

A Place for Wild Things

A Reading A-Z Level T Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,160

Connections

Writing

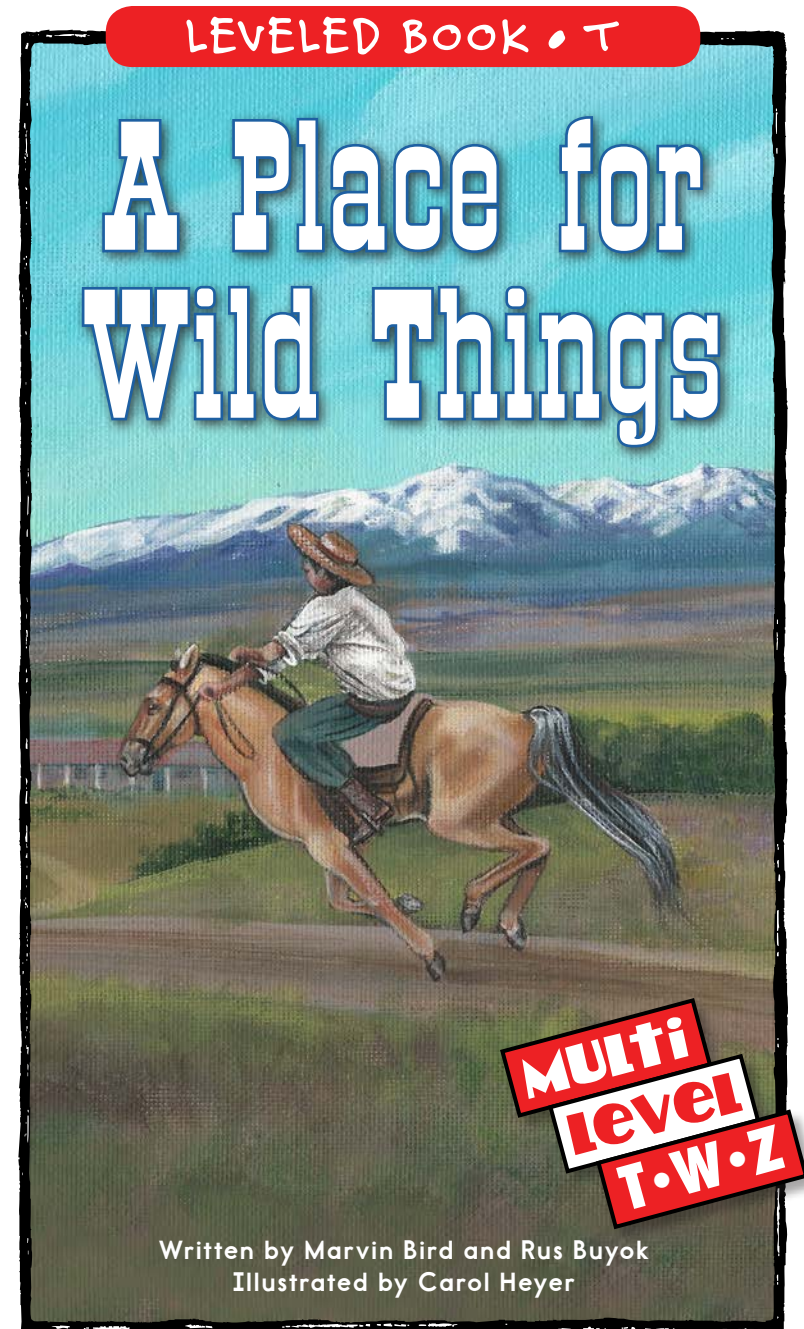
Make a list of the glossary words in the order in which they appear in the story. Write your own passage that uses all of the words in that order.

Social Studies

Research the Patagonian region of South America. Create a trifold brochure that gives details about the region's location, climate, and culture.

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A Place for Wild Things



Written by Marvin Bird and Rus Buyok
Illustrated by Carol Heyer

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Focus Question

What is Alejandro's problem, and how does he hope to solve it?

Words to Know

bombacha	overgrazed
pantaloons	pasture
estancia	porcelain orchid
gauchos	tourists
guanaco	tradition

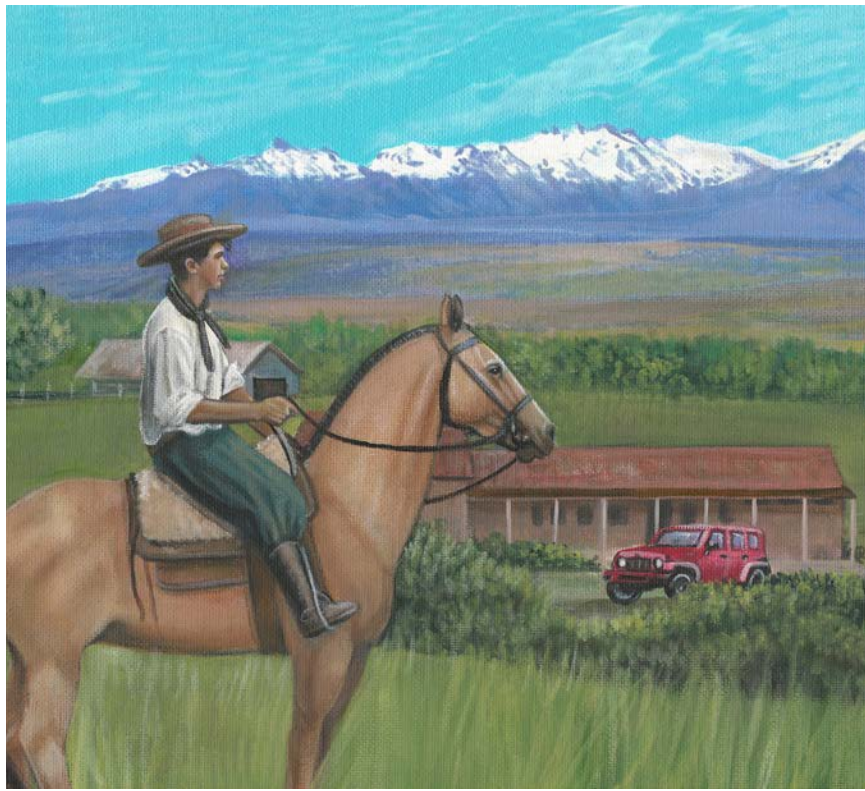
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Correlation

LEVEL T	
Fountas & Pinnell	P
Reading Recovery	38
DRA	38



After riding the **estancia** with the **gauchos** all day, Alejandro spotted an SUV parked in front of the main house. His mother, Melissa, appeared at the door next to a tall, fair-skinned man Alejandro didn't know.

"Please consider the offer, Señora Ortega. I'll return in two weeks to discuss our future plans," the man said with a broad smile.

"Who was that?" he asked his mother as the SUV sped away.



"Someone with an idea," his mother replied, turning back inside. "Please go find Martín—we all need to have a talk."

When he and Martín returned to the house, his mother was sitting at the dining room table.

"I have received an offer to sell the estancia," Melissa began. Alejandro was surprised, not only by the offer but also that his mother was including him in the talk. Since his father's death two years ago, she had relied only on Martín.

"I've always hoped to maintain our land in the true gaucho **tradition** and keep it in the family. Sadly, as you both know, we're losing money because the land is **overgrazed**. I'm just not sure how much longer we can keep the place going."

Alejandro felt sad as he thought of his father. He had always said the estancia—the land, people, and animals—was a family.

With a sigh, his mother explained more. "Mr. Somerset wants to build a resort. His idea is to create, in his words, 'a destination for travelers to experience the legendary gaucho way of life.'"

"Not travelers—**tourists!**" Martín almost spat the words.



"Ha! You thought I was just a tourist when Gerson brought me down from Santiago," Melissa said. "Even so, I was amazed by you gauchos, with your traditional berets, **bombacha pantaloons**, and leather boots. Mr. Somerset just wants people to experience a bit of this culture, and I can't say I blame him."

"Other estancias have already gone under from overgrazing," she continued. "This is a hard life." She rubbed her forehead and sighed. "Somerset said Alejandro and I could stay on for five years if we wanted, with me helping with the management."

"What would we do after that?" Alejandro asked, trying not to raise his voice. "What would happen to Martín and the other gauchos? Some of them have been here more than thirty years!"





"I'm not sure," his mother said quietly.

"But Dad said—" Alejandro stopped himself. He knew the situation was difficult for his mother, too.

"Do we have to decide right now?" Martín asked.

"Two weeks," Melissa replied.

"Then we have two weeks to find an answer," Alejandro said, trying to sound confident.

"All right, then," Martín said with a hard look on his face. "Don't be late tomorrow morning, Alejandro."

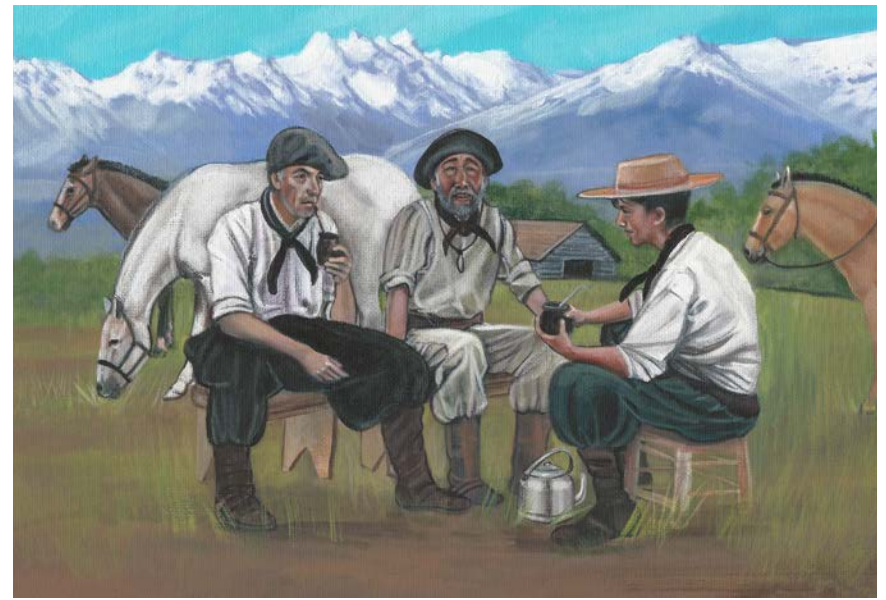
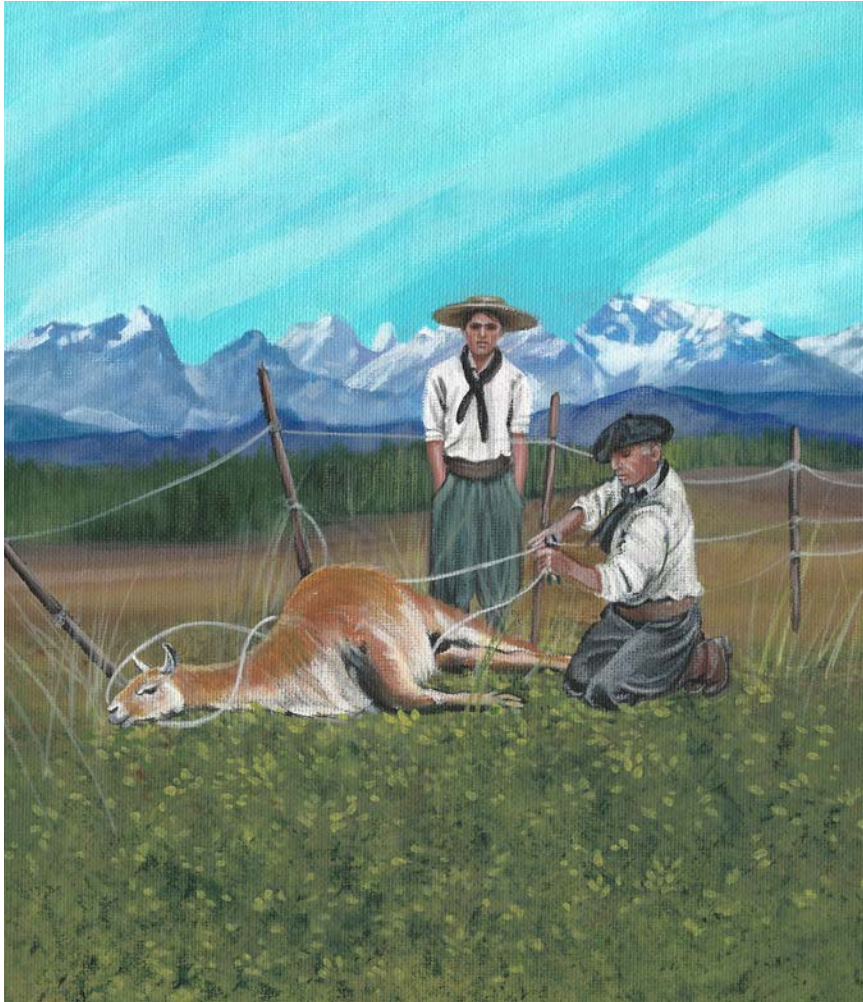
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The next few days were filled with the hardest work Alejandro had ever done. He saddled horses, herded sheep, fixed fences, and hauled feed. He made friends with an old sheepdog named Lucinda that ran along next to him. In the evenings, he would sit with his mother, who would ask, "What did you learn today?"

Alejandro excitedly told her everything, but when he was done, his body grew tired and sadness filled his heart. He didn't yet know how to save the estancia.

On the fourth day, Alejandro and Martín came across a **guanaco** with its leg stuck in one of the fences. The wild animal was scared and worn out, weakly shaking its long neck and thin legs. When Martín cut the guanaco loose, it limped away as fast as it could.



“In the old days, we didn’t have any fences on the estancia,” Martín said as he repaired the hole. “It was harder to protect the sheep, but at least there was always enough grass.”

Alejandro was silent. Something churned in his mind, but he couldn’t figure out what it was exactly.

That afternoon, Alejandro listened as a gaucho told them about seeing a puma hunting one of the flocks. “I frightened it away with a few shots,” he said.

“It’s just hungry,” Martín said thoughtfully. “The changes to the land affect us all.”

When Alejandro's mother asked him what he had learned that day, he told her about the puma and the guanaco. For some reason, though, he didn't feel the usual excitement. Something felt strange, as if his brain were trying to tie together two wires that weren't quite long enough. They did not have much time left to save the estancia.

Five days before Mr. Somerset was due to return, Martín sent Alejandro out on his own.



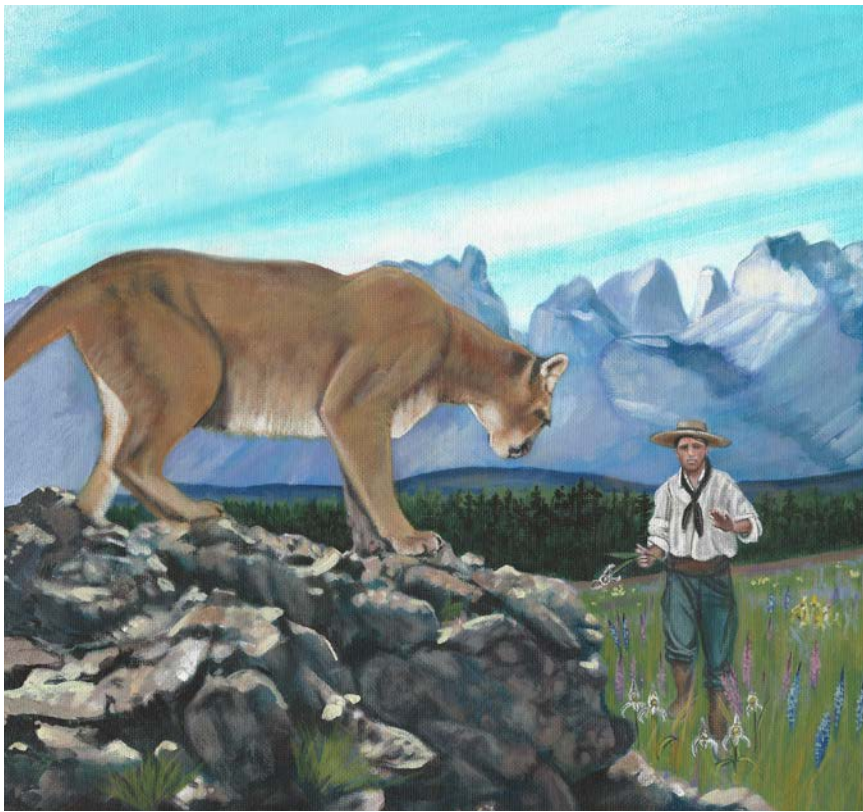
He told Alejandro to seek out a sheep that had wandered away. After a while, Alejandro saw the sheep moving through an opening in a rocky outcropping.

"How did she get on the other side of that fence?" he asked Lucinda. She barked and panted happily, bounding back and forth.

When they reached the big rocks, Lucinda suddenly refused to go through the opening. "Fine," Alejandro said. "You wait here." The space was narrow, but he could easily squeeze through by turning to the side. He saw what had attracted the sheep: a small area of deep green grass dotted with wildflowers.

The sheep was unhappy to leave her feast, but Alejandro managed to get her back through the tunnel. Before he followed, he stopped to pick one of the flowers—a yellow-tongued **porcelain orchid**. He remembered his father bringing them to his mother after working on the estancia. The orchids had once been very common, but these were the first Alejandro had seen since his father died.





He was about to leave when he noticed a sudden movement. A puma stood on a flat rock overlooking the patch of grass, staring at him with big yellow eyes.

Alejandro returned the hunter's gaze, slowly backing toward the opening. Then, as if giving up, the cat lay down with a low sigh, its eyes lazily half closing. Alejandro almost felt sorry for the beast. After all, he had ruined its meal.



With his heart still pounding, Alejandro placed the flower in his pouch and lifted the bleating sheep over the fence. He finally felt safe when he reached the other side.

As he nudged his horse forward, he couldn't push the blooming **pasture** and the puma from his mind. They were wild, strong, and healthy. The estancia was no longer a place for wild things, but instead a land controlled. The fences were keeping the sheep from the rich pastures beyond.

Alejandro imagined an estancia with no fences. Some of the sheep might die from puma attacks, but the flock as a whole would survive and grow stronger. He realized that he could tell his mother that he had truly learned something today.

Alejandro urged his horse into a gallop. He had to talk to Martín and the other gauchos. It was time to return to the old ways. They could fix this. There was still time.



Glossary

bombacha	long pants with baggy legs gathered at the ankle, typically worn in Argentina and Uruguay for working outdoors (p. 6)
pantaloons (n.)	
estancia (n.)	a South American farm or ranch used for raising livestock (p. 3)
gauchos (n.)	cowboys of the South American grassy plains (p. 3)
guanaco (n.)	a South American mammal with a long neck and soft brown fur that is related to llamas and camels (p. 9)
overgrazed (adj.)	damaged by allowing animals to feed too long in one area (p. 5)
pasture (n.)	a field with grass and other low plants on which grazing animals, such as sheep and cattle, feed (p. 14)
porcelain orchid (n.)	a South American plant with six-petaled flowers that are usually white with a green pattern (p. 12)
tourists (n.)	people who travel to places for enjoyment or to learn more about them (p. 5)
tradition (n.)	a belief or custom that is passed down from year to year and generation to generation (p. 5)