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English Literature for Children and Young Adults

Subject of project: text sample and tasks that could be included in a children's supplementary reading volume

Target age-group: 13-14 (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade)

Focus: vocabulary

## Anna Sewell, *Black Beauty: The Autobiography of a Horse*

The fragment below is taken from *Black Beauty: The Autobiography of a Horse* by Anna Sewell. The story, happy and sad at the same time, is told by Black Beauty himself. The beautiful black horse remembers all the exciting adventures that he was a part of: everything about how he was taken away from his mother and brothers and sold many times, how he was lucky to find good masters and unlucky to find bad ones, too, how he met other horses and ponies that became his friends. In the fragment presented here, Ginger, a *mare*<sup>1</sup> and one of Black Beauty's friends, tells Black Beauty about a wonderful master she had, Mr. Ryder, and his son, Samson.

### "Chapter 7 - Ginger

'(...)His son was a strong, tall, *bold*<sup>2</sup> man; they called him Samson, and he used *to boast*<sup>3</sup> that he had never found a horse that could throw him. There was no gentleness in him, as there was in his father, but only *hardness*<sup>4</sup>, a hard voice, a hard eye, a hard hand; and I felt from the first that what he wanted was *to wear all the spirit out of me*<sup>5</sup>, and just make me into a quiet, humble, obedient piece of *horseflesh*<sup>6</sup>.

If I did not do exactly what he wanted *he would get put out*<sup>7</sup>, and make me run round with that long *rein*<sup>8</sup> in the training field till he had tired me out. One day he had worked me hard in every way he could, and when I lay down I was tired, and miserable, and angry; it all seemed so hard. The next morning he came for me early, and ran me round again for a long time. I had scarcely had an hour's rest, when he came again for me with a *saddle*<sup>9</sup> and *bridle*<sup>10</sup> and a new kind of *bit*<sup>11</sup>. The new bit was very painful, and I *reared up*<sup>12</sup> suddenly, which angered him still more, and he began *to flog*<sup>13</sup> me. For a long time he stuck to the saddle and punished me cruelly with his *whip*<sup>14</sup> and *spurs*<sup>15</sup>, but I cared for nothing he could do if only I could get him off. At last after a terrible *struggle*<sup>16</sup> I threw him off backward. I heard him fall heavily on the *turf*<sup>17</sup>, and without looking behind me, I galloped off to the other end of the field; there I turned round and saw my persecutor slowly rising from the ground and going into the *stable*<sup>18</sup>. I stood under an *oak*<sup>19</sup> tree and watched, but no one came to catch me. The time went on, and the sun was very hot. I felt hungry, for I had not eaten since the early morning. I wanted to lie down

and rest, but with the saddle *strapped*<sup>20</sup> tightly on there was no comfort, and there was not a drop of water to drink.

At last, just as the sun went down, I saw the old master come out with a *sieve*<sup>21</sup> in his hand. He was a very fine old gentleman with quite white hair, but his voice was what I should know him by among a thousand. It was not high, nor yet low, but full, and clear, and kind. I stood still and let him come up; he held the *oats*<sup>22</sup> to me, and I began to eat without fear; his voice took all my fear away. He stood by, *patting*<sup>23</sup> and *stroking*<sup>24</sup> me while I was eating, and seeing the *clots of blood*<sup>25</sup> on my side he seemed very *vexed*<sup>26</sup>. 'Poor lassie! it was a bad business, a bad business;' then he quietly took the rein and led me to the stable; just at the door stood Samson. Then he led me into my box, took off the saddle and bridle with his own hands, and tied me up; then he called for a *pail*<sup>27</sup> of warm water and a sponge, took off his coat, and while the stable-man held the pail, he sponged my sides a good while, so tenderly that I was sure he knew how *sore and bruised*<sup>28</sup> they were. The skin was so broken at the corners of my mouth that I could not eat the *hay*<sup>29</sup>.

After that he often came to see me, and when my mouth was *healed*<sup>30</sup> the other *breaker*<sup>31</sup>, Job, they called him, went on training me; he was steady and *thoughtful*<sup>32</sup>, and I soon learned what he wanted.'"

(Anna Sewell, *Black Beauty: The Autobiography of a Horse*, pp. 24-26)

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<sup>1</sup> *mare*= iapă

<sup>2</sup> *bold*= curajos

<sup>3</sup> *to boast*= a se lăuda

<sup>4</sup> *hardness*= duritate (de la *hard*= dur, greu)

<sup>5</sup> *to wear all the spirit out of me*= să-mi consume toată energia

<sup>6</sup> *horseflesh*= carne de cal

<sup>7</sup> *he would get put out*= se enerva

<sup>8</sup> *rein*= frâu, hăț

<sup>9</sup> *saddle*= șa

<sup>10</sup> *bridle*= căpăstru (sistem din curele care se pune pe capul unui cal pentru a-l înhăma)

<sup>11</sup> *bit*= zăbală

<sup>12</sup> *rear up*= a se ridica pe picioarele din spate

<sup>13</sup> *flog*= a biciui

<sup>14</sup> *whip*= bici

<sup>15</sup> *spurs*= pinteni

<sup>16</sup> *struggle*= luptă

<sup>17</sup> *turf*= brazdă de iarbă

<sup>18</sup> *stable*= grajd

<sup>19</sup> *oak*= stejar

<sup>20</sup> *strapped*= (aici despre șa) strânsă bine

<sup>21</sup> *sieve*= sită

<sup>22</sup> *oats*= cereale

<sup>23</sup> *pat*= a bate ușor ca semn de afecțiune

<sup>24</sup> *stroke*= a mângâia

<sup>25</sup> *clots of blood*= cheaguri de sânge

<sup>26</sup> *vexed*= supărat

<sup>27</sup> *pail*= găleată

<sup>28</sup> *sore and bruised*= (despre părțile laterale ale calului) dureroase și rănite

<sup>29</sup> *hay*= fân

<sup>30</sup> *healed*= (despre gură) vindecată

<sup>31</sup> *breaker*= dresor

<sup>32</sup> *thoughtful*= atent

## Exercises

## I. Read the text and give short answers for the following questions:

1. Why do you think Ginger didn't like Samson?

(Answer guideline: She didn't like Samson because he treated her badly.)

2. Why do you think Ginger listened to Samson's father, the old master?

(Answer guideline: She listened to him because he took care of her and loved her very much.)

3. Do you like horses? Why?

4. Do you like animals? Which is your favourite? Why?

## II. Fill in the blanks with the right words from the text:

1. A ..... is the thing you put on the back of a horse to sit on when you ride it.

(Answer: saddle)

2. A ..... is a flexible stick with a leather belt (or more leather belts) tied to it, used for hitting or driving animals.

(Answer: whip)

3. The long leather cord which you hold on to when you are riding a horse and which you use for controlling the horse (to indicate which way to go) is called a .....

(Answer: rein)

4. .... are small metal stars which horsemen and cowboys have on their boots and which are used for hitting horses on their sides to make them go faster.

(Answer: spurs)

## III. Fill in the table with words (adjectives) or groups of words (adjective + noun) which describe the master and his son. Give at least five examples for each column.

Mr. Ryder (the old master)	Samson (the master's son)
Ex: fine old gentleman	Ex: strong
white hair	bold
full voice	tall
clear voice	hard voice
kind voice	hard hand

## IV. Imagine you had a horse (or any other pet) and write a short text in which you describe it (10 lines). What name would you give to it? How would it look like? How would you treat it? Would you take care of it?

## Teacher's guide

Anna Sewell (1820-1878), an English author, became a one-hit-wonder when she published *Black Beauty: The Autobiography of a Horse* in 1877, just a few months before she died. Whether confined to the solace of her room (she was unable to walk or stand due to a mistreated injury) or driving her father to the station from where he commuted to work, Anna

Sewell learnt about horses, the embodiment of her research being her only novel. The book became an instant success.

Technically speaking, the novel is an animal autobiography, from the second wave of such novels, written during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (the first having occupied the 18<sup>th</sup> century). This type of novel aimed at raising the audience's awareness in what animals were concerned, by trying to develop children's empathy towards animals in pain, thus teaching them that animals do have feelings and they do suffer. Problems related to credibility (referring to how exactly the story got committed to paper) were not an issue during the Victorian age, when this particular book appeared. What was indeed the object of focus for the Victorians was the attempt to find a balance between the two main vectors of the narrative: the realist one and the moralist one, the former dealing with not endowing animals with over-polished human features, while the latter saluted the noble presence of ethics in the text. By making it a narrative written in the first person, as if the horse was telling its own story, Anna Sewell breaks patterns and makes it easier for the children to follow the story, especially because it is as if they could see the world through the horse's eyes, since Black Beauty can only "talk" to his own kind. The book teaches children that animals need special care and attention and, above all, respect and love. Just like humans.