

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Horse and His Boy by C.S. Lewis

Book Information

C.S. Lewis, The Horse and His Boy
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A Talking Horse and a boy prince save Narnia from invasion. Book #5

Topics: Adventure, Rescue/Save; Animals, Horses; Series, Chronicles of Narnia

Main Characters

Ahoshta Tarkaan the groveling Grand Vizier to the Tisroc; Aravis has been promised in marriage to him

Aravis Tarkheena a proud, wealthy girl who joins Shasta and Bree in their journey after running away from home to avoid a forced marriage

Aslan the powerful and mystical lion who helps Shasta defeat Prince Rabadash's army

Breehy-hinny-brinny-hoohy-hah (Bree) the arrogant Narnian Talking Horse, who uses Shasta to escape slavery in Calormen and return to Narnia

Corin the young prince of Archenland, who urges Shasta to join the battle against Prince Rabadash

Hwin the Talking Horse who travels with Aravis

King Edmund the king of Narnia, who leads the battle against Prince Rabadash

King Lune the kindly father of Shasta and Corin; he rules over Archenland

Lasaraleen the frivolous friend of Aravis, who helps her escape Tashbaan

Prince Rabadash the conceited and headstrong heir to the throne of Tashbaan, who attacks Archenland in an effort to kidnap Queen Susan

Queen Susan the queen of Narnia, who decides not to marry Prince Rabadash after he reveals his evil nature

Shasta (Cor) a poor boy raised by a fisherman; he discovers he is a prince when he saves Archenland from being invaded

Tisroc the tyrannical ruler of Calormen and uncaring father of Prince Rabadash

Vocabulary

campaign a series of activities by an army performed in order to reach a specific goal

mettle a person's worth in terms of bravery or persistence

scimitar a large curved sword

self-conceit an inflated view of one's own value

talisman an object with magical powers for warding off evil

vizier a high-ranking official who gives advice

Synopsis

The Horse and His Boy, the fifth book of C.S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia series, focuses on the story of a poor Calormene fisherman's son named Shasta.

Shasta's adventures begin when he overhears the plans his father has made to sell him. Then a Talking Horse who had been kidnapped from Narnia persuades Shasta to run away from his abusive adoptive father. Shasta and the horse, whose name is Bree, head to Narnia hoping to find a better life. As they are traveling, the sound of roaring lions forces them to merge paths with a young girl named Aravis and a Talking Horse named Hwin.

Aravis and Hwin are running away from Aravis's father because Aravis does not want to marry Ahoshta Tarkaan, the elderly Grand Vizier to the Tisroc (leader of Calormen). The four decide to travel together to Narnia, but first they must manage to pass through the immense walled and terraced city of Tashbaan.

When they reach Tashbaan, they attempt to disguise themselves as peasants and packhorses, but the plan backfires when Shasta is mistaken for Corin, the crown prince of Archenland, and is forced to join Queen Susan and King Edmund of Narnia inside the Tisroc's palace. Here Shasta discovers that members of Narnian royalty have come to visit

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Prince Rabadash, the Tisroc's son, because Queen Susan had considered marrying him. The queen has changed her mind, though, because Prince Rabadash has shown himself to be a selfish and willful person. The Narnians now fear that Queen Susan will be forced to marry Rabadash if she refuses him. The Narnians make plans to escape via the river, and when the real Corin returns from his adventures in the city, he helps Shasta sneak away without being detected. The Narnians also successfully escape, and they make their way back to Narnia.

Shortly after being separated from Shasta, Aravis's disguise is jeopardized when she is recognized by an old friend named Lasaraleen. Aravis makes Lasaraleen hide her and help her pass through Tashbaan. When Lasaraleen tries to use a secret passage through the Tisroc's palace, the two girls are forced to hide from the Tisroc and inadvertently overhear Prince Rabadash's plans to invade Archenland and Narnia in an attempt to recapture the escaped Queen Susan. Lasaraleen gets Aravis safely out of the city, and Aravis finds her fellow travelers and tells them of Prince Rabadash's plan.

The group hurries across the desert hoping to beat Prince Rabadash's army, but their efforts are almost thwarted when they oversleep. They realize Prince Rabadash's army has almost caught up to them. They rush to outrace the army and suddenly find themselves being chased by a giant lion. The lion catches Aravis, and Shasta leaps off Bree to save her. The lion runs off when he is confronted by an unarmed Shasta, and the party is taken into the home of the Hermit of the Southern March. The Hermit tends to Aravis's wounds and waters and feeds the horses.

In the meantime, Shasta runs to alert the people of Archenland of the impending attack. He finds King Lune of Archenland hunting in the woods and tells them of Prince Rabadash's plan, but he is unable to keep up with the hunting party as they speed to the castle. Shasta then becomes lost in the woods. He is saved when a mysterious "Thing" comes to him and tells him that, he, Aslan, the great lion, has

guided him on his path. Shasta discovers he has been led to Narnia, and a Stag hurries to warn Queen Lucy of Narnia.

The next day Shasta joins the Narnian army as they head to Archenland to defend King Lune's castle. Shasta shows himself to be a brave but somewhat ineffectual fighter. The battle ends with Prince Rabadash being captured and King Lune declaring it his right to decide the prince's punishment.

It is at this juncture that Shasta learns that he resembles Prince Corin because he is actually Corin's twin brother. He was stolen from his cradle by Lord Bar, a traitor employed by the Tisroc, because Shasta was prophesied to someday save Archenland from great danger. After the army of Archenland caught up with Lord Bar's ship Shasta was set adrift in a small boat and washed up on the shore near the home of the fisherman who raised him. Shasta learns, with some trepidation, that he is the crown prince of Archenland.

Back at the Hermit's home, Shasta's friends are witnesses to the battle through a magic pool in the Hermit's garden. They are happy to see Prince Rabadash vanquished and are relieved to see that Shasta has survived the battle. Shasta comes soon afterward to tell them of his change of fortune and to take them to the palace, where they are invited to the celebration of the victory over Prince Rabadash.

During the feast, King Lune has Prince Rabadash brought forth for judgment. Instead of being contrite, Rabadash threatens to return to conquer King Lune's kingdom. Aslan arrives, however, and turns him into a donkey. The prince is told that he will regain his human form later that year but will become a donkey permanently if he ever ventures more than ten miles from the great temple of Tashbaan.

The story ends with a brief summary of the future of Shasta and his friends. Shasta becomes a great king; he marries Aravis and forms a strong bond with his brother Corin. Bree and Hwin travel to Narnia, where they eventually marry but not to each other, though they do remain friends for life.

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Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Prince Rabadash and the Tisroc have a strained relationship. What are some of the reasons that they feel so much anger towards one another?

One of the factors that contributes to their hostile relationship is their desire to use each other for their own gain. Another reason for their aggression is that they are both afraid of one another: the Tisroc fears that the prince will plot his death, and the prince knows that his father can have him put to death at any time.

Literary Analysis

Why is it important to the plot of this story that Shasta was kidnapped as a baby?

When Shasta was an infant, it was prophesied that someday he would save Archenland from a great danger. He fulfills this prophecy by warning Archenland of Prince Rabadash's attack while he is running away from his adoptive father in order to avoid being sold as a slave. If Shasta had grown up in his father's house, it is not likely that he would have ever met Aravis or known about the conspiracy to conquer Archenland and kidnap Queen Susan.

Inferential Comprehension

Explain whether or not Bree undergoes any significant personality changes during the course of this story by evaluating his attitudes toward himself and others throughout the story.

Although Bree is given ample opportunity to consider whether his vanity and conceit are really appropriate, he does not seem to be able to shed his pride and gain some humility. He is ashamed of himself for leaving his friends to face the lion alone, but he still believes himself to be a superior being, as is shown by the arrogant way he scoffs at Aravis and Hwin when they think that Aslan actually appears in the form of a lion. Even after he is proved wrong when Aslan appears, he still clings to his conceited ways. At the end of the story he does not want to return to Narnia until his tail grows back because he wants to look the part of an elegant and superior horse when he returns home.

Constructing Meaning

When the Narnians are planning their escape from Tashbaan, King Edmund says of the Tisroc, "Most likely he hopes to make one mouthful of Narnia and Archenland both." What does this statement show about King Edmund's opinion of the Tisroc?

He knows that the Tisroc is prone to war and that he does not respect the rights of his neighboring countries. He believes that the Tisroc feels threatened by the freedom these countries grant their citizens and longs to make slaves of all the people around him. He is certain that if the Tisroc were given an easy opportunity to annex Archenland and Narnia, he would jump at the chance.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting So the students can better visualize how geography affects the events in this story, have the students draw a map of the countries mentioned in this story. Have them include all important geographical features and illustrate their map with details described in the book.

Comparing and Contrasting Have the students

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write two short accounts of the battle, one from the viewpoint of Prince Rabadash and the other from a character of their choice. Have the students pay particular attention to the difference between how Prince Rabadash and other characters probably regarded the events of the battle.

Understanding the Author's Craft Have the students list the characteristics and traits of lions and consider why the author chose to make Aslan a lion rather than some other creature. Have them describe what the image of the lion means in this story and how it contributes to their impressions of Narnia and the theme of the book.

Describing Actions or Events Much of this story is a description of Shasta's journey and how he solves the problems that arise along the way. Have the students plan their own journey to a distant place. Have them write the story of their imaginary journey and what they might do to deal with any obstacles on the way to their destination.