

## ALL CLEANED UP

- ❑ *Demonstrate basic grooming to prepare a horse for a ride.*
- ❑ *Know names and functions of basic grooming tools.*

**OBJECTIVE:** Grooming is usually everyone's favorite section of Red Level—horse included! A fundamental skill for riding students, grooming is also **a good way for beginners to become comfortable working around a horse on the ground.** These lessons go hand in hand with hoof picking practice, and offer the opportunity to start naming parts of the horse. (Students are more likely to remember where the withers are if they have curried mud off of them, and they are sure to remember the dock once they have to clean it!)

While **Red Level students should be familiar with the contents of a standard grooming kit**, the goal of this requirement is not to turn horses out to gleaming, show-quality standards. A simple currying and brushing in addition to hoof-picking will suffice, with shavings/hay and major tangles removed from the mane and tail. **The emphasis should be on the horse's comfort**; thus, the most important areas to groom are the back, withers, girth area, and face. Additional grooming tasks can be incorporated depending on season and the time you have allowed.

**CHECKING IT OFF:** Students enrolled in regular lessons will hopefully have the opportunity to groom their own horse prior to each ride. You may still find additional practice is necessary for naming each tool and explaining their function. Students should also be able to articulate why grooming the horse is important in the first place. Remember, our goal is to create thinking equestrians with an understanding of *why* they do the things they do!

Each requirement can easily be checked off during the course of a pre-ride grooming (can your students talk and work at the same time?), or during an unmounted lesson or clinic.

**You'll know they've got it:** if they can identify, correctly use, and discuss the purpose of the following tools: **currycomb, dandy brush, body brush, hoofpick, sweat scraper, mane and/or tail brush, sponges/rubrag, shedding blade.**

### LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

*"Why should the currycomb be used before the dandy brush or body brush? Is currying always necessary?"*

*"Why might this metal comb be a poor choice of tool for brushing the horse's tail?"*

*"What areas are most important to groom when you are preparing for a ride?"*

*"What is the difference between the dandy brush and the body brush? Which would work best on a long-haired horse in the winter?"*

USE THE  
RIGHT  
TOOL FOR  
THE JOB!

## THE NAMING OF THINGS

**Red Level students have to learn lots of terminology**, including the names for all of the grooming tools they use on their horses. It can be a good idea to introduce the contents of a grooming kit and let your students practice identifying each tool before putting them all to use. Inventory your grooming kits before teaching this lesson—this isn't a great time to discover that Romeo is missing his hoof pick and his body brush!

Remember that in addition to learning the **names** of all of the grooming tools, Red Level students need to know **how** and **why** each tool should be used. **Here are a few ways you can help all of this information stick:**

 **Simulated grooming.** You can introduce leading, haltering, and tying without a live horse being present; why not do it with grooming, too? Pair students up and give each pair a (clean!) grooming kit. Name and show them a tool (such as the currycomb) and **let them gently "groom" each other.** They will undoubtedly remember the difference between the dandy brush and the soft body brush when they have felt the bristles in action. This can also be a great icebreaker, especially when they start picking hooves!

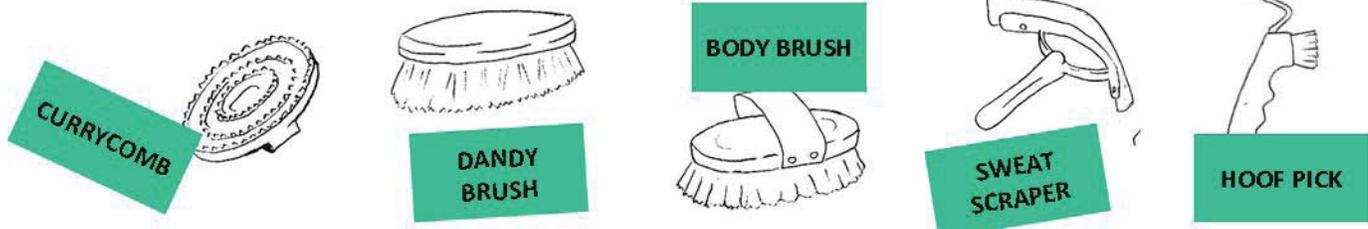
 **Grab bag.** Dump the contents of a grooming kit into a pillowcase or a similarly opaque bag. **Challenge students to identify each tool by feel.** They can only pull it out and check their answers once they have called it by name.

As a variation, you can play a round of **Taboo**, where **students must describe the item in the bag** well enough that the rest of the group can guess what it is. (Think of it as **a verbal version of Pictionary or Charades.**) The catch? **There are a few words they are not allowed to use.** For dandy brush, you might forbid the words *dandy*, *brush*, and *hard*.

 **Line it up.** Once students have been introduced to every tool in the box, divide them into two teams and give each team a grooming kit, with the tools all jumbled up. Give each team a set of index cards, each containing the name of a tool. **Challenge them to a race:** which team can be first to **line up all the grooming tools in order of use** and match them with their name? Blow a whistle or call time when one team claims they have the job done—if they have matched any tools incorrectly, whistle again and the race is back on while they make the corrections!

When it comes to placing tools in order, there are a couple of obvious "wrongs." It doesn't make much sense to use the body brush and then a currycomb or shedding blade, for example. You may also have a preference—there are valid arguments for picking hooves first (so the horse isn't standing on an uncomfortable rock) but also for currying/brushing first (to give the horse a thorough visual once over). But you should accept anything reasonable as long as your students can defend it!

**Is the game too easy?** Up the ante by asking students to arrange the tools while **blindfolded.** This challenge requires attention to detail and slightly more emphasis on teamwork, especially in a large group!



## SHORT AND SWEET

It is important to differentiate between a **pre-ride grooming**, targeting the areas most important for a horse's comfort at work, and a **thorough grooming**, which should result in a horse that is clean from head to tail. While Red Level students should be familiar with the additional tasks required by a thorough grooming, the *required* skill is a pre-ride grooming, which allows them to prepare a horse for a lesson or help other students to do the same.

At HorseSense, our expectations for each style of grooming include:

### PRE-RIDE

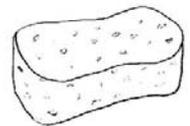
1. Pick **hooves** and check for rocks or injury.
2. Use **currycomb** on muscled areas of the horse's body (not face, legs, or flanks) as necessary to loosen mud and hair. Visually inspect horse for cuts or swelling.
3. Brush thoroughly with **dandy brush**, with emphasis on all areas in contact with tack.
4. Follow up with **body brush** *as necessary*, with attention to face where bridle will rest.
5. Remove obvious and/or potentially irritating **shavings/hay/etc.** from mane and tail.

### THOROUGH

1. Pick **hooves** and check for rocks or injury. Apply dressing if used.
2. Thoroughly **curry** muscled areas of horse's body. Visually inspect horse for cuts or swelling.
3. Brush thoroughly with **dandy brush**. While brush can be harsh on face, legs, and flanks, it can be used *gently* for persistently clumped mud in these areas. (We recommend rubber grooming mitts instead if you have them.)
4. Follow up with **body brush** on horse's *entire* body.
5. Comb out **mane and forelock**. Long manes should be brushed from the bottom up.
6. Brush out **tail**, starting from the bottom and working up gradually. Apply detangler as necessary.
7. Use damp rag or sponge to clean around horse's **eyes and inside nostrils**. Inspect ears and clean if necessary.
8. Use a different damp sponge or wipe to clean around the horse's **dock**. (Sponges or rags should be marked!)
9. Give horse a final once-over with a **damp rag** to remove residual dust.

Although students are probably not working their horses into much of a sweat at this level, they should be familiar with the role of the **sweat scraper** (removing water from coat to remove heat/facilitate cooling out) and **body sponge**. You can also discuss and/or demonstrate other seasonal grooming tasks:

-  Shedding management, including effective use of **shedding blade**.
-  **Fly spray**.
-  Removal of **bot fly eggs**.
-  **Mane pulling/trimming** and trimming **bridle paths** (demonstrate the wrong and right way to use scissors!).
-  Methods of dealing with **heavy winter coats**—be sure to explain how pastured horses produce additional dandruff and "scurf" to keep warm, so bathing and use of the body brush is not recommended in winter.



**On a rainy day...** tie horses a safe distance apart and challenge students to an equine makeover. This can be particularly fun in the winter and spring, when horses are often hairy and/or muddy. Make sure to take before and after photos!



**These fabulous ribbons are available from Hodges Badge Company (who also print all of our Levels ribbons).** We keep a package of them on hand and award them as we see fit. Rainbow and Red Level students love them and can simply earn them through a grooming job well done. They also make great camp prizes for equine makeover efforts or turnout presentations—even for Blue and Purple Level students!

**Don't throw away all your equine catalogs (we know you have a ton!).** These are a great resource for teaching students about grooming tools, tack and equipment. Send them on an imaginary shopping spree with a small budget and let them debate the necessity of Showsheen.



## ATTENTION TO DETAIL

While some students will meticulously clean every inch of the horse (and will spend all their lesson time on detangling the tail if you are not careful!), many others neglect vital areas, either through carelessness or unclear expectations. When testing Red Level grooming, make sure to inspect these frequently-missed spots:

- 🐾 **Withers** are often one of the dirtiest spots on the horse and may have some persistent, ground-in mud clumps, especially in the winter. They can also be hard for vertically-challenged students to see clearly!
- 🐾 **Around ears** and along the sides of the face where the bridle sits. The face is also hard for small children to reach and see, and students often are afraid to go after matted hair or mud here, knowing that the face is delicate and should be treated gently.
- 🐾 **Girth area and under belly.** This sensitive skin is often out of sight, out of mind. Students may groom all the visible parts of the girth area thoroughly, but miss mud or shavings near the midline of the belly.
- 🐾 **Lower legs** are not *always* critical, especially in wet or muddy weather, unless the horse wears protective boots. In that case, students should get the area between knee/hock and fetlock as clean and dry as possible!

**How well do your students remember their horse safety rules?** It is all too easy to become careless when grooming, especially if the horse is quiet and calm. Watch carefully and **review the following points:**

- 🐾 **Approach:** Do students approach the horse at the shoulder and neck after switching grooming tools, every time?
- 🐾 **Awareness:** Are students attentive to the horse's body language? Are they mindful of where their toes are in relation to the horse's hooves?
- 🐾 **Communication:** Do they pass behind the horse safely, with hand on hindquarters?
- 🐾 **Personal space:** Are students respectful of the horse's space bubble? Do they defend their own space by keeping the horse away from the wall, repositioning as necessary?
- 🐾 **Thinking ahead:** What will they do if they drop a grooming tool under the horse's belly, or behind the rear hooves?

