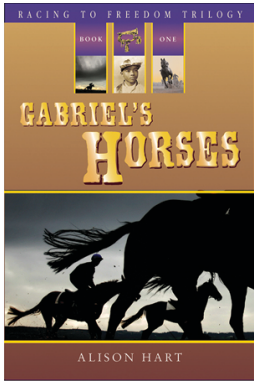


TEACHER'S GUIDE



Gabriel's Horses

Written by Alison Hart

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Ages 8–12 | Historical Fiction | Racing to Freedom Trilogy
AR • RC • Lexile • F&P • GRL V; Gr 5

ABOUT THE BOOK

In the first book of this engrossing middle grade Civil War era trilogy, a young Kentucky slave dares to pursue his dream of becoming a jockey.

The year is 1864, and twelve-year-old Gabriel hopes to become a famous jockey one day. Although he is the son of a free black father and a slave mother—making him a slave as well—he loves to help his father, one of the best horse trainers in Kentucky, care for the thoroughbred racehorses on Master Giles's farm.

But the violence of war disrupts the familiar routine of daily life on the farm. One-Arm Dan Parmer and his band of Confederate raiders are threatening area farms and stealing horses. When Gabriel's father enlists in a Colored Battalion to help the Union Army and earn enough money to purchase freedom for his wife and son, Gabriel is both proud and worried. But the absence of his father brings the arrival of Mr. Newcastle, a white horse trainer with harsh, cruel methods for handling horses...and people.

Now it is up to Gabriel to protect the horses he loves from Mr. Newcastle and keep them safely out of the clutches of One-Arm Dan and his men.

Author Alison Hart mines the complex relationships between white and black, slave and master, Unionist and Confederate, and old and young in this gripping work of historical fiction. Young readers will experience the danger and drama of a time when war split the country and human beings were segregated into the owner and the owned based on the color of their skin.

THEMES

- Racism
- Slavery
- Freedom
- Family
- The power of dreams
- Kentucky during the Civil War, 1864
- Camp Nelson
- Lexington, Kentucky
- Thoroughbred training and racing
- Confederate guerillas
- Life on a horse farm

BEFORE YOU READ

- The novel *Gabriel's Horses* is historical fiction, but it is based on facts. The section "The History Behind Gabriel's Horses" located at the end of the book will put Gabriel's story in the context of its time, which is important in understanding the novel. Students unfamiliar with the Civil War and slavery can learn more from the materials listed on page 160. These books range in reading level from easy, with photos and illustrations, to more difficult, and should be available from most libraries.

AS YOU READ

- The novel is told in first-person present tense, which creates a feeling of immediacy. Each chapter has tense situations where students can discuss the choices they might have made. Gabriel's decisions and the issues that he faces can also be related to choices and

issues that today's children must deal with.

- Each of the main characters in the novel has a goal. For example, Gabriel wants to be a winning jockey and Pa wants to become a soldier to help out his family. Have students discuss how the characters reach their goals. How do they deal with the setbacks?
- There are many different examples of African Americans in the novel in terms of jobs, levels of freedom, and character. Use them to discuss stereotypes of race and our perceptions of history.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Students should be encouraged to consider the following questions during their reading/research:

- What was slavery like?
- Was Kentucky Confederate or Union?
- How were horses trained?
- What was Camp Nelson?

More specific questions on the issue of slavery might include:

- Where did slaves live?
- What were their jobs?
- What did they eat?
- What did they wear?
- Were they able to go to school?
- How did it feel to have a master?
- What freedoms did they have?

Students should also share what they do know about the war and slavery, since knowledge will vary and depend somewhat on the history curriculum and its objectives, as well as what they learn as they read.

AFTER YOU READ

The questions students created in the "Before You Read" section can be edited to more specifically target Gabriel and his world. For example: Where did slaves live? can be changed to: Where did Gabriel live? How was this different from Master's house? Use these and other writing prompts to get students started:

- Discuss and/or write about "freedom." What was Annabel's definition of freedom? Ma's? Pa's? Jackson's?
- What skills are needed to be a trainer? A jockey?
- What did you learn about horses that you didn't know before?
- Discuss the ending. Many students may disagree with

Gabriel's choice.

- How does Gabriel change from the beginning of the novel to the end?
- Discuss the characteristics of a hero. What makes a person a hero? Do you believe Gabriel is a hero? Why or why not? Who else in the story might be a hero?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS

- Rich vocabulary permeates the novel. As students read, have them keep a class chart of new words and definitions written on a poster on the wall. They could be charted under headings like the following: horses/racing/past/soldiers. Examples of words under each: girth, purse money, portico, haversack.
- Help students look for the many metaphors, similes, sensory language, and strong verbs used in the novel. For example, Gabriel "watches with hawk eyes." Pa's forehead is "as furrowed and brown as a plowed field." Gabriel talks about Tenpenny "lipping my hair," and his "belly churns" when he thinks about the journey.
- Chapters in the novel often end with cliffhangers. Discuss what a cliffhanger is and how it is used as a writing device.
- As students read, have them add information to individual charts or dry-erase class boards/posters that compare/contrast life today and in 1864. Categories to compare are endless and might include food/clothes/language/jobs/technology. This can later be used to write a contrast essay.
- Diaries, journals, and letters were used as primary sources for writing the story. Students can use the facts on the compare/contrast chart and vocabulary chart to write their own letters about a specific incident such as taking a journey to Lexington, or keep a journal about their life on the horse farm.
- Have students sign up for how they want to communicate with their parents about something the parent does not know about them. Forms of communication are limited to video, voice recording, a letter, pictures or dramatization. The student must explain why their chosen method is a form of communication and why it may be beneficial to some but hindering for others.

SOCIAL STUDIES

- “The History behind Gabriel’s Horses” section at the end of the book can help tie history and the story together. *Gabriel’s Horses* is an exciting way to bring aspects of the Civil War to life for students. Before and as students read, discuss facts about 1864, the war, and African American soldiers.
- Compare and contrast the Civil War in Kentucky in 1864 with the Civil War in your own state. How was it the same? How was it different? Invite a re-enactor from your area to visit your class.
- Use the bibliography and websites to help students learn to research effectively.
- Research and discuss Confederate guerillas and the part they played in the war.
- Incorporate books from the list on pages 160-161 of the novel to help broaden students’ knowledge of the war and slavery.
- Horse racing is one of America’s oldest sports, and African Americans played a huge part as trainers, groomers, and jockeys. This is little-known yet interesting history, and can be a springboard to discussing the history of baseball and other sports.
- Research one Eastern culture family structure and compare it to that of the American individualistic culture. Students should provide photographs and pictures of the residences of the other cultures.

WEBSITES

Camp Nelson

www.campnelson.org

Horse Racing

www.horseracing.about.com/library/weekly/aa012499.htm

Kentucky History

www.kyhistory.org

REVIEWS

“At the core of this stirring historical novel is the question of what freedom means... The boy’s first-person, present-tense narrative brings close the thrilling horse racing on the plantation, at the race course, and in the war and the African-American history in all it’s complexity.”

—**Booklist**

“The author grounds this fast-paced tale in historical fact by providing a nonfiction epilogue. Readers will find this wonderful blend of history and horses appealing.”

—**School Library Journal**

AWARDS

- Kansas State Reading Circle Recommended Reading List (Top Pick, Middle School / Junior High)
—Kansas National Education Association
- Texas Bluebonnet Award (Master List) —Texas Library Association
- Lamplighter Award (nominee) —Children’s Crown Award
- Kentucky Bluegrass Awards (Master List, grades 3–5)
—Kentucky Reading Association, Kentucky School Media Association
- KSRA Young Adult Book Award (nominee)
—Keystone State Reading Association
- Horned Toad Tales (nominee) —Cypress Fairbanks Independent School District
- Flicker Tale Children’s Book Awards (nominee, juvenile books) —North Dakota Library Association
- West Virginia Children’s Book Award (nominee)
—West Virginia Library Commission
- Young Hoosier Book Award (nominee, intermediate)
—Association for Indiana Media Educators
- Mark Twain Readers Award (nominee) —Missouri Association of School Librarians
- Sunshine State Young Reader’s Award (nominee, grades 6–8) —FAME
- Louisiana Young Readers’ Choice Award (nominee, grades 6–8) —State Library of Louisiana and Louisiana Center for the Book
- Golden Sower Award (nominee, intermediate)
—Nebraska Library Association

**Alison Hart's
Racing to Freedom Trilogy:**

Gabriel's Horses
Gabriel's Triumph
Gabriel's Journey

**Alison Hart's
Dog Chronicles series:**

Darling, Mercy Dog of World War I
Finder, Coal Mine Dog
Murphy, Gold Rush Dog
Leo, Dog of the Sea

Also available from Alison Hart:

Anna's Blizzard
Emma's River

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alison Hart is the author of more than sixty books for young readers, including *Emma's River*, *Anna's Blizzard*, the Racing to Freedom trilogy and the Dog Chronicles series. Hart is a former teacher and lives in Virginia.

www.alisonhartbooks.com

Peachtree Teacher's Guide for
GABRIEL'S HORSES
prepared by Alison Hart

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