

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Black Stallion by Walter Farley

Book Information

Walter Farley, The Black Stallion

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Book Level: 5.2

Interest Level: MG

The understanding and love between Alec Ramsay and a magnificent wild horse endure through shared adventures and dangers. Book #1

Award: Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

Topics: Adventure, Survival; Animals, Horses; Classics, Classics (All); Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Cherish Freedom; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5; Series, Black Stallion

Main Characters

Alec Ramsay a teenage boy who survives being shipwrecked and stranded on a deserted island with only a wild, unbroken stallion for a companion and who commits himself to never being separated from the Black

Henry a former champion jockey and neighbor of the Ramsays, who agrees to board the Black in his barn and who teaches Alec the fine points of handling and riding a thoroughbred

Joe Russo and Jim Neville reporters who write about the Black

The Black the wild, black stallion stranded with Alec, who becomes so attached to him that he can be handled only by the boy

Vocabulary

carragheen a type of seaweed that grows on the Atlantic coast of Europe and North America, which can be safely eaten by humans and livestock after it is washed and dried

contrary opposite in nature, altogether different

pedigree a recorded or known line of descent, especially of a purebred animal

quarantine the place where arriving vessels are detained to determine if they are carrying any contagious diseases

thoroughbred any breed of horse developed by crossing Arabian and Turkish stallions with English mares

yarn a tale or story, especially one that is exaggerated or hard to believe

Synopsis

This is the fictional story of a teenage American boy, Alec Ramsay, and a wild stallion, the Black, who are shipwrecked on a deserted island off the coast of Spain. They manage to survive by eating seaweed that Alec washes and dries in the sun each day. While on the island, they develop a special bond, and the unbroken stallion slowly allows Alec to mount and ride him.

When gale force winds ignite Alec's shelter, a passing ship sees the flames and rescues the boy who insists they take the horse with them because the horse saved his life. They travel to Rio de Janeiro where they board another ship bound for the United States.

Once home, Alec talks his parents into allowing him to keep the Black if he can prove that he can be responsible for him. The Ramsays get the horse a stall in a barn across the road from their house. There the Black befriends an old gray horse and is allowed to pasture in the field behind the barn. Gradually, the Black adjusts to the noises and surroundings of its new home. In the spring, Alec and Henry, the owner of the barn, manage to saddle the Black and eventually to get Alec in the saddle to ride him.

In an effort to enter the Black in the racing circuit, Alec and Henry attempt to locate necessary papers on the pedigree of the Black. In the meantime, they begin taking the Black, in the middle of the night, to Belmont to train for the day when he may be allowed to race.

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When word is received that the Black has no papers, Alec's and Henry's hopes are almost dashed. About that time a newspaper reporter, Joe Russo, who had written a story about the adventure and survival of Alec and the Black comes by Henry's barn to visit. Henry and Alec relay the recent disappointing news about the Black to Joe. He then talks to Jim Neville, another reporter, who subsequently is convinced the Black is the fastest horse on earth and then manages to get the Black entered in a non-sanctioned race in Chicago.

Alec finally gets his chance to race the Black and prove that the Black is indeed the fastest horse.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

When Jim Neville wrote about the mystery horse in the paper, why didn't he come right out and suggest that the horse be included in the big race?

He probably believed the other owners wouldn't like being told what to do and that he had a better chance at getting the Black in the race if the owners suggested it themselves. Perhaps he didn't want to be the one to suggest this in case the Black didn't win. He didn't want to lose his readers' confidence.

Literary Analysis

When Alec found himself stranded on an island with very limited resources, he had to think of ways to survive on his own. What were some of the things he did in order to survive? What else do you know that you could have done if you were in his situation?

He built a shelter from the sun and cold. He made a spear to catch fish. He surveyed the island to locate all its resources. He gathered, washed and dried seaweed to eat.

Inferential Comprehension

Why do you think the Black could be handled only by Alec?

Alec had fed and built a bond with the Black while they were on the island. Alec was the first person the Black learned to trust.

Constructing Meaning

When Alec reached Rio de Janeiro and was able to pick up money from his father, he had wanted to pay the ship's captain for bringing him there. He offered to send the captain some money, but the captain told him he didn't owe him anything. Why do you think he said this to Alec?

He knew Alec had been through a great ordeal, and he was happy just to see that the boy would get home safely.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization Many people who observe Alec and the Black together are surprised to see how they relate to each other. A good example of this is the time Henry watches Alec and the Black "playing tag." Using your own imagination and writing skills, create a simile or metaphor that expresses this relationship.

Describing Actions or Events When Alec returns to the United States, word of his experience has already spread. After he disembarks, a reporter, Joe Russo, approaches Alec and asks to interview him for a news article about his experience. Imagine what that article might have said, and write your own account of Alec's story. Remember that newspaper articles focus heavily on facts and less on emotions.

Recognizing Feelings When Henry tries to explain why he has a hard time retiring from horse racing, he tells Alec that "horses are kind of like the sea once you learn to love 'em, you can't ever give them up." Many people feel this kind of passion for a sport, hobby, activity or cause. Think about your own life and how you may have this kind of attachment to something. Try to put

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into words how you feel when you're involved with that activity. Write about or share your feelings with the class.

Identifying Reading Strategies After Alec's experience on the island with the Black, he decides he never wants to be separated from the horse. When Alec arrives home with the Black, he tells his parents that he wants to keep the horse. His parents feel it would not be a good situation and it is too much for Alec to handle, but they agree to let him keep the horse for a while. They agree to consider allowing him to keep the Black permanently if he proves he can handle the responsibility. Review the story to collect reasons supporting your answer to the question: Should Alec be allowed to keep the Black? Write a paper or discuss your feelings on the issue.