

Riding with the Camel Corps

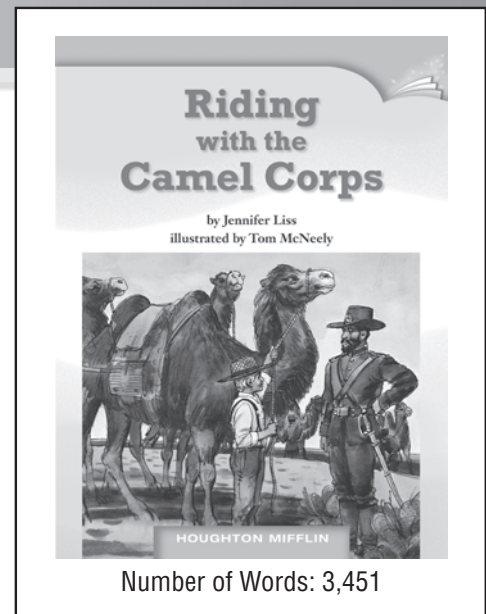
by Jennifer Liss

Fountas-Pinnell Level W

Historical Fiction

Selection Summary

The experimental Camel Corps is just the opportunity 12-year-old Roy needs to demonstrate his way with animals and possibly earn the right to travel with the corps to Fort Defiance, where his father is stationed. After several blunders, Roy realizes he has much to learn about the desert “beasts.” When he realizes his dream, Roy proves his worth by finding needed water with the help of a desert pal.



Characteristics of the Text

Genre	• Historical fiction
Text Structure	• Third-person narrative • Introduction and epilogue frame provide factual information to help explain story
Content	• Westward expansion • The U.S. Camel Corps of the 1850s
Themes and Ideas	• Observe and learn before trying something new. • Even when you think you may know something, there may still be a lot to learn.
Language and Literary Features	• Conversational language that reflects nineteenth-century western American dialect • Figurative language: <i>as sharp as razors</i> • Humor
Sentence Complexity	• Complex sentences and lengthy simple sentences • Appositives and parallelism • Dashes, exclamations, and quotation marks
Vocabulary Words	• Many animal terms, such as <i>handlers, steeds, harnessed</i> • Many multisyllable words, some of which may be challenging, such as <i>tumultuous, dejectedly, ingenuity, observational</i>
Illustrations	• Realistic color illustrations support the text
Book and Print Features	• Eighteen pages of text with illustrations on most pages
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Build Background

Help students use their knowledge of the American West and animals to visualize the story. Build interest by asking a question such as the following: *How might camels have been useful in the expansion of the West?* Read the title and author and talk about the cover illustration. Tell students that this story is historical fiction about a 12-year-old boy who wants to join a U.S. Army expedition across the deserts of the American West.

Introduce the Text

Guide students through the text, noting important ideas, and helping with unfamiliar language and vocabulary so they can read the text successfully. Here are some suggestions:

Page 3: Study the picture. **Suggested language:** *When do you think this story takes place? How can you tell?*

Page 5: Point out the picture of Roy, and tell students this is the main character and that he knows lots about horses. *Why might Roy feel he can bring this camel into **submission**? What do you think makes horses and camels similar but different?*

Page 6: Read the sentence: *The camel pulled back its big lips, looked Roy in the eye, and spit right in his face.* **Ask:** *After being covered in **gunk**, how do you think Roy feels about working with these unruly animals?*

Page 8: Look at the picture on the page. *Roy is examining prickly-pear cactus. Have you ever seen plants like this? Where did you see them? How are the plants a clue to the environment where the story takes place?*

Page 11: Point out the picture. *Why do you think the camels are tied together? How do you think the camels are being used in the story?*

Now turn to the beginning of the story and read to find out more about Roy's adventures with the Camel Corps.

Expand Your Vocabulary

gunk – a thick, greasy substance, p. 6

knobby – having a rounded bulge, p. 4

stench – a strong, foul odor, a stink, p. 7

submission – the act of giving up control to another, p. 5

unruly – difficult or impossible to control, p. 6

Read

Have students read silently while you listen to individual students read aloud. Support their understanding of the text as needed.

Remind students to use the Visualize Strategy  **TARGET STRATEGY** and to picture what each scene might be like.

Discuss and Revisit the Text

Personal Response

Invite students to share their personal responses to the story.

Suggested language: *What do you think of the idea of bringing camels to the United States to help carry cargo west?*

Ways of Thinking

As you discuss the text, help students understand these points:

Thinking Within the Text	Thinking Beyond the Text	Thinking About the Text
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roy thinks he knows about camels because he knows about horses.• When Roy finds out that camels are very different from horses, he works to learn more about them.• Roy is asked to ride to Fort Defiance with the Camel Corps, and his mother agrees. The Camel Corps complete the trek to Fort Defiance after Roy and a camel discover water.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Animals differ in how they behave, look, and function.• Respect your parents' authority. They are responsible for the safety of their children.• Doing something new and adventurous is fun and exciting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The illustrations help the reader picture the setting and animals.• The language of the dialogue shows the reader that this story takes place in the past.• The introduction and epilogue help the reader understand the setting and why camels were brought to the United States and what happened to them after this Army experiment.

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Choices for Further Support

- **Fluency** Invite students to choose a passage from the story to use for a readers' theater. Remind them to picture the setting and, if possible, modify how they read the characters' dialogue to reflect Texas in the 1850s.
- **Comprehension** Based on your observations of the students' reading and discussion, revisit parts of the text to clarify or extend comprehension. Remind students to go back to the text to support their ideas.
- **Phonics/Word Work** Provide practice as needed with words and word parts, using examples from the text. Remind students that many English words are built from Latin root words and affixes. For example, the word *corps* (page 2) comes from the Latin word *corpus*, meaning "body." A corps is a body of people who work together for a common purpose.

Writing about Reading


Critical Thinking

Have students complete the Critical Thinking questions on BLM 7.9.

Responding

Have students complete the activities at the back of the book, using their Reader's Notebook. Use the instruction below as needed to reinforce or extend understanding of the comprehension skill.

Target Comprehension Skill

Understanding Characters  **TARGET SKILL** Remind students that they can use text details to explain why characters act, speak, and think as they do. Model how to add details to the Graphic Organizer, using a "Think Aloud" like the one below:

Think Aloud

Roy felt discouraged when the camels ate through the prickly-pear fence, but he kept on with his task and continued to make suggestions to Captain Marsh. Even though Roy was inexperienced, he was a hard worker. These are details that show his character. You could add them to the "Actions" column on the chart.

Practice the Skill

Have students share an example of another story in which details explained why characters acted, spoke, or thought as they did.

Writing Prompt: Thinking Beyond the Text

Have students write a response to the prompt on page 6. Remind them that when they think beyond the text, they use their personal knowledge to reach new understandings.

Assessment Prompts

- What is the meaning of *knobby* on page 4?
- Captain Marsh told Roy why camels spit and ate their way through his fence to show that _____.
- What is an important message in the story?

English Language Development

Reading Support Make sure the text matches the students' reading level. Language and content should be accessible with regular teaching support.

Idioms The story includes many idioms that might be unfamiliar. Explain the meaning of expressions such as *ghost town* (p. 2) and *the horses will spook* (p. 10).

Oral Language Development

Check student comprehension, using a dialogue that best matches your students' English proficiency. **Speaker 1** is the teacher, **Speaker 2** is the student.

Beginning/Early Intermediate	Intermediate	Early Advanced/ Advanced
<p>Speaker 1: Who are two of the main characters?</p> <p>Speaker 2: Roy and Captain Marsh</p> <p>Speaker 1: What does Ma say about Roy going to Fort Defiance with the camels?</p> <p>Speaker 2: yes</p>	<p>Speaker 1: Why does the camel spit at Roy?</p> <p>Speaker 2: Camels spit when they feel threatened.</p> <p>Speaker 1: Why doesn't Roy's fence work?</p> <p>Speaker 2: Roy's fence doesn't work because the camels eat the cacti.</p>	<p>Speaker 1: Why didn't the Camel Corps continue?</p> <p>Speaker 2: The Camel Corps didn't continue because the rocky desert was hard on the camels' hooves, and people never got used to dealing with the stubborn camels. Also, when the Civil War started, the government could not afford to spend money on the Camel Corps.</p>

Responding

TARGET SKILL Understanding Characters

How would you describe Roy Henry? Copy and complete the chart below to show how Roy's thoughts, actions, and words help the reader understand his character.

Thoughts	Actions	Words
thinks he is good at handling animals	?	?

Write About It

Text to Self Roy Henry wants to prove his worth to Captain Marsh by learning everything he can about how to handle camels. Write several paragraphs describing a time when you wanted to prove your ability to perform a task.

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Lesson 7
BLACKLINE MASTER 7.9

Name _____ Date _____

Critical Thinking

Read and answer the questions. Possible responses shown.

- Think within the text** Why did Captain George Crosman believe camels would be the ideal animals to help Americans move west?
They could carry heavy loads and thrive in the desert.
- Think within the text** What did Roy have to learn about camels before he was able to assist Captain Crosman in a productive manner?
Camels spit, are stubborn, and eat anything.
- Think beyond the text** Why do you think Roy was so drawn to the idea of traveling west with the Camel Corps?
He wanted to be with his father to learn about camels, to show off his animal handling skills, and to see what the West was like.
- Think about the text** How does the author show Roy's transformation from the beginning to the end of the story?
At first, Roy acted as if he knew how to handle camels, but it quickly became obvious that he didn't. After Roy decided to "keep his mouth shut and his ears open," he learned how to handle camels. He found both a lost camel and water.

Making Connections Think of a time when you made an assumption that turned out to be untrue. Write about what happened and the lessons you learned from that experience.

Write your answer in your Reader's Notebook.

Critical Thinking
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Grade 5, Unit 2: Wild Encounters

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Thinking Beyond the Text

Think about the questions below. Then write your answer in two or three paragraphs.

Remember that when you think beyond the text, you use your personal knowledge to reach new understandings.

On page 10, the narrator says: “Roy decided that from then on, he would keep his mouth shut and his ears open.” What does Roy mean by these words? Do you think keeping his mouth shut and ears open helped Roy? Could it help people in everyday life? Why or why not? Support your writing with examples from the text.



Name _____ Date _____

Critical Thinking

**Riding with the Camel
Corps**
Critical Thinking

Read and answer the questions.

1. **Think within the text** Why did Captain George Crosman believe camels would be the ideal animals to help Americans move west?

2. **Think within the text** What did Roy have to learn about camels before he was able to assist Captain Crosman in a productive manner?

3. **Think beyond the text** Why do you think Roy was so drawn to the idea of traveling west with the Camel Corps?

4. **Think about the text** How does the author show Roy's transformation from the beginning to the end of the story?

Making Connections Think of a time when you made an assumption that turned out to be untrue. Write about what happened and the lessons you learned from that experience.

Write your answer in your Reader's Notebook.

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LEVEL W

Riding with the Camel Corps

Running Record Form

page	Selection Text	Errors	Self-Corrections
2	<p>A U.S. Army officer named George Crosman believed that camels would be the ideal pack animals for travel in the West. Camels, he argued, could carry heavier loads than could horses or mules. They required little food or water on long journeys; they were accustomed to desert travel. A group of people proposed that the government purchase camels from the Middle East and North Africa and transport them to the United States by ship. Military personnel would use the camels to bring supplies to the forts that had been built on the frontier from Texas to California. Congress agreed to spend \$30,000 on the experiment.</p>		
	Comments:	Accuracy Rate (# words read correctly/105 × 100) _____ %	Total Self-Corrections _____

Behavior	Code	Error
Read word correctly	✓ cat	0
Repeated word, sentence, or phrase	Ⓜ cat	0
Omission	̄ cat	1

Behavior	Code	Error
Substitution	cut cat	1
Self-corrects	cut ^{sc} cat	0
Insertion	the ^ cat	1
Word told	Ⓢ cat	1

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