

# **Chucaro: Wild Pony of the Pampa Study Guide**

**Chucaro: Wild Pony of the Pampa by Francis Kalnay**

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## Plot Summary

Chúcaro: Wild Pony of the Pampa is the story of a young Argentinian boy, Pedro, and a beautiful pink horse he discovered named Chúcaro. The story takes place in the Argentinian Pampa, the prairie between the Andes and the Atlantic Ocean. Most of the main characters are gauchos, basically cowboys and ranchers. They all herd and maintain livestock on an estancia, an enormous farm owned by a patrón or estanciero named Señor Muñoz. Pedro's familial situation is somewhat unusual. His father, called "The Vaquero", is nearing old age and is often drunk. He has left Pedro in the care of a tall, lanky, courageous but solitary gaucho named Juan. Juan and Pedro get along well and Juan protects Pedro during difficult times.

The book opens with Pedro and the Vaquero encountering Chúcaro for the first time. Pedro is able to lasso him and he and Chúcaro form an instant bond. Chúcaro lets Pedro get close to him in ways that wild horses almost never would. The next several chapters of the book introduce the setting and various minor characters in the book. It discusses the activities of gauchos, including their modes of relaxation, which often includes drinking maté and singing gaucho songs. It covers Pedro and Juan's growing bond with Chúcaro and the bond between Chúcaro and Juan's older horse, Gitana. About a third of the way through the book, the mayordomo is introduced. The mayordomo is responsible for maintaining the estancia for its patrón. He is typically a very busy man and is eager to please his boss. He runs a tight ship and intimidates most of the gauchos, that is, except Juan.

The plot begins to take shape when the mayordomo learns of Chúcaro. It turns out that the patrón's son, Armando, has a birthday coming up and wants a horse. The patrón tells the mayordomo to find him a special horse, so when the mayordomo hears of Chúcaro, he decides to secure the pony for Armando. But Juan and Pedro are unwilling to budge. They speak with the local families about how to keep Chúcaro. They are informed that because Chúcaro was found on estancia property, it may well belong by law to Señor Muñoz. So Juan and Pedro decide to offer Armando and his father a deal: if Armando can lasso Chúcaro, he can have him. But if he cannot, then Chúcaro stays with Pedro. They are sure that they can win because they have heard that Armando is a spoiled brat.

Armando, however, gladly takes the bet as he has had a lot of rancher training at his father's expense. The climax of the book comes during the match between Armando and Chúcaro. Armando can't lasso Chúcaro, and when he falls in the mud and the locals laugh at him, he throws a bola at Chúcaro, causing him to fall. When Juan sees that Chúcaro might have been hurt, he yells at Armando and shakes him. Chúcaro kicks Armando, hard. Armando blames Juan in front of his father and Señor Muñoz fires him on the spot. But Juan and Pedro are not despondent. Instead, they take Gitana and Chúcaro and start on a long journey to Iguazu Falls, something of a dream of Juan's.



# Chapters 1-6, Lasso, Ombu, The Casita, Currycomb, Tears, Gitana the Gypsy

## Chapters 1-6, Lasso, Ombu, The Casita, Currycomb, Tears, Gitana the Gypsy Summary

The story of Chúcaro is the story of a boy and his special horse out in the plains between the Andes and the Atlantic Ocean, an area called the Pampa by the Indians. The cowboys of this area are called the Pampa. The story of the boy, Pedro, and his horse, Chúcaro, occurs in the Argentine Pampa.

In chapter one, Pedro spies a beautiful pinkish horse with snow-white spots from the brush. Pedro is twelve and the son of the Vaquero people. Pedro would like to lasso him and asks his aging father for help. Pedro's father was once a strong man, but when Pedro's mother died when Pedro was one, his father lost his strength and his pride. When Pedro and his father successfully lassooed the horse, Pedro named him Chúcaro and felt that this was the right name.

Chapter two mentions the Ombu, the solitary tree of the Pampa prairie. It provides much needed shade and often helps one to relax near one's ranch.

Chapter three introduces Juan and his hut. Juan is Pedro's guardian instead of his father. Juan's hut is small and covered on top with corrugated metal. It is made of mud. Juan has many pictures inside, including a wanted poster of a man who has not been caught for years. There is a one thousand peso prize for his capture. He also has a poster of the waterfalls of the Iguazu. He had once made a poster of Jesus Christ as a shepherd, and he also has postcards of the biggest towns in Argentina, including Buenos Aires. Most important to him is the postcard he received from a girl, but he never answered her because she forgot to leave her address. The hut, or casita, contains no table but only a chest with Juan's things. Juan often wears a kerchief and has a mustache. Juan never spoils Pedro and cares for him. At night, he often remembers the girl he cannot contact.

In chapter four, Juan and Pedro lead Chúcaro to Juan's casita. Pedro wants to keep him inside to keep him safe, but Juan refuses and instead keeps him in the corral. He has Pedro fetch his currycomb, a comb used to brush horses. Chúcaro is thrilled to be combed. For animals, scratching is a serious matter, and Chúcaro is very happy to receive some. It communicates friendship.

Chúcaro had spent about a week in the corral by chapter five. Juan visits him in the morning, but Pedro is always there first, feeding and brushing him. The news of Pedro's find travels fast around the Pampa. The people hear of the magical horse with a pinkish coat. Many visited Pedro and Juan to see the horse, including Carlos and Jose, their gaucho friends, Mr. and Mrs. Pizetti and other immigrants from all over Europe. Their



faces always light up. An Indian tries to buy Chúcaro, as does an assistant bookkeeper. But Pedro always refuses. One day, early in the morning, Pedro tries to ride Chúcaro, but Chúcaro doesn't move. When Juan comes outside, Pedro is already off. He mentions trying to ride Chúcaro and says he'd like Juan to go first. Juan warns that riding would be difficult. Chúcaro stands quietly and Juan cautions to treat him gently. But Juan can tell from Pedro's face that he had already tried to ride him, and Juan is mad that Pedro took an unsafe risk without him. He yells at Pedro and Pedro cries. Juan is mad at himself for erupting and tells Pedro to get on the horse. Juan lifts Pedro up and they head out into a field.

In chapter six, Juan has a horse as well. Her name is Gitana and she is around nine. She is a "gypsy girl", very temperamental and cunning. Her coat is light-brown and she eats a lot. When she meets Chúcaro, they are immediately friendly. They understand each other and Gitana takes Chúcaro under her wing. She helps and comforts him.

## **Chapters 1-6, Lasso, Ombu, The Casita, Currycomb, Tears, Gitana the Gypsy Analysis**

The first six chapters set up the main storyline. Chapter one introduces the two main characters, Pedro and Chúcaro. Pedro spots Chúcaro and finds him beautiful, with a very unusual pinkish coat and snow-white spots. He likes Chúcaro and very much wants to have him for his own, so with his father's help, he lassoes him. Surprisingly, Chúcaro hardly resists, as if he wants to befriend Pedro. This signals early on that Pedro's connection with Chúcaro will be special, which is shaping up to be one of the most important themes of the book.

Other brief chapters, like chapter two, enrich the setting. The reader already knows that the story is set in the prairies of Argentina between the Andes and the Atlantic Ocean in an area known as the Pampa. The author gives the impression of a sparse yet beautiful grassy prairie that stretches out as far as the eye can see, with only the occasional tree or stream.

Chapter three introduces Juan, one of the other main characters and Pedro's caretaker. Pedro and Juan discuss how to take care of Pedro. They decide to keep him in the corral, which makes Chúcaro a constant feature of their lives over the next week. In chapter five, Pedro tries to ride Chúcaro without Juan around. This makes Juan angry, since Pedro engaged in a dangerous activity without him. He yells at Pedro and Pedro cries. This indicates a bit of a tension between them. In chapter six, Chúcaro's fame spreads and many people come to see him. Once can see the bond between Pedro and Chúcaro when Pedro refuses to sell him even for large sums of money.



# **Chapters 7-10, Meat, Maté, Music, What the Mayordomo Didn't Know Was Not Worth Knowing, The Red Kerchief—a Mystery, Something Is Brewing Again**

## **Chapters 7-10, Meat, Maté, Music, What the Mayordomo Didn't Know Was Not Worth Knowing, The Red Kerchief—a Mystery, Something Is Brewing Again Summary**

Chapter seven describes one of the typical past times of the gaucho. They often get together to make dinner and talk. They eat few vegetables, but instead make stews and eat meat, often sausage and beefsteak. The men mostly eat meat and are satisfied with some meat, a fire and a spit. The gauchos love company and talking and telling stories. They drink their favored drink, maté, and relax after dinner. Juan, however, is different. He rarely went to village dances like many other men; instead, he tended to stick around his own camp and sing old gaucho songs, sometimes with only Pedro around. Juan had a lovely singing voice and Pedro would listen to him on Chúcaro's back until he fell asleep. Juan would then take him inside.

A mayordomo is a manager of a large series of farms, an estancia, for the estanciero, a very rich landowner who will often leave his estancia to relax in other parts of the world. An estancia is a conglomeration of between fifty to one hundred farms. The mayordomo nearest Juan and Pedro was a tall man who knew the entire goings on of the estancia and surrounding areas. He inspired awe and was over six feet tall. Juan, however, was not in awe of him. This mayordomo had a bronze, ruddy face. He was always busy, constantly on the move, managing the health of horses, bartering for new livestock, managing crops, and so on. Again, he knew about everything. However, he did not know about Chúcaro.

Chapter nine opens discussing the mystery of Juan's kerchief. He had thrown his yellow kerchief to Pedrito when Pedrito was crying. On Sundays, Juan wore his red kerchief, but here he wears it on another day than Sunday. He says that he felt happy, which led him to wear red. Juan's friend Jose thinks that something special has happened to Juan, but that Juan won't speak up about it. Jose's wife, Maria, guesses that Juan is getting married to the girl in the postcard in his room and tells another local woman, Luisa. However, some others don't remember the postcard, but only the wanted poster in Juan's house, so they think Juan has captured the murderer. The gossipers, however, all decide to keep their gossip to themselves.



Chapter ten is very brief, noting that the Pampa seems dead from the airplane's view above, but when one is close to the Pampa, as are the gauchos and their horses, it sings, its prairie flowers bloom and the people and the ponies love it. Sometimes the weather is sad, like when the hail comes and destroys the crops, and sometimes the sun is too hot, but all and all the Pampa is a beautiful home.

## **Chapters 7-10, Meat, Maté, Music, What the Mayordomo Didn't Know Was Not Worth Knowing, The Red Kerchief—a Mystery, Something Is Brewing Again Analysis**

Chapters seven through ten set up several potential plot development lines. Chapters seven, eight and nine all discuss ways in which Juan is different from other people in the area. For example, men often get together to share meat, maté and music, but Juan often times stays by himself with Pedro and sings privately, despite having a beautiful voice. Chapter eight explains that of all people, it is only Juan who is not impressed by the mayordomo. In chapter nine, Juan is closemouthed about why he is happy. Again, he keeps to himself.

The general plot lines seem to be two. First, the mayordomo is described as having a kind of all Seeing Eye around the estancia, but heretofore has missed the presence of the beautiful Chúcaro. Perhaps he will discover Chúcaro, and what then? Further, Juan is for some reason wearing a kerchief and it signals, or so it seems, either that Juan is going to get married or that he has captured the murderer. All else equal, the former seems more probable than the latter.



# Chapters 11-13, The Vaquero Never Had a Chance, An Urgent Message, The Patrón

## Chapters 11-13, The Vaquero Never Had a Chance, An Urgent Message, The Patrón Summary

Chapter eleven opens with a busy day for the gauchos, driving bulls into their corrals. The mayordomo is busy directing them. Juan, Carlos and Pedro note how productive of a family the Pizzettis are and they later go and visit them to share Maté. After they arrive, the Vaquero, Pedro's father, shows up. He appears to be something of an alcoholic. He reports that the mayordomo had finally seen Chúcaro and liked him, but in a bad way. Vaquero noted that the estanciero, or patrón, was coming to visit and wanted a nice pony for his son, Armando. Pedro was on the verge of tears when the Vaquero reported that the mayordomo has demanded that he bring the pony to the estanciero when he arrives. Vaquero notes that he told the mayordomo that Pedro owned Chúcaro and the mayordomo became angry. The Pizzettis, Juan, Carlos and Pedro laugh when they hear how angry the Vaquero made the mayordomo, but they quickly become sad for Pedro.

Many of the people thought Pedro and Juan should resist. Juan agrees and promises to resist the mayordomo and the estanciero hard for Pedro. Mr. Pizetti notes that the law may force Juan to give up Pedro and he might be twisted into giving up Chúcaro on pain of being fired. The Vaquero suggests letting Chúcaro decide whether he wanted to be owned by Pedro or Armando. The plan adopted is to let Chúcaro loose and see if Armando can lasso him. If he can, the Chúcaro would become his property. Everyone is sure that Armando will not succeed.

Chapter twelve is brief. It shows the Vaquero asleep outside of the mayordomo's office. When the office secretary wakes him up, the Vaquero delivers a message from Juan, reportedly the plan for deciding who would own Chúcaro.

In chapter thirteen, the author notes that there is no such thing as an average estanciero/patrón. Some are good and some are bad; some are wise and others foolish. Señor Muñoz is a good man, but he had lived an uncomplicated life of luxury long into his adulthood until locusts destroyed much of his family's fortune. His life changed and he had to take part in managing his ranch, which he nonetheless enjoyed. Making decisions often caused him stress, so he left a lot of decision-making power to the mayordomo. The mayordomo sent Muñoz a telegram about Armando and Muñoz was happy for his son. The news about Chúcaro reenergized him. However, Muñoz did not realize that his son Armando was terrible spoiled. In fact, he had paid little attention to his son. Armando's mother was worn out of taking care of him, so she focused on helping others while she let Armando's tutors tend to him.





On Saturday, the patrón's party arrives. The mayordomo made sure that the estancia looked very nice. The arrival goes well, save that Armando arrives first and greets the mayordomo with a fake flower on his lapel that shoots water on the mayordomo's nice clothes. The mayordomo is furious. When Señor Muñoz arrives, he notices and said he would hold Armando responsible, but he doesn't do anything. He would surely quickly forget since he is absent-minded. Soon after everyone arrives, Muñoz starts to pelt the mayordomo with questions about the details of the farm. He also asks about Chúcaro, and the mayordomo tells him the mixed news: Chúcaro is a great pony but they had not been given enough notice to break him in, nor had they been able to secure ownership from Juan and Pedro. Muñoz is eager to placate Armando and does not care whether Pedro "owned" the horse if he by law belonged to the estancia. The mayordomo notes that the gauchos have another view and relates the proposed solution to Muñoz. Muñoz finds that gauchos' claim to ownership ridiculous, but finds the proposed challenge amenable. He notes that Armando has been trained to care for horses by the best and that he has spent a lot of money to do so. He is sure that Armando will succeed.

## **Chapters 11-13, The Vaquero Never Had a Chance, An Urgent Message, The Patrón Analysis**

Chapters eleven through thirteen fully articulate and set up the plot of the book. Chúcaro is special and he is particularly special to Pedro and Juan. The worst thing in the world would be for them to lose Chúcaro. But in chapter eleven, it becomes clear that the mayordomo has discovered Chúcaro and wants him for the estanciero, Señor Muñoz's son, the spoiled brat, Armando. The Vaquero, Pedro's irresponsible but affable father, reports about the mayordomo's plans to acquire Chúcaro for Armando. But Juan is furious and Pedro despondent at the mayordomo's proposed action. Juan decides to draw a line in the sand and resist. When Mr. Pizetti suggests that Juan could be forced to give Chúcaro up on pain of perhaps losing his job, the Vaquero suggests letting Chúcaro decide for himself who he wishes his master to be. The proposal then becomes concrete: Chúcaro will be let loose in the corral. If he can be lassoed by Armando, then Armando will be his master. Otherwise, Chúcaro will remain in Pedro's possession.

Chapter twelve simply shows the Vaquero reporting the proposal to the mayordomo, but in chapter thirteen, one can see the other side of the plot forming. The reader meets Armando and Señor Muñoz and see how they approach the proposed challenge. Muñoz is not a bad man but has little patience for the gauchos' claims on Chúcaro. He nonetheless finds the proposal amusing and is sure Armando can easily meet the challenge proposed by the gauchos.



# Chapters 14-17, Bolas, The Match, Itchy Hoofs, To Hoofs, To Iguaçu

## Chapters 14-17, Bolas, The Match, Itchy Hoofs, To Iguaçu Summary

Chapter fourteen shows Juan busy constructing a bola, a hunting weapon comprised of three strips of cowhide fit together into a Y shape. Balls are attached to each end. When the gaucho throws the bola, it wraps around the feet of an animal, like, say, an ostrich, and causes it to fall. It takes practice, and Juan is busy making one small enough for Pedro to handle. All the while, Juan's quiet appearance belies a tumultuous emotional state. A bunch of gauchos are racing horses close by, kicking up a lot of dust. The young boys are cheering Chúcaro. Juan is worried that Armando will rope him. People hurry home for church in time for the big show. Juan then thinks it might rain and changes his kerchief to blue. He wants to avoid meeting with Pedro until the match is over.

Chapter fifteen begins the match. Many old people and animals are there. Each have seen a lot in their lives, but none of them have seen so many people at the corral at one time. Everyone hears about Armando's attempt to lasso Chúcaro. So many people are on the fence that it is close to breaking. Señor Muñoz is there too. Armando is practicing in the corral when Pedro brings Chúcaro up to the corral and inside the gate. Pedro then disappears, lying in the grass with his head in his arms. Initially, Chúcaro seems confused and starts searching the crowd. He sees Gitana, who Pedro made sure would reassure him.

The first lasso is thrown but barely touches Chúcaro. And yet the people are despondent because they thought Armando would be terrible. Juan then gives Armando another chance, but before Armando can try, it starts to rain. When they reconvene, the corral is wet and full of puddles. Armando is angry and throws his second lasso hard, but slips and falls into the mud. The crowd laughs hard. Armando is furious and reaches for a bag on the floor of the car. He rips it open and it is full of bolas. Juan and Pedro cry out once they see the bolas and Gitana is scared. Pedro runs to Chúcaro but it is too late. He has been struck by Armando's bola.

In chapter sixteen, Pedro reaches Chúcaro first, who is lying in the mud. His body is trembling and he is in pain. Chúcaro then gets on his feet and Pedro takes him towards the gate. Juan grabs Armando and shakes him, telling him that he might have killed Chúcaro. He then swears that Armando would never get him. The mayordomo tells Juan to leave Armando alone and Juan lets him go. Armando then complains to his father that Juan refused to give him the pony. Juan is busy examining Chúcaro and notes that Chúcaro will be fine. Armando then picks up his bolas and orders Juan to give him Chúcaro. Pedro and Juan refuse. Armando then claims that he and his father already own everything there, but Juan and Pedro still refuse. But before Armando



could storm off, Chúcaro kicks Armando and he lands, dazed, in Mrs. Pizetti's lap. Señor Muñez is furious and has Armando placed in their car. Armando then tells his father that Juan let Chúcaro kick him. Juan says he is lying, but Muñez is furious and fires Juan on the spot.

Chapter seventeen begins with Juan riding Gitana and Pedro on Chúcaro. They have packs with them and an old third husband who accompanies them until sunset, but not afterwards. Everyone has said goodbye to them, and they have parted with their friends. Eventually, they all stop for the night and the Vaquero goes home. At night, air rushes over Juan and Pedro and they feel as if they could forget all things. Juan has brought his pictures with him, including those of The Good Shepherd and The Waterfalls of the Iguaçu and the postcard of the girl. Juan lets Pedro know that they will be okay and will have a lot of fun. It turns out that they are on their way to Iguaçu Falls. It will take them two or three months. In the Pampa, Juan and Pedro feel totally at home.

## Chapters 14-17, Bolas, The Match, Itchy Hoofs, To Iguaçu Analysis

The last four chapters bring the book through its climax and denouement. Chapter fourteen shows the build up to the match between Armando and Chúcaro, with Juan carefully making his bolas, a device that Armando will use to hurt Chúcaro after he fails to lasso him in line with the rules he agreed to. In chapter fifteen, the entire people crowd around the corral and Armando takes his shot. But he fails the first time. After a hard rain, Armando tries again but falls into the mud. He is furious and the tension in the story builds. When Armando gets up, he runs into his father's car and gets a bola, throwing it at Chúcaro and hitting him, sending Chúcaro to the ground, perhaps wounding him very badly. It is unclear at the end of the chapter how badly he is hurt.

In chapter sixteen, a suspenseful feeling comes out of the book. Pedro reaches Chúcaro, who is trembling, but Chúcaro gets up and kicks Armando. Even though Armando is okay, he blames Juan, telling his father that Juan let Chúcaro kick him. Señor Muñez is furious and fires Juan on the spot. With this, the climax of the book has passed. Armando has failed to capture Chúcaro, but keeping Chúcaro has exacted a price upon Juan and Pedro: Juan no longer has a job, and since the Muñez's own the ranch, Juan and Pedro must leave.

Chapter seventeen is therefore the denouement, showing Juan and Pedro heading off to Iguaçu Falls. Juan takes his photos with him, all of which are symbolic—his photo of The Good Shepherd, or Jesus, who represents the divine station of the gaucho, The Falls of Iguaçu, which to Juan represents a kind of promised land to which Pedro and Juan will journey towards for two to three months. And finally, there is the postcard from Juan's lost love, which again represents the far off hope of a better future. With these three symbols, Juan and Pedro and their two horses, who all share a special bond, head off to a new life. Juan and Pedro feel a deep sense of peace and have no regrets.



# Characters

## Pedro

Pedro, or Pedrito, is perhaps the most important character in the book. In many ways, Pedro is the standard innocent young boy who develops a special bond with an animal. He is sweet but sometimes misbehaves; he is outdoorsy, like most young boys and sometimes takes unnecessary risks. He loves animals and has a special connection with one of them. Pedro is the one who finds Chúcaro and lassoes him successfully. He tries to ride Chúcaro too early on but luckily is not hurt. Pedro becomes so attached to Chúcaro that he refuses to sell him to anyone, no matter how much money they offer him.

Pedro is not very close to his father, the Vaquero, who seems to spend a lot of his time being the lovable town drunk. Instead, Juan is in charge of Pedro and they develop a close bond. Juan goes out of his way to take care of Pedro, who would otherwise be without a father. Pedro seems to identify Juan as his father in more ways than the Vaquero.

Pedro's character is tested when he realizes that Juan could lose his job as a result of the stand he takes for Pedro. Pedro loves Chúcaro and Juan enough to leave with them when Juan loses his job, heading off to a faraway land that he has never heard of when he arguably could have stayed on the ranch. In general, Pedro displays an unbreakable loyalty to his "family", that is, Juan, Gitana and Chúcaro.

## Juan

Juan is a young, relatively quiet and solitary gaucho who is Pedro's primary caretaker. Juan is very kind to Pedro but often firm. He took over Pedro's care from Pedro's father, the Vaquero, when it became clear that the Vaquero was in no position to adequately care for him. Juan often eschews spending time with the other gauchos and instead sits around with Pedro at night, singing old gaucho songs by himself. Juan often communicates without words, sometimes by wearing different colored kerchiefs. He is also a man of integrity, because he refuses to sell Chúcaro for any amount of money if it meant hurting Pedro. And he is also willing to risk losing his job to protect Chúcaro from being taken away by the patrón and his spoiled son.

While Juan rarely communicates his feelings, his casita is full of symbols, particularly three: a picture of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, a poster of Iguazu Falls, a place where Juan apparently spent time before and met a girl. This girl sent him a postcard but gave no return address, so Juan could not respond to her. This last symbol represents a lost love that he ends up being able to pursue after losing his job. In fact, these items are so significant to Juan's psychology that many of the locals know of them



and Juan makes sure to take them with him when he and Pedro travel to Iguazu Falls, some of the very few items he decides to take with him.

## **Chúcaro**

The beautiful, mysterious pink horse that Pedro and Juan develop a deep bond with and who they try to protect from the patrón and Armando.

## **Gitana**

Juan's older, female horse who takes Chúcaro under her wing to teach him the ways of the horse.

## **The Vaquero**

Pedro's father and the local town drunk. Affable and friendly, he is nonetheless unable to care for Pedro.

## **The Mayordomo**

The manager of the estancia where Juan and Pedro live. In his attempts to please his boss, the mayordomo tries to commandeer Chúcaro for his own purposes. Ordinarily an intimidating figure, Juan was not intimidated by him.

## **Señor Muñoz**

The estanciero or patrón who owned the estancia and tried to take Chúcaro away from Pedro and Juan for his son, Armando.

## **Armando**

The spoiled son of Señor Muñoz, who was a terror to those around him and who wanted Chúcaro for himself. He also hurts Chúcaro with a bola at the climax of the book.

## **Carlos and Jose**

Local gauchos who are friends of Juan and Pedro's.

## **The Pizzeti's**

A local family who are remarkably efficient and who advise Juan on how to resist the mayordomo and the patrón.



## Objects/Places

### The Pampa

The prairie area between the Andes and the Atlantic Ocean in Argentina.

### The Estancia

The enormous ranch where Juan and Pedro live and herd animals with a number of other gauchos.

### Juan's Casita

Juan and Pedro's little home where Juan keeps a lot of photos and pictures.

### Iguaçu Falls

Waterfalls at the edge of Brazil and Argentina. Juan has a poster of the falls and he and Pedro leave the estancia for the falls at the end of the book.

### The Corral

The area of the estancia where many of the livestock are kept and where Armando and Chúcaro have their final showdown.

### The Lasso

A loop of rope used to trap animals. Pedro used a lasso to get Chúcaro, whereas Armando used a lasso to try to take Chúcaro away from Pedro.

### Maté

A traditional South American drink, a type of tea that the gauchos often drank.

### The Good Shepherd Photo

A photo of an image of Jesus Christ that Juan had in his casita and that seems to represent his understanding of the shepherd or gaucho's life as a divine calling.



## **The Postcard**

A postcard with a note from a girl that Juan apparently once had feelings for. The tragedy of it is that she left no return address so he could not send her a reply. He hoped to find her again. The postcard represents the loss of human connection.

## **The Poster of Iguazu Falls**

A poster of Iguazu Falls that hangs in Juan's casita and that represents a kind of far-off "promised land" and where Juan and Pedro begin to travel to when they leave the estancia.

## **Juan's Kerchiefs**

Various small pieces of cloth gauchos often wore around their necks. Juan had several kerchiefs of different colors that seem to be used to represent his moods.

## **Bolas**

Y-shaped pieces of rope with heavy balls attached to each end. Juan and Pedro use bolas to trap animals and Armando uses a bola to make Chúcaro fall after he falls in the mud trying to lasso Chúcaro.





# Themes

## The Gaucho Life and Class Conflict

Chúcaro: Wild Pony of the Pampa goes out of its way to describe the life of the gaucho, or South American cowboy. Located in the Pampa, the prairie area between the Andes and the Atlantic Ocean in Argentina, the gauchos largely herds livestock, including cows, pigs, sheep and so on. The gaucho community lives a relatively austere life but they do not seem to mind it. Instead, they focus more on companionship, communion with nature, hard work, and song. Juan is the gaucho archetype for the book: quiet, aloof, loyal, courageous and honest.

However, the gaucho's life is bound up in the economic life of the estancia, or the ranch. Estancias consist of hundreds of smaller farms and herds. The estancia is typically owned by someone with a much different life from the gaucho—the estanciero, or patrón. Typically from the landed aristocracy, a several centuries old class in Argentine history, the patrón inherits his wealth and lives accordingly. The author notes that the characters of estancieros vary, and that the patrón of the book, Señor Muñoz, is not a bad individual. Nonetheless, Muñoz inevitably uses his economic power to try to get what he wants from Juan, who is economically dependent upon being employed by him. The major conflict in the book comes down to Juan protecting Pedro and Chúcaro from Armando, Señor Muñoz and the mayordomo. In this way, the inequality of economic power enables the major conflict in the book.

## Loyalty

Chúcaro remains relatively quiet about the unusual relationship between Juan and Pedro. The Vaquero is Pedro's father, but Juan is his caretaker. Presumably, this is because the Vaquero is both elderly and an alcoholic who is unable to care for Pedro. Nonetheless, Juan does everything he can for Pedro. Explicitly depicted in the book is Juan's effort to help Pedro raise Chúcaro and train him and later protecting Chúcaro from being taken away by Armando and the mayordomo. Juan is one of the exemplars of loyalty in the book for this reason since he puts his job on the line to help Pedro keep Chúcaro. In fact, he ultimately lost his entire livelihood for Pedro's sake.

Pedro also exemplifies loyalty because he quickly forms a deep and unbreakable bond with Chúcaro. Pedro's loyalty comes out clearly when he is offered enormous sums of money to sell Chúcaro. Pedro probably knew that he did not live well and at the least he could have a much better life than he currently had. He was also unwilling to let Chúcaro go when he realized that Juan could lose his job and that he could lose his caregiver.

Chúcaro also displays a loyalty of his own because he allowed Pedro to ride him and stayed loyal to him despite attempts by Armando to lasso him. The way the story is set



up, it appears that Chúcaro is loyal to Pedro as well, particularly when he tries to prevent Armando from lassoing him. In this way, loyalty is one clear, and perhaps primary, theme of the book.

## Dreams

In the book, Chúcaro is depicted as having a kind of magical quality. He appears out of nowhere, young and healthy. He has no history and immediately forms a bond with Pedro. He comes to occupy a pretty substantial portion of Pedro's attention and energy. Pedro builds so much of his life around Chúcaro that he becomes willing to sacrifice for Chúcaro to an unusual degree.

But this bond affects Juan's life in an unusual way. One of the most notable features of the book is the attention it gives to three posters in Juan's casita: a picture of Jesus Christ, a picture of Iguazu Falls and a postcard sent from an unknown girl that notably has no return address.

These three images form a set of ideals in Juan's life. The picture of Jesus represents the notion that Juan's role as a shepherd is holy, that postcard is from a lost love that Juan never forgets. Juan seems to associate the girl and the falls. This seems to be one reason why he doesn't mind being fired, as he and Pedro, Chúcaro and Gitana, soon leave for Iguazu Falls. Arguably, Juan's dream was to go there, perhaps to find his lost love. Their final departure is represented as peaceful and almost mystical. Chúcaro was a dream for Pedro and traveling to Iguazu Falls was a dream for Juan. They both followed their dreams in the end.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of *Chúcaro: Wild Pony of the Pampa* is third person. All the main characters, including Pedro and Juan, are described from the external point of view, alone, however. One does not see into their thoughts as readers. The effect of staying outside of the inner thought life of the characters is to leave some of their main features mysterious. This is especially effective with Juan's character, as a lack of discussion of his thoughts gives him a greater air of mystery, which amplifies his already noble, though withdrawn character. The fact that the author writes in the third person point of view also enables him to describe features of the landscape and lives of the gauchos of which the main characters may not have been aware, such as how the Pampa looks from the air or how the lives of the gauchos differed from the lives of other peoples in the Pampa.

The story is told in chronological order, starting with the introduction of Pedro and the Vaquero catching Chúcaro for the first time. It moves slowly through a period of no more than a few months while Pedro and Juan form a bond with Chúcaro and the mayordomo plots to acquire Chúcaro for the patrón. However, occasionally the chapters focus on features of the gaucho life, such as how they socialized. This adds a bit of a non-fiction point of view to the book, as the book tries to capture some real-world features of the gaucho life in the Pampa.

## Setting

The book is set in the Pampa, the prairie area that runs between the Andes Mountains and the Atlantic Ocean in Argentina. The time period is unclear, though it seems to range between 1920 and 1950, given the presence of an automobile but without the use of electricity. The entire story takes place on an estancia, an enormous ranch that conjoins perhaps one hundred smaller farms. The estancia is where all the livestock are held and where all the gauchos and administrators live, including the mayordomo. Chúcaro is found in the estancia, which adds an important element to the plot—since by law the estanciero's family owns what is found on the estancia, it looks as if the patrón and his son have legal claim to Chúcaro, which breeds the main conflict of the book.

The local setting, however, is in the corral area of the estancia where a number of the houses are. Juan's casita is a particularly important setting because it is where Pedro and Juan and Chúcaro live and it is where Juan keeps his three symbols, the picture of Jesus, the picture of Iguazu Falls and the postcard from his lost love. Its austere make-up makes it an authentic representation of the gaucho life. The corral is also an important setting because it is where the final showdown between Armando and Chúcaro and Juan takes place.



But perhaps the most important setting is the final setting, where Pedro and Juan begin their journey to Iguazu Falls. They are located outside of the estancia in the Pampa, all by themselves under the stars.

## Language and Meaning

Chúcaro: Wild Pony of the Pampa is a children's book, mostly for pre-teens. Consequently, the word choice and plot are very simple and easy to follow. The book contains many sketches of the main characters and events in order to enable better comprehension of the text. There are few words on each page. However, the author will, from time to time, throw in complex vocabulary words, perhaps in an attempt to encourage his reader to increase her vocabulary. Most important to the language of the book, however, is the attempt by the author to teach his English reader Spanish words common among the gauchos, like maté and estancia. As a result, the language and meaning of the text introduce the reader to the linguistic distinctiveness of the culture covers in the book.

Like many children's books, the text reads in a rather austere and sparse manner with respect to books for adults. Since everything in the book is simple, the sentences and paragraphs themselves are simple. They read clearly, but in a way that might quickly lose the interest of even advanced pre-teen readers. On the other hand, the book's simple prose is partly an attempt to make clear the culture of the time period and place where the book is set. It therefore appears that the language and meaning of the book are meant to focus the reader's attention on non-fictional cultural elements along with giving a unique cultural feel to the story as a whole.

## Structure

Chúcaro: Wild Pony of the Pampa is a short book with seventeen very short chapters. The first several chapters introduce Chúcaro and the other main characters, along with their relationships, culture and work life. Chapters one through seven begin with Pedro lassoing Chúcaro, the reader learning about Juan and Pedro's relationship and Juan's mysterious symbols, acquaintance with the drinking, eating, singing and work habits of the gauchos and the introduction of some of the other locals, including Gitana, Juan's horse. There is also a brief tension between Juan and Pedro over whether Pedro should ride Chúcaro given his and Chúcaro's young ages.

In chapter eight, the mayordomo is introduced and he quickly discovers Chúcaro. When he decides to try to gain Chúcaro for his boss, the major plot line is set, as it is in chapter nine when Juan mysteriously puts on his red kerchief for reasons unbeknown to anyone but him. As the book progresses, the tension builds. By chapter twelve, the Vaquero is delivering a message to the mayordomo about Juan and Pedro's challenge to Armando, where he can keep Chúcaro only if he can lasso Chúcaro for himself. They think that if Chúcaro really wants to stay with Pedro, he will resist Armando. When the antagonists of the book are introduced in chapter thirteen, the reader quickly builds up

to the climax chapters, chapters fifteen and sixteen, which show Armando failing to lasso Chúcaro then hurting Chúcaro and then Juan getting fired by the patrón. Chapter seventeen is the denouement, where Juan and Pedro ride off to Iguazu Falls.



## Quotes

"Chúcaro is just the right name for a good horse like you."  
Chap. 1, p. 21

"You may lie down under that Ombu tree. Its shade is so inviting."  
Chap. 2, p. 24

"Pedro really belonged to Juan. It was really Juan and not the Vaquero who raised the child."  
Chap. 3, p. 33

"He knew that it wasn't the brush only but those kindly fingers that offered him joy and begged for friendship."  
Chap. 4, p. 41

"How strange. Chúcaro doesn't seem to mind it! I've never seen a wild colt carry the saddle without blindfolding. No jumping, no kicking, no biting! Well, my friend, you might as well jump on him."  
Chap. 5, p. 46

"The very moment Gitana saw Chúcaro, she felt friendly toward that beautiful colt."  
Chap. 6, p. 52

"You tell me the rest of the story tomorrow. Good night, my Chúcaro."  
Chap. 7, p. 58

"But he didn't know anything about Chúcaro."  
Chap. 8, p. 64

"Juan is going to get married!"  
Chap. 9, p. 68

"Something is brewing again."  
Chap. 10, p. 74

"Sonny, you'd better keep an eye on Chúcaro!"  
Chap. 11, p. 79

"Chúcaro is yours, Pedrito. And they can get him only over my dead body!"  
Chap. 11, p. 85

"Chúcaro? How splendid! And he decides who is to be his owner! Think of that! How perfectly splendid!"  
Chap. 13, p. 104



"I mustn't meet Pedrito until it is all over."

Chap. 14, p. 108

"Bolas! You can't do that! No, not that ...!"

Chap. 15, p. 114

"No one shall call my son a liar. Get your pay and go! And take that beast with you. I wouldn't have that pony at any price!"

Chap. 16, p. 119

"How can one part with friends, friends who are as close as your own arm?"

Chap. 17, p. 122

"They felt at home, completely."

Chap. 17, p. 127



## Topics for Discussion

What is special about Pedro and Chúcaro's relationship?

Explain the relationship between Juan and Pedro. How does it function? Why do you think Pedro is closer to Juan than to his own father?

What is the significance of each of the three images on the walls of Juan's casita? How do they relate to the end of the book?

What is the main conflict of the book? How does the mayordomo create the main conflict of the book?

Why doesn't the patrón recognize the character flaws in his son?

What happens to Juan as a result of fighting for Chúcaro? How does he react?

Do you see any symbolism in Juan and Pedro's journey towards Iguazu Falls?