

Teacher's Guide Common Core

Horse Dreams

Horse Dreams is a coming-of-age novel about an eleven year old lonely, latch key girl, Izzy Carlucci, who dreams of horses and riding lessons forbidden by her mother. Izzy does small jobs for neighbors in her city apartment building, earning money for lessons kept secret from her mother. Running errands, Izzy makes friends, in particular a mysterious old woman.

From an aging stallion and this elderly friend, Izzy learns horse skills, people savvy and self reliance. When the stallion develops pneumonia, Izzy cares for him day after day. Her dedication heals the stallion and earns her mother's respect. As Izzy turns twelve, her horse dreams help her find strength to appreciate her mother, find new dreams, and face the death of her wise old friend.

Key Themes:

Lonely "latch key" child
Self reliance
Illness, healing and death
Lies versus deception
Practice and persistence
Responsibility
Horse sense
People savvy
Friendship and community building
Prejudice and class consciousness
Jobs and chores

This book provides many of the goals recommended in the Common Core for fourth and fifth grades.

Discussion or Essay topics:

1. What does Izzy do to develop her self reliance?
2. Do Izzy's strengths grow or change in the story? If so, how do you know?
3. Is there a difference between lies and deception?
4. What do you think about Izzy's mother? Do your feelings about Mrs. Carlucci change as the story unfolds? If so, why?
5. Do you see prejudice toward different persons in the story? Does the prejudice disappear, and if so, why?
6. What does Izzy learn about practice and persistence?
7. What does Izzy learn about illness in the story? Have you ever worried about a sick pet, a sick friend or member of the family? Does Izzy's story help you think about the end of life?

Special Words:

Many of the words below have numerous meanings. The definitions given are shaped by the context of the story.

- Dray (3) a large cart
- Ingenuity (5) innovative ideas, cleverness
- Opportunities (7) a chance for progress
- Ambushed (8) trapped
- Arthritis (9) a physical ailment which causes stiffening of joints
- Lassoed (9) caught by a rope, commonly used by cowboys in the old days
- Menial (11) low, unimportant
- Jodhpurs (12) riding trousers, flared at the top, close fitting from the knee down
- Temperamental (12) high-strung, nervous
- Thoroughbreds (12) usually used in reference to long, purebred line of racing horses
- Muck out/mucking (12 , 13) Muck is a word meaning manure, thus mucking and mucking out means cleaning up the manure and other impurities
- Grimace (14) an angry or hurt look, a scowl or frown
- Apparently (20) clearly, obviously
- Syllable (20) a unit of a word with a vowel sound and one or more consonants
- Measly (21) skimpy, implying worthless
- Scrunched (22) huddled, squeezed
- Passel (22) group, mass
- Veterinarian (25) animal doctor
- Pneumonia (25) a lung disease
- Contagious (25) catching
- Disinfectant (26) a substance that cleans germs
- Prospects Expectation of developments
- Sacrifice (28) something given up
- Reveille (29) a get up (awakening) call
- Compost (30) a mixture of decaying matter like hay and manure
- Ambulance (36) a transport for the sick or injured
- Reflexes (39) muscle responses
- Medicine (39) something used to treat disease
- Medication (40) a particular substance that treats disease
- Oxygen (40) a gas necessary for human breathing
- Olympic (42) a reference to games that have come from ancient Greece
- Therapeutic (45) curative
- Concentrated (48) focused
- Adjusting (49) fitting
- Convenience (50) suitable
- Permission (52) consent
- Practitioners (55) experienced workers
- Insecure (56) not confident, uncertain
- Vibrations (58) movements, sensations
- Cantankerous (60) crabby

Craft:

Point of View: First person narrative

Similes: Hint: they often use the word “like.”

1. “...a coppery red like the setting sun. (1)
2. “Pulling a story from Mrs. McPherson took some doing, like tugging a stubborn pony from a bucket of oats.” (17)
3. “I held out my hand and Flash put his hoof in it, gentle as a kitten.” (31)
4. “Dad’s and Mr. Atwood’s voices buzzed around me like hornets.” (26)

Metaphors:

1. “...the fortress, my name for our clunky old apartment building. (1)
2. My bike had become a stallion. (1)

Horse related words in many places throughout this novel can be defined as metaphors used to describe feelings and actions:

3. “I’m holding your reins, young filly. Come sit by me and tell me a family story.” (15)
4. “The conversations at the end became my high hurdle. My van held no more stories. My tale-telling had thrown a shoe and limped badly.” (15)
5. “I must be saddled and bridled by the time Izzy comes.” (17)

Idioms, Adages and Proverbs:

1. “Blind as a bat.” (14) Mrs. McPherson corrects the adage herself.

Grammar Corrections:

1. “May I, dear, not can.” (9)

This is a story method for pointing out that can is a word meaning to be able, while may is the proper word to use for asking permission.

2. Izzy asks her angry mother, “Can I take riding lessons?” (2)
3. Mrs. Carlucci does not correct Izzy. The reader might guess that she was too angry to bother about a grammatical mistake.

Inference from Details:

1. Izzy infers that something serious is happening with Mrs. McPherson: “...Mrs. McPherson looked up at the ceiling. She stiffened rigid like a stick. Her eyes rolled back in her head. I spoke and she didn’t seem to hear me.” (35 –36)
2. From action details, Izzy sees that her mother can be kind and smart: “I’ll look in her bathroom cabinets. If she takes medicine, the doctor’s name will be on the prescription.” (39)
3. “Mom contributed a song from the Wizard of Oz: her voice was high and sweet. *Somewhere over the rainbow...*” (39)
4. A few pages later, Mrs. Carlucci softens her rules about not visiting Mrs. McPherson: “Maybe your music is therapeutic.”

“Thera?”

“Therapy, healing, soothing, like rubbing your horse.”

“Oh.”

“You practice a bit more tonight. You want it to sing for her tomorrow.” (45)

The Use of Active Verbs:

1. “Her voice squeezed out” (2)
2. “...and hailed himself and his wagon” (4)
3. “...Dad started to spin another one” (5)
4. “My jaw flapped” (7)
5. “My riding lessons flickered” (8)
6. “...the door banged open” (8)
7. “The Indians stormed up” (8)
8. “...but her grip had lassoed me” (9)

Exaggeration for Tall Tales and Storytelling:

1. “He spent money so fast it would have made your eyeballs spin to watch it go.” (3)
2. “They clip-clopped through Hoboken on into Hackensack and on and on.” (4)

Dialect and Voice:

Horse Dreams uses a small grammar change instead of dialect to suggest a different voice:

1. “...but the boss don’t pay me much...” (doesn’t would be correct)
2. Several pages later, the same character says: “...she don’t like noise.” (8)

Dialogue to move the story, to show not tell:

1. “In my books, kids deliver newspapers,” I said.
“Not today. Men in cars do that now.”
“Well, I could help Joe haul out the trash every day.”
“Humph, you don’t even clean your own room.” Mom stalked off. (5)
2. I pulled my bag of coins out of my pocket and held it out to Mr. Atwood. “I want riding lessons.”
He started to laugh but he may have changed his mind because he slapped his silly pants.
“What do you know about horses?”
“I’ve read Black Beauty and Smoky and...”
“Ever been nose to nose with one?”
“No Sir.”
“Come along.” (12)
3. “Once upon a time. Mr. Atwood says he was a champion.”
“Once a jumper, always a jumper. Be prepared. My mom had a bad fall with a retired jumper.”

Transitional words and phrases to manage sequences of events:

Chapter beginnings may need to set the stage for a passage of time or new activity:

Beginning of Chapter Two “The next night, Dad started to spin another one.”

Beginning of Chapter Three: Working with Joe created a lot of opportunities.
Beginning of Chapter Four: "Spring vacation came."
Beginning of Chapter Five: "Mucking stalls is hard work."
Beginning of Chapter Six: "Every week I had something new to tell Mrs. McPherson."
Beginning of Chapter Seven: "The next visit came faster than I had planned."

Transitions can also be necessary within chapters:

1. "Dad didn't come in for stories that night." (29)
2. At the end of that paragraph, there is another transition: "before I knew it, Dad was knocking on my door." (29)

Alliteration:

1. "The fiery one nickered. My face grew Hot. My fingers tingled. I flew onto his back and floated..." (1)
2. "...soaking up the heavy horse hoof beat..." (2)

Grammatical Points In *Horse Dreams*:

1. Quotation marks: in dialogue
Indent paragraph for each speaker. This allows the reader to know who is speaking without a series of "she said," or "Mrs. McPherson said."

"What's all this noise? Galloping horses, I suppose."
"Yes'm."
"And just why are you galloping in MY hallway?" (8)
2. In long statement by one speaker: there is no quotation mark at the end of the first paragraph. The quotation mark at the beginning of the next paragraph indicates that the same speaker is picking up the quotation.

"Hear me out. Father had a lofty position in business, but he couldn't unbend to listen to his daughter. That attitude made me stubborn. No, I'll be honest. I am stubborn and that made me more so. I lied to my father. I told him I went every afternoon for piano lessons. Fortunately, he left for work in the early morning and came home late after dinner. Forrest, the chauffeur, drove me to the stables.

"See, it's not like you and your mom...." (56-57)

3. It can be important to identify the speaker. Separate quote from speaker identification with comma:

"I can see you are a good worker," she said. (51)

4. Large quotations, newspaper articles, can be designated by narrowing both the left and right margins and setting the quotation apart with double line spaces before and after the indentation. See example of newspaper article on page 52.

5. Alphabetizing titles. If writing directly about a person, one would capitalize the title.

“At dinner that night, Mom asked about Flash.” (28)

“I’ll ask Dad to drive me out early the way he did this morning...” (28)

Do not capitalize the title when speaking about someone indirectly:

“What happened to your mom, I mean after the fall and all.”

6. Adverbial phrases: Adverbial phrases lead with a preposition and gives additional detail to a verb, adjective or another adverb.

Horse Dreams uses many adverbial phrases.

“I rode into the fence and fell off my bike.” Two horses galloped in the pasture.

”the fiery one nickered and came toward me.

I flew onto his back and floated away from school and away from our silent apartment.

I could feel his muscles ripple as he danced in the bright light. (1)