

Horse Mad Dianne Wolfer

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Synopsis

On her eighth birthday Alice wakes up and discovers she is no longer a horse. This is a problem as her best friends all belong to the Pony Club. Being horsey is what they do. *Horse Mad* tells the story of how Alice tries to get her horsiness back and how she learns about the meaning of friendship in the process.

Author Inspiration

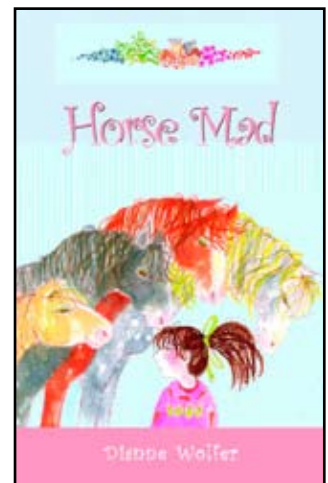
The idea for *Horse Mad* was sparked by something my daughter said during dinner one evening. Sophie was in Year Six and made some comment about 'the horse girls'.

'What do you mean?' I asked.

She told me how annoying it was that they always talked about horses in class and then spent lunchtimes galloping around. I suddenly wondered what would happen if one of them lost their horsiness.

Although I wasn't all that horsey as a girl I did long for a pony, and I had a stuffed doorstop called Eye-Ore that I used to gallop around on. Eye-Ore was actually meant to be a daschund door/windstop. My nana had copied the pattern from a magazine but it didn't work out... I saw the funny shaped creature when I was about three and it was love at first sight (I was a Winnie the Pooh fan).

Eye-Ore went everywhere with me after that, even on an aeroplane when we moved to Bangkok when I was ten. I used to organise gymkhanas and make all the ribbons etc. He was a very well travelled doorstop. So, although I wasn't really a 'horse-girl' I do understand how a strong imagination makes things feel real. Since writing the story, adult friends have confessed that they also loved snorting and galloping. To end with a horsey pun, I think it's fantastic when people allow their imagination free rein!



Illustrations (from Dianne's POV)

I was thrilled by the way Sharon Thompson interpreted my ideas. Her drawings are bright and fun and capture the mood of the story. I liked the way Sharon portrayed the horses as part real/part imaginary (pg 28). Details such as the horsey PJs, beetles as chapter headings and the girls' wild, mane-like hairdos was great.

Pre-reading

In pairs or groups students can brainstorm all that they can guess about the story by looking closely at the cover. A class discussion would then establish some of the shared predictions students agreed on and can be recorded for review after the story has been read.

During Your Reading

- Draw a picture of the girls galloping around in the playground.
- Alice feels left out and scared when she feels that her friends will abandon her. How would you help a friend who felt upset? Do you think Alice was right to tell her friends about her secret of not feeling 'horsey' anymore?
- Alice's 'Horsey' name is *Bay*. What name would you give yourself if you were a horse. What name would you give your best friend if they were a horse?
- Write about what your friends mean to you. Include jokes that you share and things that you do together. In groups, discuss what you've written, and compare similarities and differences.
- Ideas of fantasy and role playing. What games do you and your friends play? Do you sometimes imagine that you are someone or something else?

Characters

- Describe Alice and her mother. Do they have a close relationship?
- Alice seems to always go to her mother for advice. Who do you like to talk to for advice?

Discussion Topics

- Who are your best friends?
- How long have you been friends?
- What makes a good friend?
- What are the things you have in common with your friends?
- Are there things you disagree on? If so, how do you work out differences?
- Do you have a friend who is different to you (background, interests, family...)?
- Have you ever had a pen pal from a different country?
- Have you ever tried hard to include someone who is different?
- Are you horse mad? Mad about something else?
- What does it mean to be passionate about something?

- If you had to choose one word to describe your group of friends what would it be (sporty, funny, crazy...)?
- Which character (for girls) is most like/unlike you?
- If you were a member of the Pony Club, what would your horse name be?
- How would you have reacted if you were Alice when the other girls ignored you?
- How did you feel about the character Melanie?
- How do the illustrations add to the story of *Horse Mad*?
- Do you have a favourite page?
- Who is your favourite character? Why?
- Try and think of another title for the book.
- Does the blurb tell enough about the story? Does it hook you?

Activities

- Books have different levels. On one level *Horse Mad* is about a girl who is no longer able to imagine she is a pony. On a deeper level it's about friendship and what being a friend means. Ask students to write a paragraph about what they thought the book was about. You may like to give them three choices: school, horses, friendship. Discuss their answers (there is no wrong answer).
- Brainstorm famous horse stories (Black Beauty, Robert the Rose Horse, The Black Stallion...)
- Brainstorm books with other animal characters (Call of the Wild, Ring of Bright Water, Watership Down, Reepicheep in the Narnia Series, Harry Potter's Hedwig, The Mud-dle-Headed Wombat...)
- How about unforgettable animals from picture books (Old Pig, Fox, Possum Magic, The Rabbits, The Cat in the Hat, Deliverance of Dancing Bears...)
- Listen to the poem, The Man from Snowy River. Draw the colt from old Regret. Draw Clancy and his plucky mountain pony. Draw the wild bush horses. Now write your own poem about a horse (or other animal) you know.
- Make up a play about horses – include 2 different viewpoints
- Make a Bookweek poster featuring a horse/animal character.
- Give a short talk about this character. Perhaps you could present it from the animal's perspective.
- Plan a horsey birthday party and write invitations explaining all the highlights.
- List as many horse words as you can from the book (bridle, fetlock...)
- Research Topics
- Find out about the famous Australian racehorse, Phar Lap. Where can you see him? (Melbourne Museum)
- Alice has a collection of horse pictures on her walls (Shetlands, broncos, Arabians...). Choose one to do a project on.
- Research the history of your local Pony Club.
- Research the history of the RSPCA.
- List the names of past Melbourne Cup winners. Make up a name, background and training regime for your own fictitious racehorse.
- Research a famous jockey.
- Find out about mythical horses (Pegasus, centaurs...)
- What do you call someone who collects beetles? Find out more about this job.

Reading Extension

- Horses are the main theme of the book. What do you know about horses?
- What other animals do you like?
- Do you sometimes visit a farm or zoo? If so, write a paragraph about your visit. Who did you go with and what did you see?

Some Websites to Explore

www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/horses

www.rspca.org.au

www.museum.vic.gov.au/pharlap

www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/melbournecup