

The Horsecatcher Lesson Plans and Classroom Activities

A Study Guide & Classroom Resource

Here are some teaching activities for use with *The Horsecatcher*, offering some specific ways to make the Mari Sandoz book come alive in the classroom for, perhaps, reluctant students/readers.

Objectives:

- To help students understand the history of the horse in North America
- To help students understand the location and interactions regarding horses between various Indian tribes on the Plains
- To help students understand equine (horse) terms used in the novel
- To help students connect the significance of horse catching to the main character, Elk, in the novel.

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On Horses and The Horsecatcher

Melinda Wright, English Teacher-Lincoln Southwest High School (2/23/09)

A One (90 min. block) or Two Day (45 min. class) Web-based Lesson Plan

Some of the web sites I have used in my lesson plan will change with time. However, you can search for new sites using my key phrases and then update the various web sites on which your students can search.

What You'll Need to Prepare Before the Day of this Lesson:

1. Reserve a computer lab at your school for your class or have your students access the Internet as homework.
2. Run copies of the individual handout provided or make an overhead or ELMO copy to use with entire class.
3. Decide if you are going to use this lesson as a graded assignment (summative) or an ungraded (formative) learning activity. If you decide on taking a grade, you will find a rubric you are welcome to use after the handout.

Lesson Plan

(This is my cooperative learning version, you may set the lesson up individually as well):

1. On 3X5 index cards write the name of as many of the following color types of horses as you need to create student groups: Example: if you want 6 groups of 4 students, then mix up 4 bay, 4 sorrel, 4 roan, 4 white, 4 dun, 4 claybank, gray, black, pelousy (Appaloosa) are extra if you prefer the name/color or if you need more groups.

Now I even go so far as to color coordinate my 3X5 notecards by major horse color to help students who are more visual, but then I LOVE that kind of detail connection, so my bay cards would be a red b, a black a, a red y, my sorrel would be a red s, a brown o, a yellow r, a red r, a brown r, a yellow e, a red l and so on (you just have to check out the actual color combinations of your horses. Spread index cards in your hand or on a desk/counter, and have every student choose a card. Their card determines their group randomly. (Pick your beautifully made cards up and rubber band them so you can use them again next year!) Tell students where in the classroom to sit as a group. (Approximately 15 min. with a class of 30)

2. Give each group one copy of the Horsecatcher Handout and read through the directions at the top. Tell students they should read over the entire handout and assign different questions to different people to find answers, then they can come together later in the class or tomorrow to go over what they have found. (Approximately 15 min.)
3. Go to your school Computer Lab to allow students research time as you walk around offering suggestions or answering student questions. Or, this part of the lesson plan can be offered as homework.
4. In a school lab, have student groups sit in close proximity to one another so they can converse without other groups copying their answers. If students are on their own or with their group outside of school, remind them their job is to find the information their group needs to function as the most cohesive team.

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The Horsecatcher Horse Handout

Melinda Wright, English Teacher-Lincoln Southwest High School (2/23/09)

Turn in one of these handouts per group

Names of group members who contributed their “fair” share of information: _____

Depending on your group assignment, check out the following web sites to find the information you need to do YOUR JOB for your group!

http://www.thefurtrapper.com/indian_horse.htm (Spanish Colonial Horse and the Plains Indian Culture)

<http://www.equusite.com/articles/basics/basicsColors.shtm> (Colors and types of horses)

<http://www.pryormustangs.org> (a modern day mustang preserve in Wyoming)

<http://www.accessgenealogy.com/native/tribes/cheyenne/cheyennehist.htm> (Cheyenne history)

http://www.bigorin.org/cheyenne_kids.htm (facts on the Cheyenne Indians)

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/WWcheyenne.htm> (another history of the Cheyenne)

<http://www.greenhorn-horse-facts.com/indian-horse-names.html> (Indian names for horses)

Questions for Your Groups/With Answer Key

1. What is a feral horse? A feral horse is a horse that has never been domesticated.
2. If Cortez did not introduce the horse to Plains tribes, who did? The tribes of the Southwest.
3. Where did Eohippus originate? North America
4. What is the Przewalski horse? The Przewalski horse is the last remaining specie of wild horses. All other horses have been domesticated, or descended from horses that were once domesticated. Until the mid-1990's, the Przewalski was extinct in the wild. Through efforts of the Przewalski Foundation in the Netherlands and breeding preserves in Askania Nova, Ukraine, two breeding groups of Przewalski horses were reintroduced to Mongolia. The ultimate goal of the Przewalski Foundation is to have the Przewalski horses running free on the Mongolian steppe
5. Describe a bay horse. Bay horses run from light reddish or tan shades to dark brown and mahogany/auburn shades. Bay horses always have black points (legs, muzzle, mane and tail, and the tips of their ears are black). Many bay horses have black legs that are covered by white markings.
6. Describe a dun horse. Dun horses have a sandy/yellow to reddish/brown coat. Their legs are usually darker than their body and sometimes have faint “zebra” stripes on them. Dun horses always have a “dorsal” stripe, which is a dark stripe down the middle of their back. Sometimes the dorsal stripe continues down the horse's dock and tail, and through the mane. Many dun colored horses also have face masking, which makes the horse's nose and sometimes the rest of the face a darker color than the horse's body.
7. Describe a roan horse. Roan horses have otherwise solid colored coats, but with white hairs interspersed. The white hairs are not actual spots, but single white hairs mixed with the darker coat color. You'll find descriptions and pictures of some common roan colors on the next page.

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Describe a Roan Horse

The Roan Gene can be applied to any color of horse. The most common are Red Roans, Bay Roans and Blue Roans. There are also Palomino Roans, Red Dun Roans, Dun Roans, Buckskin Roans, etc. The Roan gene adds white hairs into the body of the horse. The legs and head are not affected and will remain darker than the body. The mane and tail are usually not affected, but some may have some white hairs mixed in.

1. Describe a buckskin horse. Buckskin horses are a light-to-dark sandy yellow or tan color with all black points. Buckskins are very similar to duns, however, buckskins do not have a dorsal stripe or other “primitive” markings that are shown in the dun color.
2. Describe a white horse. There are a couple of different types of “white” horses. Dominant Whites are very rare and must have a white parent. They have pink skin, usually hazel or brown eyes and white hair. There are also Sabino Whites which can pop up in any breed that has the Sabino gene, this includes Arabs, Thoroughbreds, Quarter Horses, Paints, Tennessee Walkers, Saddlebreds, and more. A Sabino White is what we call a maximal pinto, just imagine that the white markings on the horse are so big they cover the entire horse. Sabino Whites also have white hair, sometimes with a few dark hairs on the poll or ears, pink skin and dark eyes.
3. Describe a sorrel (chestnut) horse. Chestnut, (also known as “sorrel”), is reddish brown. The points (mane, tail, legs and ears) are the same color as the horse’s body (other than white markings). Chestnuts range from light yellowish brown to a golden-reddish or dark liver color. All chestnuts have shades of red in their coats.
4. Describe a black horse. Black horses have pure black coats with no signs of brown or any other color. Many horse-people mistake dark bays or liver chestnuts for black. If you can see any other color (with the exception of white markings) on the horse’s coat in the winter, he is not a true black. The reason I say “in the winter” is because the sun tends to lighten a dark horse’s coat in the summer, and the exception is when the hair has been sun-burnt.
5. Name the town and state closest to the Pryor Wild Mustang Center. Lovell, Wyoming
6. What is Shane vs. Red Cloud? It is a photo of two Pryor Mountain Stallions fighting.
7. Who are the Pryor Mountain Mustangs related to? The Spanish Conquistador’s horses.
8. How many feet are recommended for visitors to maintain between themselves and the wild horses they are viewing? The Pryor Mountain Wild Mustang Center and the Bureau of Land Management ask that visitors never get closer than 100 feet to the wild horses. We have found that this is a generous distance for viewing and photographing the horses.
9. What tribe drove the Cheyenne west? The Sioux?
10. What treaty separated the Northern and Southern Cheyenne? This separation was made permanent by the treaty of Ft Laramie in 1851, the two sections being now known respectively as Southern and Northern Cheyenne, but the distinction is purely geographic, although it has served to hasten the destruction of their former compact tribal organization.
11. A famous chief of the Northern Cheyenne was _____ . Dull Knife
12. Who were the Cheyenne Dog Soldiers? The Dog Soldiers were the most famous of the Cheyenne warrior societies. They were also known as the Dog Warriors or Dog Men. They had this name because of a Cheyenne legend about dogs who turned into fierce warriors. Cheyenne Dog Soldiers were especially brave and honorable. When he was defending a Cheyenne village, a Dog Soldier would stake his long belt to the ground, to show that he would not run away but would defend his people to the death.
13. Who wrote a journal entry that was “A Report of an Exploration of the Country lying between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains (1842)” and dealt with the Cheyenne? John C. Fremont

BONUS: Name your imaginary group horse with the coolest first, middle, and last name you can all come up with, and you may use the Greenhorn Web Site to give you ideas.

The Legend of the Horsecatcher

Chyrel Remmers, Madison Public School (Nebraska)
English 1010/1020 and World Literature

Nebraska Reading-Writing Standards: Grade 8

- 8.1.3 By the end of the eighth grade, students will identify and classify different types of text.
- 8.1.4 By the end of the eighth grade, students will identify and apply knowledge of the structure, elements, and literary techniques to analyze fiction.
- 8.2.4 By the end of the eighth grade, students will demonstrate the use of multiple forms to write for different audiences and purposes.
- 8.2.5 By the end of the eighth grade, students will demonstrate the ability to use self-generated questions, note taking, summarizing and outlining while learning.
- 8.3.2 By the end of the eighth grade, students will use multiple presentation styles for specific audiences and purposes.

Teacher Directions/Notes:

Using a chapter (or partial chapter), each student (or pair of students) will create a legend of Young Elk and his exploits as a Horsecatcher. In order to create the legends, however, students must elaborate the imaginative details to create a character “larger than life.” It may be necessary to differentiate between a myth (supernatural forces, less “truth”) and a legend for students. Students should be able to clarify the “local lore,” a message and a theme for the legend.

Website Resources offer examples of legends.

- Circle of Stories: <http://www.pbs.org/circleofstories/storytellers/index.html>
<http://www.pbs.org/circleofstories/voices/index.html>
- Native American Lore: <http://www.ilhawaii.net/~stony/loreindx.html>
- First People: The Legends: <http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Legends/>

Technology Links

Students could record their legends using technology to incorporate music and digital pictures. (Caution: Authenticate student music and picture choices to ensure accuracy of storytelling information!)

Procedure:

1. Develop a list of characteristics of “legend.”
 - a. Orally passed.
 - b. Based on historical events.
 - c. Can explain natural phenomena.
 - d. Can be “embellished” with imaginative, but not supernatural, details.
 - e. Portrays the importance of the spirit of the individual or the cultural group.
2. Examine familiar legends of our culture.
 - a. Possibilities: George Washington and the cherry tree, Abe Lincoln’s returning change to customer, etc.
 - b. Websites will provide additional examples of Native American legends.

3. As a whole class, read the first half of Chapter 1 of *Horsecatcher*. Use that section to create a legend of Young Elk to model the process of creating and developing the legend.
 - a. What important characteristic might the class want to develop? (stealth, intelligence, patience, planning).
 - b. What additional details might be used to make Young Elk “larger than life”?
 - c. How can we create a story of conflict, rising action, and climax?
4. Each student (or cooperating pair) should choose a section of Young Elk’s experiences to create the legend of the “Horsecatcher.” Possibilities include these incidents from these chapters:
 - a. Being punished for sneaking out of camp. (2)
 - b. Catching Bear Colt (1-2)
 - c. Traveling with Yellow Wolf and catching several horses (2)
 - d. Delivering horses to others in the camp (2)
 - e. Killing the Kiowa (3)
5. Allow time for re-reading the text to choose a story for creating the legend, writing imaginative details, revising the legend, and practicing the story-telling for presentation.

Achieving Your Dream Amber Maire

Even though I am not becoming a teacher, I have an idea for a lesson plan. Have each student write down either a dream or something they wish for. After they decide their “hearts desire,” have the students write out a course of action or their plans on how they plan on getting what they want.

Then have them correspond what they did to get what they wanted to what Young Elk did. Students can share their dreams and their plans if they wish.

Theme Role-Play Activity Stefanie McCain

(To be completed prior to reading novel.)

Students will be assigned to groups to be determined by the instructor. Students will improvise skits in small groups about one of the following situations that are similar to situations in the novel.

Situation 1: A time you had to prove yourself to someone.

Situation 2: A time you wanted something that your enemies had or you had to overcome obstacles to gain what you wanted.

Situation 3: A time you may have had to take a risk for something you believed in.

Situation 4: A time that you had to make a choice that caused disappointment from others.

Situation 5: A time you had to work to gain recognition from others.

During reading of novel students can come back to these situations and record in a reading journal examples that illustrate these situations. After reading the book, students can reflect on how they dealt with the hypothetical situation their group acted out at the beginning and compare it to how Young Elk reacted to the same situations.

“TRAIL DAY” Field Trip

Classroom or group activity to accompany the reading of *The Horsecatcher* by Mari Sandoz

Gina Burke

TRAIL DAY FIELD TRIP:

Plan a field trip for your students. This trip will be a day at a local park and nature trail or some other known area that is abundant with plants and wildlife. Have a nature hunt scavenger list prepared. It should include plants and animals that could be seen on your trail. Prior to leaving for your trip, talk with your students about how they will get the best results in experiencing wildlife. Give them examples from the book *Horse Catcher*. Discuss the different ways that Elk hid while on his journeys so as not to be seen by enemies or scare off the horses.

This would be a good discussion to have the day before the trip, allowing the students to find examples from the story. Along with learning about ‘behavior’ in the wilderness the students can make a parfleche and water bladder. The directions follow. After your walk through nature, find a quiet clearing where you can sit with your students and discuss the items they found, saw or heard while on their journey.

Once back in the classroom, have your students write a paper about their adventure. Encourage them to try and draw pictures of any plants or animals they saw along the way.

(I did this activity with a multi-level Girl Scout troop, ages 6 to 16. We paired the girls off, a younger one with an older one. It proved to be a wonderful day. We ended it with a campfire, singing, dancing and a camp out. I had 33 girls and 7 adults. The Girl Scout camp site here in North Platte was a perfect place for this activity. There is another awesome camp site in Grand Island. Try it. I think you will really enjoy it.)

MAKING A PARFLECHE:

Directions for preparing material:

Give each student an 8” x 18” sheet of brown paper. To simulate the look of buckskin, the paper should be crumpled up tightly and then carefully opened and laid flat. Using an electric iron, press the sheets flat. Ironing does not remove the wrinkles, but causes the material to lay flat so that it can be folded and worked.

After flattening, fold each edge over about 1/2 inch and glue it down. This reinforced the edges (real buckskin would not have been folded at the edges). Then fold the sheet up about 7 inches from the bottom. The remaining portion forms the top flap of the parfleche and is folded down. The flap is reinforced by folding the corners over to form a pointed tip, which is then folded down and glued in place.

Students are provided with a variety of visual sources for designs. Many will chose to use the traditional Plains-style designs as a source of inspiration for their own. On a separate sheet of paper, they can develop their designs. Using rulers and pencils, they lay out their designs on the front of their parfleches.

The designs are to cover the front of the parfleche, extending under the flap. The part of the design that is covered by the flap is to be repeated on the flap so that the entire design would be visible with the parfleche opened or closed. The pencil lines are then traced over by fine-tipped markers, and color is added. The color of the material is included as one of the colors of their designs.

With the design completed, the students fold the parfleche together, leaving the flap up, and measured for holes through which to string the raffia/sinew. The holes are laid out 1/2 inch in from each edge and 1/2 inch apart along both sides.

Holes can be punched with standard hole punches, or blunt tapestry needles could be used to punch more realistic holes in the material. Two holes are then punched in the flap 1/2 inch from the end and about 1 1/2 inches apart. Corresponding holes in the front of the parfleche are punched with a tapestry needle.

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One strip of raffia about a foot long is slipped through the holes in the front of the parfleche from the inside, pull even and glue into place. This will form the tie that will hold the parfleche closed on those long treks. Using a plastic tapestry needle as a substitute for a bone needle, the sides of the parfleche are stitched with raffia using any number of stitching techniques.

Once the students have their parfleche finished, they can use them to pack a lunch that they will take with them on a "Trail Day" field trip. Students can also make raw string pouches to carry their juice/water bottles. These would be substitutes for the buffalo bladders that the Indians used.

Give each student 2 circles of brown paper about 18-24 inches in diameter. Follow the crinkling and ironing procedures in the parfleche instructions. Glue the two circles together at the edges. This will give them added strength. Punch holes $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from the edge of the circle and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from each other. Be sure to go all the way around the circle. Weave a strip of raffia through the holes, leaving two knotted ends. When these ends are pulled taught the circle will fold up into a pouch. 8 to 10 ounce bottles should fit inside, nicely.

Illustrating The Horsecatcher

Janelle Wallinger

These are the directions I gave my class when we began the reading.

Within each chapter of *The Horsecatcher* Young Elk has new experiences. In order to better visualize the events, we, as a class, will create an illustrated storyboard for each chapter. Each of our four walls will have a large piece of paper hung on it. Upon completion of each chapter we will all work together to create pictures which tell the story. Each paper will cover 3-4 chapters dependent upon the events. When we finish the book we should be able to look at our illustrations and follow the experiences and growth of Young Elk. So, pull out your drawing pencils, put on your creative cap, and let's surround ourselves in the images of this coming of age story.

Comparing the Cheyenne Culture to Ours

Amy Prince

Audience: Middle School/High School aged students

Objectives:

- 1) To gain a better understanding of the Cheyenne Native Americans and their culture.
- 2) To exercise creative writing, and improve the techniques used
- 3) To enhance critical thinking skills

Steps:

- 1) Reserve a computer lab
- 2) Create scenarios that kids will go through based upon incidents that happened within the book. Scenarios will likely have to be doubled in order for every student to get one.
- 3) Have students research Cheyenne lifestyles and customs
- 4) Once this is complete, have each student draw from a hat or bucket the scenario that they will have to deal with.
- 5) After the students have received their scenario, hand out the rubric for their project.
- 6) Basic rubric qualifications:
 - a. They have to write a paper, journal and something extra dealing with how they would handle the situation presented to them while staying true to the Cheyenne culture.
 - b. Students may choose to do an artistic project for an extra effect, but mostly the goal is to get them to write about how they would feel during the situation, how they would handle it, etc.
 - c. You can be creative as to other aspects you want the students to complete.

Creating Artifacts

Virginia Post

One of the major projects I would do with this book is have students design an artifact for the story. I think it lends itself quite well to this method of presentation. I like this because it gets students thinking about symbolism, and allows them to select their own preferred style of learning. I would discuss it with the students prior to the reading, with it being due at the end of the book.

ARTIFACT: Present a real, 3-D, tangible object that represents the story *The Horescatcher*. Be prepared to present this to the class. You need to have a typed explanation of why you selected the artifact you did, and how it represents the events and feelings in the book. (Examples: Rock Pyre – Japanese internment camp (rock gardens are part of culture). “Night” – chimney, fence, dead people, fence with an open gate, broken violin, bread & water, etc.) “Speak” – custodial closet, two-sided face (speaking/non-speaking), tree.

Anticipation Guide for *The Horse Catcher*

Judith Johnson

Directions: Pick one of the statements to write. Be prepared to defend and support your opinions with specific examples. (Write the examples on the back of the worksheet.)

After reading the text, compare your opinions on those statements with one of the characters from the story. Do you agree or disagree with the character? Why or why not?

Have any of your opinions changed? If yes, why do you think so? If no, why not?

Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree/Not sure

1. Families always have their members' best interests at heart.
2. Hard work always guarantees success.
3. Setting a goal and working to achieve it is an honorable way to live.
4. Traditions should always be followed.
5. Animals are easier to work with than human beings.
6. Pride is a good thing.
7. Courage comes in many different forms.
8. Education only happens in school.
9. Society's rules (laws) should always be obeyed.
10. It is easier to be physically brave rather than emotionally brave.