

SAMPLE # 1

HorseSense Learning Levels

FLATWORK SKILLS

RED LEVEL

DAY AT THE RACES

OBJECTIVE: *Students will develop strength and stability in the two-point position and posting trot while improving ability to keep horse on the rail.*



EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- GROUND POLES OR CONES TO CREATE "TRACK"
- 4 BENDING POLES OR CONES FOR START & FINISH LINE
- OPTIONAL ROSES, TROPHY OR OTHER PRIZE

PREP

Lay ground poles and/or cones along rail to create track approximately 5m wide - make sure rail is free of arena equipment. Set separate pairs of poles or cones to mark start/finish line. If teaching this lesson as a follow-up to **#20 Train Tracks**, the same arena setup may be used.

INTRO

ASK: Have you ever seen a horse race on television? Can you name a famous race for Thoroughbreds, or a famous race horse? In order to run a successful race, jockeys must maintain a consistent track near the rail and help the horse by staying off their back. We use the same skills riding in the arena - just not at a full gallop!

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MIN

LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Switching between a full seat and two-point position at the walk, while keeping the horse on the track. For an additional challenge, ride a few transitions between the halt and the walk while maintaining two-point.

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Emphasize: Students still have full use of their aids in two-point position! An **order of operations** for a left or right turn in two-point might be eyes, outside leg, opening inside rein. Rein length may need to be adjusted to accommodate the forward position of the student's hands.

 **Review:** One at a time or in staggered starts, ask students to ride a posting trot once around on the track. **ASK: Are there places where your horse slows down or tries to leave the track? Why do you think this is?**

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 **PRACTICE:** Gather students in the "infield." **Challenge them to a race in three parts**, explaining that for safety's sake, each rider will go around the track individually and have a recorded time rather than racing head to head. Begin at the halt at the start line and stop the time after the rider crosses the finish pole. The races, in order:

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Kentucky Derby - Walk in two-point (no trotting allowed!)

Preakness Stakes - Posting trot

Belmont - Jockey style (walk or trot with shortened stirrups - a true test of endurance!)

Students must complete each round successfully in order to advance to the next.

REVIEW

- ? Do you feel a difference in how your horse moves when you are in two-point?
- ? Riding with short stirrups is strenuous, isn't it? Riding the horse at the gallop takes a lot of strength and balance. How fit do you think jockeys need to be?!

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MIN

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RED LEVEL

FUN AND GAMES

- 🐾 Ask each student what they think their horse's **fancy racehorse name** would be. Have suggestions ready for shy students who can't think up a name on the spot!
- 🐾 Teach this lesson on or around **Derby Day** and award **silk roses** to riders who win and/or complete a round. Roses can also be used in place of batons if you wish to form relay teams.
- 🐾 If you are awarding prizes, give one to the winner of individual races but also have a special prize on standby for a potential **Triple Crown winner**. If there isn't a clean sweep of the races, oh well, no Triple Crown this year!



Unless you have unusually short leathers, you will probably have to wrap them to achieve a simulation of "jockey length," particularly for children!

GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- 🐾 If you are teaching a large **group** with a wide range of horses, including students with "plodders" who may be at a disadvantage, you may wish to level the playing field by forming relay teams, or by running "match races" where students compete with just one other student of your choosing. If you want to pair students off but have an uneven number, you can use the **Champion Format**, where two students race to face a designated Champion in the final round. (Make sure each student gets a chance to be Champion!)
- 🐾 **Private** students can race against themselves, riding each round twice (once on the left rein, once on the right) and attempting to improve their time on the second go. You may wish to ride the final race only once, as most Red Level students fatigue quickly in the "jockey crouch"!

FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 Having students race individually against the clock usually discourages horses from getting too swept away in the game, but if you suspect there is any chance of a horse getting strong, cantering off or otherwise taking advantage of their rider in the homestretch, **precede each race with a test of the emergency braking systems**. Ask students to perform both a one-rein stop with the inside rein and a pulley rein with the outside rein. **ASK: Which emergency stop works best on a narrow track? Where could you safely circle after the finish line?**
- 🐾 Shortening stirrups for the final round, while entertaining and eye-opening for students of all ages, does render a rider's legs somewhat ineffective. If students don't regularly ride with a crop, and the horses are tolerant of them, this lesson can be a good opportunity to **introduce and practice correct use of artificial aids**.
- 🐾 As always, **watch students carefully for any signs of rough riding** - particularly younger children with a competitive nature. Establish penalties for unfair use of the aids such as excessive kicking or going straight to the crop. You might wish to issue one warning and then a disqualification, or add time penalties for any infraction.

SAMPLE #2

HorseSense Learning Levels

CROSS-COUNTRY SKILLS



OUT AND ABOUT

OBJECTIVE: *Students will learn techniques for riding in the open, including trail riding etiquette, on a guided leadline hack at the walk.*



EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- HALTER AND LEAD ROPE FOR EACH HORSE, COMFORTABLY FITTED UNDER BRIDLES

PREP

Plan a safe route for the leadline hack and walk it ahead of time. Ideally, the ride should last 15-20 minutes, include one gate and gently rolling terrain. Avoid ditches, water crossings, busy roads and occupied fields. Ensure that your route will be free of ATVs, cyclists and barking dogs if possible!

INTRO

“Have you ever been on a guided trail ride? Riding a horse on a trail or in the open can be a different experience from riding in the arena. To trail ride safely, you need to know how to handle changes in terrain, natural obstacles, and spooky situations... but once you are prepared, riding out can be a joyful experience for both you and your horse!”

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MIN

LESSON AND EXERCISES

Review: Safety seat, one-rein stop and pulley rein technique at the walk, both along rail and down centerline. Check each rider’s safety seat with a **Tug Test** at the halt before repeating exercises at the trot.

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Discuss: When riding in the open, we often have to negotiate **slopes or hills**. In order to maintain their own balance and help the horse remain balanced on the hill, students must be ready to adjust their position.

PRACTICE: Transitioning between the full seat, a two-point position (closed hips, grabbing mane!) and a gentle safety seat (open hips, allowing hands) used to ride downhill, at the halt and the walk.

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Review: In rare circumstances, riders must be prepared to bail. Practice an emergency dismount at halt, walk, and slow jog, on centerline.

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Discuss: Procedure for hack, including maintaining spacing (**no horse left behind!**), looking ahead (**keep an eye for trouble!**), and pointing out hazards.

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Emphasize: Although safety drills are necessary before attempting any new activity with a horse, the likelihood of an incident in these controlled circumstances is low. As long as students are following the rules, they can relax and enjoy the ride.

PRACTICE: Lead the ride on foot through their designated hack. Students should have full control of the reins, with Ground Buddies holding the lead rope just in case.

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REVIEW

- ? Does your horse feel different in the open than he does in the arena?
- ? What should you do if you are riding out and a dog tries to chase your horse?

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MIN

SAMPLE #2

OUT AND ABOUT

RED LEVEL

AN OUNCE OF PREPARATION

- 🐾 A leadline hack is a **logical follow-up to a lesson reviewing survival skills**. If you are able to set an **obstacle course** as a preparatory lesson, be sure to relate each obstacle to a challenge students might face on the trail. They can weave through “trees,” cross the “bridge over the river,” step over the “log,” ride through the gate, etc.
- 🐾 At HorseSense, we have a **permanent pedestal** constructed out of a tractor tire filled with M10 gravel, large enough for the average lesson pony to stand on with all four feet. Once horses and ponies are comfortable with the pedestal (most learn to enjoy standing on or crossing it), we use the pedestal to teach the adjustable position needed to ride up and down steep hills and small banks. As a bonus, it encourages careful steering, as the tire is narrow enough for horses to easily avoid. Make sure students are warned about the sensation they will experience, as the change in the horse’s elevation and stance can be alarming if unexpected!



On a rainy day... solve trail trouble from the comfort of your office or living room by leading a group discussion of hypothetical situations. We use **Stuff Happens** cards to teach our hopeful trail riders before stuff happens to them!

<https://HorseSenseLearningLevels.com/resource-center/challenges/stuff-happens/>

CROWD CONTROL

Unlike an arena group lesson, where open spacing between horses is preferred, care should be taken when riding out not to let students get **too far apart**. Even on the leadline, horses may experience **separation anxiety** and grow increasingly spooky or run through their rider’s aids. Encourage students to fan out (“**like flying geese**”) wherever space permits, and periodically ask front riders to halt or circle if slower horses are left behind.

Of course, if you are teaching a private lesson, you can simply walk at the horse’s head yourself, with no worries about herd dynamics. Just make sure the lesson horse is capable of working solo outside of the arena!

“But when can they trail ride?” We get this question a lot, both from eager students and from parents interested in working an equine experience into vacations. Certainly, beginner riders go on commercial trail rides all the time, on horses trained specifically for the job. **Our policy, however, is that to ride in the open independently, a student should first achieve Green Level Horsemanship - proving they are capable of riding without stirrups, cantering, and hopping over small obstacles, as well as demonstrating a secure safety seat and good instincts.** In the meantime, their trail experiences should take place on the leadline or with a reputable trail business.



FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 All horses used for this lesson must be **proven to be reliably sane in an open space**. This is not the time to test the new pony to see how he does, especially when riding out in a group. Use grass reins on any horse who dives even on the leadline. If it is a gusty, windy day and the horses are already jittery, be prepared to postpone the hack and create an arena trail course instead. A student’s first experience in the open should be **relaxed and positive!**
- 🐾 Recruit your best Ground Buddies. You need **volunteers who will walk the distance** without complaining, engage with students along the way, and can immediately establish control if something goes wrong. If you have a short supply of helpers, consider breaking large classes into small groups, rescheduling students if necessary.