



Classroom Guide for
FIRST DAY IN GRAPES
by **L. King Perez**
illustrated by **Robert Casilla**

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grade 2–3

Interest Level: Grades 2–5

Guided Reading Level: N

(Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula)

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.2/.5

Themes

Self-Esteem, Bullying, Conflict Resolution, Courage, Family Pride, Migrant Families, Making Friends, Latino/Hispanic Interest

Synopsis

Chico's father is a migrant worker, and so the family moves from place to place following the harvest of fruits and vegetables in California. September is marked by the harvest of grapes and the beginning of yet another new school for Chico. *First Day in Grapes* shows the problems caused by this nomadic existence, including difficulty making friends and bullying, and how Chico faces them. The year Chico begins third grade, however, proves to be different. He finds courage in an encouraging teacher, who recognizes his excellence in math, and a friendly classmate. When confronted by bullies in the lunchroom, Chico does not resort to fighting. Instead, he relies on his own strengths and responds in a unique and effective, nonviolent way. Buoyed by this "pretty good first day," Chico even approaches the grumpy, feared school bus driver with a friendly greeting.

Background

In the United States, temporary farm workers migrate from region to region harvesting and processing crops such as fruits and vegetables which must be picked as soon as they ripen. Estimates of the size of this labor force range from 125,000 to over a million. Most of these workers receive low wages and do not remain in one place long enough to

qualify for government aid such as food stamps or disability payments. They are not protected by federal laws regulating hours or salaries, and migrant families often live in substandard housing. Many lack adequate health care. Because migrant children change schools so frequently, they tend to fall behind in their class work, even though they value education as a way to emerge from the migrant life. Only about a fifth of these students attend school beyond sixth grade.

Schools with migrant populations often sponsor special programs to help these students, and most children aspire to a better life while balancing their desire for an education with their commitment to helping their families survive. Chico, the main character in this story, is one such child. He is based on the author's husband, who worked in the fields as a child growing up in California, and later during summers to put himself through college. He earned a degree in mathematics from UCLA and began his career on the cutting edge of the computer age.

Teacher Tip

If you use this book in November, you might relate it to Thanksgiving. Make a construction paper cutout of a cornucopia for a bulletin board display. Have students cut out or draw pictures of fruits and vegetables, especially those mentioned in the story, and add them to the cornucopia. Point out that many of these foods will be served at Thanksgiving dinners. Suggest that when students give thanks for their meals, they also remember all the people who helped bring their food to the table.

BEFORE READING**Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing the book, you may wish to have students discuss one or more of the following questions as a motivation for reading.

1. Why do people move from one place to another? Have you ever moved? What was it like?
2. What is a bully? Why do people act that way? How do bullies make you feel? How do you treat them? What does it take to stand up to a bully?
3. Is it easy or hard to make new friends? How do you make new friends?
4. What is it like starting at a new school? What would you tell your new classmates about yourself?
5. How do you think fruits and vegetables get from the fields where they are grown to stores? What is the first thing that happens when fruits and vegetables become ripe?

Exploring the Book

Display the book and read aloud the title. Ask students to comment on what they think the book will be about.

Direct students to the cover illustration. Ask them about what is shown there. Where is the boy? Where might he be going or coming from? What might he be thinking about? What are the people in the background doing? What are in the large containers?

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Ask students to read the book to find out what the title means.

VOCABULARY

Put the following chart (without the words in parentheses) on the chalkboard and have students look through the book to find the missing word to complete each compound. Call on volunteers to come up to the board and fill in the blanks. The answers are the words in parentheses.

| Word | + | Word | = | Compound Word | Answer |
|---------|---|--------|---|---------------|----------------|
| trouble | | | | | (troublemaker) |
| every | | | | | (everybody) |
| | | noon | | | (afternoon) |
| chalk | | | | | (chalkboard) |
| | | board | | | (cardboard) |
| eye | | | | | (eyebrows) |
| | | room | | | (bedroom) |
| | | ground | | | (playground) |
| seat | | | | | (seatmate) |
| grand | | | | | (grandmother) |

READING AND RESPONDING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to help guide their understanding of the book. Encourage students to refer to passages or pages in the book to support or illustrate their responses.

1. What does the title mean?
2. Why does Mamá always put up yellow curtains even though the family will move soon?
3. Chico thinks Mamá doesn't know how scary school can be. Do you think he is right? Why or why not?
4. Why is George Washington's picture hanging in the school? Why does Chico think of him as a friend?
5. Why do you think some people treat Chico as a foreigner?
6. Why does Chico think of time and places in terms of fruits and vegetables?
7. What message does Chico feel his mother has given him when she puts her hands on him to straighten him up?
8. Why do you think Chico chooses the picture of a white house for his writing assignment? How do you think the house in the picture differs from the ones he usually lives in?

9. How does Chico use his mathematical ability to stand up to the bullies?
10. Why does Chico speak to Old Hoonch when he gets off the bus? How do you think Old Hoonch will act toward Chico in the future?
11. What do you think Chico learns about getting along with other people? What does he learn about dealing with bullies?

Teacher Tip

First Day in Grapes is also available in Spanish under the title *Primer día en las uvas*.

Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in developing the roles of the circle members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Question section of this guide to help group members explore the book.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for words or passages that describe how Chico feels.
- The **Illustrator** might draw Chico telling his family what happened at his first day of school.
- The **Connector** might do research to learn more about the lives of migrant workers.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might find out where in the United States besides California migrant workers go to pick crops.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *Getting Started With Literature Circles* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *Literature Circles: Voice And Choice In Book Clubs And Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize what they have read. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, sketches, or in oral discussion.

1. What do you wish for Chico? Why?
2. What part of the story did you like best? Why?
3. Chico's mother says, "We all have jobs, and school is yours." What does she mean?
4. What did you learn from this story? Why would you recommend it to others?

Other Writing Activities

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for them to share and discuss their work.

1. In *First Day in Grapes*, Chico's teacher passes out pictures and has the students write about them. You might also collect pictures from magazines, catalogs, old calendars, greeting cards, and so on, for students to use as writing prompts.
2. Ask students to write a conversation that Chico and his father might have the first night of school. What would Chico tell his dad? What advice might his father give him?
3. Suggest that students write letters to Chico. They might comment on how he handled the bullies, ask him more about his life, or tell him about themselves.

ELL (ESL) Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. If there are Spanish-speaking students in the class, have them pronounce and explain in English the meanings of words such as **abuela, hola, buenos días, amigo, senorita, ándale, salsa, tortilla.**
2. Write the names of these fruits and vegetables mentioned in the story on separate cards: **orange, apple, onion, tomato, pepper, grapes, artichoke, garlic, cucumber, radish.** Bring an example of each to school so students can make the connection between the food and the English word. Have students draw a picture of each food next to its name on the card.
3. Encourage students to use the book illustrations, especially the facial expressions, to tell you in English how Chico is feeling.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

To help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas, introduce some of the following activities.

Social Studies

1. Students might research the life and work of César Chávez (1927–1993), who led a movement to organize migrant workers so they could get better working conditions and wages.
2. Students might work in small groups to make a flow chart showing how fruit or vegetables get from the growing fields to consumers. Suggest that students present their information in illustrated panels with captions explaining each step.

Citizenship

This story offers a good opportunity to discuss bullying. Begin by having students take turns role playing how Chico stands up to the bullies in his school. Point out that Chico does not use violence, but instead uses an element of surprise (Tony and Mike are not expecting him to give them math problems) and his wits (his ability to do math computations quickly in his head). Then work with students to develop other scenarios that they can role play. In each situation, students should include a satisfactory solution to a bullying situation that does not involve fighting or violence.

Math

Chico hopes to stay at his school long enough to take part in the Math Fair. Organize a class Math Fair for your students. Encourage students to think of activities to include at the fair.

Language Arts

1. Remind students that Ms. Andrews asks the new students to introduce themselves to the class. Ask students to imagine that they are new to your school and are going to tell the class about themselves. Suggest that students jot down some ideas before they speak. Have students take turns telling about themselves.
2. Other books about children and the migrant experience that students may enjoy reading include *Amelia's Road* by Linda Jacobs Altman (picture book for younger readers), and *The Circuit* and *Breaking Through* by Francisco Jiménez (for middle grade readers).

Nutrition

Have students write a grocery list for their family. Then have them mark each item on the list that is a fruit or vegetable. Ask students to research where each fruit and vegetable is grown in the United States (there could be several places) and their nutritional values. Discuss the number of servings of these foods per day that are recommended for a healthy diet.

You may also wish to extend this activity into a study of the USDA food guide pyramid. Reproducible food guide pyramid graphics are available on line at: www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/Fpyr/pyramid.html#q6. There is also additional information available at: kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/food/pyramid.html, and many other Web sites.

Art

Have students follow up on the Nutrition activities by choosing a fruit or vegetable and making posters or writing ads advertising the food. Students should try to use some of what they learned from the above activities as "selling points" in their ads.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

L. King Pérez has won many awards for her fiction and poetry. In addition to writing, she accompanies visiting authors to their appearances in Dayton, Ohio, where she and her husband live. Pérez based *First Day in Grapes* on her husband's experiences growing up as a migrant child. She says, "My husband began picking grapes in the first grade, and picked his way through UCLA, where we met. His stories of life in the camps fascinated me, and there is no greater inspiration than knowing someone whose

perseverance led them to success.” In addition to writing, Pérez enjoys reading, gardening, photography, and cooking.

First Day in Grapes has won numerous awards and honors, including the Pura Belpré Illustrator Award Honor, a “Choices” selection from the Cooperative Children’s Book Center, a *Smithsonian* magazine Notable Book designation, and the Pennsylvania Young Reader’s Choice Award Masterlist. “Chico’s success story is cheering,” said *Kirkus Reviews*, and *School Library Journal* praised the book for “shed[ing] light on the life of migrant children in a poignant, balanced manner.”

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Robert Casilla won the Pura Belpré Illustrator Honor Award for his illustrations in *First Day in Grapes*. He is a full-time illustrator who has also won several other awards for his children’s books. Before getting started on the illustrations for this book, Casilla researched migrant families, grape farming, migrant homes, and migrant communities. He even used himself as the model for the bus driver, Old Hoonch. *Kirkus Reviews* praised Casilla’s illustrations, saying they “excel in conveying Chico’s emotions through facial expressions.”

Of this book Casilla says, “Stories that help kids become familiar with other cultures or others in different situations are books that I like to illustrate. I appreciate the way the author put the main character in situations that kids deal with daily in real life and how the boy used his wits to get out of tough situations.” As a child, Casilla also faced bullies and feels this helped him relate to Chico. Casilla is a graduate of the School of Visual Arts in New York City. He lives in Yonkers with his wife and their children.

Resources on the Web

Learn more about *First Day In Grapes*:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/49/hc/first_day_in_grapes

First Day in Grapes in Spanish:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/155/hc/primer_dia_en_las_uvas

BookTalk with Robert Casilla

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/casilla.mhtml>

View other **Active Reader Classroom Guides** at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/p/teachers-latino_hispanic.mhtml

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Order Information

On the Web:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/49/hc/first_day_in_grapes (secure on-line ordering)

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/ordering.mhtml> (general order information)

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