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.
At noon, everybody would sit down around one big table and eat together. I was always hungry. Grandma, Susanita’s mother, and María the cook had been working hard all morning too. They would make soup, salad, and lamb stew or pot roast, or my favorite, carbonada, a thick stew made of corn and peaches.

After lunch the grown-ups took a siesta, but not us. We liked to stay outdoors. Some afternoons, when it was too hot to do anything else, we rode out to a eucalyptus grove that was nice and cool, and stayed there until it got dark, reading comic books or cowboy stories.

Other times we would gallop for two hours to the general store and buy ourselves an orange soda. Then, while we drank it, we’d look at all the saddles and bridles we planned to have
when we were grown up and rich. Sometimes the storekeeper would take down a wonderful gaucho belt like Salguero’s, and we would admire the silver coins and wonder where each one came from. STOP

One day we rode far away from the house, to a field where Susanita thought we might find ñandú eggs. They are so huge, you can bake a whole cake with just one of them. After riding around all afternoon, we found a nest, well hidden in the tall grass, with about twenty pale-yellow eggs as big as coconuts.

Salguero had warned us to watch out for the ñandú, and he was right! The father ñandú, who protects the nest, saw us taking an egg. He was furious and chased us out of the field.
The next day we used the ñandú egg to bake a birthday cake for my grandmother. We snuck into the kitchen while she was taking her siesta, so it would be a surprise. The cake had three layers, and in between them we put whipped cream and peaches from the trees on the ranch.

We had a wonderful party for my grandmother’s birthday. The gauchos started the fire for the asado early in the evening, and soon the smell of the slowly cooking meat filled the air.

There was music, and dancing too. We stayed up almost all night, and I learned to dance the zamba, taking little steps and hops, and twirling my handkerchief.

Most evenings were much quieter. There was just the hum of the generator that made electricity for the house. We liked to go out to the mate house, where the gauchos spent their evenings.
We listened to them tell ghost stories and tall tales while they sat around the fire, passing the gourd and sipping mate through the silver straw. We didn't like the hot, bitter tea, but we loved being frightened by their spooky stories.

The summer was drawing to a close, and soon I would be returning to Buenos Aires. The night before I was to leave, Salguero showed me how to find the Southern Cross. The generator had been turned off, and there was only the soft sound of the peepers. We could see the horses sleeping far off in the field.

The next morning, my last at the estancia, Susanita and I got up before dawn. Pampita and the other horses were still out in the field. Salguero handed me his own horse’s reins. He told me he thought I was ready to bring in the horses by myself. I wasn’t sure I could do it, but Susanita encouraged me to try.
I remembered what I’d seen Salguero do. I tried to get the leading mare, with her bell, to go toward the corral, and the others would follow her. It wasn’t easy. The foals were frisky and kept running away. But I stayed behind them until finally the little herd was all together, trotting in front of me.

I was so busy trying to keep the foals from running off that I didn’t notice the whole household waiting in the corral with Salguero. Everyone cheered as I rode in, and before I knew it, my grandfather was helping me off the horse. “You’ve become quite a gaucho this summer,” he said. My grandmother held out a wonderful gaucho belt like Salguero’s, with silver coins from around the world—and my initials on the buckle!

“And,” she added, “there’s something else every gaucho needs. Next summer, when you come back, you’ll have your
very own horse waiting for you!” She pointed to the leading mare’s foal, the friskiest and most beautiful of them all.

Before I could say a word, the foal pranced over to me, tossing his head. I would have the whole winter to decide what to name him, and to look forward to my next summer on the pampas.
About the Author/Illustrator

MARÍA CRISTINA BRUSCA

*On the Pampas* is a true story about María Cristina Brusca’s childhood in Argentina. The summers spent at her grandparents’ ranch meant so much to her that she dedicated the story to her grandparents and to her cousin, Susanita.

When she was older, Ms. Brusca moved to New York. Later she wrote and illustrated another book about her childhood, titled *My Mama’s Little Ranch on the Pampas*. With her friend, Tona Wilson, Ms. Brusca has written two books of South American folk tales.
Reader Response

Comprehension Check


2. How did the author and Susanita spend their time after the work was done? Give details.

3. Did the author write *On the Pampas* to inform, to entertain, or to persuade? Explain your answer with examples from the selection.

4. Sometimes clue words show that an author is making a generalization. Read the following sentences from the story. Which one is a generalization? How do you know?
   (Generalizing)
   a. I grew up in Argentina, in South America.
   b. Most evenings were much quieter.
   c. The foals were frisky and kept running away.

5. Now make a generalization. Tell why this selection belongs in a unit called “Keys to Success.” (Generalizing)

Open for Discussion

Pretend you have been asked to spend next summer at an estancia on the pampas. What will you plan to do there?

Test Prep

Look Back and Write

Look back at pages 311–313. The narrator and her cousin, Susanita, share adventures at the estancia.

How are the two girls alike? How are they different? Use details from the story to support your answer.