Vocabulary

Words to Know

brand  corral  manes  
bridles  herd  reins  
calves  initials

Words that are pronounced the same but spelled differently, such as reins and rains, are called homophones. Homophones also have different meanings. To understand the difference between homophones, look for clues in the surrounding words and sentences.

Read the paragraph below paying special attention to its meaning as a whole. Why is reins used, and not rains?

Adventures at the Ranch

I entered the horses’ corral and chose Champ—he had one of the most beautiful manes of hair on his neck. I took one of the bridles and put it over Champ’s head. I hopped on his back and grabbed the reins. Then I rode through a herd of cattle to rope young calves so I could help brand them with their owners’ initials.

Write About It

You’re visiting a ranch. Use vocabulary words in a postcard that you’re sending home.
These pages will help you read and understand the meanings of Spanish words in the story *On the Pampas*.

**GAUCHO CLOTHES**

*Gaucho* (GOU-choh)
A cowboy on the southern plains, or pampas, of South America.

*Boleadoras* (boh-lay-ah-DOOR-ahs)
Gauchos used to catch ñandús and other animals with boleadoras, which they threw in such a way that the animals' legs were tangled up in them.

*Bombacha* (bome-BAH-cha)
Loose gaucho pants.

*Rastra* (RAH-stra)
A gaucho belt made from a wide strip of leather decorated with silver coins, usually from different countries. Some gauchos have their initials on the buckle.

**Estancia** (eh-STAHN-see-ah)
A South American cattle ranch.

*Las Pampas* (las POM-pas)
The pampas are the very flat, almost treeless grasslands that stretch for hundreds of miles through central Argentina and Uruguay. Ranch animals live on the pampas year round, even during the mild winter months, eating grass.
**Asado** (ah-SAH-doh)
Meat, usually beef, roasted outdoors over a fire.

**La Carlota's Brand** (la car-LOH-ta)
The brand represented two crossed fencing swords, but we called it “the scissors.”

**Hornero** (or-NAIR-oh)
The hornero is a kind of oven bird. Its nest looks something like an oven and is built out of clay, usually on top of a post or pole.

**Recado** (ray-KAH-doh)
The gaucho saddle, made of many layers of leather and wool, with a sheepskin on the top.

**Ñandú** (nyon-DOO)
The ñandú, or South American ostrich, is the largest bird in the Americas. It grows to be five feet tall and to weigh about fifty pounds. Although it cannot fly, it can run very fast. The male ñandú guards the nest, hatches the eggs, and takes care of the chicks.

**Mate** (MAH-tay)
Mate is a bitter, greenish tea. It is sipped through a silver straw called a bombilla (bome-BEE-yah) from a hollow gourd that is passed around.

**Rebenque** (ray-BAIN-kay)
A short, wide rawhide strap, used to lash cattle and horses.

**Yegua Madrina** (YAY-goo-ah mah-DREE-na)
The yegua madrina, or leading mare of a herd of horses, keeps the herd together. She generally has a bell around her neck.
I grew up in Argentina, in South America. I lived with my family in the big city of Buenos Aires, but we spent our summers in the country, at my grandparents’ estancia. One summer my parents and brother stayed in the city, so I went without them.

My grandmother met me at the station in Buenos Aires, and we had breakfast as we rode through miles and miles of the flattest land in the world—the pampas. All around us, as far as we could see, were fences, windmills, and millions of cattle grazing.

Our station, San Enrique, was at the end of the line, where the train tracks stopped. My grandfather was there to meet us in his pickup truck and take us the five miles to the estancia.

The ranch was called La Carlota, and the gates were made of iron bars from a fort that had been on that very spot a hundred years before. As we drove up to the gates, we were greeted by a
cloud of dust and a thundering of hooves—it was my cousin Susanita, on her horse.

Susanita lived at the estancia all year round. She knew everything about horses, cows, and all the other animals that live on the pampas. Even though she was three years younger than me, she had her own horse, La Baya. Susanita was so tiny, she had to shinny up La Baya’s leg to get on her back. But she rode so well that the gauchos called her La Gauchita—“The Little Gaucho.”

I didn’t have a horse of my own, but old Salguero, the ranch foreman, brought me Pampita, a sweet-tempered mare, to ride. She wasn’t very fast, but she certainly was my friend.

Susanita and I did everything together that summer. She was the one who showed me how to take care of the horses. We would brush their coats, trim their hooves, and braid their manes and tails.
Susanita was always ready for an adventure, no matter how scary. She used to swim in the creek holding on to La Baya’s mane. At first I was afraid to follow her, but when she finally convinced me, it was a lot of fun.

I wanted to learn all the things a gaucho has to know. I wanted to ride out on the pampas every day, as Salguero did, and to wear a belt like his, with silver coins from all over the world and a buckle with my initials on it. Salguero said I’d have to begin at the beginning, and he spent hours showing Susanita and me how to use the lasso.

It was going to take a while for me to become a gaucho. The first time I lassoed a calf, it dragged me halfway across the
corral. But Salguero told me that even he had been dragged plenty of times, so I kept trying, until I got pretty good at it.

Whenever the gauchos were working with the cattle, Susanita was there, and before long I was too. Sometimes the herd had to be rounded up and moved from one pasture to another. I loved galloping behind hundreds of cattle, yelling to make them run. I never got to yell like that in the city!

One day we separated the calves from the cows, to vaccinate them and brand them with “the scissors,” La Carlota’s mark. That was more difficult—and more exciting too. I tried to do what Salguero told me to, but sometimes I got lost in the middle of that sea of cattle.