

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

King of the Wind

by

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Book Information

Marguerite Henry, King of the Wind

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An Arab stable boy's love for a Sultan's horse begins the line from which Man o' War was sired.

Award: Newbery Medal; Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

Topics: Animals, Horses; Recommended Reading, Coop. Children's Book Center

Main Characters

Agba a mute horseboy who devotes his life to the care of Sham; he vows to gain the recognition and glory the horse deserves

Benjamin Biggle a "fat dolt" who is the son-in-law of Jethro Coke

Bishop Fleury a kind advisor to King Louis XV

Earl of Godolphin an English nobleman who frees Agba from prison and gives him and Sham a home on his estate; he eventually comes to recognize Sham's potential and uses him for breeding a famous line of swift horses

Grimalkin a tomcat that befriends Sham and Agba

Hobgoblin the Earl of Godolphin's prize stallion

Jethro Coke a kind Quaker gentleman who purchases Sham to save him from the cruelty of the wood carter; he also offers Agba and Grimalkin a home

Lady Roxana the prize mare by which Sham sires the line of horses leading to Man o' War

Louis XV the boy king of France to whom the Sultan gives a gift of six stallions

Man o' War a descendent of Sham that defeats Canada's top horse in a race

Mistress Cockburn the kind cook and housekeeper to Mr. Coke; she befriends Agba and is instrumental in getting him released from jail

Roger and Mistress Williams the proprietors of the Red Lion Inn; they are opposites in temperament -- Roger is kind, while Mistress Williams is demanding and heartless

Samuel Riddle the owner of Man o' War, who reflects on his horse's heritage

Sham the famous Godolphin Arabian that sires a new line of race horses; he is born in the stables of Morocco, Africa, and is sent to Europe, where his racing ability is finally recognized

Signor Achmet the head groom to the Sultan; he is a strict master, but he understands and defends Agba

Sultan Mulai Ismael the bloodthirsty Sultan of Morocco, who gives King Louis XV of France a gift of six stallions to improve the line of European racehorses with the hope his cruel regime will be overlooked

Titus Twickerham the Earl of Godolphin's head groom

Vocabulary

bay a reddish-brown horse

dais a raised platform

draper a dealer in cloth or clothing

faggot a bundle of sticks or branches

fen a marsh or swampy land

handicap a drawback or advantage given to individuals in a race in order to equalize the chances of winning

mosque the house of worship for Muslims

retinue the attendants accompanying a person of high rank

wizened shriveled or dried up

Synopsis

The story begins with the American horse Man o' War defeating the Canadian triple-crown winner, Sir Barton, in the Windsor race. When people approach Samuel Riddle, Man o' War's owner, about racing him in the Newmarket race in England, he announces the horse's retirement, feeling his horse does not need the Newmarket race to prove his pedigree. He finds that to convince his friends of the

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wisdom of his decision, he needs to tell them the story of Man o' War's ancestor, the Godolphin Arabian, who had lived two hundred years before.

The Godolphin Arabian's life begins in the northwest corner of Africa. A young, mute horseboy named Agba works in the stables of Sultan Mulai Ismael, the bloodthirsty ruler of Morocco, under the watchful eye of Signor Achmet, the chief groom. The month of Ramadan, a sacred month of fasting in the Muslim faith, has left both man and horses hungry. Agba has a special attachment to a swift mare that is about to give birth. In the brood-mare stable she bears a foal with a white spot on its heel, a sign of swiftness. Agba names the foal Sham, the Arabic word for sun. The mare dies shortly afterward. Agba promises to be a father to the foal and see him to greatness. When Signor Achmet looks in, he sees a mark like a wheat ear on the foal's chest that foretells bad luck, and he intends to kill it, but Agba counters by showing him the white spot, and the foal is spared.

Shortly thereafter, Signor Achmet, Agba, and some other horseboys are called before the Sultan. The Sultan announces his desire to give a gift of six well-proportioned and differently colored stallions to King Louis XV of France. They are to sire a new and better breed of horse. The Signor is to choose the very best horses and accompany them along with six horseboys. Sham best meets the requirements for the bay color, so Agba and Sham leave on the journey along with the others.

Unfortunately, the captain of the ship that is to take them across the Mediterranean swindles the Sultan and deprives the men and animals of adequate rations, so all arrive in the King's court looking gaunt and tired. The King's duke ridicules the horses and suggests they be sent back to Africa, but Bishop Fleury intervenes and suggests Sham be used as a cart-horse for the cook.

A series of misfortunes takes place next, interspersed with some hopeful moments. Upset that Sham will only let Agba control him, the cook takes Sham and sells him to a cruel wood carter.

After searching the streets of Paris for some time, Agba is finally reunited with Sham. Grimalkin, a tomcat, has befriended Sham in Agba's absence, and the three become inseparable. On an icy day, Sham slips and collapses while pulling an overloaded cart of wood. Seeing the cruelty being done to Sham, a Quaker named Jethro Coke buys him and allows Agba and Grimalkin to live with him in England. When Sham throws and injures Mr. Coke's doltish son-in-law, he sends Sham and Agba into what he thinks will be a good situation at a nearby inn. The cranky mistress, however, gets Agba thrown into jail, by accusing him of being a horsethief.

The Earl of Godolphin and his mother-in-law, who do charity work in the prison, free Agba and bring him, Sham, and Grimalkin to Gog Magog, his estate. He treats them kindly, but considers Sham as only a workhorse. When the day arrives for the Earl to breed his prize horse Hobgoblin to Lady Roxana, Agba, out of jealousy, releases Sham from his stall and Hobgoblin and Sham fight. Sham wins the battle, and Roxana breeds with Sham instead of Hobgoblin.

The Earl is distraught and banishes Agba, Sham, and Grimalkin to a desolate fen. Two years later, when the Earl discovers that Sham's colt, Lath, can outrun all his other horses, he sends an entourage to bring the three back to his estate. Sham goes on to sire more foals with Roxana. The Earl confesses to Agba that he is deeply in debt and hopes to enter Sham's offspring in the Newmarket races to win the Queen's cup and restore his wealth. Sham is too old to race himself, but stands by the sidelines to see his progeny race and win. The King and Queen acknowledge Sham as worthy of great honor. Agba has fulfilled his promise to Sham to make his name great, and Sham goes on to sire a whole line of horses that bear his blood. Sham dies at an old age, and Agba returns to Morocco, his mission complete.

Open-Ended Questions

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

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Initial Understanding

How does Agba discover the whereabouts of Sham after the King's chief cook sells him to the wood carter?

Agba first makes himself a pest, following the cook's every move, trying to glean what he can from the cook's conversations. All he can discover is that Sham was left in Paris. Going to Paris, he frequents the stalls of the marketplace hoping to see or hear about Sham. He sees and follows a horse one day, although he does not immediately recognize Sham because of his poor physical condition. He realizes it really is Sham when Sham responds to his purring noises.

Literary Analysis

Why does the author choose to tell the story from a third person omniscient point of view?

The author uses this point of view because it is a particularly effective way of conveying the thoughts and feelings of Agba, who cannot speak, and the motives for Sham's behavior. By using this method, the author is able to balance the weight given to the "voice" of Agba and Sham with that given to those who speak for themselves in the story.

Inferential Comprehension

What can the reader infer from the presence of the royal fly-flicker, the sword carrier, the slipper man, the tea-maker, officers, messengers, and watch-keepers surrounding the Sultan?

It appears the Sultan is not to be bothered with the mundane issues of existence and is to be waited upon hand and foot. He need not lift a finger, even to brush away a fly. He has servants at his call at all times, and his orders can thus be carried out as quickly and efficiently as possible in an era in which instant communication does not exist. The size of his entourage reveals the great power he possesses.

Constructing Meaning

What role does prophecy and promise play in the story?

For Agba, at least, prophecy and promise play a large role. He remembers the words of the wizened man who told how Allah willed the wind to have a creature proceed from it and condense itself in the horse. Agba repeats those same words as his special mare is about to give birth, willing a creature to proceed from her. Sham is then born. Throughout the story the two opposing symbols, the curse of the wheat ear and the blessing of the white spot that mark the foal, mirror the hardships and honors in Sham's life. Agba's promise to Sham when he is born -- to be a father to him and to ride him before the multitudes -- bears fruit with Sham's appearance at the Newcastle race. It defines the mission of Agba's life. The Sultan's prediction thus comes true; the Arabian horse does sire a better breed of horse.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Agba and the subjects of the Sultan of Morocco are followers of Mohammed. Have the students learn about the practices and precepts of the Muslim faith. There is no mention of women anywhere in the part of the story set in Morocco. What would have been the role of Muslim women at that time? The students could be asked to make a poster showing some of the places, customs, and practices central to the Muslim faith.

Recognizing Details In the world of thoroughbred racing, pedigree is paramount. Meticulous records of a horse's lineage must be kept. Breeders use these records to ensure the best chances of developing a champion horse. Had Sham's pedigree survived, the Earl may have recognized Agba's potential sooner. Choose a recent champion horse and try to learn about its pedigree. List any major races the horse has won and create a "family tree" of its ancestors. Have the students present their findings in a chart. Currently, what traits are most valued in a thoroughbred racehorse?

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Recognizing Setting Sham and Agba journeyed from Africa to Europe. Have students find a map of Northern Africa and Europe to locate the places where Agba and Sham lived and traveled. Ask students to create a travel brochure, noting such things as interesting sights, climate, history, culture, resources, economy, etc. of the different countries and regions.

Identifying Persuasive Language Agba persuaded Signor Achmet to spare Sham after the chief groom saw the wheat ear on his chest. The Earl, the Duchess, and Mistress Cockburn persuaded the warden to release Agba from jail. Have the students choose a cause of interest to them and write a persuasive paper or give a persuasive speech as to why their cause deserves support.