Seabiscuit: The Wonder Horse
HC: 9781416933601

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY
During the 1930s, when many people were suffering from tough economic times, they found momentary diversion at the racetrack. An unusual horse named Seabiscuit—a wild, lazy, angry, stubborn horse—was transformed from a loser to a winner through the loving care of his owner, trainer, and jockey. As a result, Seabiscuit went from being a battered underdog to being a celebrated hero, finding his way into the hearts of millions of people. This amazing horse went on to defeat the famous horse War Admiral in 1938, providing fans with a much-needed escape from their problems and a reason to cheer. Even President Roosevelt took time out from his schedule to follow this exciting race.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES
Key Ideas and Details
The questions and activities below draw on Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for reading informational text (RI) that ask children to ask and answer questions about a text, identify the main topic and key details that support it, and describe the relationship between a series of events, concepts, or ideas. Encourage students to cite evidence from the book when discussing their ideas.

1. What was life like for most people in the 1930s? How does the illustration at the beginning of the book show this?
2. Seabiscuit was changed from a wild, lazy, angry, stubborn horse to a winning racehorse. How did each of the following people help change Seabiscuit from a loser to a winner?
   - Charles Howard, Seabiscuit’s owner
   - John “Red” Pollard, Seabiscuit’s jockey
   - “Silent Tom” Smith, Seabiscuit’s trainer
3. How did people feel when Seabiscuit won the race against War Admiral? How does the author let you know this?
4. Do you agree with the author that “Seabiscuit was America’s hero”? Why?
5. Hot Seat!!!! Put each of the following characters on the hot seat. That means that a student pretends to be a character in the book. Other students ask the character questions. Using information from the book, the student on the hot seat answers the questions the way the character would answer. For example, if a student is pretending to be Charles Howard, two questions he might be asked are “Why did you decide to buy Seabiscuit?” and “Why did you want Seabiscuit to race against War Admiral?”

Here are some characters to put on the hot seat:
   - Charles Howard, Seabiscuit’s owner
   - John “Red” Pollard, Seabiscuit’s jockey
   - “Silent Tom” Smith, Seabiscuit’s trainer
   - George “The Iceman” Woolf, the jockey who rode Seabiscuit in the race against War Admiral
   - A fan of Seabiscuit—someone with “Seabiscuit-itis”

Craft and Structure
To learn about craft and structure, the CCSS asks us to help students learn and understand vocabulary words and phrases, think about the features of nonfiction text, and assess the author’s point of view. The questions and activities below emphasize these understandings.

1. Magnet summaries. (See Seabiscuit Magnet Summaries Reproducible Sheet at the end of this section.) Create magnet summaries of important topics in the story.
2. Mind Portraits: What Did People Think about Seabiscuit? (See Seabiscuit Mind Portraits Reproducible Sheet at the end of this section.) Show the points of view of different people mentioned in the story by creating mind portraits.
3. Examine the author’s note at the end of the book. What extra information does the author provide? How does this information help you understand how Seabiscuit became a hero and a champion?
4. Do you agree with the author that going to the racetrack was a good way for people to forget their troubles for a short time? Why?
5. Watch a video of the famous race when Seabiscuit defeated War Admiral in 1938 at: Meghan-McCarthy.com/Seabiscuit.html
Writing

CCSS emphasizes writing informative and explanatory text in the early grades. The writing activities below provide experience writing to give an opinion, to inform, and to explain a sequence of events.

1. **RAFT Writing Activity.** (See *Seabiscuit* RAFT Reproducible Sheet at the end of this section.) RAFT stands for Role, Audience, Format, and Topic. By shifting each of these features, we can think of interesting ways to write about Seabiscuit.

2. Seabiscuit really changed over time. Make a series of pictures showing how the horse changed. Then, underneath each picture, write about the change.

3. What is your opinion of Seabiscuit? Was he a hero? Write your thoughts about this horse.

4. Read *Wonder Horse: The True Story of the World’s Smartest Horse* by Emily Arnold McCully. Write about how Jim Key, the Wonder Horse, was similar to and different than Seabiscuit.

5. Visit the website of author Meghan McCarthy at Meghan-McCarthy.com to learn more about her books, writing, and illustrating. Click on “All About the Books” to find out about the author/illustrator’s other books. Prepare a written summary of one of the author’s books. Be sure to tell the main idea of the book and the details that help readers understand this idea.
Create magnet summaries of important topics in the story. Here’s how.

First, begin with a key word that explains the topic. You can think of this word as a magnet that attracts other related words. Second, list other words and phrases that describe and explain the magnet word. Third, use as many words and phrases as possible to write a magnet summary about the topic.

**Here is an example:**

Magnet Summary: In the beginning, Seabiscuit was a lazy, stubborn, angry horse. But with the help of his owner, who saw his potential, and his trainer and jockey, who knew how to care for him, he became a champion.

On a separate sheet of paper, try writing magnet summaries using these topics:

**Seabiscuit:**

- tough times
- elegant
- escape
- racehorse
- forget their troubles
- long lines for food
- mighty
- fastest horse in history
- Samuel Riddle
- challenge
- WAR ADMIRAL
- scoffed
- goofy-looking challenger
- grand horse

Create your own magnet word and related words. Write a magnet summary for your word choices. Illustrate your magnet summary.
What did people think about Seabiscuit? You can show the points of view of different people mentioned in the story by creating mind portraits.

First, draw a picture of the person—a face with features. Second, draw an empty face with no features. Instead, show what each person thinks about Seabiscuit—what’s on the person’s mind. Use both words and pictures.

For example, here is owner Charles Howard’s face. Then, in the empty face, we see his thoughts about Seabiscuit.

On separate sheets of paper, make your own mind portraits of these characters:

- **John “Red” Pollard**
  Seabiscuit’s jockey

- **“Silent Tom” Smith**
  Seabiscuit’s Trainer

- **George “The Iceman” Woolf**
  Seabiscuit’s jockey in the big race

- **Samuel Riddle**
  War Admiral’s owner
**Seabiscuit: The Wonder Horse**

**RAFT Writing Activity**

RAFT stands for Role, Audience, Format, and Topic.

Role refers to who is doing the writing. Audience refers to who is receiving the writing. Format refers to the kind of writing being done. Topic refers to what the writing is about.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROLE</th>
<th>AUDIENCE</th>
<th>FORMAT</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charles Howard, Seabiscuit’s owner</td>
<td>Samuel Riddle, War Admiral’s owner</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>I challenge War Admiral to try to beat my horse Seabiscuit in a race. Why I think Seabiscuit will win.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Riddle</td>
<td>Newspaper reporter</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Why the goofy-looking Seabiscuit will not win.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Pollard</td>
<td>George “The Iceman” Woolf</td>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>Please race for me. Ride Seabiscuit when he races War Admiral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Howard</td>
<td>Himself</td>
<td>Scrapbook of photos and items to remember about Seabiscuit</td>
<td>Memories of Seabiscuit and how he changed from a slow, angry horse to a champion and hero.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan of Seabiscuit</td>
<td>Herself</td>
<td>Diary</td>
<td>Why I went to the racetrack to root for Seabiscuit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Here are the writing ideas from the chart above:**

- As Seabiscuit’s owner, write a letter to Samuel Riddle, challenging War Admiral to a race with Seabiscuit and stating why he predicts Seabiscuit will win.
- As Samuel Riddle, respond to the questions of a newspaper reporter. Tell him why the goofy-looking Seabiscuit will not win.
- As Red Pollard, convince George “The Iceman” Woolf that he should ride Seabiscuit in this place when he races War Admiral.
- As Charles Howard, make a scrapbook of photos and items to remember how Seabiscuit changed from a slow, angry horse to a champion and a hero.
- As a fan of Seabiscuit, write a diary entry about how you went to the racetrack to root for Seabiscuit when he raced War Admiral.

Try adding your own ideas to the chart. Share these ideas with your classmates.