



HORSES IMPORTANT TO CULTURAL HEALING

BY: DAMON BADGER HEIT | JANUARY, 2012

One Arrow First Nation, a Cree community north of Saskatoon, has retained its ties to its historic horse culture. Over the past year, the band, along with the One Arrow equestrian Centre, has partnered to create a program where horses and traditional knowledge are part of a healing process for youth and community.

"One Arrow has made a significant investment financially, mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually in using equine Assisted Learning and therapies as a fundamental strategy to instill hope, healing and prosperity for the community," explains Chief Paul Dwayne, in a letter to SaskCulture. He explained how, the youth of One Arrow First Nation are facing similar hardships to those of other First Nations communities: significant difficulties at home and school, four times the rate of youth being placed in foster care than non-Aboriginal children, failing to complete high school, alienation and depression, high incidents of abuse and high rates of risk behavior and suicide.

The leadership at One Arrow First Nation wanted to creatively and proactively address these problems. In 2011, they committed to support the I.D.E.A.L. (Inspire Direction equine Assisted Learning) program that included a strong cultural component integrated into the program.

"The horse is a powerful spiritual entity in Cree culture," writes Chief Dwayne of One Arrow First Nation, "The horse gives us strength and symbolizes freedom." The horse, or mistatim which literally translates as 'Big Dog' in the Cree language, has a special place of honor in the cultural heritage of First Nation peoples. The introduction of the horse during European settlement revolutionized First Nation cultures of the plains and this relationship was quickly integrated into fabric of the day to day life. The horse greatly enhanced capabilities in hunting, travel and trade and to this day, this bond between human and horse is considered sacred.

Elder Gerald Prosper, who has been supportive from the beginning and onset of the program, was engaged over the summer, thanks the help of SaskCulture's Aboriginal Arts and Culture Leadership Grant, to incorporate the cultural components of the IDEAL program. The main activity involved engaging youth in the program during summer camps

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cultural significance of the horse from a Cree world view. Prosper incorporated the standard programming of the equine assisted learning and therapies and tied it back to culture for both the young people participating in the workshops and also through mentorship with the staff of the centre.

According to Koralie Gaudry, one of the equine Centre's programmers, "It was amazing. Kids were sitting at the door steps at 8 a.m. before the staff even showed up. The closeness as a group really grew."

Other communities, such as St. Louis, Nipawin and other First Nations bands, are now interested in the program, says Gaudry. Besides reaching out to new communities, the equine Assisted Learning Centre plans to continue to build the cultural component of the program. "The connection with horses, culture and spirituality," she adds, "is effective in building strong, healthy and culturally knowledgeable young people."

The grand opening of the equine Assisted Learning Centre was on June 9, 2011, which saw roughly 300 guests including delegates of the FSIN and One Arrow Leadership, featured several different demonstrations.

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THERE ARE FOALS on the range land. Against the high-sky heat of midday they are flopped on their sides, tails twitching, soaking up sun on their flanks. It's a reminder, I suppose, of mother heat not so long past.

Driving by later, in early evening, I watch them cavort. They race about in bursts of speed that end abruptly, as though they're suddenly puzzled at the glee that drives them to kick up their heels and run. They pause and look outwards at the road with their heads held high and still. There's pride in them, nobility, and a staunch sense of identity that's fractured by yet another crazed dash.

My people were bush people, and they never cultivated a horse culture. But there is something about the animals that has always appealed to me. Horses are called Spirit Dogs in some native cultures, and maybe it's their loyalty and good-heartedness that makes them special to me.

I was thirteen when I learned to ride. My adopted family had left for a summer vacation, and I was dropped off to stay with relatives for three weeks. Uncle Wilf and Aunt Peg had a small farm outside of a southwestern Ontario town called Teeswater. I'd only been there a handful of times, and I felt out of place and alone.

But they had animals. It wasn't a large farm, but there was stock, some chickens, a few dogs and a knot of barn cats. Uncle Wilf assigned me barn chores to do every day. Every morning I gathered eggs from the henhouse. I shovelled stalls in the afternoon and helped hay and feed the cattle in the evening. It never felt like work to me. The presence of the animals was comforting, and even the huge Hereford bull in the back stall didn't faze me.

It was the pony that fascinated me most. She was a small Shetland cross. The first time I saw her she was dirty, with a knotted tail and mane. She started when I approached her, shrank to the back of the stall and eyed me nervously. Still, I felt drawn to her.

Aunt Peg told me that the pony's name was Dimples. They'd bought her from a neighbour for their daughter Kathy to ride, but the neighbour hadn't told them that Dimples had been beaten as a colt and so was unrideable. She was bareback broke and halter broke, but the heavy-handedness of her training had made her distrustful of people. They told me not to go near her, except to let her out into the big pen every now and then.

"She'll bite you," Aunt Peg told me, "and she'll kick."

But there was something about Dimples that drew me. I knew nothing of horses or ponies, but at thirteen I understood the feeling of being displaced and lost and frightened. I saw that in her, and I started to visit her.

At first I just stood by the rail of the stall and talked to her. She didn't move, but after a few days of this she

seemed to calm. Then I opened the gate and stood there, talking soft and low and gentle. It took another few days for her to get used to this. Eventually I moved a yard or so closer.

The day I touched her for the first time was magical. She shivered, twitched. I kept my voice low, moved slowly and rubbed her flank. I could feel her anxiety, but the more I stroked her the more she calmed and settled. Within days she let me curry comb her mane and tail, all the while talking soft and low.

Uncle Wilf showed me how to put the halter on. He had to demonstrate on a pillow, because Dimples wouldn't allow anyone but me in her stall. When I came back alone, she let me slip the halter on. I led her into the big pen and walked her around it slowly. Everyone was amazed.

I got on her back the next day. I mounted off the fence rail, easing down onto her. She shivered, shifted her feet nervously, but she stood still and let me find my seat. We didn't move. I sat and rubbed her and talked to her for half an hour and did the same the next day. Then I walked her out into the field.

Riding Dimples was pure joy. We walked around that forty-acre field for a couple of days, and she relaxed. Soon, I got courageous enough to push her up to a trot. And one day, after a week of this, she cantered for me. Coming back one evening she broke into a full gallop. It scared me at first, then filled me with glory.

I rode her every day of that vacation, and Dimples learned to love it as much as I did. Finally, she let Kathy ride her. Watching them from the stoop of the farmhouse, I felt like an adult for the first time in my life.

My adopted family moved away shortly after that, and I never saw Dimples again. But I still think about her whenever I ride. Riding her was a challenge that I met and won. But it was more than that. It was the first time I'd felt kinship with a creature, a joining that went far beyond mere domestication. It was a union of spirits that transcended earthly things such as loneliness, sadness and hurt. I felt like a healer, even though I didn't have the words for that yet.

We heal each other with kindness, gentleness and respect. Animals teach us that.

In a paragraph of 200-350 words, answer one of the following questions below:

1. Discuss what the narrator of "A Kindred Spirit" would think of the school in "Horses Important to Cultural Healing"

or

2. Discuss the healing power of the relationship with animals in both "A Kindred Spirit" and "Horses Important to Cultural Healing"

Remember:

- Have a strong and clear topic sentence
- Use Transition words between your ideas
- Use at least 2 direct quotations from the texts
- Integrate your quotes smoothly into your sentence
- Have an insightful conclusion
- Stay in the present tense and third person

General Outline

1. Topic Sentence (list your argument and the title of both stories)

2. Discuss two or three things that the narrator from "A Kindred Spirit" would say about the school in "Horses Important to Cultural Healing" (Topic 1)

Or,

Discuss 2 or 3 ways that "Horses Important to Cultural Healing" and "A Kindred Spirit" show the healing power of the relationship with animals in a similar way

3. Conclusion (recap your argument and end with an insightful comment)

Part B: Synthesis of Texts. In answering the written-response synthesis question, students should be able to develop a unified and coherent essay based on two of the texts you are given. Students must connect both texts to the topic they are given. Students should citing specific details, features and information from the texts and give at least one direct quote from each text.

Score	3 (Barely Adequate)	4 (Competent)	5 (Proficient)	6 (Superior)
Meaning/Content Understanding of task, analysis and synthesis of texts, and provision of supporting evidence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Both texts are discussed but understanding of one or both may be very superficial or have slight flaws -there is an attempt to address the task but thesis is unclear or unfocused -little analysis is given for either text or analysis is very literal (or almost nothing is given for one of the texts) -no direct quotes are given or references are general or vague -synthesis is present but very limited *if only one text is referenced, then response will receive a "0". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -A basic analysis of both texts is demonstrated (may be literal) -the task has been addressed but the thesis is basic and analysis is simplistic -References and quotations are present but limited -Some synthesis is present but may be superficial -may be reliant on plot summary or "re-telling" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -A strong analysis of both texts is demonstrated -The task has been addressed and the thesis is clear -References and quotations chosen accurately support the thesis -Synthesis is proficient and clear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -An insightful analysis of both texts is demonstrated -the task has been approached with a clear and sophisticated thesis -Details and quotations chosen are pertinent and convincingly support the thesis and analysis (strongly referenced) -synthesis is superior and thoughtful (texts are combined) -the paper reflects engagement with BOTH texts
Style Voice and tone Syntax Word Choice Stylistic Techniques Quote incorporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Little awareness of audience -Simple sentence structure, limited range of sentences -Repetitive and colloquial language (words are too casual) -quotes are present but awkwardly incorporated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Voice and tone may be inconsistent -Some sentence variety -word choice is appropriate, not concise -difficulty expressing abstract ideas; may be redundant -quotes are grammatically correct but not smooth in their incorporation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Appropriate voice and tone -Varied sentences -Word choice is varied; some complex vocabulary -Uses a variety of stylistic or rhetorical techniques -quotes are competently worked into the writer's own words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Effective voice and tone; may use humour, irony, satire -Varied sentence create specific effects -Effective, economical word choice, strong verbs, adjectives -Takes risks, shows originality, inventiveness -Is aware of audience -quotes are effectively woven into the writer's own words
Form Organization & Sequence Transitions Paragraphing Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Intro does not identify texts or reference question -Limited organization or structure -Connections between ideas unclear -Paragraphing is illogical or omitted -Conclusion weak or absent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Intro mentions texts & question -Organization adequate but ineffective -Limited transitions -discussion of one text not as well developed -Conclusion very short or formulaic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Intro references both texts and links both clearly to the question -Carefully and logically structured -Transitions connect paragraphs -References to both texts developed competently -Explicit, logical conclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Intro links both texts clearly to question in a thoughtful way Structure is natural & spontaneous -Well chosen transitions create continuity, unity -Effectively developed references to both texts (paragraphs) -Satisfying conclusion has impact
Conventions Spelling Sentence structure punctuation	Frequent and noticeable errors in basic sentence structure, spelling, and grammar that distract the reader and may interfere with meaning	Includes noticeable errors that may cause reader to pause or re-read; often surface errors-could be fixed by careful proofreading	Few errors that do not affect meaning; appears to have been carefully edited and proofread	Very few errors; these do not distract the reader