

And Now Miguel Short Guide

And Now Miguel by Joseph Quincy Krumgold

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Overview

And Now Miguel is the gentle, personal story of twelve-year-old Miguel Chavez, who longs to accompany the men of his family on their annual shepherding trip to the Mountains of Sangre de Cristo.

Based on the true story of a boy from New Mexico, this realistic novel presents accurate details of a shepherd's life.

Down-to-earth and human, the characters in And Now Miguel have distinct personalities and express well-defined emotions. Their words provide a simple, yet insightful, glimpse into the life of a close, loving, and religious Hispanic American family.

The novel treats themes of self-acceptance, growth, responsibility, and family pride. It also explores the meaning of hope, the purpose of dreams and wishes, the importance of belonging, the difficulties of overcoming failure, and the problems and joys of communicating with others.

About the Author

Joseph Krumbgold was born on April 9, 1908, in Jersey City, New Jersey, to Henry and Lena Gross Krumbgold.

Fascinated with his father's career as a film exhibitor, Joseph decided that he, too, wanted to work with movies. He attended New York University, receiving a bachelor's degree in 1928, and went to work in the New York office of MetroGoldwyn-Mayer. He then moved to Hollywood to begin a career as a screenwriter and producer, working for Paramount, Republic, RKO, and Columbia. His screenplays include *Lady from Nowhere* (1936), *The Blackmailer* (1936), *Adventure in Manhattan* (1936), *Lone Wolf Returns* (1936), *Join the Marines* (1937), *Jim Hanvey—Detective* (1937), *Lady Behave* (1938), *Speed to Burn* (1938), *Main Street Lawyer* (1939), *The Phantom Submarine* (1940), *The Crooked Road* (1940), *Seven Miles from Alcatraz* (1942), *Magic Town* (1947), and *Dream No More* (produced in Israel in 1950).

From 1940 to 1946 Krumbgold served as a producer and director for Film Associates in New York City, and he worked for the Office of War Information. From 1946 to 1950, when the nation of Israel was being founded, he was the president of production for Palestine Films. In 1950 he began his own film company, Joseph Krumbgold Productions, creating award-winning documentaries. Among the honors bestowed upon the company's releases were an Academy Award nomination and first prizes at the Edinburgh, Prague, and Venice film festivals. He also worked as a writer, producer, and director for the National Broadcasting Company, Columbia Broadcasting System, National Educational Television, and Westinghouse Television.

Krumbgold had a deep love for books, particularly for stories that families could enjoy together, and was a prolific author. His novels included *Thanks to Murder* (1935), *Sweeney's Adventure* (1942), and *The Most Terrible Turk: A Story of Turkey* (1969). He also wrote a historical book, *The Oxford Furnace, 1741-1925* (1976); a critique entitled *Where Do We Grow from Here: An Essay on Children's Literature* (1968); and numerous articles for periodicals.

Krumbgold received the Newbery Medal from the American Library Association for *And Now Miguel* and *Onion John*, becoming the first author to be honored with this award twice.

Joseph Krumbgold married Helen Litwin on January 10, 1947, and had one son, Adam. He traveled and worked in New York, Hollywood, Israel, Paris, London, Turkey, and Rome, and he lived on Shiloh Farm in Hope, New Jersey, where he died of a cerebral hemorrhage on July 10, 1980.

Setting

And Now Miguel is set during the early 1950s on a Hispanic American sheep ranch near Taos, New Mexico. Two nearby places illustrate the vast difference between the old way of life and the new in the southwestern United States: the village of Los Cordovas, a small Catholic community that celebrates a fiesta in honor of its patron saint, San Ysidro, and the city of Los Alamos, where the federal government has recently built an atomic energy laboratory.

The Chavez family rents land for its flocks on a mesquite-covered mesa near the Rio Grande Canyon. The Pueblo River runs through this land, providing excellent trout fishing. From their home, the Chavez family can see the peaks of the Mountains of Sangre de Cristo, part of the Carson National Forest. These mountains, where the men of his family take the sheep to graze each summer, fascinate Miguel. The novel focuses on his intense desire to go up into the mountains and culminates with his first visit to the snow-covered peaks.



Social Sensitivity

Religious questions and ideas play a major role in *And Now Miguel*. Miguel prays to San Ysidro, then questions the validity of prayer and the ability of God or a saint to change reality. Different perspectives on faith are presented as various family members explain their understanding of "luck" or "making wishes," and the conclusion of the story suggests that the acceptance of God's will may be a sign of personal maturity.

Although based on a Roman Catholic culture, the novel explores questions that might be asked by people of any religion or culture.

Some readers may feel that the simple dialogue, with its occasionally improper grammar, presents a negative, stereotypical image of a minority family.

Nonetheless, Krumbold imbues his characters' discussions and actions with more than enough wisdom and thoughtfulness to counteract his perhaps overzealous attempts at dialect.

The stereotypical gender roles may cause some concern as well. Miguel's somewhat gruff father earns the family's money while the affectionate mother keeps house and raises the children.

Readers should remember that *And Now Miguel* was written over thirty years ago, and the book may be used as a launching point for a discussion of changes in sex roles that have taken place over the past few decades.

Literary Qualities

Written as a first-person account of Miguel's thoughts and experiences, *And Now Miguel* is a realistic novel. The unsophisticated vocabulary reflects Miguel's age, and the dialect reflects the characters' Hispanic heritage.

Throughout the book, Krumgold includes vivid and detailed factual information about shepherding, lending a documentary feel to the novel. This information adds color to the story and develops an analogy between the care a shepherd gives his sheep and the care and love that one should extend to other human beings.

Although simple, the language of the book gains power through the repetition of key phrases and images. Recurring symbols—clouds, music, laughter, and the act of throwing an object—unify the narrative. The novel's themes develop through day-to-day changes in Miguel's maturing perspective.



Themes and Characters

Twelve-year-old Miguel Chavez, the novel's main character, is introspective, yet impatient. He has grown up in an environment that emphasizes the importance of religion and family, and he values both. As he begins to contemplate Illustration by Jean Chariot for ... And Now Miguel by Joseph Krungold. Thomas Y. Crowell: New York (1953).

the attitudes that have shaped his childhood, Miguel wonders about the meaning of prayer and longs to be an adult.

Although hardworking and kind, Miguel's father, Old Blas, does not always have the patience to understand Miguel's feelings. Taking care of her large family keeps Miguel's warm but strict mother busy. Both parents place great importance on responsibility and education.

Young Blas, Miguel's oldest brother, drives the school bus and helps with the sheep, as do Uncle Eli, Uncle Bonifacio, and Grandfather Chavez, who is nearly eighty years old. Nineteen-year-old Gabriel, Miguel's second oldest brother, enjoys popularity and success. Miguel admires him and is greatly upset when a letter from the Selective Service arrives, stating that Gabriel has been drafted into the U.S. Army.

Miguel's younger brother, seven-year-old Pedro, displays artistic talent and seems to be content. Miguel observes that for Pedro, "it is enough for everything to be like it is." Miguel also has three sisters—Tomasita, Leocadia, and little Faustina, who loves to make up nonsensical words—and a friend from school named Juby.

Miguel prays to San Ysidro, the patron saint of Los Cordovas, entrusting the "saint for farmers" with his deepest wishes. San Ysidro never actually appears in the novel; his character derives from Miguel's imaginative interpretation of Catholic teachings about him.

Johnny Marquez, a member of a family of sheepshearers, personifies saintly qualities for Miguel. Though he is an adult, Johnny understands young boys and enjoys Miguel's company. Miguel imagines that Johnny is the kind of person saints would hire to carry out good deeds on earth.

The action of *And Now Miguel* revolves around the Chavez family. The story develops the idea of kinship, stressing the importance of making sure that each person feels a sense of belonging. In their attempts to talk with and understand one another, the Chavez family members illustrate the value of communication. Their actions demonstrate the concepts of responsibility, family pride, and appreciation of and respect for others.



And Now Miguel is also a book about growing up. Miguel believes that the day his parents realize he is old enough to go to the mountains will be the greatest day of his life. As he waits for that day, he struggles to understand what it means to wish and dream, and he achieves a degree of self-awareness and self-acceptance along the way. Miguel also learns to be more sympathetic toward other people as he observes how his brothers and his parents face issues surrounding "growing up." Miguel realizes that growing up is difficult for everyone involved and that maturity is a way of thinking.



Topics for Discussion

1. In what ways does Miguel consider himself "different" from his brothers and sisters? Why does he say "the trouble with me is that I am Miguel"?

2. What is "The Plan"? Why does Miguel decide he needs to have a plan?

What suggestions would you give Miguel for actions to include in his plan?

3. Why are the Mountains of Sangre de Cristo so alluring to Miguel? How does he describe the mountains to his younger brother and sister? Is this an accurate description? Why or why not?

4. Why does Miguel like being called "the Bookkeeper"? What is the significance of that nickname?

5. What does Miguel say is the worst thing that could happen to a lamb? Why does he say that? How does this relate to how he feels about himself?

6. Why do the adults in Miguel's family, particularly his father, often have difficulty understanding what Miguel is talking about?

7. When Miguel finds the missing sheep, his grandfather says he is "just like a real pastor." What does this mean?

How does Miguel feel about this?

8. During the Festival of San Ysidro, Miguel is intrigued by the new statue of the saint and says, "as soon as I saw him, I knew I was lucky." Why does he say this? Does his attitude toward the saint change? What does it mean to be "lucky"?

9. After school closes for the summer, Miguel's father treats Miguel differently than he has before. What is the difference? How does Miguel respond to this change?

10. In chapter 9, Miguel says that hoping is "like too big a load of wood from the woodpile." What does he mean? Why does Gabriel tell Miguel that it is dangerous and risky to make wishes?

11. Miguel says that watching the sheepshearer, Johnny Marquez, makes it "easy to think of San Ysidro." What are some of the ways in which Johnny and San Ysidro are similar? How are Miguel's expectations of them the same?

12. Why does Miguel not call for help when he falls into the fleece bag? How does this fall change the way he feels about himself? How does it change his attitude toward work and toward his family? After falling into the bag, Miguel refers to himself by saying, "my name's Babaloo." What is the significance of this title?



13. Why is the day that Gabriel receives the letter from the Selective Service a "kind of holy day" for Miguel? How is his prayer on this day different than his prayer on San Ysidro Day? Why is it easier for him to think of what to say now?

14. When Miguel finally reaches the Mountains of Sangre de Cristo, he says, "There was no more Miguel." What does he mean? Why does he say that this first moment on the mountain was "the minute that divided everything"? What was being divided?

15. Why do the Chavez men carve their names on the trees on the mountain?

What is the significance of the story closing with Miguel saying that his name would be difficult to carve?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Compare and contrast the attitudes that the various characters hold concerning the meaning of prayer. How do their opinions change during the course of the story?
2. Make a list of the Spanish words and phrases that are used in the novel. Then use a Spanish-English dictionary to find the meaning of those words and phrases. How does the inclusion of foreign words add to the story? What is the author's purpose in including them?
3. Throughout the book, Miguel is referred to by a variety of nicknames. What are those names, who calls him by each name, and what is the significance of each? How do the nicknames change as he changes as a person? Which names does Miguel use for himself, and which does he prefer? Why?
4. Research what it is like to raise sheep today. Compare and contrast the life of a modern shepherd to that of the Chavez family.
5. Choose one of the novel's recurring symbols, such as clouds or music, and trace how that symbol is used throughout the book. What does that object symbolize? Does it always symbolize the same thing, or are there several different meanings for the object?
6. Take each of the characters in the story, including family members, friends, and even God and Saint Ysidro, and show how communication plays a part in Miguel's relationship with each.

What kinds of things do the characters attempt to communicate? How do they succeed, and how do they fail? What are some of the factors that hinder or enhance communication?

7. In chapter 13, Miguel asks Gabriel why San Ysidro does not "go out and fix up things in general." Why does this question make Gabriel so angry, and why does Miguel consider it so important that Gabriel not think it a "dumb question"? What does Miguel decide is the proper answer to this question?

Once Miguel has decided on this answer, why does Gabriel insist that Miguel tell him what he is going to do about it? Why should he have to do anything? What action do you think he should take? Do you agree with his conclusion? Why or why not?

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71 Boston: Horn Book, 1965. This article provides biographical information about Krumgold.

Krumgold, Joseph. "Acceptance Paper."

In *Newbery Medal Books: 1922-1955*, edited by Bertha Mahony Miller and Elinor Whitney Field. Boston: Horn Book, 1955. In acknowledging the receipt of the Newbery Award for *And Now Miguel*, Krumgold compares the village of Los Cordovas with the city of Los Alamos.

Krumgold, Joseph. "Archetypes of the Twentieth Century." *School Library Journal* (October 1968): 112-115.

Krumgold explains the relationship between *And Now Miguel*, *Onion John*, and *Henry 3*, and he compares these stories to well-known fairy tales. This article gives an excellent summary of the themes of his novels.



Related Titles/Adaptations

And Now Miguel is based on a 1953 award-winning documentary film of the same title. Krumgold visited Miguel's family, then wrote and directed a film about them. Translated into fifteen languages, the film was distributed worldwide by the U.S. State Department. In 1966 another film version of And Now Miguel appeared, released by Universal Pictures. The screenplay was written by Ted Sherdeman and Jane Clove; the film was produced by Robert B. Radnitz and directed by James B. Clark, and starred Pat Cardi, Michael Ansara, Guy Stockwell, and Joe De Santis. Like the original film, the movie has a documentary flavor.

And Now Miguel is part of a trilogy of novels, each of which portrays the life of a twelve-year-old boy in a different American community. And Now Miguel focuses on life in a rural, Hispanic community; Onion John centers on life in a small town; and Henry 3 depicts life in a suburb of a large city. All three novels emphasize the importance of family relationships, the difficulty of communication, and the need to value the attitudes and opinions of others.



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