knowing that would help him more toward becoming a teacher.

As a high school counselor, Mr. Kinkade was doing his job. However, listening intently to Francisco's dreams for his future was still a kind action. He let Francisco know that someone was listening, and that someone would be there to help him achieve his goal.

Mr. Mike Nevell

Mr. Mike Nevell owned the cleaning company that Roberto, Francisco and eventually Trampita worked for before and after school. His role in Francisco's story is significant because at first, he wasn't going to allow Francisco to help Roberto clean. However, Francisco proved himself well enough that he not only got to help Roberto, but he got a couple of his own assignments.

The boys did not interact often with Mr. Nevell, but his trust in Francisco and his brothers was evident when he let them take his keys and his truck in order to do the jobs. Mr. Nevell provided steady work for each of the boys for as long as they could



work, and the income was the most steady income Francisco's family had after Papa stopped working regular hours in the fields.

Mr. Ito

Mr. Ito was the man who hired Papa to work in his strawberry fields. He was important to Francisco's story because without him and his sponsorship, the Jimenez family would have had a much harder time coming to America in the first place, as well as returning after they were deported.

The reader does not learn anything about Mr. Ito except that he gave Papa work when possible after Papa could no longer work every day. The reader might infer that Mr. Ito was a compassionate man who made good on his word, especially for hard-working people.

Miss Audrey Bell

Miss Audrey Bell was one of Francisco's English teachers in high school. Miss Bell was paramount in boosting Francisco's confidence in his writing, which was his weakest skill. Francisco strived to excel in everything he did. Francisco's biggest academic difficulty was with English class, even though he felt he worked the hardest at it. Miss Bell knew Francisco wanted to be better, so she gave him suggestions and encouragement along the way. With her help, Francisco received a high grade in English.

Miss Bell's character is not described by Francisco but can be observed by the reader through her actions. She helped Francisco become a better and more confident writer, as she gave him notes and corrections and allowed him to bring her a revised version of one of his papers. Francisco does not mention that she did this for anyone else, so the reader can infer that she was the kind of teacher who taught to the student rather than taking a cookie-cutter approach.



Objects/Places

School

For most of his school time, Francisco and his siblings went to the Santa Maria school district. Francisco loved school because that seemed to be where he felt the most free. Francisco loved to learn and to socialize with his peers, and so school was the perfect place to do that.

Bonetti Ranch

Bonetti Ranch is where the Jimenez family lives most of the time of "Breaking Through." It's an old Army barrack compound that was made into living quarters. Not a lot about the area is described, and only one or two neighbors are mentioned. However, it is clear that other Mexican families live on Bonetti Ranch, which is probably one of the reasons why the Jimenez family chose to live there.

Labor camps

The labor camps were one of Francisco's least favorite places. The Jimenez family spent a good deal of time between 1947 and 1957 going between labor camps; it all depended on where they could find work. It's important that the reader note that the labor camps described by Francisco weren't the organized labor camps similar to internment camps. Rather, they were compounds where typically migrant workers stayed for as long as there was work.

Mexico

Mexico is where Francisco's family is originally from. However, since the Jimenez family spends most of its time in America, the only part of Mexico that is described is just over the border of Nogales, Arizona. The family waits just a couple blocks from the border for approval from the government for all Jimenez family members to be legal immigrants, so that when all are approved they can easily migrate back to the U.S. Mama, Papa, and the four youngest siblings also stay in Mexico even after everyone is legal so that Francisco and Roberto can earn money to afford for the entire family to be in the U.S.

Offices where Francisco cleaned

Francisco spent almost as much time cleaning offices as he did at school, since he did it before school as well as after. Francisco never complained about working at the offices, and even was afforded a couple opportunities as a result of his reliability. Francisco cleaned a law office, a Western Union office, and a few other unnamed offices.



Dances

Roberto and Francisco enjoyed dances at the Vets Memorial building as well as at the high school on the weekends. There, Roberto met his first girlfriend named Susan. Francisco enjoyed the dances because he loved music and he loved to dance. Aside from school, Francisco seemed to feel the most free at the dances.

Saint Christopher medal

Francisco received a Saint Christopher medal from his father as a gift for graduating from Junior High. The object meant a lot to him for more than one reason. First, Papa was not hugely communicative so a gift from him was likely his way of communicating his love for Francisco. Second, spirituality was important to the Jimenez family, so the gift was also encouraging in that way.

Typewriter

Francisco had started to clean the office of a local law office. At the time, his grade in his typing class wasn't very good because even though he could type quickly, he couldn't type accurately. There was an old typewriter in the corner of the law office where he cleaned, and a man from the office gave it to Francisco for the cost of a replacement ribbon and five dollars. He was proud to bring it home and practice his typing skills, which ultimately became good enough for a good grade in the class. High grades were important to Francisco, so the typewriter was essential in helping Francisco remain satisfied with his academic performance.

Tennis shoes

Francisco's tennis shoes that were required for gym class were stolen, and he lost points every time he didn't wear them. His family couldn't afford a new pair at first, so Trampita and some of the other siblings found new tennis shoes for Francisco at the city dump. That was not the first time the Jimenez family found clothing items at the city dump. The tennis shoes were too big for Francisco so he had to stuff them until he got new ones, which he did end up obtaining before the semester was over.

Clothes from JC Penney

When Francisco was leaving for college, Mama presented him with a small batch of new clothing from JC Penney. The Jimenez family almost never bought new clothing, so the fact that his mother saved money from the grocery budget each week just so he would have new clothing for school was significant. To Francisco, it meant that even with six children his Mama paid attention to his needs.

Themes

Belonging

Belonging is one of the central themes in "Breaking Through," as Francisco wanted very much to belong with his peers all throughout high school. Though he never went to extreme, harmful lengths to belong, he did modify his behavior and tailor to what his classmates were interested in, in order that he would feel a sense of belonging among his peers.

As a young boy, Francisco intentionally listened to his classmates when they talked among themselves; he wanted to know what they were into so he could figure out where he might be able to fit in. The reader should note that Francisco listened in on the boys' and girls' conversations, and he was much more into the girls' topics than the boys'. Francisco's decision to not discriminate between male and female interests is likely due to his being from another culture. In America, gender identities and interests at that time were especially distinct. Francisco, being from another country and culture, likely didn't think about that when he decided to become interested in rock 'n' roll and dancing, as opposed to sports and cars.

Francisco worked hard to know rock 'n' roll artists and songs, as well as dance moves that he could use at the Vets Memorial and school dances. He wanted to make friends and have people he could talk to. His native language was Spanish and he came from a different country than most of his peers. Even though everyone thought Francisco was an American citizen, he knew better. It was important for him to belong not only to feel a purpose for his time at school, but also to have something fun to do, an energy release amidst all the work he did for his family.

Another reason it was important for Francisco - and Roberto - to fit in is because they didn't want anyone knowing there weren't born in California. Though other people knew the Jimenez family was Mexican, nobody knew they were illegal. Belonging via pop culture and similar interests was a way for Francisco and Roberto to mask that fact. Even when they became legal citizens of the U.S., Mama and Papa didn't want anyone to know they moved there from Mexico.

Family

Family is one of the most prominent themes in "Breaking Through." The Jimenez family goes through difficult times, and in every anecdote they go through the hard times together, supporting, encouraging, and helping one another.

Mama and Papa were particular about their family business staying family business. They taught their children that any family issues were to stay within the family. Their intention seemed to be out of loyalty to one another rather than embarrassment. Mama



and Papa raised their family to be united, and it seemed that they thought if their private life were made public, even to close friends, that unity would be threatened.

The reader can see each member of the family's sense of loyalty to the family in his or her actions. Mama was patient and encouraged her children when they felt down, and she was the only one who could calm down Papa when he was angry. Francisco didn't write about her getting angry with Papa, which is a testament to where her loyalties lie since Papa was often in a sour mood. Roberto, Francisco, and their siblings each worked hard to contribute to the family income. Even when Roberto leaves his family of origin to marry, he still helps bring his parents and siblings money for their expenses.

The importance of family is fairly common in the Mexican culture, so it is not culturally unusual that Roberto, Francisco, and Trampita's income from their cleaning jobs went to help out the family instead of in their own bank accounts. The Jimenez family depended on each other and not really anyone else for their physical and emotional needs.

Spirituality

Spirituality played a large part in Francisco's life, mainly because it was paramount in his mother's life. The theme is woven throughout Francisco's anecdotes.

As a teenager, Francisco trusted his mother and her instincts. Her advice often included a spiritual element, such as encouraging Francisco to pray about a situation. Mama felt that if Francisco prayed and had faith about what was going wrong, the situation would get better. Francisco found his mother to be correct every time.

Another element of spirituality present in "Breaking Through" is the Saint Christopher medal Papa gifts to Francisco. Saint Christopher is sometimes seen as a saint for protection, though Francisco and his family do not seem to use prayers to Saint Christopher for protection. Rather, any prayers to a saint or to God are used as a reminder to have faith through difficult times. The medal from his father means a great deal to Francisco.

Francisco also keeps a small Jesus bust statue under his pillow, further suggesting his belief that faith in God was important to him as a teenager. Francisco's spirituality, especially as encouraged by his mother and the example she set, is something Francisco considers to be a contributing factor to his success and generally positive outlook on life.

Work ethic

Having a strong work ethic is extremely important to Francisco's family, and so is a theme running throughout Francisco's anecdotes in "Breaking Through."

The Jimenez' strong work ethic can be seen from the beginning when Francisco writes about his father working from early in the morning until dinner, and then again after



dinner until dusk. Papa's intention was always to provide for his family, and he believed that working hard was the only way to adequately do so. Sometimes Francisco's parents would also work overnight shifts, especially when their family continued to grow.

The reader can see Mama's strong work ethic, too, though hers was exhibited mostly inside the home. She worked overnight shifts at an apple cannery with Papa for some time, but for the most part she cared tirelessly for the family, doing most of the cooking and cleaning, as well as emotional care for her husband and children. According to Francisco's stories, Mama never complained, which can be attributed to her strong work ethic.

Mama and Papa's work ethic transferred to their children. After all family members are accepted back into the U.S. legally, Francisco and Roberto worked and saved their money so they could send money to their parents, helping them afford to move to Santa Maria. Not only did they work for income, but they worked to keep the house clean, especially when they got word that the rest of their family would soon arrive.

Not only did Mama and Papa pass down their strong work ethic by example, but also in verbal directions. Francisco notes that when he was offered more offices to clean by Mike Nevell, he wanted to turn it down because of how much work he was already doing, but Francisco's father taught him to never turn down work. Even though Francisco ended up so exhausted that he came down with mono, he continued working when he could and never complained about it.

Cultural identity

The theme of one's cultural identity and belonging in "Breaking Through" relates to Francisco and Roberto as they tried to understand American culture, as well as to Francisco's pride in being Mexican.

Francisco was not ashamed of being Mexican. Even though he told people he was born in California, that was for his and his family's protection, not because he was embarrassed. Some of the traditions he and his family carried with them to America was Mama's daily homemade tortillas, nicknames for one another, and Papa's interest in Mexican music. In their home, Francisco's family spoke Spanish, likely because his parents spoke little English.

The culture they brought with them to the United States is likely one of the things that helped keep the Jimenez family united through their difficult times. When their future was uncertain, the fact that they all shared a cultural identity may have helped them push through.

The other aspect of culture present in the book is Francisco and Roberto trying to understand American culture. Since the two were born in Mexico and their native language is Spanish, the two had to work at understanding pop culture, traditions, and appropriate mannerisms in various situations. Sometimes Francisco didn't understand something related to American culture, but at no point did he seem to dwell on it.



For example, Francisco was intentional about finding out what it was his classmates were into so that he could learn the subject and have something to talk about with his peers. Also, Francisco and Roberto were invited to dinner at a restaurant by a woman on their cleaning route, and in order to do the right things at the restaurant, the boys had to watch what the woman did, i.e., putting her napkin on her lap, which they mimicked.

Understanding American culture wasn't difficult for Francisco or Roberto, but it was purposeful. Francisco wanted to fit in, which he thought was only possible by understanding American culture. Though he had trouble sometimes understanding sarcasm or American colloquialisms, Francisco worked hard to understand American culture.

Generational gap

The generational gap between Francisco and Roberto, and their parents, is apparent throughout "Breaking Through," and it is something that causes Francisco some stress during his high school years.

Francisco and Roberto enjoy rock 'n' roll music, especially Elvis Presley. When they lived on their own, separate from their parents and younger siblings, they listened to Elvis' music and practiced their dance moves so they would feel more confident at the Saturday night Vets Memorial dances. Not only is wanting to fit in with their American peers a generational difference, but Papa does not like the rock 'n' roll music.

Though Papa allowed Francisco and Roberto to attend the school dances, which Francisco and Roberto attended during high school, he remained unable to relate to his sons. The reader can see the gap in the stilted conversations between Papa and his boys. Papa saw himself as an authority figure first and foremost, and doesn't seem to have diverged from that role very often.

The impact of a generational gap between Papa and his children impacted Francisco in both tangible and intangible ways. When Francisco wanted to go to a dance, Papa would let him but only if he didn't talk back. Papa's view of himself as the authoritative figure was absolute, and any attitude disregarding that was punished. The gap also seemed to have given Papa and Francisco a limited relationship, much unlike that which he had with his mother.

The reader may note that a generational gap was likely present between Mama and her children, but due to her empathic and understanding nature, it didn't show as much in Francisco's anecdotes. Mama strived to listen to her children when they spoke of their interests, which helped her form emotional bonds with her sons and daughter.



Opportunity

A theme running through almost every story in "Breaking Through" is opportunity. Francisco was offered one after another in order to persevere through various life situations.

Francisco's early life was less about individual opportunity and more about collective opportunity for his family. When Mr. Ito sponsored Papa for a work visa to be in the United States, it afforded the family an opportunity to leave Mexico and make a life in the United States. When jobs opened at various labor camps or in the fields, the opportunity was for the collective of Francisco's family.

In Francisco's adolescence, his opportunities were more individualized, especially when they were school-related. His English teacher gave him a second chance on an important assignment, giving Francisco an opportunity to better himself and gain confidence in his writing. He had opportunities to be the leader of the Spanish club and participate in the Squires club. Each opportunity Francisco was offered at school was a chance for him to belong among his peers and gain confidence in his academics, two important aspects of adolescence for Francisco.

At the end of high school, Francisco received scholarship opportunities which afforded him to go to college. When Mr. Penney presented him with the opportunity, as soon as he got permission from his father Francisco did everything he was supposed to do in order to take advantage of that opportunity.

Outside of school, opportunity came because Francisco sought it. While cleaning a law office, he took a chance and asked if he could purchase the old typewriter; the owner of the office agreed. The typewriter gave Francisco an opportunity to practice typing, which helped improve his typing class grade. While helping Roberto clean, he did such a great job that Mr. Nevell paid him and eventually gave him his own offices to clean. The extra income was essential for his family, since they struggled to meet basic needs.

Opportunities abound in Francisco's stories throughout "Breaking Through." However, throughout his anecdotes the opportunities wouldn't have mattered if Francisco hadn't taken full advantage of them, working hard, following instructions, and paying attention. The collection of opportunities Francisco experienced throughout his adolescence helped him, at the end of the book, leave home and go to college, a goal he at one time was unsure could be achieved.

Responsibility

Responsibility as it relates to fulfilling one's role is one of the most prominent themes in "Breaking Through." For Francisco, being responsible related to generating income for his family, especially after his father was unable to go back to work full-time due to his physical ailments. Francisco readily took up his responsibility of helping his family, as did Roberto.



Mama and Papa set the example for taking responsibility in the family by always working hard and doing whatever it took to keep a roof over the family's head, food on the table, and clothes on their backs. Their example is likely why Francisco, Roberto, and Trampita never complained about their responsibilities inside or outside the home.

The responsibility of helping the family did catch up with Francisco by his senior year when he came down with mono. The weight of having to stay on top of his work so that his family is cared for was a lot of responsibility for a teenager. Most of the time, Francisco carried the responsibility without complaining. He was able to release some stress at the school dances some weekends, which helped balance the work he did the rest of the week.

When Roberto moved out, Francisco accepted even more responsibility since they had lost Roberto's income. Then, when Francisco left for college, Trampita took on more responsibility to make up for Francisco's lost income. Trampita's attitude when Francisco left for college was that of acceptance and almost excitement, because now he would get to work. Trampita likely looked up to his two older brothers, especially since the family was so tight-knit, and so now that he would get to do what Roberto and Francisco had been doing for the last several years, he was excited.

Desperation

Desperation is a running theme in "Breaking Through," but it's one that lies under the surface of Francisco's stories. Francisco's family had extremely limited funds, and so they lived in a small house, had a small grocery budget, found clothes and shoes in the dump, and considered it a huge stress to have to buy anything new. The reader may note that each job Mama, Papa, or one of their children took was out of desperation; they needed every penny they could earn.

Papa's desperation likely increased more than anyone else's when he became so ill that he could not work. As the head of the household, he expected himself to earn enough money to provide for the family. When he couldn't work due to physical ailments, Francisco's descriptions make it sound like Papa was desperate for any relief, both from the weight of earning money for his family and his daily physical aches.

Francisco's desperation can be seen toward the end of his novel, when at the beginning of his senior year in high school Francisco fell ill with mono. He was so exhausted from working every single day that he became ill. At that point, he was desperate for a change, even though he knew there would be none in his immediate future.

Francisco and his father are not forthcoming with their desperation, though both show it in their actions. For Francisco, he wanted to slow down on working so much because he was so tired, but he knew he couldn't; his responsibility was to help bring in money for his family. Papa was likely too proud to admit how desperate he felt for a better, easier life.



Dreams for the future

One thing that kept Francisco moving forward, and therefore can be considered a theme of "Breaking Through," were his dreams for the future. Francisco wanted to be a teacher, and that was likely one of the reasons he tried so hard in school and wanted such good grades. Francisco likely paired a strong academic performance with the possibility of becoming a teacher.

Francisco faced challenges to his dream, such as weak writing skills as a result of English not being his native language. Another obstacle for Francisco was his father; Papa was in a sour mood on such a regular basis that when Francisco mentioned his dreams for the future, he was promptly shut down.

Francisco's mother encouraged him in his dreams, though her encouragement is sparsely included in Francisco's anecdotes. However, the reader can assume she did so more often, and Francisco did not include them for the purpose of being concise, as he included only certain stories from his adolescence.

The reader can see Francisco as he moved toward his dream of becoming a teacher each time he tried to better himself. Whether it was practicing his typing, working with his English teacher to improve his writing, or working hard to memorize poems. Francisco knew that if he wanted to be a teacher, he should do well in school, since doing well in the setting he wished to eventually work would bode well for him.

The others' dreams aren't articulated, likely because the book is a memoir for Francisco. The reader may observe that Mama doesn't guilt-trip either Roberto or Francisco when they leave home, suggesting that her dream for her children is that they lead a life easier than the one with which they grew up.

Styles

Structure

"Breaking Through" is a non-fiction collection comprised of anecdotes by the author about his life as a Mexican immigrant. The beginning of the book is about when he, his brother, and his mother were illegal, but a majority of the memoir is about his life in America as an adolescent.

The anecdotes are short. Some segue into each other, others do not. The anecdotes are in chronological order, beginning when Francisco was a child all the way through young adulthood when he leaves for college. The author notes that he wanted to convey what life was like for him as he tried to break through barriers during adolescence that other children and young adults may have experienced, as well. There is usually a life lesson learned in each story.

Perspective

"Breaking Through" is written in the first person. Francisco Jimenez is a Mexican immigrant, along with his four younger and one older siblings and their parents. The benefit for the reader of a first-person account is genuine feelings of the person who experienced the story. Francisco's goal with "Breaking Through" was to help children and young adults who go through similar experiences read something they could relate to. By writing in first person, the author can achieve his goal of relating to readers.

Tone

Francisco's first-person tone is a mix of exhaustion, hope, and moving forward. Sometimes he writes as though he's writing a journal for himself, which allows the reader great insight into how each event impacted Francisco. He is forthcoming with his feelings, which ebb and flow depending on his family's current situation. He was not afraid to write about his joy, nor was he afraid to write about his sadness and frustration.

Francisco's joy was most often written in conjunction with stories with Roberto, his older brother. The two were best friends and the reader can hear the tone in which Francisco writes when he writes relating to Roberto that it is happier than when he writes about others.

When Francisco writes about his father, it is usually with frustration and/or anger. He was obviously more distant from his father than any other family member, though he respected his father - for the most part - as long as he was living under his father's roof. Francisco doesn't write about how their relationship was during his college years or into his adult life, though from the patterns described throughout Francisco's stories, it was

either strained or non-existent, as Papa was very sick and was, by choice, increasingly non-communicative.



Quotes

They hung on to Mama's legs like two children who had just been found after being lost.
-- Francisco, as narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 8)

Importance: The quote is Francisco's description of two of his younger brothers hanging on to his mom as the family stood outside their home waiting to be taken by Border Patrol. The way Francisco describes his younger siblings lets the reader know how upset his family was to be leaving America. Not only were they upset to have been caught after being in the country illegally for ten years, but they had built up a home. The boys younger than Francisco were born in the United States, and they were being taken away from the only home they'd ever known.

I changed the channel to rock 'n' roll, and Papa got upset. He said it was junk and changed it back.
-- Francisco, as narrator (chapter 5 paragraph 1)

Importance: One of the main concepts in "Breaking Through" is the generational gap between Francisco and Roberto, and their parents. Francisco and Roberto treated rock 'n' roll as something to calm their nerves or get them excited. They, especially Francisco, saw rock 'n' roll as a way to relate to their peers. Papa, however, saw rock 'n' roll as something negative and unnecessary.

I wrote the information in a small notepad, which I carried in my shirt pocket, and memorized it while I picked.
-- Francisco, as narrator (chapter 5 paragraph 2)

Importance: One of the most prominent themes in "Breaking Through" is work ethic. The reader should note that Francisco often double-dipped in terms of working; he often studied while he worked, increasing his knowledge so he could keep up his grades, while earning money for his family.

Here, mijo," he said, "I want you to have this. It will guide you.
-- Papa (chapter 6 paragraph 2)

Importance: Francisco's father was often in a sour mood due to his family's financial state and his physical ailments. A consistently sour mood meant that he was never overly affectionate with his children. In this statement, Papa is giving Francisco his Saint Christopher medal. The Jimenez family held their spirituality and their trust in God in high regard, giving great significance to the gift. For him to give a significant spiritual gift to Francisco showed Francisco and shows the reader how he felt about his son.

I went through my other classes worrying about typing class.
-- Francisco, as narrator (chapter 8 paragraph 3)

Importance: Francisco worried about his typing class because he wasn't sure how he



was going to be able to study. In present day, worrying about a typing class is barely conceivable given how prevalent the internet, computers, and texting are. It's important for the reader to note that not only was typing a serious class in Francisco's era (late 1950s/early 1960s), but also that Francisco's living situation was such that he worried about something that many others took - and currently take - for granted. He wanted to excel at every single class.

A plate of cookies sat on the counter with a Handwritten note that read PLEASE HELP YOURSELF. The following day, the plate of cookies was still there. No one had touched them. By the end of the week, someone had changed the note. It read JANITOR, PLEASE HELP YOURSELF.

-- Francisco, as narrator (chapter 10 paragraph 2)

Importance: In this quote, Francisco is cleaning at the local gas company. The fact that someone had to change the note to specifically address Francisco - even though it's to the janitor, Francisco is the only janitor - indicates to the reader that Francisco did not feel entitled to anything, nor did he assume any fringe benefits from his jobs. Francisco's work ethic was pure.

Then I remembered Papa telling us to avoid owning anybody anything, including favors.
-- Francisco, as narrator (chapter 11 paragraph 3)

Importance: Francisco remembered his father's advice after a man at a law office told him he could keep an old typewriter. The fact that Francisco remembered his father's instructions during an excited moment tells the reader how important it was to Francisco that he respect his father, whether in his presence or not.

The word 'grapes' reminded me of working in the vineyards for Mr. Sullivan in Fresno. I looked up the word 'wrath' and thought of the anger I felt when I lost my blue notepad, my librito, in a fire in Orosi.

-- Francisco, as narrator (chapter 12 paragraph 2)

Importance: Francisco took his time reading "The Grapes of Wrath," and he had difficulty with it, but he ultimately enjoyed it because of how well he could relate to the main characters. The reader can see that right from the start of Francisco reading the novel, "The Grapes of Wrath" stirs various emotions within him. Francisco didn't know yet how well he was going to relate to the story, but as he writes his memoir, in retrospect, he can see that the novel intrigued him as soon as he started to understand what it meant.

On our way to Cal Poly we talked about classes and the dance coming up that Saturday night. As soon as they began discussing sports, I tuned out.

-- Francisco, as narrator (chapter 15 paragraph 2)

Importance: Francisco's statement confirms to the reader his consistency of character. Toward the beginning of the memoir, when Francisco talked about wanting to make friends, he didn't just pick any activity that his peers choice. Instead, Francisco had



listened to what they cared about, did research into each of the subjects he heard his peers discuss, then choose from those what he genuinely enjoyed. He was always more interested in dances and social situations than he was about sports; Francisco's character seemed to remain the same throughout high school.

I never hide that I am Mexican," I said. "I am proud of it too. Besides, even if I tried to hide it, I couldn't; my accent gives me away. My friends tell me they can cut it with a knife.

-- Francisco (chapter 17 paragraph 5)

Importance: Though Francisco and his family members make it appear to other people that they were born in the United States and that they are U.S. citizens, they are not ashamed of their Mexican heritage. Francisco's statement is absolute, and at no point do his actions indicate otherwise. It's important for the reader to note that Francisco and his family, though poor and unlike many of the kids' classmates, are not embarrassed to be exactly who they are. The tone is set by Mama and Papa, and carried on by Francisco and seemingly the other children, as well.

I looked up the word 'scandal' in my dictionary. I did not like the sound of it. 'Why would our class want to put on a shameful show?

-- Francisco (chapter 18 paragraph 4-5)

Importance: Francisco doesn't understand why a variety show at the high school is called Junior Scandals. The fact that he looks up the word 'scandal' in the dictionary, then doesn't understand that it's meant to be sarcastic, shows the reader that even though Francisco has been in America for most of his life, some cultural nuances are lost on him due to language and culture barriers.

I felt like a bird caught in a storm.

-- Francisco, as narrator (chapter 19 paragraph 3)

Importance: At this point in the novel, Francisco has yet to complain about any of his work. He never complained about being the fields, he only stated that he didn't like it, especially when he had to do it without Robert. When Papa is hurt and rendered physically useless in regards to income, Francisco likely feels a great deal of the burden fall on him. That burden weighs heavily on Francisco and so he feels powerless, like a bird being tossed around in stormy weather.

This life is killing us all.

-- Papa (chapter 21 paragraph 4)

Importance: Francisco wakes up the morning of his first day of his senior year of high school in so much pain that he can't move. He's worn out from working so much. When Papa sees his son is ill, Papa's cynicism tells Francisco and Mama that the life they live is killing them all because it's so difficult. Papa feels great shame at not being able to provide for his family, and he likely blames his illness on the weight of that shame. He



knows his sons work tirelessly to contribute to the family income, and so he knows that Francisco's exhaustion has made him ill.

Spanish words wove with English words like braids.
-- Francisco, as narrator (chapter 22 paragraph 3)

Importance: Francisco was called up on stage unexpectedly during the Rotary Club luncheon. He considered it his biggest regret of his time as student body president to have gone to the luncheon, as he was embarrassed to have stood in front of the group and not spoken adequately. Francisco's immediate response to speak in Spanish and English, his native language and the language he was expected to speak, tells the reader that he was incredibly flustered but wished he knew exactly what was expected of him.

After so many years, I was still moving.
-- Francisco, as narrator (chapter 25 paragraph 2)

Importance: This statement is the last in the novel, and is important for the reader to note, since in one statement Francisco captures his past and his future. Growing up as an illegal immigrant, Francisco was always moving, which he hated. All Francisco wanted when he was growing up was to start school with his classmates and stay in school, but instead his family had to move with his father's jobs. Now, however, Francisco is moving of his own accord and he is excited about it, since his moving involves him going to college and making a great future for himself.



Topics for Discussion

Relationships

What are some of the ways Francisco tries to gain the approval of his father, and how can the reader tell Papa's approval is important to Francisco?

Growing up

What are some of the ways Francisco and Roberto are forced to grow up faster than their age would suggest, and how does that impact their behavior both on their own and in front of their parents?

Spirituality

How might Francisco's reception of and use of his Saint Christopher medal indicate a spiritual side to his personality?

Personal growth

How can the reader tell Francisco's commitment to personal growth, even at a young age? And how might Francisco's actions impact his future?

Work ethic

How might Francisco's hard work during high school have contributed to his success as an adult?

Independence vs. Family Obligation

Francisco works hard to earn money for himself and for his family. Based on his actions and his stated motivations, which reason for earning money - for his own endeavors or for his family - seems to be stronger, and how can the reader tell?

Friendship

Until this section, Francisco doesn't go into much detail about his friends. Why might Francisco be developing strong friendships during his last two years of high school?



Family

What does Francisco and his parents' reactions say about their expectation for supporting one another when Roberto marries Darlene and is no longer able to contribute to the family income?

Boldness

Francisco is more bold with his father as time goes on; why might he feel the right to be more bold, and what might he gain and/or lose from doing so?

Embarrassment

What might be the root cause of Francisco's embarrassment at the Rotary Club, and what might he have done differently had he been warned of being called up on stage?