

nostrils fidgeted apprehension
canter counselor optimistic

Horse Troubles

Jessica took a deep breath, letting the warm smell of horses fill her nose as she walked into the stable. Every summer, Jessica spent two weeks at Green Meadow Farm's horseback riding camp. Rose, her camp counselor, led Jessica through the aisle of snorting horses, with Jessica looking out for Piper, her favorite horse. Last year, Jessica and Piper had spent days riding the trails. At the end of camp rodeo, they finished 2nd in the obstacle course race. Jessica loved everything about Piper, from her speckled gray hair to the way Piper's soft nose tickled her hand whenever Jessica fed her apples.

"I can't wait to ride Piper," Jessica told Rose.

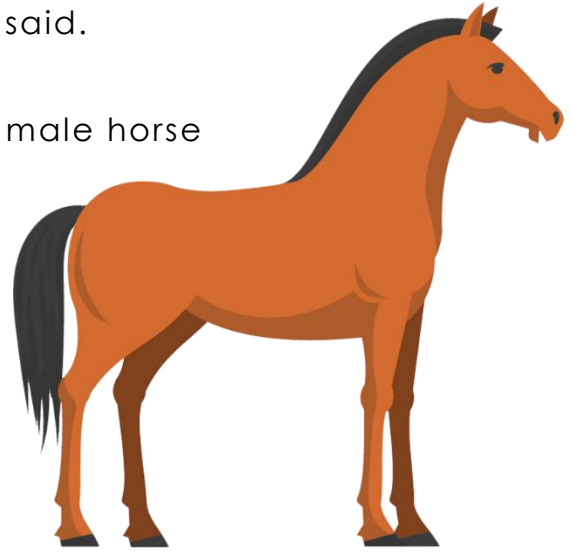
Rose smiled. "I know you love Piper, but we need to save her for some of our newer riders this year."

Jessica tried not to let the disappointment show on her face, but she felt crushed. Piper was one of the best-behaved horses, so it made sense that she would be used by the younger riders. Still, Jessica would miss her favorite horse.



“How about you try riding Harley?” Rose said.

Jessica was a little startled by the giant, male horse in a nearby stall that Rose pointed to. Even though Harley was beautiful with his shiny chestnut hair and his thick black mane, he looked restless. He had flared nostrils and wild eyes, and he was taller than the other horses.



Rose could sense Jessica's apprehension. “Don't worry. He just needs an experienced rider to help train him.”

Jessica tried to stay optimistic, hoping that Harley would turn out to be easier to ride than he looked. She cautiously approached him, but the horse moved away from her. He was just so big, thought Jessica. As Jessica put Harley's saddle on his back, the horse fidgeted and brayed, making Jessica even more nervous and causing her to fumble with the buckles.

Jessica glanced at a group of new riders gathering around Piper's stall. They patted her neck and in return, Piper nuzzled her pink nose on their heads. Jessica tried not to feel jealous as she adjusted the saddle on Harley's back.

An annoyed Jessica led a reluctant Harley outside. She climbed on top of him and headed to the obstacle course. However, when they reached the log fence, Harley planted his hooves in the dirt, refusing to take another step.

The next day, Jessica tried cantering through the fields like she'd done with Piper. Harley got off to a good start, but he wouldn't slow down even when Jessica tugged on the reins. Jessica was terrified as Harley galloped faster and faster. Luckily, he eventually got tired and stopped running.

After that disaster, they tried a simple ride through the trails, but Harley flinched at every noise in the woods making an already jittery Jessica even more anxious. When a bird screeched, Harley panicked and went up on his back legs, bucking Jessica off. She landed on the hard ground with a thud. Lying in the dirt, feeling bruised and achy, Jessica's eyes filled with tears.

She arrived at the stables the next day and found Rose cleaning a stall.

"I really miss Piper and her gentleness," Jessica said. "I'm afraid of Harley, and he's too hard to control. I have a huge bruise on my back from him bucking me off yesterday."

When Jessica had finished speaking, Rose rested her chin on her pitchfork handle, looking thoughtful. "Harley isn't used to being ridden," she said. "He's in a new place with a new person on his back. I bet he's pretty scared, too."



Jessica hadn't thought about it that way. Harley seemed so big and strong to her that she didn't realize that he could be afraid of her, too.

"It's okay to be scared, but just remember that Harley has his own fears," Rose explained. If you are nervous, you will make him nervous. If you are confident, he will feel confident. If you show him trust, he will trust you."

After her conversation with Rose, Jessica decided that it was time for a fresh start with Harley. She grabbed an apple from her lunch box and went to find Harley. When he saw her coming, Harley flared his nostrils.

"I know you're scared of me," Jessica whispered. "We're still strangers, and it's up to me to make sure that we become friends."

She pulled the apple out of her jacket pocket and slowly extended her hand towards Harley, talking to him softly at the same time. At first, Harley eyed the apple with suspicion, but then he cautiously took it in his big teeth and began crunching it up. Jessica couldn't help but giggle. Harley looked so silly with his big teeth chomping on the apple, juice spraying everywhere. As she fed him, she moved closer and stroked his long neck, so that he could get used to her touch and scent. For the first time, Harley acted calm, and Jessica realized that she was also feeling calmer.



Ignoring the saddle, Jessica led Harley around the ring so that he could get used to being with her and following her direction. That went well and they took a short walk up the trail where Harley had been so scared by all the noises the previous day. This time he paid no attention to the screeching birds as he followed Jessica and the carrot she was holding.

Jessica and Harley made progress together as their confidence in each other grew. The next day Harley muzzled her hair when she arrived in the morning. By the end of the week, they had completed the obstacle course together.

On the final day of camp was the rodeo and obstacle course race. Jessica confidently climbed onto Harley and watched the others go through the course, including Piper. Then it was Jessica's turn, and Harley, sensing the excitement of the day, tore through the course like a madman, easily winning. The other horses were just no match for the big strong Harley.

Rose handed Jessica the winner's trophy with a wink, and at that moment, Jessica realized the real reason Rose had asked Jessica to ride Harley. Rose knew that Jessica would have had a nice time with Piper, but she had wanted Jessica to step out of her comfort zone and challenge herself to be a better rider.

Jessica gave Rose a hug and then brought the trophy, and a carrot, over to Harley.



Horse Troubles (exercises)

1. Multiple Choice

How does Jessica feel when she sees the new riders playing with Piper?

- a. jealous
- b. excited
- c. confused
- d. afraid

What activity does Jessica like to do at horse camp?

- a. the obstacle course
- b. cantering in the fields
- c. riding on the trails
- d. all of the above

Why does Jessica feed Harley an apple?

- a. She has extra apples and needs to get rid of them.
- b. She wants Harley to be less afraid of her.
- c. Harley is very hungry and needs food.
- d. Rose tells her to take the apple to Harley.

2. Match the horse-related terms to their meanings.

reins	A speed between a trot and a gallop.
saddle	A section of a stable that is meant for one horse.
canter	A seat that is put on the back of a horse in order to ride it.
stable	A strap which is used to guide or slow the horse.
stall	A building that horses are kept in.

3. Write down 3 things you can do to gain an animal's trust.

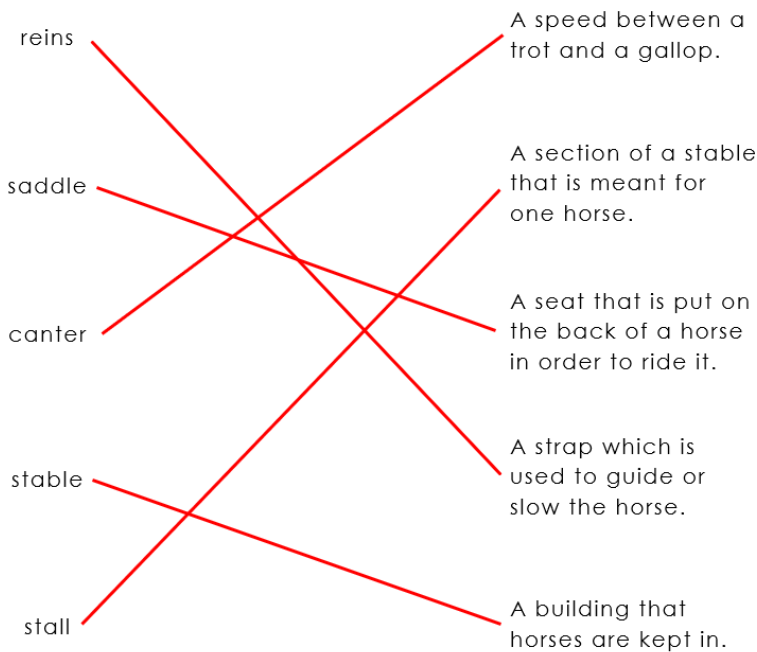
- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Horse Troubles (answers)

1. Multiple Choice

- a. jealous
- d. All of the above
- b. She wants Harley to be less afraid of her.

2. Match the horse-related terms to their meanings.



3. Write down 3 things you can do to gain an animal's trust.

(Answers may vary)

feeding them, letting them smell you, being calm and confident around them, touching them gently, etc.