

HORSE AND PONY ACTIVITIES
Inspired by *The Night Ride* by J. Anderson Coats



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Dear Pony: Advice Column

Have you ever heard of Dear Abby? In advice columns like hers, a person writes to an expert and asks for help with a problem, and the expert writes back with a solution. In “Dear Pony,” you will describe a problem that you are experiencing with your horse or pony (either real or imaginary) and ask for advice to solve the problem. Then it’ll be your turn to be the expert, and you’ll play the role of “Dear Pony” and help another person solve their problem.

Directions:

1) Think of a problem. This could be real problem that you’ve had in the past or that you’re having right now, or it could be completely made up.

- Examples: My horse runs away when I try to catch him in the pasture; My pony won’t let me pick up her feet; I can’t seem to find a riding helmet that fits comfortably; I can’t get up the courage to try jumping

2) On your Dear Pony stationery, write a letter in which you:

- Describe the problem. Be thorough and use examples.
- Explain why the problem is a problem.
- Mention anything you’ve tried already to fix the problem.
- Discuss how it makes you feel.
- Sign your letter, using either your real name or a made-up name designed to hide your identity (“Horseless in Pastureland”; “Barefoot Filly”; “Mister Gallop”)

You can write your letter from your point of view, as your horse’s human caregiver, or from your horse’s point of view.

If you want to, use a separate piece of paper to illustrate the problem.

3) When your letter is finished, put it in the container that your leader has provided. Attach your drawing if you made one.

4) Now it’s your turn to be the expert! Choose a letter out of the container. (If you get your own letter, return it to the container and choose again.)

5) On your blank stationery, write a response to your fellow rider, giving them advice on their problem. As you respond, please remember to:

- Make your advice upbeat and compassionate. We’re not here to judge one another, but to help one another learn to do and be better.
- Acknowledge the author’s feelings
- Offer a variety of solutions, starting with things that are simple and working up to things that are more complicated.
- Include an “if all else fails” solution.
- If you want to, illustrate your solution

6) Once you're finished with your response, attach it to the original letter and return both to the container. When all the letters are returned, find your original letter and read the advice you're given.

Dear Pony: Advice Column

In this activity, learners will use a Dear Abby-style advice column format to present a horse-related problem to group members, then offer solutions to one another's problems on a peer-support model.

Target Audience: Ages 8+

Learning objectives:

- Analyze a description of a problem regarding horse behavior or care
- Access and apply prior knowledge of horse behavior and care
- Conduct research to fill in gaps in knowledge or understanding
- Build group cohesion, highlight interdependence, and reinforce the notion of peer support

Materials needed:

- Blank copies of the “Dear Pony” stationery worksheets
- Blank paper for optional illustrations
- A bag or box
- Pens or pencils
- Paper clips or a stapler

Optional:

- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils

Directions:

1) Explain the activity, and if necessary, explain who Dear Abby is and the intent of an advice column.

- Optional: Have the group brainstorm potential problems or issues for the learners to use when writing their Dear Pony letters.

2) Give each person a blank copy of the “Dear Pony” worksheet. (There is a version that has “Dear Pony” as the expert, or you can use the blank version to customize the recipient field to an expert of your choosing. You can also use notebook paper.)

3) Ask everyone to write a letter describing a problem they or their horse is experiencing, whether it's a behavioral issue, a health/wellness issue, or an issue of horsemanship.

- Let them know that this problem can be real or imaginary.
- Let them know they can write it from the horse's point of view, or from their own perspective as the horse's human caregiver.
- Give them the option to illustrate the letter if desired and time permits.

- 4) Ask everyone to attach any drawings, then fold their completed letters in half and drop them into a bag or box.
- 5) When all the letters are complete, ask everyone to select one letter out of the bag or box to answer.
- 6) When everyone has a letter, ask the learners to consider the problem carefully, then come up with several suggestions to solve the problem or improve the behavior. Ask them to draw on their knowledge of horse care, and if they are unclear on what the best steps are, to conduct research to find out more. Hand out blank copies of the stationery for them to write down their response.
 - Time permitting, give the learners the option to illustrate their solutions to further help the person asking for advice.
- 7) Ask the learners to staple or paper-clip the original letters to their responses and return them to the bag or box. Once the letters are all returned, ask the learners to collect their original letter and read the response.
- 8) If learners are comfortable with it, have them read the questions and answers aloud to the group. Time permitting, have the learners constructively discuss the advice.

Reflection:

Ask the learners who they would go to if there was a problem with their horse or pony. Discuss the many people who are knowledgeable when it comes to horse care.

Suggested Timetable:

Activity Phase	Time Required
Explain the activity & hand out materials	2-3 minutes
Optional: The group brainstorms potential problems	1-2 minutes
Learners write their Dear Pony letters	15-20 minutes
Learners choose another person's letter and create a reply	15-20 minutes
Learners get their own original letters back	1-2 minutes
Optional: Learners share with the group	5-10 minutes
Reflection	3-5 minutes

Total time: 1 hour (including optional phases). If the optional phases are left out, the letter-writing times can each be extended by five minutes or so. These times may be adjusted as needed based on the needs of the group.

Dear Pony -

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.

A large rectangular area with a blue border, containing 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing.

Fantasy Stable

You have just been hired as the designer for a brand-new stable! This is your chance to design the perfect stable from the ground up, and cost is no object.

You have been chosen because you know a lot about horses and their care, not because you're a fabulous artist (although maybe you are!) There's no right or wrong way to create your fantasy stable. You can make a floor plan, a blueprint, a map, or a regular drawing. If you don't think you're good at art, that's okay – just take your time and make things look intentional.

Directions:

1) Brainstorm with your group what a perfect stable would look, feel, smell, and sound like.

- If you have the materials and equipment, do a little research into what makes a stable healthy for horses and convenient for people. Your leader can direct you to some reference materials or websites to help you along.

2) Once you have some ideas, make a rough draft of your fantasy stable on a blank piece of paper. Use pencil so you can erase and make changes before you make a final drawing!

Remember that cost is no object, which means it doesn't matter whether something is expensive. Think big and choose specific things that will help this stable be the very best.

3) When you're happy with your rough draft, create your final draft on a new sheet of paper.

4) Choose at least three features that you want to highlight. (You can always choose more than three if you want.)

5) On your Fantasy Stable drawing, number these features, then use the Key sheet to explain a little bit about what the feature is and why you chose it.

- Example: (1) "My stable has large windows to let in natural light and help with ventilation."

6) When everyone has completed their drawings, take a moment to comment positively on someone else's fantasy stable. If you have a chance, and you want to, share with the group why you made your drawing the way you did, and what features you chose to highlight.

Fantasy Stable

In this activity, learners will use their knowledge about horse care and stable maintenance to create a drawing of an ideal stable that maximizes the health of horses and convenience of people.

Target Audience: Ages 8+

Materials needed:

Blank paper
Copies of the Fantasy Stable Key
Pencils and pens

Optional:

Markers, crayons, or colored pencils
Rulers/Straightedges

Learning objectives:

- Identify conditions necessary for the health and well-being of horses and ponies
- Use creativity and imagination to demonstrate understanding of good stable maintenance
- Encourage team building, peer support, and interdependence

Directions:

1) Describe the activity and reassure the group that being a good artist isn't necessary for making a successful fantasy stable. Encourage them to be intentional with their drawings if they are not confident artists.

2) Ask the learners to brainstorm what a perfect stable would look, feel, smell, and sound like, assuming cost was no object. Ask them to use their knowledge of horse care and hygiene to name features that would provide ideal conditions for horse health, ease of access, morale, and convenience.

- Optional: Either individually or in small groups, give learners time to consult reference materials or websites. A few websites to get started:
 - <https://theultimateequestrian.com/stable-yard-design/>
 - <https://www.thesprucepets.com/designing-a-stable-for-your-horse-1886937>
 - <https://extension.psu.edu/horse-stall-design>
 - <https://extension.psu.edu/horse-stable-ventilation>
 - <https://practicalhorsemanmag.com/lifestyle/build-horse-barn>
 - <https://dressagetoday.com/lifestyle/55-tips-for-better-horse-barn-function-16999>

3) Give each learner several blank sheets of paper and a Fantasy Stable Key. (There is a second page of the Key sheet in case the learners choose to highlight more features.)

4) Ask the learners to use the brainstorming session (and any research) to create a stable that maximizes healthy conditions and conveniences. Give learners the option of creating a floor plan, a map, or a standard drawing. Encourage creativity!

Encourage the learners to create a rough draft, then a final draft.

5) Ask the learners to choose three features to highlight. Ask the learners to number these features and list them on the corresponding key sheet, along with a brief explanation of what this feature is meant to help with. (There is a second page of the Key sheet in case the learners choose to highlight more features.)

- Example: (1) “My stable has large windows to let in natural light and help with ventilation.”

6) If learners are comfortable with it, have them show their fantasy stables to the group and explain some of the features.

- Optional: If possible, ask learners to hang their drawings on the walls or lay them on tables as a “design gallery,” and encourage them to comment positively on the other fantasy stables.

Reflection:

Ask the learners to name three things about their horses’ current stable(s) that make it easy for them to care for their horses. Discuss the things horses need to stay healthy, and ways their human caregivers can help.

Suggested Timetable:

Activity Phase	Time Required
Explain the activity & hand out materials	2-3 minutes
The group brainstorms ideal stable conditions	3-5 minutes
Optional: Research time	5-10 minutes
Learners create their fantasy stables, and identify and describe their three key features	35-40 minutes
Learners share with the group	3-5 minutes
Optional: Learners hang their drawings and create a “design gallery” for their peers to comment positively	3-5 minutes
Reflection	3-5 minutes

Total time: 1 hour (not including optional phases). If the optional phases are included, the drawing time should be reduced by 10-15 minutes. These times may be adjusted based on the needs of the group.

Fantasy Stable

Three great things about my fantasy stable are...

①

②

③

Fantasy Stable

More great things about my fantasy stable are...

④

⑤

⑥

Memory Match

Have you ever played the picture matching game called Memory? Here's your chance to play a horsey version – complete with cards you make yourself!

Directions:

1) Choose three terms that relate to horse care or horsemanship. (If you have time later, you can always choose more.) These may be terms you need to know for a trivia competition, or just because they're important. Your leader may have a list for you to choose from, or your group may have brainstormed some.

- Make sure your group chooses at least 15 terms. You can always have more!

2) On two blank index cards, create identical pictures of one term. There should be one picture per card, and they should be the same. Label your picture with the term.

- You can draw the pictures by hand, print them from the internet, or clip them from magazines. What is important is that you can tell that they're the same image so they can be matched with one another later. Here's an example:



Repeat this process with all the terms you've chosen.

3) When the card sets are finished, choose someone to shuffle them thoroughly and lay them face down on a table. Now it's time to play!

4) Decide who will go first. That person chooses two cards and turns them face up. If the cards don't match, the person has to turn the cards face down again and it's the next person's turn.

5) If the person is able to make a match, they must identify the horse term or item depicted and give a brief description or explanation of what it's for. If they are able to do so, they keep the matched pair. If they can't, or if their description is incorrect or incomplete, the person has to turn the cards face down again and it's the next person's turn.

- Note: If someone doesn't give a correct description of the term and loses their turn, it's okay for the next person to choose the same two cards and try to give a description.

6) If the person successfully matches the cards and provides a correct description of the term, they keep the matched pair in front of them. Then they get to keep turning over

cards until either the cards don't match, or until they can't correctly define a term. Then it's the next person's turn.

- Another way to play: Once a person successfully makes a match and defines the term, it's the next person's turn. Your group can decide which of these ways they want to play, but make sure to decide before the game starts. 😊

7) The game is over when all the matched pairs have been claimed. The person with the most pairs is the winner.

Memory Match

In this activity, learners will create matching pairs of cards that feature different horse management terms and play a memory game to help learn the terms.

Target Audience: Ages 8+

Materials needed:

Blank index cards

Pens or pencils

Optional:

Markers, crayons, or colored pencils

Laptop/phone/tablet, internet access, and printer

Old magazines, scissors, glue

Learning objectives:

- Increase comfort and familiarity with horsemanship and horse management terms
- Prepare for trivia competitions in a creative and engaging manner

Directions:

1) Have the group brainstorm a list of terms used in horsemanship or horse management.

- Alternatively, give the learners a list of terms that will be helpful for them to learn or review for a trivia competition, or simply because they're important.

2) Based on the size of the group, ask each learner to choose three terms, either at random or from the list. (If you have a small group or eager learners, allow them to choose more terms if time permits.) Aim for at least fifteen terms all together.

3) Give learners blank index cards and ask them to create two identical images of each of their terms, one per card, so they are a matched set. Ask learners label them clearly to help the matching process.

- The images can be drawn by hand, printed from the internet, or clipped from magazines. What is important is that they be recognizable as the same image so they can be matched with one another later. Here's an example:



- 4) When the card sets are finished, choose a learner to shuffle them thoroughly and lay them face down on a table.
- 5) Decide on an order of play, then ask the learners to take turns trying to make a match by turning over two cards at a time.
- 6) If the cards don't match, the learner must turn the cards face down again and play passes to the next person.
- 7) If a learner is able to make a match, they must identify the horse term or item depicted and give a brief description or explanation of what it's for. If they are able to do so, they keep the matched pair. If they can't, or if their description is incorrect or incomplete, the learner must turn the cards face down again and play passes to the next person.
- 8) If the learner successfully matches the cards and provides a description of the term depicted, play can either pass to the next person, or the learner who matched the card can keep choosing until they fail to make a match and/or correctly define the term.
 - One style of play may be more suitable, based on group size, the ages of the learners, or available time.
- 9) The game is over when all the matched pairs have been claimed. The learner with the most pairs is the winner.

Reflection:

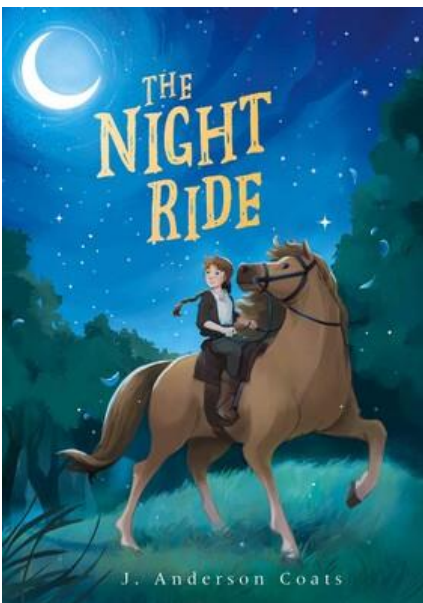
Ask learners what the best part of the game was, and what was the most challenging. Ask them what, if anything, they would change about the game for next time.

Suggested Timetable:

Activity Phase	Time Required
Explain the activity & hand out materials	2-3 minutes
Learners create their matched card sets	15-20 minutes
Explain the rules of the memory matching game	1-2 minutes
Learners play the memory matching game	25-30 minutes
Reflection	3-5 minutes

Total time: 1 hour. These times may be adjusted based on the needs of the group.

About *The Night Ride*



Ages 8-12 / Grades 3-7
Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2021
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The Black Stallion meets Tamora Pierce in this adventure-filled middle grade novel about a young stable girl who discovers a secret that endangers her beloved horse and threatens her future.

Sonnia loves horses more than anything. She works at her family's struggling pony ride business but dreams of the beautiful steeds in the royal stables, especially Ricochet, who she's been slowly saving money to buy—even though she knows people from her impoverished neighborhood are rarely so lucky.

Then Ricochet is moved to the racetrack across town, and Sonnia lands a job there. Now, she can see Ricochet every day and earn enough money to buy him in no time—all while helping her family with her new wages! She even joins the junior racing cadre to train to become a jockey. But then she uncovers their secret pastime: competing in the Night Ride, a dangerous and highly illegal race in the darkest hours before dawn. Every race puts the horses at risk.

Sonnia wants to protect the horses she's grown to care for, but she's only a kid from the poor side of town—considered expendable, just like the horses. If she just keeps her head down, soon she can buy Ricochet and get him out of there—and keep supporting her family. But would she be able to live with herself?

About the Author

J. Anderson Coats has received two Junior Library Guild awards and earned starred reviews from Kirkus, School Library Journal, the Horn Book Review, and Shelf Awareness. Her newest books are *The Night Ride*, a middle-grade action-adventure about a girl determined to protect horses in danger, and *Spindle and Dagger*, a historical YA set in medieval Wales that deals with power dynamics and complicated relationships.

The Wicked and the Just was one of Kirkus Reviews' Best Teen Books of 2012 and won the Washington State Book Award for Young Adults. She is also the author of *The Many Reflections of Miss Jane Deming*, a middle-grade novel set in Washington Territory in the 1860s which won the 2018 Washington State Book Award for Middle Grade, as well as being a 2017 Junior Library Guild selection and one of Kirkus's Best Historical Middle Grade Books of 2017. Her short story, "Mother Carey's Table," appeared in *A Tyranny of Petticoats: 15 Stories of Belles, Bank Robbers, and Other Badass Girls* (Candlewick, 2016). She is also the author of *R is for Rebel*, which Booklist called "empowering and timely story about resistance," and *The Green Children of Woolpit*, which Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books described as "precise, distinctive, and very beautiful."