

Reading Group Guide

1. In your opinion, what draws Anita to Giuseppe and vice versa? Is it love at first sight? Do you believe there needs to be a reason for people to fall in love, or do you believe some people can have an immediately strong connection?
2. From a young age, Anita made clear that she had ambitions beyond the role of wife and mother. After training horses with her father, she became a nurse and, eventually, a soldier. How did her upbringing prepare her to take on the role of a revolutionary?
3. Before Anita meets Giuseppe, she is characterized as a troublemaker, as crazy, as a manipulator. After she meets him, she is characterized as a brave revolutionary, as a radical thinker, as a brilliant strategist. Her intelligence and take-charge attitude are only praised *after* she is partnered with a great man. How does this shift in attitude exemplify women's continued struggle to be taken seriously in the absence of a male counterpart?
4. In chapter 16, Anita, pregnant with her first child, says, "Suddenly my life wasn't my own; a future person was sucking away everything that I was." Many women today struggle with the notion of losing themselves after a child is born. How did motherhood alter Anita's sense of identity?
5. In chapter 24, Giuseppe begs Rossetti to abandon his printing press as they travel to São Gabriel: "Telling our story doesn't have to be your job...Brother, let someone else carry that burden. Just for a little while." Discuss the symbolism of the printing press in this scene: its weight, its importance, and its capacity to establish a personal and political legacy. Do you

believe Rossetti was right to prioritize the preservation of history and personal glory over his own life?

6. In chapter 25, Anzani describes Montevideo as the “Florence of the Americas,” where expats from different cities in Italy came together and called themselves Italians. How else did Montevideo foreshadow a future, united Italy?
7. In chapter 27, Anita says, “In the parlor the men talked, but it was in the kitchen that the important decisions were made.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? How is this idea illustrated in South America? In Italy?
8. What do you think of Giuseppe’s decision to leave Anita a note explaining his departure to Corrientes in chapter 32? Why do you think he didn’t tell her he was leaving in person?
9. Why do you think Anita dreams of her father before Rosita dies? Before her own death? Is his presence an omen of death, or a subconscious attempt at comfort?
10. Discuss the importance of the color red in the novel, from its association with professional butchers to Anita’s adoption of the color for her personal wardrobe.
11. What do you think of Anita’s decision to shear off her hair and join Giuseppe on his campaign to Rome, leaving her children in the care of their grandmother? What decision would you have made?
12. Birds play a heavily symbolic role in the novel. In the prologue, Anita worries black vultures are a sign of her husband’s passing; in chapter 2, a bird on a branch foreshadows Anita’s father’s death; in chapter 53, a little black bird personifies Destiny. In Brazil, the Bororo people believe the human soul manifests in the shape of a bird upon a person’s passing. In Uruguay, the tero bird is a “common literary symbol for the audacious, bold, attentive, and

vivacious nature of the gaucho.” Discuss the disparity between these two interpretations and how they relate to Anita at various points in the novel. When the little black bird appeared in the final chapter of the novel, did you realize Anita was about to die?

13. Anita was born on August 30, 1821. She died at the age of twenty-seven on August 4, 1849.

Though she lived more than 170 years ago, her story resonates with contemporary readers, as women continue to campaign for equality today all around the world. How does Anita’s life represent women’s ongoing struggle to be recognized for their work and overall contributions to society?