

## Ballad of the Horse and Mule: Some Will Make It Through

### Geography

1. In each of the three parts of *Ballad of the Horse and Mule*, how does the geography affect the horses and riders?
2. Which of the three geographical areas do you think was most difficult on the horses? Why? Which do you think was most difficult on the riders? Why?
3. The race begins near the Finger Lakes, NY. What type of lake are the Finger Lakes? What are their characteristics?
4. The race ends just west of Donner Pass, CA. What famous historic event happened at Donner Pass during the winter of 1846-1847?
5. If you live in one of the eleven states the race goes through, which parts of your state's geography do you recognize in *Ballad of the Horse and Mule*? If you were writing *Ballad of the Horse and Mule*, which aspects of your state's geography would you emphasize?
6. If you live in a state that the race does not travel through, draw a race route across the United States that goes through your state. Look at your route after you finish — in what ways would the endurance race be different if it traveled through your state? (If you live in Alaska or Hawaii, you will have to transport the equines by ship or plane to one of the “mainland” states and start the race there.)
7. Using the daily standings, give two examples from the book that show how geography affected the results.

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### The Ballad

1. The ballad is a particular type of poetry. What kind of stanza does a ballad have? What are the usual ballad rhyme schemes? What is the usual ballad meter?
2. Describe the stanza structure in *Ballad of the Horse and Mule*.
3. Did you enjoy reading the story in ballad form? Do you think the form helped the story? If so, how? Would you have preferred it if the story were told in straight prose? Why? Do you think that straight prose would be an improvement on the ballad form in this story? Explain.
4. In music, the ballad has been a very popular form since the 1300s. There are many old ballads from England, Scotland, and Wales, and many of these are still sung in the US Appalachian Mountain areas. Choose one of these ballads and analyze its structure. There are also cowboy ballads such as "The Streets of Laredo." Analyze its structure. And then there are jazz ballads, which differ from traditional ballads. Choose a classic jazz ballad and analyze its structure. In what ways does it differ from the traditional ballad structure? In what ways is it the same or similar?
5. Have you read any other story ballads? If so, what were they? What did you like about them? Was there anything you disliked about them?
6. Write a short review of *Ballad of the Horse and Mule*. Write it in the same stanza form that the story is told in.

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### Equines and Math

1. On Day 1, Robert and Beth are talking about how many hours it might take to reach the end of the route and win the race. How does Robert come up with the figure of 250 hours as the winning time?
2. What is the actual winning time? What is the difference between Robert's estimate and the winning time?
3. The race is 2500 miles long and first prize is \$500,000. How much did the first-place finisher earn per mile? How much did the fifth-place finisher earn per mile? The tenth-place finisher?
4. The average speed of a horse running an endurance race is from 8-12 miles an hour (depending on terrain and other conditions). What was the average speed of the winner in *Ballad of the Horse and Mule*? What was the average speed of the fifth-place finisher? The tenth?
5. The four basic gaits of a horse are walk, trot, canter, and gallop. Write a short report on the gaits, listing the speed of each. Which gait do you think most of the endurance riders used most of the time? Why?

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### Vocabulary

1. Below are a few words that appear in *Ballad of the Horse and Mule*. Choose five of the words, look each up in a dictionary, then write a definition of the word. Choose the definition that's relevant to the way the word is used in the book. The number in parentheses is the page number the word appears on.

**proud (6)**

**gait (10)**

**masseuse (18)**

**game (21)**

**smidge (37)**

**skulk (49)**

**skittish (59)**

**qualm (62)**

**ballyhoo (70)**

**prance (83)**

**distinct (99)**

**berate (115)**

**reclaim (126)**

**frolic (140)**

**throng (144)**

**endurance (6)**

**fetlock (14)**

**reap (19)**

**thrive (24)**

**grime (38)**

**transpire (52)**

**picker (60)**

**alight (65)**

**curry (74)**

**plight (84)**

**headlong (103)**

**accord (118)**

**spent (137)**

**minuscule (142)**

**converge (148)**

**penalize (8)**

**bide (16)**

**tranquil (20)**

**zeal (28)**

**turnabout (47)**

**potent (59)**

**aloof (61)**

**grueling (65)**

**hefty (80)**

**rebound (96)**

**speculate (105)**

**anew (125)**

**plummet (137)**

**discard (142)**



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### **Making Predictions**

1. After you had read several chapters of *Ballad of the Horse and Mule*, who did you predict would win the race? What made you think so?
2. As you read, did you think there would be a “snake incident” or “snake encounter” somewhere in the book? What made you think so. Did you think that Robert would get bitten by a rattlesnake? Were you surprised by what happened?
3. Did you predict or anticipate that Robert Stroud would change? What made you think so?
4. When you saw the cover of *Ballad of the Horse and Mule*, what did you anticipate the story would be like? Was the story what you anticipated?
5. Did the story’s subtitle, *Some Will Make It Through*, lead you to reach conclusions on what would happen? In what way were your conclusions accurate? In what way were they different?
6. In poetry and in songs, a refrain is a repeated line or lines, usually at the end of each verse. The refrain in *Ballad of the Horse and Mule* is repeated, but not every day. What kinds of things did the refrain make you think would happen? Were your assumptions / conclusions right or wrong? In what way?



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### Characters

1. Who was your favorite character in *Ballad of the Horse and Mule*. Explain what you liked about this character.
2. What was Supreme like as a character? What was Mack like?
3. What is a *villain*? In what ways was Carson Kloos a villain?
4. What did you think of the vets? Why?
5. Sammy and Micah are teens, the other characters are adults. What do Sammy and Micah add to the story that the adults could not?
6. In what ways did Robert Stroud change? What caused these changes?
7. What is a *hero* in real life? What is a *hero* in fiction? Who do you think the hero of this book is? Why? Do you think a book can have more than one hero? Do you think this book has more than one hero? Explain.

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### Theme

1. At the beginning of the story, Robert makes judgements about which horses and riders are “worthy” and which are not, which he thinks will win and which will drop out. On what basis does Robert make these judgements?
2. As the trek continues, Robert begins to make judgements using other criteria. Which equines and riders does he begin to re-evaluate? What new criteria enters his thinking to make him re-evaluate his initial judgements?
3. Discuss the friendships in the book. What makes a good friend and good friendship? What role does friendship play in the book? In what ways does friendship help each rider?
4. Does Robert have advantages that some of the other riders do not? Name some of these. How does having these advantages affect Robert? How does not having these advantages affect some of the other riders?
5. What is kindness? What role should it play in our lives? What role does it play in this book? Give three examples of humans helping fellow humans in the story. How was this help important to the person(s) receiving it?
6. On Day Forty Ethan tells Robert about horses, oxen, and mules on the westward trek of the pioneers. What do you think the point of this story is? Why do you think Ethan tells it to Robert?
7. *Ballad of the Horse and Mule* hints that everyone who completed the race should consider themselves a winner. Do you agree with this or disagree? Explain why you think so.
8. Discuss the last stanza (the refrain) in detail, especially examining the key words *fall, rise, tall, prize*.