

Pocho Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Pocho is the story of a Mexican family who moves to southern California in the 1930's. Their son, Richard, is a "pocho," the child of immigrants, growing up surrounded by American culture. American values do not always go along with the Rubio family's traditional Mexican culture, and they have some trouble adjusting to their new way of life. Richard is an intelligent, independent boy who wants to make a life for his own, but his parents very much want him to continue their traditional Mexican lifestyle instead.

At the beginning of the book, Juan Rubio is a soldier traveling around Mexico after fighting in several revolutions. After carelessly killing a man, Juan flees several miles north to the U.S.A., just past the border. Soon Juan's wife, Consuelo, and his daughters join him in America, and the family moves to California. One night, Consuelo gives birth to Richard, the only boy of many sisters. Both parents openly admit that Richard is their favorite child. Juan decides to settle down and be a proper husband and father to his family. Juan's influence in the community grows, and he becomes the leader of the Mexican community, helping newcomers find jobs, food, and shelter.

Richard is an extremely intelligent, inquisitive child. He gets in trouble for asking questions about Catholic dogma, which worries his mother. As time goes by, Richard's faith weakens, and eventually he stops going to church altogether. Various groups try to recruit Richard because it will be good for him as a Mexican. In fact, he really wants to go to college and become a writer. One day Richard's mother has a talk with him, and she tells him that he will probably have to drop out of school in a few years so that he can help support the family. When Richard is a small child, a little girl named Zelda bullies the entire neighborhood. When the children are young teenagers, the boys dare Zelda to have sex with all of them, unless she is chicken. She reluctantly agrees. Eventually, Zelda and Richard start secretly dating.

Although Juan always wants to go back to Mexico, Richard continues to be assimilated into American culture. Richard hangs around for a while with a group of pachucos, Mexican immigrants who reject both Mexican and American cultures. Richard is dissatisfied with his parents' plans for his life and wants to do something greater than marry and have children. Consuelo also has to adjust to an American way of life. She is tired of always being a submissive, quiet wife, acting as a servant to her family. There are many fights in the family, and finally Juan decides to move out. He tells Richard to go ahead and become a writer, if that is what he wants. Richard has more and more responsibility, as the man of the house. He decides that the only way for him to get out of his situation is to enlist to fight in World War II.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Around the turn of the twentieth century, Mexico went through a turbulent time, being swept by one marauding army after another. Near the border of the United States and Mexico, a man named Juan Rubio arrives in a bar of a Mexican town. Being an old soldier, he quickly gets into trouble and has to emigrate to the U.S.A.

Juan Rubio arrives in the Mexican city of Juarez. He goes to get a drink in a cantina and sees a whore that he likes. He pressures her to go with him, but her pimp objects. Juan Rubio shoots the man dead and takes the girl up to his hotel room. Later that night, guards show up to arrest Rubio for murder. He happily goes along with them and talks insolently to the commander. He tells the commander his name, and the commander is horrified that he has arrested a famous war hero well known for his bravery and calculation. His superior shows up and embraces Rubio, since the two are old friends. The general complains that Rubio has put him in a bad spot. He does not want to punish Rubio, but he can not just let him go, because he killed an important man. Instead, the general sends Rubio over the border to the U.S.A., to a job smuggling cattle.

Juan eagerly looks forward to the day when he will have enough money and the correct leader is in place, for him to return to Mexico. He has fought twice, on both sides, liberating Mexico City over and over, and he will fight for his people once again, as soon as there is someone for whom to fight. One day, some men secretly meet with Rubio, to plot for him to assassinate the current President of Mexico. He agrees to do it for no money because he thinks the President needs to die. While they are conspiring, a messenger arrives and tells them that Francisco Villa is dead. Rubio weeps for his dead friend and tells the men that there is no point killing the President now because there is no one to rise to power in his place.

Rubio's whore tells him she is pregnant, and he deserts her. Instead he sends for his wife, Consuelo, and their three daughters. The family moves to Los Angeles, and Juan Rubio changes his ways, becoming a responsible husband and father. Even so, each year, he wishes he could go back to Mexico. One night, Consuelo goes out to the outhouse and gives birth on the ground. It is a baby boy named Richard, the only boy in the family.

Chapter 1 Analysis

There is an extreme contrast between the soldier Juan Rubio at the beginning of the chapter and the father at the end. This underscores what an extreme change it is in Juan's life when he moves to California from the homeland he has fought so hard to protect. In earlier scenes, he is brutal and cruel. When he meets his whore, she points



out that he doesn't even know her name, and he replies that it does not matter. When he is being interviewed at his arrest, the general asks him if he has deserted his wife, and Juan answers that he does not know yet. The fate of these women is nothing to him, just as it is nothing for him to kill a man. His unfeeling, animal brutality shows him for what he is: a soldier and mercenary, a killer, and a man looking after his own back.

Once Juan is with his family in California, Juan can no longer go around killing people. He is touched by the fact that Consuelo is willing to follow him so far, and he loves Richard in a way he has never loved his daughters. Juan keeps on putting off going back and finishing the revolution, and he gets more frustrated, the more adjusted he is to peaceful living.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

When Richard is nine years old, he goes to his First Confession. He gets very confused from what he hears at Catechism (schooling in the beliefs of the Catholic Church). Richard wants to have faith and believe correctly, but he is a very inquisitive, thoughtful little boy and usually makes his teachers, priests, and parents uncomfortable with his many questions. When Richard goes to confession, the priest asks him if he ever plays with himself and if he ever plays with and touches his sister. The boy, misunderstanding, innocently answers yes to all three questions, recalling that his mother makes him play with his sister. The priest becomes very angry. Richard, asking his mother about it, upsets her even more when he tells her that now he realizes that he misunderstood what the priest was asking him. Richard tells a story about some older neighbor girls playing with him and pulling down his pants, and his mother cries that she has such a filthy, sinful son.

As Richard awaits punishment for his sin, he thinks hard about what the connection is and realizes that it has something to do with the time his mother was giving birth in the tent. Although no one will explain anything to him, he is sure there is a connection.

Juan Rubio creates a kind of island of Mexican culture on his property, often letting other Mexicans live in his barn and yard. Although some of the locals make fun of the Mexicans, this mockery dies down as the Great Depression comes down. Various hungry groups of organized labor forces start roaming the countryside, raiding food trucks and demanding more welfare relief. Juan and Richard attend some Communist Party meetings, where agitators try to organize various groups of immigrant workers to strike. One day, the workers arrive at a ranch and demand a large raise, then riot when the raise is denied them. In the riot, the police attack, and one young man kills a policeman. Richard is the only witness, and he lies to the police and says that he did not see who did it.

Chapter 2 Analysis

It is obvious from the first presentation of Richard that he thinks too much for his own good. Richard completely trusts the word of his elders, to whom he comes with his many questions, but he is not satisfied with their answers. His parents are determined to keep him ignorant for as long as possible, which is surprising, considering the extremely close quarters, with one bedroom for twelve people.

It is interesting to note the contrast between Richard's open, honest confession with his mother and with the priest, and his lying about the man who is murdered. At home Richard is taught that it is a mortal sin to question God or be seen naked, but with his father, he is taught to kill or be killed. He does not seem to be especially bothered by his

conscience for protecting the young murderer. Richard does not understand the situation, but he stands up to the crowd of strikers wanting to protect his friends, the farmers.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Since Richard asks so many questions, one day his mother pulls him on to her lap for an important discussion. She tells him that it worries her that his mind wants to know so much and warns him that he will have to quit school in a few years. As the only boy in the family, it is important that he work to support the family. Consuelo says that there is no point in him reading all the time, since he has nothing for which to study. Richard protests that he wants to learn only for the sake of learning because he loves it. His mother counsels that Juan has high hopes for Richard, that one day he will be able to support his own family at a higher standard than they are now living. When Richard says that this is not what he wants out of life, Consuelo feels as though he is speaking against the Church. Richard admits he has difficulty believing everything his priests and teachers say because not everything they say makes sense. When he says these things, his mother says that he contains the Devil, and that because of this moment, the child she now carries will be stillborn.

When the baby is delivered stillborn, Richard feels terribly guilty, especially since his mother nearly dies. Richard partly feels like it is his fault, but another side of him knows that this might not have happened if his mother were willing to go to a hospital. She worries that a male doctor will see her naked if she goes to a hospital.

Two new children arrive in the neighborhood, and are quickly persecuted by others for being Protestant. When Richard tries to defend them, a female bully chases him home and screams racial slurs through his window. Juan beats Richard for running away from a girl and sends him back outside, where the girl beats him up. At school, the little Protestant girl, Mary, is the only student besides Richard who like reading. Richard is far beyond his class in reading level, and he and Mary decide to be friends. Richard invites Mary over to his house after school and lends her his favorite book, fished out of the town dump. The boy and girl like each other a lot, but find their racial and religious differences to be confusing.

When Mary gets home, her mother is horrified that Mary has eaten at the home of the Mexicans and disgusted at the filthy book she brings home. She makes Mary leave in on the porch. Mary tells her father that she plans to marry Richard someday.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Richard is struggling out from under the veil of ignorance that his family has placed over him. Even with threats of Hell, Richard is too logical to think only partway around an issue. This shows that he is truly the product of a different culture than his parents, who were raised to fill the role of Mother and Soldier. Even when Consuelo uses superstitious tactics like telling Richard that he has caused the death of his unborn



sibling, he deals with it rationally and knows that it has nothing to do with him. Since he asks such hard questions at this age, it is apparent that the questions will get much harder by the time Richard grows up.

Another interesting contrast is that of Richard's family versus Mary's family. Although Mary's mother is disgusted by the Mexicans, thinking that they are dirty, and Mary is very impressed by the Spanish that they speak, the real difference seems to be that Richard is Catholic and Mary is Protestant. Since both children have been taught that the other one is a sinner, they begin to question what they have been taught. Many of the questions Richard has had so much trouble with, like wanting to read the Bible but knowing it is a sin, are easily answered through Protestantism, but that does not make the answers any easier to live with. The children are too young and innocent to know that sometimes cultural and religious conflict can get very ugly. It is interesting foreshadowing when Mary says she is going to marry Richard because it is obvious that neither family would approve of such a match.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

A Brazilian man named Joe Pete moves into town and at first is very popular, as a possible connection to the Old Country. Soon the people living near him decide he is strange and leave him alone, except for the children, who love to follow him around and pet his cows. Richard and a little girl named Genevieve become friends with the man, and Richard starts spending part of every day talking with Joe Pete. Even though they do not speak the same language, Joe Pete's Portuguese is similar enough to Spanish for Richard to understand him. Joe Pete is a cultured, educated man, the son of an aristocrat, and Richard loves their discussions. Joe Pete is the smartest person Richard knows, and the only one who can answer many of his questions.

Richard confesses to Joe Pete that he has realized that sometimes the priests and his teachers do not know about what they are talking. Richard complains that these authority figures pretend to know everything. This makes him question their teachings. Joe Pete, not wanting to tell Richard what to believe, tells him not to worry, that when the time comes, he can let go of his beliefs.

Richard, helping with the summer harvest, goes a long time without seeing Joe Pete. Richard hears terrible rumors, and it turns out that Joe Pete has molested thirteen-year-old Genevieve and gotten her pregnant. Joe Pete goes to jail, and the police start asking questions of every neighborhood child, especially Richard. Richard staunchly defends Joe Pete, denying that the man has ever touched him.

Chapter 4 Analysis

There is foreshadowing that Joe Pete is going to leave, when on page 86 it says that "It was one of those days near the end." In this scene, Joe Pete tells a strange story about a sexual encounter from his teenage years, that shames and upsets him. This is an interesting contrast with what Joe Pete himself does, by molesting a young girl. In a way, sexual awakening symbolizes mental awakening as well, since to Richard, Joe Pete is his favorite teacher. One day Joe Pete says to him, "All I can tell you is that you should have faith for the present, and when the time comes when you feel you do not need the belief, the doubts will help you discard it, forgetting the friend it once was to you." (Chapter 4, Section II, p. 86) Since such wisdom comes from a kind child molester, it indicates that knowledge has a price, and once the price has been paid, there is no going back. Yet Joe Pete clearly care something about protecting Richard. When he tells Richard his traumatic sexual story, he leaves out some details, not wanting to mar the child's innocence.

Joe Pete also represents, to some extent, the way emigration changes people's status in life. Just as the peasants are hoping to create a better life in America for their

children, Joe Pete is also making a new life but living in poverty instead of the luxury with which he grew up. He is an aristocrat who surrounds himself with peasants.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Living in America has a marked effect on Richard's mother. In Mexico, a wife is utterly subservient to her husband and family with no voice of her own. Consuelo hears the talk of her neighbors, and she begins to long for a life of her own, where her opinion matters. One night at supper, she accuses her husband of seeing other women. Juan hits her and tells her that it is none of her business what he does! After he storms out, she cries and tells her children that in this new country, if a man beats his wife, he will be sent to jail. Richard is horrified that his mother would even think of doing such a terrible thing as sending his father to jail, and he tells her she is wrong to speak this way. She pushes him away, and he goes out.

When he is outside thinking, Richard contemplates all the tradition that keeps people living in their patterns. He thinks about how he is expected to give up his dreams in order to support a family. He also thinks about how his mother is constantly subservient, and how his sisters will soon marry and take on the same role, and he suddenly realizes that they are all prisoners to tradition. It is hard for him because he really values being Mexican and takes pride in it, but he does not want to sacrifice his dreams to tradition. He vows that he will never again tell his mother she is wrong for standing up for herself.

On Richard's twelfth birthday, he gets a new set of clothes and feels today he is a man. At lunch that day, his parents reminisce about Mexico, and Consuelo tells Richard that once Juan was one of the best horsemen in Mexico. She speaks proudly of her Indian heritage. Juan talks about how he used to not trust the priests because they were on the side of the government. When Richard asks questions about the horses, he shows that he only understands Hollywood horses, and his parents laugh at him. Richard notices that his father is subtly fondling his mother's leg, and he is shocked to realize that this makes him happy.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Richard is starting to recognize his mother as a person in her own right. She is no longer just a servant but is now allowed to have opinions and desires. This coincides with Richard deciding he is a man. This could mean that he now no longer needs someone to mother him, so he allows his mother to become more of a full person. The surprising thing is that Consuelo has not objected to her lot in life sooner. She marries Juan when she is fourteen, and by the age of thirty-four, has given birth twelve times. On page 92, "She wished that once, only once, she could sit to dinner with her family, but she could not. She must wait on them until they were finished, and not until then could she sit down." (Chapter 5, Section I, p. 92)



When Richard realizes he does not truly believe that the man should be above the women, he is sad, because this means he can not be truly Mexican. Being macho and in charge is so important to Mexican men, that a man who will not take charge is not worth much in their eyes. Yet Richard wants to remain true to himself and what logic tells him about right and wrong. Richard and Consuelo are like a mirror of one another in the way they become more assimilated into the American culture.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

One day some men set up a boxing ring in Richard's playground. He watches a few matches, and then his friend Thomas asks him to fight. Richard is the only one who is the same size as Thomas. Richard refuses, but after Thomas asks several times, he agrees to fight so that he will not look like a coward. Thomas beats him in two rounds, and afterward, the man running the event talks to them. He offers Richard money to come do more boxing matches, but Richard tells him no. The man says that Richard should do it because it is a good profession and a Mexican to go far in it. Richard thinks it is funny that all his teachers want to suggest trades for him because he is Mexican. Richard just wants to learn all he can. Richard decides that codes of honor are stupid and not worth a sacrifice.

Richard is best friends with a boy named Ricky. The two have a lot in common, and Ricky is always at the top of the class, while Richard is a few spaces below him. Ricky is also successful and popular, but as Richard gets to know him, he realizes that much of Ricky's intelligence is a facade. Nonetheless, the two boys discuss a variety of subjects and have a great time together, being obnoxious, pubescent boys. One day, they are clowning around together, and Richard tells Ricky that he loves him. Ricky backs off and asks Richard if he is queer or something. Richard gets very upset, feeling that the special bond that they have shared is destroyed forever. He assures Ricky that he is not gay but is disappointed that Ricky does not understand his brotherly love. Richard feels that he is now more intelligent than Ricky and feels powerful in this knowledge.

Richard's friends all begin to masturbate, but Richard holds back, not wanting to do it. Ricky tells him that he really should try it, that it is a little like going to Heaven. Finally, Richard tries it, and soon is enslaved to the practice, just like his friends. However, unlike his friends, he only does it by himself, instead of meeting in the barn as they do. Richard takes pleasure in telling every detail to the priest in Confession, shocking and exciting the man. When the priest expresses his dismay that Richard is so depraved, it occurs to Richard that the priest must know that all his friends masturbate, unless they are making bad confessions. He leaves the confessional and goes up to take Communion, acting like an automaton. When he is about to take it, he instead walks out of the church. Richard's father falls ill a few days later, as the priest predicted would happen if Richard masturbated. Nonetheless, Richard keeps telling himself that it is not his fault his father is sick.

One day, Richard's friends are playing in the barn, and Zelda is there. Zelda has always been the neighborhood bully, and the leader of their group. She complains that one of the boys is trying to feel her up, and Richard dares her to take off her clothes, calling her a chicken. She falls for it, and next he dares her to have sex with all the boys present. At first she protests, but when he calls her chicken again, she agrees to it. This



is the first time for most of the boys. From that day on, whenever Zelda hangs out with the boys, they tolerate her only because they always have an orgy.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Richard is becoming more and more independent. Although he still caves to peer pressure, often, he knows himself well enough to ignore the words of many who want to tell him how to live his life. He does not listen to the advice of well-wishers who want to foist a small world upon him, in which he can flourish as a happy domestic servant. Richard wants something bigger than that for himself.

Zelda's story is so sad. She is an interesting foil for Richard's relatives. While Richard's mother and many sisters are quiet, submissive, and virginal; Zelda is loud, mean, dominant, and casual about her sexuality. Even as Consuelo becomes less submissive, Zelda finally submits to the boys that until now she has beat up. When she gives herself to the boys, she is losing her powerful position and is being used by them. Zelda represents some of the dangers which Juan fears for his daughters.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Juan visits the home of his friend Cirilo, who lives in a swamp. Cirilo tells Juan that he is soon going to move to a nearby plot of land that he has bought. Juan volunteers to help Cirilo build a house there, and they talk about how nice it will be for him to farm and live on what he grows. He is looking forward to isolating his wife from the influence of the various nationalities living around them in America. Cirilo suggests that Juan also buy some land and do the same thing with his family, but he disagrees. He says that if he buys land and starts a farm, he will know that he is never going back to Mexico. Instead he plans to buy a nice house in town, which they can sell when they move back to Mexico.

They reminisce about life in Mexico for a while. Juan has had many chances to be a rich man, but he always remains poor because he loves giving to the poor. He recalls how he had a grocery store once, which quickly went bankrupt because he would give all his food away on credit, but not keep track of his debts. Now, in America, he is a sort of guardian to poor people, Mexicans in particular. Whenever new immigrants show up and need food, shelter, or jobs, the sheriff brings them to Juan Rubio's house, and he uses his connections to get them what they need. He even helps the Okies, farmers coming from Oklahoma. He is happy to help those who are less fortunate, but the Okies take advantage of his generosity and then disappear. This season, Okies have taken many people's jobs by working for lower wages, and then the Okies leave town. Juan comments that next year, people will not be very good to the Okies, who disrupt established work relationships.

Talking about old-fashioned values, Juan begins to feel real love for Consuelo, and he feels bad that she has to live like a servant. He decides to take her to the movies that night. On the way home, he tells her that he is going to buy a house for them in town, so they can have their own bedroom. She is very happy about this and especially that her husband chooses to discuss an important decision with her. For one of the first times, she experiences sexual desire, which embarrasses her. Once she finally starts enjoying sex with her husband, Consuelo has the seeds of jealousy, worried that some other woman will enjoy the pleasure that is rightfully hers.

One night Richard arrives home late, and Juan scolds him. Richard answers that he must live his own life, and Juan is angry that Richard is talking back to him. Richard says that he can not be happy with the life his family has planned for him, in which he strives to make money so that he can feed a huge family. Juan chides him for his attitude, and Richard answers that Juan has always encouraged him to be a man, to stand up for himself. He complains about the way his parents lied to him as a child in order to make him behave, filling him with fear of the things that would get him if he misbehaved. Juan says that he was wrong to teach Richard such things, but that he did



not know any better, being uneducated. Richard decides that if all he has to look forward is drudgery and reproduction, he would rather not marry.

Chapter 7 Analysis

There is a lot of discussion in this chapter about what it means to be a man. Cirilo and Juan agree that having land and producing one's own food, makes one feel like a man. In contrast, Richard feels the need to go against his parents' wishes in order to follow Juan's advice to be a man. The definition of a man is very important in Mexican culture, and it does not harmonize with the more equal treatment of men and women that is more common in the U.S.A. Juan starts to see that it is standing up for himself and allowing his mind to grow, which will make him a man, and not any physical or sexual prowess.

The way Consuelo experiences a sexual awakening after twenty years of marriage is a sort of symbol of her becoming a whole person. Even after so long, and having so many children, sex is still a mystery to her, but she finally begins to explore the mystery to a small extent. All she has ever been taught about sex is that it is painful and unpleasant, but that it is her duty to submit and have children. She feels somewhat sinful and ashamed, desiring her husband, and for the first time, she minds the thought that he might sleep with other women. It is interesting that Juan is quite guilty earlier, when they are in Mexico, but he stops sleeping with other women when the family moves to California. When Consuelo accuses him, he is in fact innocent, but he does not tell her this. Instead, he allows her to think that he is guilty because as the husband, he feels it is his right to go after other women if he wants to.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The Rubio family moves into the nice house and becomes more middle class. Seeing this happen to them makes Richard sad, feeling that they are abandoning many of the good values of their culture. Consuelo stands up for herself more and more, and she listens to the gossip of her foreign neighbors. She often accuses Juan of being unfaithful, and so he obliges her by going to see various other women. They end up staying in separate bedrooms, and sometimes Juan cooks for himself. Consuelo lets the house get filthy, as though the dirtier it gets, the more she is liberated from her role as a servant in her own home. Juan goes and has an affair with Cirilo's wife.

Fourteen-year-old Richard goes to his old neighborhood, looking for Zelda so he can sleep with her. He runs into his old friend Mary, who invites him to sit on her porch with her and eat fudge. She tells him that her family is moving to Chicago in a week, and that he should write her. Mary says that someday she will return, and they will be married. Richard is not sure what to make of this, so he wishes her well and kisses her goodbye. A little while later, he finds Mary's brother Ronnie, and the two boys argue. The only reason Richard holds back and does not fight Ronnie is because he is Mary's brother, for the boy is a snob and thinks he is better than the other kids in the area.

That evening, during a game of hide-and-seek, Richard gets into a wrestling match with Zelda. After bruising her some, he kisses her, and the two have sex. Afterward, she says that it is different now because she has never been kissed before. She admits that she has had a crush on him for a while, and he says that now she is his girl. She must now submit to him, and take care of him, and only sleep with him, no other boys. Zelda says that she is afraid of Mary, and Richard tells her that, though Mary is one of his best friends, Zelda has nothing to be afraid of.

Everyone is surprised at the drastic change that comes over Zelda because she is dating Richard. For the first time, she puts effort into her appearance, wearing dresses and doing her hair. She acts somewhat ladylike or at least gentle. She turns out to be very pretty, but the only way she knows to tell a boy "no" is to punch him. No one knows that Zelda and Richard are a couple because he does not take her anywhere in public. Instead they go out in the country, to secluded places, and make love on a blanket. Zelda loves Richard, but he feels indifferent to her. She worries that she will get pregnant because she knows that if she does, Richard will abandon her. However, Zelda does imagine that someday she and Richard will be married.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Zelda's situation with Richard is sadly similar to Juan's relationship to the whore he found in the cantina. In both cases, the man views the young woman as an object to be



enjoyed, as long as it is easy and pleasurable. There is no need to expend effort to take care of the consequences because the men do not care what becomes of the woman. This is a sad foreshadowing of what will probably become of Zelda. However, in both cases, the man can hardly be blamed because both women are casually promiscuous enough that they would probably get pregnant sooner or later anyway. Just as the whore was abandoned in favor of Consuelo, Juan's wife, so it seems Zelda is right to fear Mary, who may someday return and displace her. It is disturbing how much Richard's encounter with Zelda during hide-and-seek resembles rape, and in fact, it is not clear where the line lies when one begins having sex with a fighting partner. It is also bizarre how such brutality leads to tenderness. The tenderness is so unknown to Zelda that she focuses on it, instead of the way he forces himself on her.

The disintegration of the Rubio household seems like a parable, warning of the consequences of not respecting tradition. There is foreshadowing that this transition will kill Consuelo, saying that she does not clean house again until her death. The message of the parable is clear: "No one could be blamed, for the transition from the culture of the old world to that of the new should never have been attempted in one generation." (Chapter 8, Section I, p. 135)



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

One day, Richard comes home from football practice and is as usual disgusted by the squalor of his house. He finds his mother picking lice out of his little sister's hair and gets angry and calls a family meeting. His sisters start cleaning, since it is not the first time this has happened. One sister does not come when he calls for her, so he goes and hits her until she comes and helps. That night, they sit down as a family at supper again, and later Richard reads out loud to his parents for several hours. He somehow knows that this is the last time they will spend an evening together like this as a family.

When World War II begins, there are lots of soldiers in California and also lots of Mexican immigrants. Many of them form a group called the pachucos, who hate both white Americans and traditional Mexicans. Richard is very curious about these pachucos in their zoot suits and begins hanging out with them a lot, even dating one of the girls. He quickly finds that, though the girls show a lot of skin, they are harder to conquer than traditional American girls. Richard goes along with many of their practices, even though he doesn't really feel the way they do. One night, some pachucos recruit Richard to go with them to fight another gang. He reluctantly agrees to do it, and he does some serious damage with a bike chain. The pachucos tell Richard that if he ever needs a favor to let them know.

One evening, Richard is with his old gang of friends, and they are trying to steal a car part. They get arrested before they can even do anything, and right away the cops start beating them. The cops think the entire group is Mexican, even though Richard is the only one in the group who is Mexican. After beating the boys some more, the police take them each away for individual questioning. Richard, fearing that police brutality could lead to death, smarts off to them, and tells them that they have no business arresting him and his friends. Eventually, the police let them go because there are no formal charges, but Richard's friends all regard him with some distrust. They think that none of them would be in trouble at all if Richard were not with them, and they are right. From that day on, Richard hates the police. He is deeply grieved when he realizes that this is the first time he has ever really felt discrimination.

Chapter 9 Analysis

It is an interesting contrast, that when he is guilty, Richard is congratulated, and when he is innocent, he is arrested and beaten. Even though Richard is wounded in both scenarios, he does not really care when he is hurt by brawling. His pride is injured when the police accost him. He keeps his head enough to smart off to them, without giving anything away. In some ways, this is similar to the way he carefully revealed his confessions to the priest, revealing exactly as much information as he wants.



Richard is learning to be truly independent and not worry about affiliating himself with a group. He does not see himself as Mexican, yet he is clearly not of the ruling class in America. Richard certainly does not have much in common with the pachucos, not even really speaking their language, which is a form of Spanglish. While the pachucos are lost because they lack country or people, Richard is free because he does not feel bound by the traditions of his people. He wants to fulfill the traditions of his country, though, since he sees the U.S.A. as his country. Richard wants to live his life with the individualism that is worshiped in the U.S.A.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Once, Juan takes Richard to the home of his friend Cirilo (with whose wife Juan has slept). Cirilo introduces them to his sixteen-year-old niece, Pilar, who has recently come to live with him because her parents are dead. Richard is surprised at her manner because she behaves in the submissive, quiet way of a woman from Mexico. He has not seen women act this way since his own mother started speaking her mind. Since Pilar is pretty, Richard enjoys talking with her, while the adults entertain themselves. Pilar laughs at Richard's Spanish, which he describes as "California-Mexican-American Castilian." (Chapter 10, Section I, p. 165) Richard likes hearing Pilar talk about Mexico because for years he has heard his parents talk about Mexico as it was twenty years ago, but now he can hear from Pilar what things were like just before she came to California. When the Rubios are leaving Cirilo's house, Juan makes a joke to Richard, that Richard likes Pilar.

One night around three a.m., Richard comes home from meeting with Zelda to find a huge fight going on at his house. Richard's sister is in big trouble for coming home so late, and Juan tells her not to act like a whore. Juan says that she is his daughter, and in his house, and she will do as he says. Richard's sister screams that the house is in Consuelo's name, and that Juan should leave and let them have the house. Juan slaps his daughter down, and when Consuelo intervenes, he hits her too. Richard joins the fight, and Juan storms around destroying things and hitting people until Richard is knocked unconscious.

When Richard comes to, things are somewhat peaceful again, and Juan tells him that he is leaving. Juan will stay nearby, but the time has come for him and Consuelo to split up. Richard is a little sad, but he knows that it is really the right thing to do. They cry, and Juan tells Richard that sometimes he has worried that Richard will turn out gay, from being raised around so many women. Juan says that even if that were the case, he would still love him, even though he would hate it. Richard tells his father that he would like to follow the traditional Mexican path, but that he wants to be writer instead. Juan says that if that is what Richard truly wants, he should go for it and not let anyone get in his way.

As soon as Juan leaves, Consuelo begins cleaning up the filthy house. The symbolism is not lost on Richard, and his mother starts trying to play her old role as servant, but now with Richard as the man of the house. She rails against the poor quality of American women and tells Richard that she is so glad that he has sided with her against his father. Richard refuses to patronize her and tells her honestly that he has not taken sides, but is staying with her because he knows she needs him more. Consuelo tells him that she knows that he really wants to go to college, but now that he is the only man to support their family, he will have to settle down and take care of them. She wants to go to church and receive a special blessing, since their family is making a new



beginning. Richard refuses to go along with her fantasy and tells her that he will stay with her and the girls as long as he chooses. However, he does not plan to stay forever and support the family. Furthermore, Richard tells Consuelo that he no longer believes in God but that he will live a good life anyway. Consuelo goes into a sort of mourning, feeling that now she has lost both of her men forever.

Chapter 10 Analysis

When visiting Pilar and Cirilo, Juan teases Richard that Richard likes Pilar. This foreshadows a future affair, as the narrator tells the reader that Richard does not know that Juan wants Pilar for himself. This is somewhat symbolic, since Juan is placing Richard into the role he himself wants to fill. Later, Consuelo tries to make Richard fill the role that Juan is already occupying.

When Consuelo finally cleans her house after Juan leaves, it makes the situation real for Richard. "She began to sweep the house, and the symbolism was so starkly real to him at that moment that he ran out the rear door, and, clutching at the trunk of the walnut tree, he uttered painful sobs until there were no tears left." (Chapter 10, Section I, p. 170) It is obvious that the problem has not been that Consuelo and Juan are uncomfortable living in America, but that they are no longer able to live out their traditional Mexican roles with one another, in the context of California.

Although there has already been plenty of violence in the book, this fight scene seems especially violent because of its placement in the story. Violence seems more natural in revolutionary Mexico, or on the streets of Los Angeles, but not in a middle-class family home. In a way, this shows that perhaps the Rubios have not progressed as much as it seems.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Richard and Ricky graduate high school, and that summer they get jobs in a steel mill. They make very good money there, and Richard quickly falls into a routine of taking care of his family. He finds that his mother keeps pushing more and more responsibility on to him, trying to get him to be the head of the family. Richard does not want to work in a steel mill for his whole life but feels he must do what he can to support them. He figures that he will keep doing this until he finds a way out of this life he sees ahead of him, but he worries because each day the situation seems more and more permanent. He takes a night class in writing and does not learn how to write, but he makes friends and enjoys talking to more intellectual people. He finds that they tend to underestimate him because he is young and Mexican.

One day, Richard is playing pool with his old friends, who start asking him why he spends so much time with strange people. Ricky says that he is worried about Richard abandoning traditional values and maybe even hanging out with queers. Richard answers that in fact, the men he was seen with are queers, but that is all right, and it does not make Richard gay by association. The boys start planning a trip to a whorehouse, and it makes Richard sad to see how they all live for their Saturday night. He thinks about this dull pattern and worries that some day he will be some boring old man, still living in this town, still doing the same dull things, probably still with Ricky. He desperately wants to find a way out of this, but he does not see any way out.

Ricky tells Richard that he is studying hard for the exam to get into officer's school, so he can be an officer in the army. He encourages Richard to go along with him and do the same. Richard is filled with envy that Ricky is going to college, but he knows that this would not work out for him. He tells them that the only way he would be in the army is if he were drafted, and he will not be drafted, because he has so many dependents. Their friend Thomas shows up to say goodbye to them. Because he is of Japanese heritage, he and his family are being sent to an internment camp because of the war. Thomas tries to be happy about it, not knowing what is in store. He tells Richard that he appreciates that Richard seems to be the only one who does not distrust him for being Japanese-American. Thomas tells Richard about being beat up a few nights before by a group of boys, and Richard goes to find his pachuco friends. Remembering that they owe him a favor, Richard sets the pachucos on the boys who beat up Thomas. Afterward, Richard feels bad, knowing that he has just perpetuated a cycle of violence.

Juan asks Consuelo for a divorce because he wants to marry his girlfriend, who is pregnant. When Consuelo angrily tells Richard that Pilar is Juan's other woman, Richard is surprised and laughs. He points out to his mother that of course Juan was going to find another woman, being who he is. Consuelo says that she will never grant the divorce, and Juan and Pilar will burn in hell for living in sin. It makes Richard sad to see her locked in this life that can not make her happy anymore.



Richard tells his family that he is going to enlist in the army. He goes off to find Juan, so that Juan can accompany him when he signs up and is surprised when they put him on a train right away. On the train, Richard thinks about all the different people he has come to respect over the years of his life so far, and he thinks about the direction his life is now taking. He does not know what he will do with his life, but he does understand that he will never be able to go back to the way he was.

Chapter 11 Analysis

There is a striking contrast between the image of Richard traveling to war at the end of the book and Juan coming back after many years of war at the beginning of the book. Throughout Juan's time in California, he always intends to go back to Mexico, and can not rest until he does. Although Juan does not physically make it back to the old country, the home of Cirilo and Pilar represents a tiny piece of Old Mexico, on their farm. Juan even points out to Cirilo that the farm is like a bit of Mexico, removed from the American culture all around them. Pilar is like a replacement for Consuelo. When Richard first meets Pilar, she reminds him of his mother, before Consuelo was "contaminated" by American values. In a way, by starting a new family with Pilar, Juan goes back to the Mexico of his youth, and finds satisfaction. Richard is the one who keenly feels the fact that "for him there would never be a coming back." (Chapter 11, Section I, p. 187) This could refer literally to dying in war, but more metaphorically, he will never be able to return to being a good son who can make his Mexican mother proud. While Mexican values are too important to Consuelo and Juan to ever forget them, Richard finds that he just can not hold on to Mexican beliefs, having been raised in America, so he understands that their immigration is not just physical. All the children of this generation will have different values than their parents.

In sharp contrast to the differences between Juan and Richard's attitudes, is the similarity of their positions. While Juan fought in order to help the people of his country, Richard goes to fight because it is the best way he can come up with to live out his life. Even though both father and son would say that Richard has ended up far from following in his father's footsteps, they are both soldiers. Right after Richard feels bad about continuing the cycle of violence on the small scale, through street fighting, he goes ahead and continues his family's tradition of fighting in war. Thinking he is rebelling against tradition, Richard is trapped in the same net that ensnared his father.



Characters

Richard Rubio

Richard is the son of Juan and Consuelo Rubio. He has around nine sisters, and as the only boy, is expected to support the family as soon as he is old enough. Richard is very independent and a deep thinker. His favorite thing in the world is reading, and he wants to be a writer when he grows up. Richard often gets himself in trouble by asking tough questions of his priests and teachers. The more he learns, the less he believes the teachings of Roman Catholicism. Richard is determined to be a better man than his father and not cling to the less admirable elements of Mexican culture. However, he has many of the same faults as his father and often treats women cruelly or carelessly. After getting good grades throughout school, Richard joins the army.

Richard sometimes caves in to peer pressure, but the older he gets, the more he is willing to stand up against a crowd. Even though he does what he can to blend in with the group of pachucos, he knows all the time that he is faking it and just experimenting with what it is like to be one of them. He experiences no shame at all at the thought of being Mexican. In fact, he rarely thinks about it, but when he does, it is with pride, even though he is subject to much discrimination.

Juan Rubio

Juan Rubio is Richard's father. He is married to Consuelo, and they have a multitude of daughters. Juan has been a mercenary and soldier in several campaigns in Mexico and kills quickly and casually. He takes the women he wants, regardless of their wishes, and holds on to them as long as he wants them around. He is deeply motivated to liberate Mexico from its oppressors, but he needs someone to fight for, and there is no one who can fill the role.

Juan starkly shows the contrast between old revolutionary Mexico and twentieth-century California. In California, he places a priority on his family, and he no longer goes with other women or beats his wife. Juan becomes a flourishing farmer, who helps the poor and feeds the hungry. Once his wife ceases to submit quietly to his every wish, Juan no longer wants to stay with her and soon starts sleeping with other women again. One of the first women he goes after is the wife of his good friend, which shows what sort of friend Juan is.

Consuelo Rubio

Consuelo is Juan's wife and Richard's mother. She finds freedom for the first time in America.



Mary

Mary is a little Protestant girl who becomes best friends with Richard and wants to marry him.

Zelda

Zelda is a bully to all the other kids when she is a little girl. Later, she is Richard's girlfriend.

Ricky Malatesta

Ricky is a close friend of Richard's who gets to go to officer's school.

Joe Pete

When Richard is a child, he becomes good friends with an older man named Joe Pete, an aristocrat from Argentina. He turns out to be a child molester.

Rooster

Rooster is a leader in the group of pachucos with whom Richard hangs out.

Thomas

Thomas is Richard's Japanese friend. Thomas and his family have to go to a relocation camp when the war starts.

Cirilo

Cirilo is Juan's friend; Juan helps Cirilo build his house. Juan also has an affair with Cirilo's wife.

Pilar

Pilar is Cirilo's niece who lives with him. Juan gets her pregnant and wants to marry her.

Luz Rubio

Luz is one of Richard's sisters who is close to him in age and very rebellious.

Dolores

Dolores is the whore that Juan drags out of a cantina.



Objects/Places

Juarez

Juarez is the city in Mexico that Juan goes to in the first scene. It is where he kills a man and is arrested.

Mexico City

Mexico City is the capital of Mexico and one of the world's largest cities. Juan has marched in and "liberated" it many times.

California

After initially living right by the border of the U.S.A. and Mexico, the Rubios move to California, near L.A.

Santa Clara

Juan buys a house for his family to live in in Santa Clara. This means that they are middle class.

The Barn

Richard and his friends like to go to the barn and fool around.

Toby Tyler

Toby Tyler is the name of Richard's favorite book. It is about a boy in the circus, and his monkey.

Consuelo's Rosary

When Richard is a small child, he watches his mother struggle in childbirth. She clutches her rosary so tightly that it breaks.

The Orchard

The Orchard is where the group of pachucos fights a group of boys from Ontario.



The Jamison Farm

One day, some Communist agitators convince all the fruit pickers to strike at the Jamison farm to get higher wages.

The Great Depression

During the 1930's, there was great poverty in the U.S.A., and many poor people flooded into California looking for jobs.

Church

Richard is made to go to church and confession often as a child; eventually, he decides he will not go anymore.



Themes

Mexican Culture versus American Culture

The primary theme of *Pocho* is the meeting of Mexican culture with American culture. There is a major difference between Juan and Consuelo, who consider themselves Mexican, and Richard, who calls himself an American. Consuelo gets a taste of American independence when she realizes it is against the law for her husband to beat her. After years of drudgery and acting as a servant to her entire household, Consuelo rebels by becoming a loud, lazy shrew, the exact opposite of a traditional Mexican woman. "She had lived so long in the tradition of her country that she could not help herself now, and abused the privilege of equality afforded the women of her new country." (Chapter 8, Section I, p. 134)

Juan, on the other hand, desperately wants to return to Mexico, remembering it as a wonderful place, even though they were poor. "There had been much music and laughter—here, now, there was not much laughter left." (Chapter 7, Section I, p. 121) Juan misses the sense of community he used to have in Mexico, living with a huge extended family and having fiestas regularly. He does what he can to create an island of Mexican culture in his backyard and barn, allowing many families to live there, and helping them out. When he moves to a slightly better part of town, Juan loses most of this camaraderie.

Richard, a pocho, at first wants to be a strong, macho Mexican man. One day, he scolds his mother after she has a fight with Juan. After thinking about what he has done, Richard decides that he was wrong to treat her like that, and that she is entitled to her own opinion. "And he knew that he could never again be wholly Mexican, and furthermore he could never use the right he had as a male to tell his mother that she was wrong." (Chapter 5, Section I, p. 95) This is but one step of many that Richard takes in which he rejects traditional Mexican teaching.

Perpetuating a Cycle of Violence

Right from the beginning, the book hints that the characters are extremely violent people. On the first page, when introducing Juan Rubio, it says, "As he walked along the crowded streets, he almost wished for the old days, and carelessly wondered how many men he had killed there." (Chapter 1, Section I, p. 1) This man is a cold-blooded killer who does not know or care how many he has killed. The brutality of the way he kills another man in order to get a whore underscores this idea. When Richard is born, Juan decides to change his ways and become a family man instead of a soldier. Yet the cycle of violence continues throughout their lives.

Once in a while Juan beats his wife and children, but not often. Richard, however, gets into many fights. He is usually unwilling, because he usually loses fights, but he fights in



streets and in orchards, in a ring, in a gang, and with a girl. Richard is offered money to fight regularly, but he wants none of it, wanting to go another route with his life. Still, he not only fights with a gang, but also sics that same gang on others. The only route he can see out is to become a soldier. Richard thinks that he is doing the opposite of his father's lot in life, but he is going the exact same direction, by being a soldier.

Early in the book, Juan is plotting an assassination so he can storm back into Mexico, when he finds out that his hopeful leader has been killed. He thinks that, "All the dead in the struggle had died for nothing, and the living who had followed him would live also for nothing." (Chapter 1, Section I, p. 10)

Thinking for Yourself

One of the first times that Richard is asking his mother difficult questions, she tells him to be more obedient and accept what the priest tells him. She worries that he reads too many books, and thinks too much, and will want to be educated beyond high school. She asks Richard what is the point of all this learning, if he is not learning a trade. He answers, "I want to learn, and that is all. I do not want to be something—I am." (Chapter 3, Section I, p. 64) Richard's mother finds his independent attitude terrifying.

The older Richard gets, the less he is willing to accept what others around him say. He seeks truth and logic and will not accept half-hearted explanations. He also refuses to blindly follow societal rules that he does not believe in, like going to church. One day, he realizes that people give up great sacrifices based on their code of honor, and he vows that he will not do so. "Codes of honor were really stupid—it amazed him that he had just learned this—and what people thought was honorable was not important . . ." (Chapter 6, Section I, p. 108) Eventually, Richard's independent thinking leads him to believe that he can become anything he wants, and he is determined to remain true to himself. "I can be a part of everything . . . because I am the only one capable of controlling my destiny . . . I will not become a follower, nor will I allow myself to become a leader . . ." (Chapter 9, Section I, p.152) Despite his resolution, Richard becomes something of a leader because of his strength of character.

Style

Point of View

The book is told from the point of view of a third-person, omniscient narrator. This narrator usually only reveals the thoughts or feelings of one or two characters, but often the narrator knows things that the characters do not. For instance, sometimes the narrator hints at the way events will turn out, as though the narrator knows because the narrator is telling the story. By speaking the thoughts of several people, the narrator allows the reader to understand the story from more than one point of view. This is important, since the story is about clashing points of view.

In a book about the differences between Mexicans and Americans, it is not obvious which nationality the narrator may be. Although the narrator is certainly quite familiar with many aspects of Mexican culture and does not treat them as though they are shocking, the narrator also has extensive knowledge of the way things work in America. There are a few lines in Spanish, but they are not usually translated, as though the narrator is so familiar with the language that the narrator does not bother to clarify and assumes the reader will also understand.

Setting

The first chapter of the book takes place in Mexico, and it presents a grim picture of Mexico. People are dirty and violent and crude. It is interesting that this repugnant picture is totally different from the stories the characters tell when they are reminiscing about Mexico. A major theme is how much some of them long to go back.

The other setting is California during the Great Depression. The border between Mexico and the U.S.A. is still open, so people surge across, fleeing the oppression strangling Mexico, after several revolutions. The Rubio family slowly moves up in the world. First, they live in a tent and migrate around, following the fruit harvests. Later, they live in a tiny house, with lots of other Mexicans living in their backyard. They also have a huge vegetable garden and grow a lot of their own food. Once the Rubios get really established, they move into a bigger house in the town of Santa Clara. It is only a few blocks away from their old house, but it is a major change because now they no longer live like peasants.

Because of the Depression, Santa Clara is filled with people coming from the dust bowl hoping to find work. They are not received kindly by the Mexicans, whose jobs they take by undercutting wages.



Language and Meaning

The earlier it is in the book, the more Spanish is spoken. In the first chapter, which takes place in Mexico, there are lots of Spanish words, as though the action can not be conveyed in straight English. Throughout the book, people sometimes speak in Spanish, but it is rare, and these utterances decrease as Richard and his family become more Americanized. Richard's mother, Consuelo, does not learn English, nor does she want to, wishing to remain separate from American culture. Sometimes other people make fun of the Rubios for speaking Spanish, but Richard's friend Mary thinks it sounds very hard to learn and is impressed. When Richard meets Pilar, he feels how American he really is because she laughs at the way he speaks Spanish.

The pachucos, who have a culture all their own, neither Mexican nor American, create a language of their own to reflect this. Richard speaks little and does his best to understand their Spanglish. This is reminiscent of the way, as a child, he had conversations with Joe Pete, who spoke only Portuguese. Portuguese is similar enough to Spanish that Richard could understand him.

Structure

The book is divided into eleven chapters. Each chapter in turn has several sections, often denoted with a different Roman numeral. Each chapter seems to be a step in the direction of assimilation into American culture. The first chapter stands out as different from all the others, with a different setting and action, and with a main character acting very differently than in the rest of the book. In this chapter, Juan moves to America from Mexico, and Richard is born. These events set the main story in motion.

In Chapters Two through Four, Richard is a child, and learning all he can about the world around him. The Rubio family seems to be adjusting fairly well to life in America. In Chapters Five and Six, Richard becomes an adolescent and discovers sex. In Chapters Seven and Eight, Consuelo becomes very dissatisfied with her marriage, and life in the Rubio house becomes very stressful. Things are no longer getting better. In Chapters Nine through Eleven, Richard starts to take responsibility for his own destiny. His parents' marriage breaks up, and he decides to make his own decisions about what to do and who to be. World War II begins, and Richard goes off to fight.

Quotes

"Saturday night is the only time worth living for some people—a lot of people live just for Saturday night." (Chapter 11, Section I, p. 178)

"I do not have to fear God in order to love man." (Chapter 10, Section I, p. 173)

"When I went to war, I was three times as old as you, and now I am only twice as old . . . You will be me someday." (Chapter 1, Section I, p. 15)

"There must be a sense of honor or a man will have no dignity, and without the dignity a man is incomplete. I will always be a man." (Chapter 1, Section I, p. 15)

"The ever-increasing army of people swarmed across while the border remained open, fleeing from squalor and oppression." (Chapter 1, Section II, p. 16)

"The death of an immortal showed most clearly the unalterable fact that everyone must die, himself included." (Chapter 1, Section III, p. 26)

"He thought the robin and the rabbit were God's favorites, because they were endowed with the ability to make play out of life." (Chapter 2, Section I, p. 32)

"To die was easy, but to give up life was not an easy thing even to think about, and yet it was obvious to him that it could not be too difficult a thing, for even cowards somehow managed to die." (Chapter 2, Section II, p. 43)

"Inside, he knows that it is inevitable that you will have to go to work soon, for you are the only boy in the family, and when you are in the secondary school, maybe it will be the end of your education." (Chapter 3, Section I, p. 61)

"Your father talks about you being a lawyer or a doctor when we return to Mexico, but he knows that you will be neither and that we will never leave this place." (Chapter 3, Section I, p. 62)

"Mexicans were the most fortunate people in the world, because they ate strong chile and cried." (Chapter 10, Section I, p. 168)

"Because they were daughters, they could not interfere; because they were women, they wept for themselves and their destiny—their subservience to men." (Chapter 5, Section I, p. 92)

"They attempted to segregate themselves from both their cultures, and became truly a lost race." (Chapter 9, Section I, p. 149)

"He lived in dread that suddenly he should find himself old and ready to die before he could get from life the things it owed him." (Chapter 6, Section I, p. 102)



"Well, they ain't got nuthin' and they don't even talk good English." (Chapter 9, Section I, p. 148)

"You have fulfilled but a part of your debt to your race, but you are young yet, and must fulfill the destiny of your God." (Chapter 7, Section II, p. 131)

"A man must have a house, place his family within it, and leave no room for authority but his own, for it was the only place a man could have authority." (Chapter 7, Section I, p. 122)

"When I . . . could not find game, I would encounter a young bull, make a steer of him, and make myself a meal of the balls. Have you ever eaten the glands roasted over an open fire?" (Chapter 7, Section I, p. 125)

"He was unaware that he was fashioning the last link of events that would bind him to America and the American way of life." (Chapter 7, Section I, p. 129)



Topics for Discussion

In what ways does Richard remain true to his Mexican heritage? In what ways does he go against it?

Is Juan a good man or a bad man? How can you tell?

Why does the Rubio's marriage fall apart? Is it someone's fault?

The U.S.A. is made up almost entirely of immigrants and the descendants of immigrants. What does it mean to be American?

Juan is always thinking about going back to Mexico. Will it ever be possible? Why is it so important to him?

Why does Richard not try to go to officer's school with Ricky?

Explain the change that comes over Zelda when she starts dating Robert. From what sort of family do you think Zelda comes?

What is the author's attitude toward fighting? Does he think it is a good thing or a bad thing?