

# Before You Read

This selection also appears in *Elements of Literature*.

## Amigo Brothers by Piri Thomas

### LITERARY FOCUS: THE SHORT STORY

Most television shows are only a half-hour or an hour long. Because TV shows don't have as much time to develop a story as full-length movies do, their plots and conflicts tend to be less involved or complicated. The same is true of short stories and novels. A **short story** is usually between five and twenty pages long, whereas a novel is usually more than one hundred pages long. Although short stories and novels may have identical plot patterns, such as the one shown below, the action in a short story unfolds much more quickly than it does in most novels.

#### Short Story Structure

Meet **main characters** → Learn their **problems** → Sort out **complications**

→ Move to the story's **climax** → **Resolution**

### CONFLICT

**Conflict** is the struggle or battle that characters in a story face. In "Amigo Brothers," the two main characters face both external and internal conflict. The two best friends must battle each other in a boxing ring, an **external conflict**. Each boy also struggles with this **internal conflict**: How can he do his best in the ring and at the same time avoid hurting his best friend?

### READING SKILLS: COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

You compare and contrast things all the time without even thinking about it. When buying sneakers, for example, you may discover that although two pairs both are lace up, nylon, and designed for running (points of comparison), you like the blue pair better than the white pair (point of contrast).

Use the same strategy when you read "Amigo Brothers." Take notes as you discover what makes the two main characters alike and different.

#### SKILLS FOCUS

##### Literary Skills

Understand forms of prose: the short story; understand internal and external conflict.

##### Reading Skills

Understand comparison and contrast.

##### Vocabulary Skills

Recognize synonyms.

## VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

## PREVIEW SELECTION VOCABULARY

Preview the following words before you begin to read "Amigo Brothers."

**bouts** (bouts) *n.*: matches; contests.

*Both boxers had won many bouts.*

**pensively** (pen'siv·lē) *adv.*: thoughtfully.

*Felix nodded pensively as he rested.*

**torrent** (tôr'ənt) *n.*: flood or rush.

*A torrent of emotion left him close to tears.*

**dispelled** (di·speld') *v.*: driven away.

*All doubt was dispelled the moment Tony made up his mind.*

**frenzied** (fren'zēd) *adj.*: wild.

*The audience's reaction was as frenzied as the battle in the ring.*

## CLARIFYING WORD MEANINGS: CHOOSING SYNONYMS

Synonyms are words that have the same meaning. It's helpful when learning a new word to also learn its synonyms. Each sentence below contains an italicized word or phrase that is a synonym for one of the vocabulary words. The vocabulary word appears in parentheses following its synonym.

- In a ninth-inning rally, the hitters poured out a *flood* (torrent) of line drives on the tired infielders.
- The champion boxer was undefeated in his last twenty *fight*s (bouts).
- After winning the relay by six seconds, our swim team *drove away* (dispelled) our coach's fear that we couldn't work as a team.
- A group of *wild* (frenzied) fans ran onto the field after the soccer final.
- Michelle studied the basket *thoughtfully* (pensively) before the last-second free throw.

# AMIGO BROTHERS

Piri Thomas

## BACKGROUND: Literature and Social Studies

This story is about two friends (*amigos* in Spanish) living on the Lower East Side of New York City. Many boys from the Lower East Side have dreamed of building a better life by winning the New York Golden Gloves, a tournament started in 1927 by Paul Gallico, a newspaper writer. This tournament marks an amateur's entry into the world of big-time boxing.

## Notes

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### IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 1–17. Underline the names of the two **main characters**. Circle three details that tell how similar, or alike, they are.

Antonio Cruz and Felix Vargas were both seventeen years old. They were so together in friendship that they felt themselves to be brothers. They had known each other since childhood, growing up on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the same tenement<sup>1</sup> building on Fifth Street between Avenue A and Avenue B.

Antonio was fair, lean, and lanky, while Felix was dark, short, and husky. Antonio's hair was always falling over his eyes, while Felix wore his black hair in a natural Afro style.

10 Each youngster had a dream of someday becoming lightweight champion of the world. Every chance they had, the boys worked out, sometimes at the Boys' Club on 10th Street and Avenue A and sometimes at the pro's gym on 14th Street. Early morning sunrises would find them running along the East River Drive, wrapped in sweat shirts, short towels around their necks, and handkerchiefs Apache style around their foreheads.

1. **tenement** *n.* used as *adj.*: apartment. Tenement buildings are often cheaply built and poorly maintained.

"Amigo Brothers" from *Stories from El Barrio* by Piri Thomas. Copyright © 1978 by Piri Thomas. Reproduced by permission of the author.

While some youngsters were into street negatives, Antonio and Felix slept, ate, rapped, and dreamt positive. Between them, they had a collection of *Fight* magazines second to none, plus a scrapbook filled with torn tickets to every boxing match they had ever attended, and some clippings of their own. If asked a question about any given fighter, they would immediately zip out from their memory banks divisions, weights, records of fights, knockouts, technical knockouts, and draws or losses.

Each had fought many **bouts** representing their community and had won two gold-plated medals plus a silver and bronze medallion. The difference was in their style. Antonio's lean form and long reach made him the better boxer, while Felix's short and muscular frame made him the better slugger. Whenever they had met in the ring for sparring sessions,<sup>2</sup> it had always been hot and heavy.

Now, after a series of elimination **bouts**, they had been informed that they were to meet each other in the division finals that were scheduled for the seventh of August, two weeks away—the winner to represent the Boys' Club in the Golden Gloves Championship Tournament.

The two boys continued to run together along the East River Drive. But even when joking with each other, they both sensed a wall rising between them.

One morning less than a week before their bout, they met as usual for their daily workout. They fooled around with a few jabs at the air, slapped skin, and then took off, running lightly along the dirty East River's edge.

Antonio glanced at Felix, who kept his eyes purposely straight ahead, pausing from time to time to do some fancy leg work while throwing one-twos followed by uppercuts to an imaginary jaw. Antonio then beat the air with a barrage

### INTERPRET

Underline the details that describe each youngster's fighting style (lines 27–33). What does the author mean when he says Antonio is “the better boxer,” while Felix is “the better slugger”?

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### VOCABULARY

**bouts** (bouts) *n.*: matches; contests.

### INTERPRET

The two boys “sensed a wall rising between them” (lines 40–41). What is happening to their friendship? What is the wall?

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2. **sparring sessions:** practice matches in which boxers use light punches.

## WORD STUDY

What might the word *ace-boon* in lines 56–57 mean? Use context clues to help you.

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## PREDICT

Pause at line 74. How do you think Antonio and Felix will solve the problem they have about fighting each other?

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50 of body blows and short devastating lefts with an overhead jaw-breaking right.

After a mile or so, Felix puffed and said, “Let’s stop a while, bro. I think we both got something to say to each other.”

Antonio nodded. It was not natural to be acting as though nothing unusual was happening when two ace-boon buddies were going to be blasting each other within a few short days.

They rested their elbows on the railing separating  
60 them from the river. Antonio wiped his face with his short towel. The sunrise was now creating day.

Felix leaned heavily on the river’s railing and stared across to the shores of Brooklyn. Finally, he broke the silence.

“Man. I don’t know how to come out with it.”

Antonio helped. “It’s about our fight, right?”

“Yeah, right.” Felix’s eyes squinted at the rising orange sun.

“I’ve been thinking about it too, panin.<sup>3</sup> In fact, since we found out it was going to be me and you, I’ve been awake  
70 at night, pulling punches on you, trying not to hurt you.”

“Same here. It ain’t natural not to think about the fight. I mean, we both are cheverote<sup>4</sup> fighters and we both want to win. But only one of us can win. There ain’t no draws in the eliminations.”

Felix tapped Antonio gently on the shoulder. “I don’t mean to sound like I’m bragging, bro. But I wanna win, fair and square.”

Antonio nodded quietly. “Yeah. We both know that in the ring the better man wins. Friend or no friend, brother  
80 or no . . .”

3. **panin** (pā-nēn') *n.*: Puerto Rican Spanish slang for “pal” or “buddy.”

4. **cheverote** (che've-rō'tā) *adj.*: Puerto Rican Spanish slang for “the greatest.”

RETELL

Re-read lines 75–91. Then, retell what the friends decide about how they will fight and how they will prepare for the fight.

Lined area for retelling the story.



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Felix finished it for him. “Brother. Tony, let’s promise something right here. OK?”

“If it’s fair, hermano,<sup>5</sup> I’m for it.” Antonio admired the courage of a tugboat pulling a barge five times its welter-weight size.

“It’s fair, Tony. When we get into the ring, it’s gotta be like we never met. We gotta be like two heavy strangers that want the same thing and only one can have it. You understand, don’t cha?”

90 “Sí, I know.” Tony smiled. “No pulling punches. We go all the way.”

“Yeah, that’s right. Listen, Tony. Don’t you think it’s a good idea if we don’t see each other until the day of the fight? I’m going to stay with my Aunt Lucy in the Bronx. I can use Gleason’s Gym for working out. My manager says he got some sparring partners with more or less your style.”

5. hermano (er-mă'nô) n.: Spanish for “brother.”

## VOCABULARY

**pensively** (pen'siv-lē) *adv.*: thoughtfully.

## INTERPRET

Pause at line 108. **Conflict** is a struggle between opposing characters or forces. In this story, the fight is an example of **external conflict**. One friend is supposed to knock the other one out. The friends also struggle with **internal conflict**, a fight that takes place inside a character's mind. What internal conflict do they have?

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## INFER

The night before the fight, why does Tony try not to think of Felix (lines 120–127)?

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Tony scratched his nose **pensively**. “Yeah, it would be better for our heads.” He held out his hand, palm upward. “Deal?”

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“Deal.” Felix lightly slapped open skin.

“Ready for some more running?” Tony asked lamely.

“Naw, bro. Let’s cut it here. You go on. I kinda like to get things together in my head.”

“You ain’t worried, are you?” Tony asked.

“No way, man.” Felix laughed out loud. “I got too much smarts for that. I just think it’s cooler if we split right here. After the fight, we can get it together again like nothing ever happened.”

110

The amigo brothers were not ashamed to hug each other tightly.

“Guess you’re right. Watch yourself, Felix. I hear there’s some pretty heavy dudes up in the Bronx. Suavecito,<sup>6</sup> OK?”

“OK. You watch yourself too, sabe?”<sup>7</sup>

Tony jogged away. Felix watched his friend disappear from view, throwing rights and lefts. Both fighters had a lot of psyching up to do before the big fight.

The days in training passed much too slowly. Although they kept out of each other’s way, they were aware of each other’s progress via the ghetto grapevine.

120

The evening before the big fight, Tony made his way to the roof of his tenement. In the quiet early dark, he peered over the ledge. Six stories below, the lights of the city blinked and the sounds of cars mingled with the curses and the laughter of children in the street. He tried not to think of Felix, feeling he had succeeded in psyching his mind. But only in the ring would he really know. To spare Felix hurt, he would have to knock him out, early and quick.

6. **suavecito** (swä'vā-sē'tō) *adj.*: Puerto Rican Spanish slang for “cool.”

7. **sabe** (sä'bā) *v.*: Spanish for “you know.”

Up in the South Bronx, Felix decided to take in a movie in an effort to keep Antonio's face away from his fists. The flick was *The Champion* with Kirk Douglas, the third time Felix was seeing it.

The champion was getting beaten, his face being pounded into raw, wet hamburger. His eyes were cut, jagged, bleeding, one eye swollen, the other almost shut. He was saved only by the sound of the bell.

Felix became the champ and Tony the challenger.

The movie audience was going out of its head, roaring in blood lust at the butchery going on. The champ hunched his shoulders, grunting and sniffing red blood back into his broken nose. The challenger, confident that he had the championship in the bag, threw a left. The champ countered with a dynamite right that exploded into the challenger's brains.

Felix's right arm felt the shock. Antonio's face, superimposed on the screen, was shattered and split apart by the awesome force of the killer blow. Felix saw himself in the ring, blasting Antonio against the ropes. The champ had to be forcibly restrained. The challenger was allowed to crumble slowly to the canvas, a broken bloody mess.

When Felix finally left the theater, he had figured out how to psych himself for tomorrow's fight. It was Felix the Champion vs. Antonio the Challenger.

He walked up some dark streets, deserted except for small pockets of wary-looking kids wearing gang colors. Despite the fact that he was Puerto Rican like them, they eyed him as a stranger to their turf. Felix did a fast shuffle, bobbing and weaving, while letting loose a **torrent** of blows that would demolish whatever got in its way. It seemed to impress the brothers, who went about their own business.

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### CLARIFY

Pause at line 152. How does watching the movie help Felix prepare for the fight?

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### VOCABULARY

**torrent** (tôr'ənt) *n.*: flood or rush.



INTERPRET

How would you describe Antonio's **conflict** in lines 166–177? What does he fear will happen to his friendship with Felix?

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PREDICT

Pause at line 187. Who do you think will win the fight? Will Antonio and Felix still be friends after the fight? Tell what you think will happen.

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160 Finding no takers, Felix decided to split to his aunt's. Walking the streets had not relaxed him; neither had the fight flick. All it had done was to stir him up. He let himself quietly into his Aunt Lucy's apartment and went straight to bed, falling into a fitful sleep with sounds of the gong for Round One.

Antonio was passing some heavy time on his rooftop. How would the fight tomorrow affect his relationship with Felix? After all, fighting was like any other profession. Friendship had nothing to do with it. A gnawing doubt crept  
170 in. He cut negative thinking real quick by doing some speedy fancy dance steps, bobbing and weaving like mercury. The night air was blurred with perpetual motions of left hooks and right crosses. Felix, his amigo brother, was not going to be Felix at all in the ring. Just an opponent with another face. Antonio went to sleep, hearing the opening bell for the first round. Like his friend in the South Bronx, he prayed for victory via a quick clean knockout in the first round.

Large posters plastered all over the walls of local shops announced the fight between Antonio Cruz and Felix  
180 Vargas as the main bout.

The fight had created great interest in the neighborhood. Antonio and Felix were well liked and respected. Each had his own loyal following. Betting fever was high and ranged from a bottle of Coke to cold hard cash on the line.

Antonio's fans bet with unbridled faith in his boxing skills. On the other side, Felix's admirers bet on his dynamite-packed fists.

Felix had returned to his apartment early in the morning of August 7th and stayed there, hoping to avoid seeing  
190 Antonio. He turned the radio on to salsa<sup>8</sup> music sounds and then tried to read while waiting for word from his manager.

8. **salsa** (säl'sə) *n.* used as *adj.*: Latin American dance music, usually played at fast tempos.

The fight was scheduled to take place in Tompkins Square Park. It had been decided that the gymnasium of the Boys' Club was not large enough to hold all the people who were sure to attend. In Tompkins Square Park, everyone who wanted could view the fight, whether from ring-side or window fire escapes or tenement rooftops.

200 The morning of the fight Tompkins Square was a beehive of activity with numerous workers setting up the ring, the seats, and the guest speakers' stand. The scheduled bouts began shortly after noon and the park had begun filling up even earlier.

The local junior high school across from Tompkins Square Park served as the dressing room for all the fighters. Each was given a separate classroom with desk tops, covered with mats, serving as resting tables. Antonio thought he caught a glimpse of Felix waving to him from a room at the far end of the corridor. He waved back just in case it had been him.

210 The fighters changed from their street clothes into fighting gear. Antonio wore white trunks, black socks, and black shoes. Felix wore sky-blue trunks, red socks, and white boxing shoes. They had dressing gowns to match their fighting trunks with their names neatly stitched on the back.

The loudspeakers blared into the open windows of the school. There were speeches by dignitaries, community leaders, and great boxers of yesteryear. Some were well prepared; some improvised on the spot. They all carried the same message of great pleasure and honor at being part of  
220 such a historic event. This great day was in the tradition of champions emerging from the streets of the Lower East Side.

Interwoven with the speeches were the sounds of the other boxing events. After the sixth bout, Felix was much

#### IDENTIFY

Circle the details in lines 192–216 that help to build suspense.

#### DECODING TIP

*Yesteryear* (line 217) is a term that is not in common use today. Draw a line between "yester" and "year." What might that word mean?

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## Notes



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relieved when his trainer, Charlie, said, “Time change. Quick knockout. This is it. We’re on.”

Waiting time was over. Felix was escorted from the classroom by a dozen fans in white T-shirts with the word FELIX across their fronts.

230 Antonio was escorted down a different stairwell and guided through a roped-off path.

As the two climbed into the ring, the crowd exploded with a roar. Antonio and Felix both bowed gracefully and then raised their arms in acknowledgment.

Antonio tried to be cool, but even as the roar was in its first birth, he turned slowly to meet Felix’s eyes looking directly into his. Felix nodded his head and Antonio responded. And both as one, just as quickly, turned away to face his own corner.

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Bong—bong—bong. The roar turned to stillness.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, Señores y Señoras.”

The announcer spoke slowly, pleased at his bilingual efforts.

“Now the moment we have all been waiting for—the main event between two fine young Puerto Rican fighters, products of our Lower East Side.”

“Loisaida,”<sup>9</sup> called out a member of the audience.

250

“In this corner, weighing 134 pounds, Felix Vargas. And in this corner, weighing 133 pounds, Antonio Cruz. The winner will represent the Boys’ Club in the tournament of champions, the Golden Gloves. There will be no draw. May the best man win.”

The cheering of the crowd shook the window panes of the old buildings surrounding Tompkins Square Park. At the center of the ring, the referee was giving instructions to the youngsters.

“Keep your punches up. No low blows. No punching on the back of the head. Keep your heads up. Understand? Let’s have a clean fight. Now shake hands and come out fighting.”

260

Both youngsters touched gloves and nodded. They turned and danced quickly to their corners. Their head towels and dressing gowns were lifted neatly from their shoulders by their trainers’ nimble fingers. Antonio crossed himself. Felix did the same.

BONG! BONG! ROUND ONE. Felix and Antonio turned and faced each other squarely in a fighting pose. Felix wasted no time. He came in fast, head low, half-hunched toward his right shoulder, and lashed out with a straight left. He missed a right cross as Antonio slipped the punch and countered with one-two-three lefts that snapped  
270 Felix’s head back, sending a mild shock coursing through

## Notes

## FLUENCY

Re-read the boxed passage silently. Re-read it again, aloud. Pretend you are the announcer, and use a tone of voice that will get the attention of the crowd and help build suspense.

## VISUALIZE

Re-read the description of the first round in lines 264–286. Notice the details that help you see, hear, and even feel what’s happening in the ring. Circle five of the details that help you picture the fight.

9. *Loisaida* (loi-sī’dä) *n.*: Puerto Rican English dialect for “Lower East Side.”

### COMPARE & CONTRAST

Highlight or color-mark Antonio's actions in lines 264–286. Use a different color to highlight Felix's actions. In what way are the fighters the same? In what way are they different?

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### VOCABULARY

**dispelled** (di-speld') *v.*: driven away.

### PREDICT

Pause at line 299. What do you think will happen in round two?

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him. If Felix had any small doubt about their friendship affecting their fight, it was being neatly **dispelled**.

Antonio danced, a joy to behold. His left hand was like a piston pumping jabs one right after another with seeming ease. Felix bobbed and weaved and never stopped boring in. He knew that at long range he was at a disadvantage. Antonio had too much reach on him. Only by coming in close could Felix hope to achieve the dreamed-of knockout.

Antonio knew the dynamite that was stored in his  
280 amigo brother's fist. He ducked a short right and missed a left hook. Felix trapped him against the ropes just long enough to pour some punishing rights and lefts to Antonio's hard midsection. Antonio slipped away from Felix, crashing two lefts to his head, which set Felix's right ear to ringing.

*Bong!* Both amigos froze a punch well on its way, sending up a roar of approval for good sportsmanship.

Felix walked briskly back to his corner. His right ear had not stopped ringing. Antonio gracefully danced his way toward his stool none the worse, except for glowing glove  
290 burns showing angry red against the whiteness of his midribs.

"Watch that right, Tony." His trainer talked into his ear. "Remember Felix always goes to the body. He'll want you to drop your hands for his overhand left or right. Got it?"

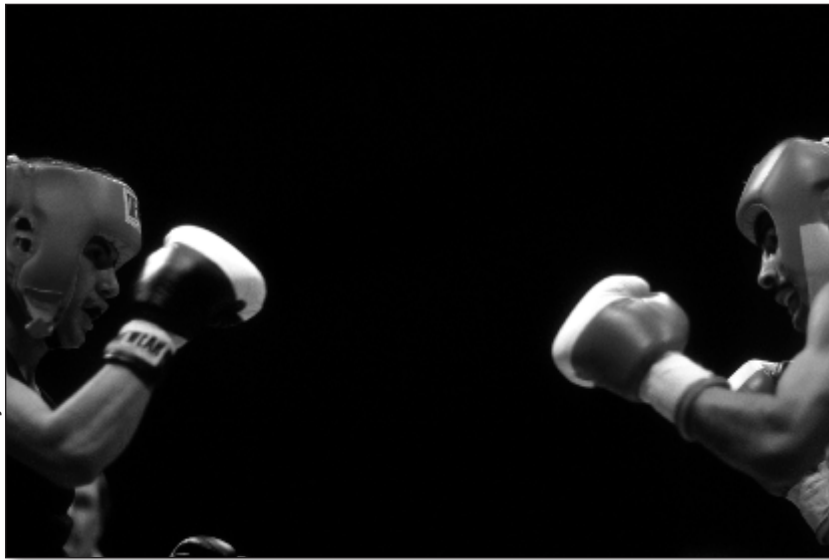
Antonio nodded, spraying water out between his teeth. He felt better as his sore midsection was being firmly rubbed.

Felix's corner was also busy.

"You gotta get in there, fella." Felix's trainer poured water over his curly Afro locks. "Get in there or he's gonna chop you up from way back."

300 *Bong! Bong!* Round two. Felix was off his stool and rushed Antonio like a bull, sending a hard right to his head. Beads of water exploded from Antonio's long hair.

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### IDENTIFY

Circle five details in lines 310–314 that use boxing terms to help you picture the fast action.

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### WORD STUDY

The author states that Felix had the habit of “playing possum when hurt” (lines 318–319). Possums (short for opossums) are animals that pretend to be asleep, ill, or dead when in danger. Why might Felix choose to “play possum” when boxing?

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Antonio, hurt, sent back a blurring barrage of lefts and rights that only meant pain to Felix, who returned with a short left to the head followed by a looping right to the body. Antonio countered with his own flurry, forcing Felix to give ground. But not for long.

Felix bobbed and weaved, bobbed and weaved, occasionally punching his two gloves together.

310

Antonio waited for the rush that was sure to come. Felix closed in and feinted with his left shoulder and threw a right instead. Lights suddenly exploded inside Felix’s head as Antonio slipped the blow and hit him with a pistonlike left, catching him flush on the point of his chin.

Bedlam broke loose as Felix’s legs momentarily buckled. He fought off a series of rights and lefts and came back with a strong right that taught Antonio respect.

320

Antonio danced in carefully. He knew Felix had the habit of playing possum when hurt, to sucker an opponent within reach of the powerful bombs he carried in each fist.

**IDENTIFY**

Underline the details in lines 328–343 that tell you that Antonio and Felix are no longer thinking about their friendship.

**VOCABULARY**

**frenzied** (fren'zēd) *adj.*: wild.

**RETELL**

Pause at line 355. Retell what has happened in the second round.

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A right to the head slowed Antonio’s pretty dancing. He answered with his own left at Felix’s right eye that began puffing up within three seconds.

Antonio, a bit too eager, moved in too close, and Felix had him entangled into a rip-roaring, punching toe-to-toe slugfest that brought the whole Tompkins Square Park screaming to its feet.

Rights to the body. Lefts to the head. Neither fighter was giving an inch. Suddenly a short right caught Antonio  
 330 squarely on the chin. His long legs turned to jelly and his arms flailed out desperately. Felix, grunting like a bull, threw wild punches from every direction. Antonio, groggy, bobbed and weaved, evading most of the blows. Suddenly his head cleared. His left flashed out hard and straight, catching Felix on the bridge of his nose.

Felix lashed back with a haymaker, right off the ghetto streets. At the same instant, his eye caught another left hook from Antonio. Felix swung out, trying to clear the pain. Only the **frenzied** screaming of those along ringside  
 340 let him know that he had dropped Antonio. Fighting off the growing haze, Antonio struggled to his feet, got up, ducked, and threw a smashing right that dropped Felix flat on his back.

Felix got up as fast as he could in his own corner, groggy but still game. He didn’t even hear the count. In a fog, he heard the roaring of the crowd, who seemed to have gone insane. His head cleared to hear the bell sound at the end of the round. He was glad. His trainer sat him down on the stool.

350 In his corner, Antonio was doing what all fighters do when they are hurt. They sit and smile at everyone.

The referee signaled the ring doctor to check the fighters out. He did so and then gave his OK. The cold-water

sponges brought clarity to both amigo brothers. They were rubbed until their circulation ran free.

*Bong!* Round three—the final round. Up to now it had been tic-tac-toe, pretty much even. But everyone knew there could be no draw and that this round would decide the winner.

360 This time, to Felix’s surprise, it was Antonio who came out fast, charging across the ring. Felix braced himself but couldn’t ward off the barrage of punches. Antonio drove Felix hard against the ropes.

The crowd ate it up. Thus far the two had fought with mucho corazón.<sup>10</sup> Felix tapped his gloves and commenced his attack anew. Antonio, throwing boxer’s caution to the winds, jumped in to meet him.

370 Both pounded away. Neither gave an inch and neither fell to the canvas. Felix’s left eye was tightly closed. Claret-red blood poured from Antonio’s nose. They fought toe-to-toe.

The sounds of their blows were loud in contrast to the silence of a crowd gone completely mute. The referee was stunned by their savagery.

*Bong! Bong! Bong!* The bell sounded over and over again. Felix and Antonio were past hearing. Their blows continued to pound on each other like hailstones.

Finally the referee and the two trainers pried Felix and Antonio apart. Cold water was poured over them to bring them back to their senses.

380 They looked around and then rushed toward each other. A cry of alarm surged through Tompkins Square Park.

Was this a fight to the death instead of a boxing match?

The fear soon gave way to wave upon wave of cheering as the two amigos embraced.

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### IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 356–384. Underline details that build suspense right up to the **climax** of the story. Circle the action that resolves the **internal conflict**, when you find out whether Antonio and Felix can still be friends.

10. **mucho corazón** (moo'cho dô'ra-sôn'): Spanish for "a lot of heart."



RETELL

Retell what happens in the final round of the fight.

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INTERPRET

The last sentence of the story refers to both fighters as “champions.” In what way are they both champions?

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No matter what the decision, they knew they would always be champions to each other.

*BONG! BONG! BONG!* “Ladies and Gentlemen. Señores and Señoras. The winner and representative to the Golden Gloves Tournament of Champions is . . .”

390 The announcer turned to point to the winner and found himself alone. Arm in arm the champions had already left the ring.



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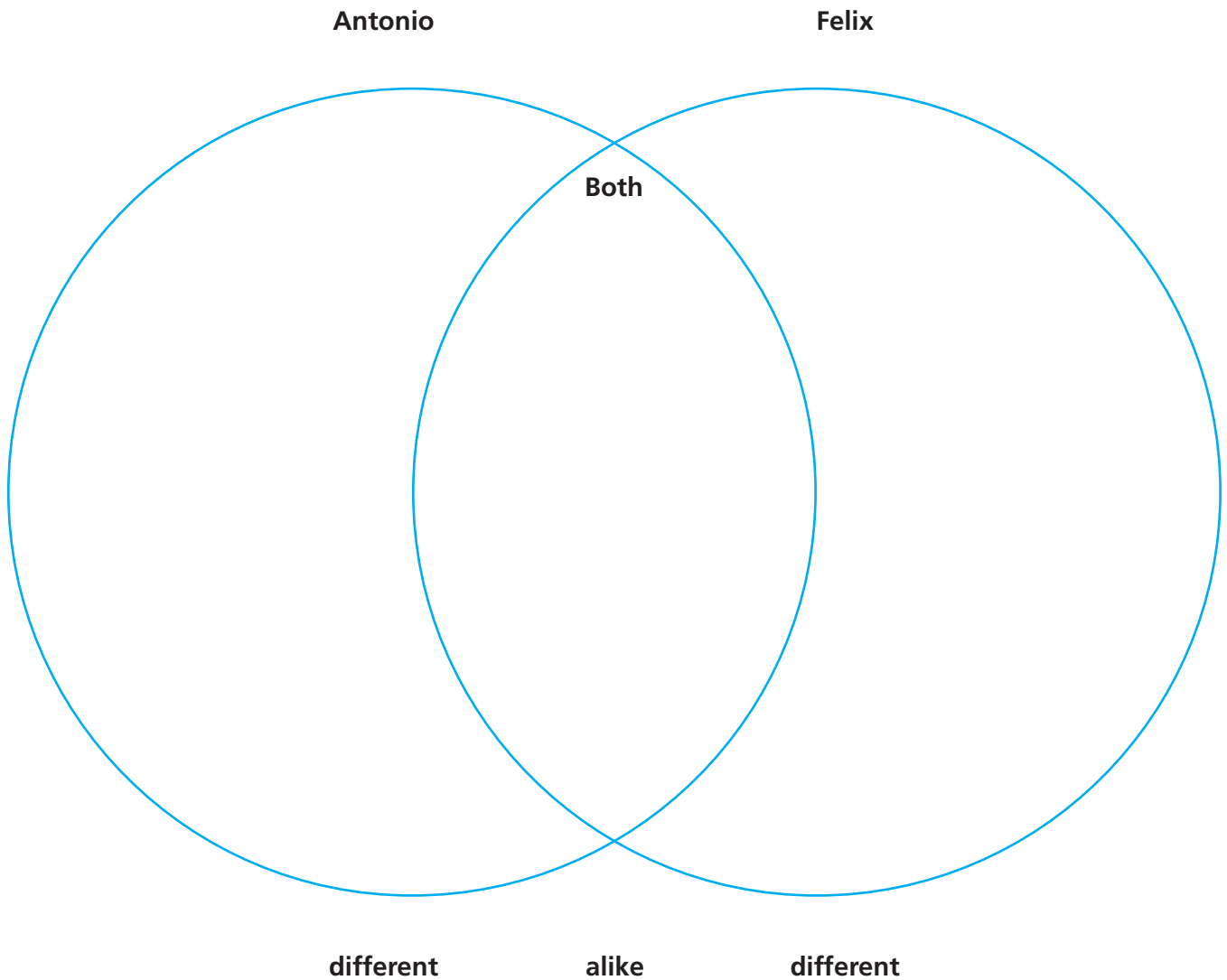
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# Amigo Brothers

**Venn Diagram** Piri Thomas begins his story by contrasting the two best friends: “Antonio was fair, lean, and lanky, while Felix was dark, short, and husky.” A **comparison** points out similarities between things; a **contrast** points out differences. Go back over the story, and use a Venn diagram to help you identify the ways in which Felix and Antonio are alike and different. Write their likenesses in the part where the circles overlap.



**Reading Skills**  
Understand comparison and contrast.



# Skills Review

## Amigo Brothers

### VOCABULARY AND COMPREHENSION

#### Word Bank

bouts  
pensively  
torrent  
dispelled  
frenzied

**A. Clarifying Word Meanings: Choosing Synonyms** Choose the word or phrase that is the best synonym for each Word Bank word. Write the letter of the synonym in the correct blank.

- |                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| _____ 1. torrent   | a. driven away  |
| _____ 2. pensively | b. flood        |
| _____ 3. bouts     | c. thoughtfully |
| _____ 4. frenzied  | d. wild         |
| _____ 5. dispelled | e. contests     |

**B. Reading Comprehension** Answer each question below.

1. Where do Antonio and Felix live? How long have they known each other? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What dream do Antonio and Felix share? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Why do Antonio and Felix stop training together? What agreement do they make? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Why don't Antonio and Felix stop fighting when the final bell sounds? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Does the fight end the friendship between Antonio and Felix? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

SKILLS  
FOCUS

**Vocabulary Skills**  
Recognize synonyms.

## Page 146

### IDENTIFY

Possible response: The narrator reveals her inner thoughts and feelings of embarrassment. Because she reveals them, most readers will feel sorry for her and root for her.

## Page 147

### RETELL

Possible retelling: She is starting to get to know Holly, but then she mentions that her father teaches viola as well as violin. Then Mrs. Hanson interrupts their conversation, mistakenly thinking that the narrator is trying to get Holly to take lessons from her father. Next, the narrator's father responds to Mrs. Hanson, and Mrs. Hanson backs down.

## Page 148

### INFER

Possible response: Holly may be uncomfortable talking about herself and her family.

### INTERPRET

Possible response: The cultural backgrounds lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding.

### CLARIFY

The narrator doesn't know that hospital records are patient histories—not recordings of music.

## Page 149

### INFER

Possible answer: Holly likes pets, especially cats.

## Page 150

### INFER

Possible answer: Holly probably wanted to give the narrator one of her kittens.

### IDENTIFY

He thinks of bean sprouts.

### IDENTIFY

The narrator's names are "Mary" and "Yingmei."

## Page 151

### IDENTIFY

"We Chinese think that being fat is good. It's a sign of good fortune."

### INTERPRET

Mother wants to tell Mrs. Hanson that she is a good person who is blessed. Instead, she says that Mrs. Hanson is "actually quite fat," which is considered an insult in America.

## ■ Possible Answers to Skills Practice

### Narrator Chart (page 152)

Narrator: third sister in the Yang family

Possible observations: (1) "We were all happy about the invitation." (2) "What excited me most was hearing that Holly Hanson and her mother were invited, too." (3) "Apparently Mrs. Hanson had got over her anger at being called old, and we Yangs were not disgracing ourselves."

### Whose Point of View?

Answers will vary. Possible answer: If Mrs. Hanson were the narrator, she might tell how well behaved the Yang children were. She would probably tell how odd it was that Mrs. Yang kept insulting her by telling her she was old and fat.

## ■ Possible Answers to Skills Review

### Vocabulary and Comprehension (page 153)

- A.
1. tasty
  2. made a face
  3. quarrelsome
  4. bringing shame
  5. did not give up
- B.
1. The narrator and her family live in Seattle. They moved to the United States from China.
  2. The Yangs have been invited to the Connors' house to experience a traditional Thanksgiving dinner.
  3. Holly and Yingmei play in the school orchestra together.
  4. Mrs. Yang calls Mrs. Hanson "old" and "fat." Mrs. Yang intends her comments to be compliments. Instead, the comments are taken as insults.

## COLLECTION 5

### Amigo Brothers, page 156

#### Page 158

### IDENTIFY

The two main characters are Antonio Cruz and Felix Vargas.

Similarities: "both seventeen years old"; "so together in friendship that they felt themselves to be brothers"; "growing up on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the same tenement building."

#### Page 159

### INTERPRET

The details that describe each youngster's fighting style are "Antonio's lean form and long reach made

him the better boxer, while Felix’s short and muscular frame made him the better slugger.”

Possible responses for meaning of “better boxer” and “better slugger”: A better boxer would be faster and would throw punches more accurately. A better slugger would be a power hitter, a boxer with more strength, power, and endurance. A slugger’s blows would land harder.

**INTERPRET**

Possible responses: Antonio and Felix feel that the upcoming match is interfering with their friendship. The “wall” is the match they both want to win.

**Page 160**

**WORD STUDY**

Possible meanings of “ace-boon”: close, affectionate, understanding. Context clues to the meaning are “not natural to be acting as though nothing unusual was happening” and “blasting each other.”

**PREDICT**

Possible predictions: Antonio and Felix will flip a coin to decide which one will drop out of the fight; they will forget about being friends, at least until after the fight is over; they will promise to be friends while still being rivals.

**Page 161**

**RETELL**

Possible retelling: They decide that in the ring they will act as if they are strangers who both want the same thing. They will not pull punches. They also agree to work out separately, and they agree not to see each other until the day of the fight.

**Page 162**

**INTERPRET**

Possible response: The internal conflict is their desire to win versus their desire not to hurt a friend.

**INFER**

Possible response: Tony tries not to think of Felix because he doesn’t want to think about punching him and possibly hurting him.

**Page 163**

**CLARIFY**

Possible response: The movie gives Felix a strategy. He decides he will pretend during the fight that he is a champ who needs to defend his title against a challenger.

**Page 164**

**INTERPRET**

Students’ responses will vary. Possible response: Antonio’s conflict is internal. His desire to win is in conflict with his desire to keep his friendship with Felix. He fears that, no matter who wins, his friendship with Felix will be over.

**PREDICT**

Students will choose different favorites to win the fight. Many students might predict that one of the youngsters will drop out of the fight. Maybe one of them will be hurt on the way to the fight or be disqualified for another reason. Some students may predict that the fight won’t take place, and Antonio and Felix will remain friends.

**Page 165**

**IDENTIFY**

Details in lines 192–216 that build suspense are “It had been decided that the gymnasium of the Boys’ Club was not large enough to hold all the people who were sure to attend”; “everyone . . . could view the fight . . . from ringside or window fire escapes or tenement rooftops”(lines 193–197); “The morning of the fight Tompkins Square was a beehive of activity”; “The scheduled bouts began shortly after noon and the park had begun filling up even earlier” (lines 198–202); “Antonio thought he caught a glimpse of Felix waving to him from a room at the far end of the corridor” (lines 206–208); “The fighters changed from their street clothes into fighting gear” (lines 210–211); “The loudspeakers blared into the open windows of the school” (lines 215–216).

**DECODING TIP**

The word *yesteryear* might mean “in previous years” or “years before this one.”

**Page 167**

**VISUALIZE**

The five details that students circle will vary. Some of the details that help students picture (and hear) the fight include “BONG! BONG! ROUND ONE”; “faced each other squarely in a fighting pose”; “head low, half-hunched toward his right shoulder, and lashed out with a straight left”; “Antonio danced, a joy to behold”; “His left hand was like a piston pumping jabs.”

**COMPARE & CONTRAST**

Possible responses:

**Antonio's actions:** “slipped the punch and countered with one-two-three lefts”; “Antonio danced, a joy to behold. His left hand was like a piston pumping jabs one right after another”; “He ducked a short right and missed a left hook”; “Antonio slipped away from Felix, crashing two lefts to his head.”

**Felix's actions:** “came in fast, head low, half-hunched toward his right shoulder, and lashed out with a straight left. He missed a right”; “Felix bobbed and weaved and never stopped boring in”; “Felix trapped him against the ropes just long enough to pour some punishing rights and lefts to Antonio's hard midsection.”

**Similarities:** Both fighters are aggressive and quick; they display good sportsmanship by freezing a punch when the bell rings.

**Differences:** Antonio has a longer reach than Felix.

**PREDICT**

Students' predictions will vary. Possible prediction: The two fighters will be equal for a while, then one—maybe Antonio—will gain advantage of the other.

**IDENTIFY**

Details include “rush”; “closed in”; “fainted”; “threw a right”; “slipped the blow”; “pistonlike left.”

**WORD STUDY**

Felix would act hurt in order to draw, or lure, his opponents within reach.

**IDENTIFY**

Details that tell you that Antonio and Felix are no longer thinking about their friendship: “Neither fighter was giving an inch”; “Felix, grunting like a bull, threw wild punches from every direction”; “His left flashed out hard and straight, catching Felix on the bridge of his nose”; “Felix lashed back with a haymaker, right off the ghetto streets”; “Antonio struggled to his feet, got up, ducked, and threw a smashing right that dropped Felix flat on his back.”

**RETELL**

Possible retelling: At the start of round two, Felix rushes Antonio “like a bull.” The advantage shifts back and forth between them with each one battling as hard as he can. Felix knocks down Antonio; then Antonio knocks down Felix. At the end of the round, both fighters have been hurt.

**IDENTIFY**

The details that build suspense include “*Bong!* Round three—the final round”; “Neither gave an inch and neither fell to the canvas”; “Felix and Antonio were past hearing. Their blows continued to pound on each other like hailstones. Finally the referee and the two trainers pried Felix and Antonio apart”; “They looked around and then rushed toward each other. A cry of alarm surged through Tompkins Square Park. Was this a fight to the death instead of a boxing match?”

The action that resolves the internal conflict is “the two amigos embraced.”

**RETELL**

In the third and final round, Antonio comes out fast and drives Felix against the ropes. Felix comes back, and neither gives ground as they savagely punch each other, toe to toe. The crowd is silent. Felix's eye is swollen closed and Antonio's nose is bleeding. When the bell signals the end of the round, both Felix and Antonio continue to punch each other and the referee has to pry them apart.

**INTERPRET**

Possible responses: They are both champions because they know they did their best—they did not pull any punches—during a difficult competition, and their friendship has survived the fight.

## ■ Possible Answers to Skills Practice

### Venn Diagram (page 173)

**Antonio (Different)**—fair, lean, lanky, hair falling in his eyes, lean form, long reach, the better boxer

**Felix (Different)**—dark, short, husky, wore his hair in an Afro style, muscular, the better slugger

**Both (Alike)**—seventeen, grew up in the same building, had the same dream of becoming lightweight champion, had won medals for boxing, had a positive outlook

## ■ Possible Answers to Skills Review

### Vocabulary and Comprehension (page 174)

- A. 1. b
2. c
3. e
4. d
5. a

- B.**
1. Antonio and Felix live on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in New York City. They have known each other since childhood.
  2. Antonio and Felix share the dream of becoming lightweight champion.
  3. They stop training together because they want to approach the fight as if they were going to fight a stranger. They agree to not pull punches, to “go all the way.”
  4. They don’t stop fighting because they are so involved in the fight that they don’t hear the bell.
  5. The fight doesn’t end their friendship. As soon as the fight ends, they embrace each other. They leave the ring arm in arm before the referee even announces the winner.

## I’m Nobody!, page 175

### Page 176

#### INTERPRET

The “they” in line 4 may refer to people who are “somebody” or to those who live in “an admiring Bog.”

#### IDENTIFY

The simile in the second stanza is “like a Frog.”

#### IDENTIFY

The “admiring Bog” refers to the public who admire famous people.

#### INTERPRET

Possible response: The speaker is conveying the idea that it is better to be anonymous than to be a famous person.

## ■ Possible Answers to Skills Practice

### Punctuation Clues (page 177)

- Line 1: Stop at the end of each short sentence.  
 Line 2: Stop at end of the sentence.  
 Line 3: Stop at end of the sentence.  
 Line 4: Stop at ends of sentences, and pause briefly after the comma.  
 Line 5: Stop at end of the sentence.  
 Line 6: Set off the phrase “like a Frog” by pausing before and after.  
 Line 7: Make a slight pause at the end of the line, but continue on to the next line to complete the sentence.  
 Line 8: Complete the sentence begun in line 7.

## ■ Possible Answers to Skills Review

### Comprehension (page 178)

1. The speaker claims to be “Nobody.”
2. The speaker is addressing any reader who also considers himself or herself nobody important.
3. The speaker thinks it would be dreary to be “Somebody.”
4. The speaker compares “public” people to a frog. It’s an example of a simile.
5. Possible response: The speaker thinks it’s better to be unknown than to be famous. Students may agree that famous people lose their freedom. Others may think being admired would be fun.

## Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout Would Not Take the Garbage Out, page 179

### Page 180

#### IDENTIFY

Students should circle the following words:

Line 1: /s/ Sarah, Cynthia, Sylvia, Stout

Line 3: /sc/ scour, scrape

Line 3: /p/ pots, scrape, pans

Line 6: /t/ not, take, out

Possible response: Alliteration makes the poem funny.

#### IDENTIFY

Adjectives that describe the garbage include the following: *Gloppy, cold, withered, Soggy, burned, Gristly, Greasy, gooey, green, Rubbery, blubbery, Curdled, Moldy, dried-up, Cold, rancid, Yellow.*

Possible response: Most students will say the adjectives make the garbage sound disgusting.

### Page 181

#### INFER

Responses will vary. Possible inference: Sarah was buried in the garbage.

#### INTERPRET

Responses may vary. Possible responses: The speaker is warning young listeners to avoid Sarah Stout’s fate and take out the garbage; the speaker is warning children to obey their parents.