

AMIGO BROTHERS

Based on the story by Piri Thomas



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Antonio Cruz and Felix Vargas were both seventeen. They had been best friends for so long they felt like brothers. They lived in the same apartment house on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Antonio was light-skinned, tall, and thin. Felix was dark, short, and muscular.

Both dreamed of becoming the world lightweight boxing champion. They trained together. Early mornings, they ran along the river together.

Both had won four boxing medals. Their styles were different, though. Antonio had a longer reach and was a better boxer, but Felix was a more powerful slugger. **A B**

In just two weeks, they would fight each other. The winner would represent their club in the Golden Gloves Championship Tournament. **C**

A

HERE'S HOW

Reading Focus

This story is all about similarities and differences. I will start **comparing** and **contrasting** the main characters, Antonio and Felix. The guys are the same age, live in the same place, and have the same dream. But they do not look alike, and they do not fight alike.

B

HERE'S HOW

Language Coach

A **suffix** is a word part that is added to the end of word. I know the word *power* means "strength." The suffix *-ful* means "an amount that fills." *Powerful* means "full of power."

C

READ AND DISCUSS

Comprehension

What is the author telling us about the Golden Gloves tournament?

A HERE'S HOW

Literary Focus

In lines 19–23, the two friends talk about the fight. Both boys are worried about the fight, so I know that is the story's **conflict**.

B READ AND DISCUSS

Comprehension

How does the boys' decision to train separately add to what we know about Antonio and Felix?

C YOUR TURN

Vocabulary

The word *trunks* can mean "large chests," "enclosed auto compartments," "stems of trees," "elephants' noses," or "very short trousers." What meaning do you think *trunks* has in line 39?

As they ran one morning, Felix said they needed to stop and talk. Their match was less than a week away. They leaned against the railing, looking out at the river.

"I don't know how to say this, bro," Felix began.

20 "I've been worrying about our fight, too, *panin*.¹ I don't sleep. I think about pulling punches so I don't hurt you."

"Me, too," said Felix. "I want to win fair and square. Let's make a promise, OK? When we fight, we've gotta be like strangers." **A**

"Sí,"² Antonio agreed.

"Listen, Tony, I think we shouldn't see each other until the fight. I'm going to Aunt Lucy's in the Bronx. I'll train up there."

Felix suggested they split right there. After the fight, he said, they'd be together again like nothing ever happened.

They hugged and went their separate ways. **B**

The night before the fight, Antonio went up to the roof.

30 The only way not to hurt Felix, he thought, was to knock him out quickly. He worried about what the fight would do to their friendship.

That night, Felix watched a boxing movie, imagining himself as the hero. It was Felix the Champion against Antonio the Challenger. He hoped for a quick, clean knockout, too.

On the day of the tournament, fans filled Tompkins Square Park. In their dressing rooms, Antonio put on white trunks, black socks, and black shoes. Felix wore light blue trunks, red socks, and white shoes. **C**

40 There were six matches before their fight. Finally, it was time. The crowd roared as they entered the ring.

Bong! Bong! Bong! "Ladies and Gentlemen, *Señores*³ and *Señoras*.⁴ For the main event we have two young Puerto Rican boxers: Felix Vargas at 134 pounds and Antonio Cruz at 133 pounds."

The referee told them to fight cleanly. "Now shake hands and come out fighting."

1. **panin** (PAH NEEN): Puerto Rican Spanish slang for "pal" or "buddy."
2. **sí**: Spanish for "yes."
3. **Señores** (SEH NYO REHS): Spanish for "gentlemen."
4. **Señoras** (SEH NYO RAHS): Spanish for "ladies."

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50

The bell sounded for round one. Felix punched a hard straight left, but Antonio slipped away. Antonio's three fast lefts snapped Felix's head back. Felix knew then that Antonio wasn't pulling any punches. Both would fight to win. **D**

Antonio danced around, punching again and again. Felix moved in closer so he could reach Antonio. At the end of the round, he trapped Antonio against the ropes and smashed his abdomen. Two hard lefts to his head set Felix's ear ringing.

Bong! Both boxers froze mid-punch as round one ended.

60

Felix's right ear rang as he moved to his corner. Antonio had red marks on his midribs. **E** "Remember," Antonio's trainer told him, "Felix always goes for the body."

Felix's trainer warned him, too. "You gotta get in close, or he'll chop you up from way back." **F**

Bong! Bong! Round two. Felix rushed in and landed a solid right to the head. Hurt, Antonio hit back hard and fast. Felix returned a left to Antonio's head and a right to the body.

Antonio waited while Felix danced around. Then, Felix rushed in and slugged Antonio. Antonio hit him hard on the chin, and lights exploded inside Felix's head. **G** His legs

D

YOUR TURN

Literary Focus

The beginning of the fight is described in lines 48–51. Underline the sentence that tells you about the promise the boys made.

E

HERE'S HOW

Reading Focus

Here are some more **comparisons** and **contrasts**. Both Felix and Antonio are injured, but they are injured in different ways.

F

READ AND DISCUSS

Comprehension

What can we learn from the conversation between the boys and their trainers?

G

HERE'S HOW

Vocabulary

I have heard the word *exploded* when someone talks about bombs or fireworks. That does not seem to fit in this sentence. Here, I think *exploded* means that lights flashed in Felix's head because he was punched.

A YOUR TURN

Reading Focus

The crowd's attitude changes during the fight. How do the crowd's actions in lines 79–80 **contrast**, or differ, from their actions in line 87?

B READ AND DISCUSS

Comprehension

What is going on now? How does this connect to what we know about the boys?

C YOUR TURN

Literary Focus

The story's **conflict** was that the boys worried the fight would affect their friendship. What was the **resolution** to that problem?

folded, but he managed to fight off Antonio's attack. Felix
70 came back with a powerful right.

Antonio smashed Felix's right eye, which puffed up right away. Toe to toe, the boxers battered each other. Right, left, right, left. The crowd stood and roared.

A sudden right to the chin turned Antonio's legs to jelly. Felix hit wildly until Antonio punched him hard on the nose.

Then Felix landed a fierce blow. Antonio dropped, then staggered to his feet. He slugged Felix hard, and Felix went down flat on his back.

He got up in a fog. The crowd roared wildly as the bell
80 sounded the end of round two.

Both fighters were hurting, but the doctor said they were OK to continue.

Bong!—the last round. So far the fight seemed even, but there could be no tie. There had to be a winner.

Antonio charged, driving Felix against the ropes. They pounded each other fiercely. Felix's eye was closed, and blood poured from Antonio's nose. The crowd watched in silence. **A**

The bell sounded the end of the fight. But the boxers kept on pounding each other. The referee and trainers pulled them
90 apart, and someone poured cold water over them.

Felix and Antonio looked around and hurried toward each other. The audience cried out in alarm. Would they fight to the death? Then they cheered as the amigo brothers hugged.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, *Señores* and *Señoras*. The winner and champion is . . ." The announcer turned to point to the winner.

But he stood alone in the ring. The champions had already left, arm in arm. **B C**

Comprehension Wrap-Up

1. What does the way the boys went about getting ready for the fight, fighting the fight, and their actions after the fight tell us about them?