

## THE POOP SCOOP

- ☐ *Demonstrate mucking and re-bedding a stall, cleaning stall thoroughly and efficiently.*

**OBJECTIVE:** As Red Level students gain experience around horses, we hope they also gain an interest in all aspects of horse care, and a desire to spend more time at the barn. This means getting involved in some of the less glamorous parts of stable management, including **mucking out stalls**. As any horse owner can tell you, the ration of time spent poop-scooping to time spent riding is not always a favorable one!

**Anyone can clean out a horse's stall, but not everyone does it well.** The objective here is not to have students clean a stall once for the experience, but to have them practice it enough that you would happily leave them the job for a week, knowing that stalls would meet your standards on your return. Of course, stall cleaning is a routine that can vary widely from barn to barn, depending on geographical location, farm design and personal preference. Students need to understand that in your barn, stalls should be cleaned your way - but that there are many methods that are perfectly acceptable as long as they provide the horse with a clean, comfortable, and safe living space.

We also expect that Red Level students can perform a routine stall-cleaning reasonably efficiently; a student that cleans the stall thoroughly but takes half an hour to do so will not earn their checkmark. **Efficient work** is an important concept for students to practice as there is *always* a long list of work to be done around a barn. When one task is dragged out, other important tasks are often left undone.



**CHECKING IT OFF:** Stall cleaning can be incorporated in a summer camp program, stable management clinic, or working student day. It isn't actually necessary for you to watch the whole process, as long as you are sure that the student has done the work entirely on their own and they are able to discuss the procedure. If a stall is cleaned quickly but sloppily, or it takes them too long to do a good job, withhold your checkmark until they can accomplish both objectives.

**You'll know they've got it:** if they can muck a stall completely in less than fifteen minutes (depending on the size of the job), removing ALL manure and urine-soaked bedding, replacing bedding as needed, and checking/cleaning water buckets. Students should be able to discuss reasons for regular cleaning and bedding, and know how often stalls must be mucked.

### LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

*"Horse pee doesn't smell great, does it? The strong smell in urine comes from ammonia. Would it be good for your horse to breathe it in?"*

*"What pests are attracted to horse manure? Why do you think it would be a problem to leave just a few scattered pieces of manure in the bedding?"*

*"How often would you muck a stall if the horse lived in part-time? Full-time?"*

*"What is the purpose of the bedding? What materials can be used to bed stalls?"*



A CLEAN  
BED IS A  
HEALTHY  
BED!

## WHAT GOES IN MUST COME OUT

Before arming students with manure forks and asking them to move real horse poop, you can **simulate mucking out by using a model horse barn**. (This exercise is a great **rainy day lesson** or an indoor camp activity.) Fill the stalls of the barn with sawdust and create “pee spots” using a small amount of apple juice. Chocolate chips make great manure balls, depending on how you feel about students wanting to eat your model horse poop! Tiny pitchforks can be found in any model horse stable set (ask your younger students) or dollhouse store. In a pinch, use plastic forks.

Aside from the mechanics of cleaning a stall, **the barn opens up several other conversation topics**: *Should students clean a stall with a horse in it? Why or why not? Where does the manure go after cleaning? How would a barn owner manage their ever-growing manure pile? Are stalls the only place where poop-scooping occurs? How can we manage manure in paddocks or pastures? Where should manure forks and wheelbarrows be kept when they are not in use?*



What's wrong with this picture?

## DO AS I DO

When it comes to hands-on skills like stall cleaning, nothing beats a good old-fashioned **demonstration** followed by **repeated practice**. As you muck, it is important to spell out every step that you take and the reasons for it. There are many tiny sub-skills to cleaning a stall that we take for granted, but that students may not intuitively grasp. A few examples:

-  **Sifting clean bedding out of the pitchfork.** Many students (especially children) have a hard time doing this without dropping all of their manure.
-  **Getting large manure piles into the wheelbarrow** without dropping it all
-  **Sorting clean bedding and urine-soaked bedding;** removing pee spots in their entirety
-  **Raking bedding across the stall** to find all of the “buried treasure”

You can also discuss the various **reasons for keeping the stall clean**, **routine schedules**, the **purpose of bedding**, the **COST of bedding** (this can be an eye-opener!), and the difference between **picking**, **mucking** and **stripping** a stall. You may also wish to point out the differences in stall construction and how that affects bedding strategies. (Are your floors dirt? Matted? Level or uneven?) Even if you do not bank your stalls personally, it is a good idea to mention it, as this lesson may be the only time a student encounters the concept of **a horse getting cast** until they actually witness it. (And we hope they don't witness it any time soon!)



**Most manure forks and wheelbarrows are designed with an adult user in mind, making them too tall for many children.** Imagine trying to efficiently clean a stall with a manure fork taller than you are—you'd be dropping it everywhere, too!

Consider investing in one or two child-sized forks, and try to use lightweight wheelbarrows instead of heavy muck carts. Very small children may need help pushing the wheelbarrow, which is perfectly okay as long as they have the *knowledge* to muck out independently!

## POOP PARTY

Even if your horses live out 24/7, you undoubtedly have no shortage of horse manure on your farm. Invite your students to participate in a **group clean-up effort**, which fosters camaraderie and leaves your farm much cleaner—a win-win situation.

Decide ahead of time whether the party will open to just students, or to family and friends as well. Even if there will be no interaction with actual horses, make sure you have a signed release for all participants. Provide **refreshments**, including a cooler of water in hot weather, or **host a potluck** with all party-goers bringing a dish to share. (We live in a time where you can buy poop emoji cupcake decorations, so you can have some fun with a theme!) Poop-scooping activities can be followed by a meal and short free ride or an unmounted play session in the arena, depending on the size of your group and the age of your participants.



If you have a large group, you'll undoubtedly have more hands than manure forks, so figure out how to **divide and conquer** your group. You may wish to rotate teams through stations, with one group raking and shoveling manure, another in charge of the wheelbarrow convey, a third scrubbing and refilling buckets and troughs, etc. If you are cleaning or stripping stalls, place several students in charge of hauling and spreading clean bedding. If working in paddocks or pastures, assign a team to walk fence lines and check for breaks, overgrown weeds, litter, etc. **Introduce the idea that maintaining an equine facility is a LOT of work**, and that there are always small jobs available for willing hands!

One word of warning: if you use cheap plastic manure forks, there is a good chance the party will end with broken or missing tines. Ask students to be careful with forks (especially in the field, where breakage is most likely to occur).



### We love barn parties.

At HorseSense, we make it a point to host several parties a year to give students and parents a chance to connect and make horsey friendships. These parties usually follow the same loose format: a two-hour community workday followed by a potluck, hobbyhorse games or other unmounted activities in the arena, and a carefully structured free ride.

Social activities at the barn can be particularly valuable for Red Level students, who are usually new members of the HorseSense family and may still be making connections.

## TIME TRIALS

**Challenge students to a test of efficiency** by giving each student or team a stall (or row of stalls) to muck out, with the goal of being the first to achieve **a stall so clean that they would be willing to lie down in the bedding themselves!** Establish ground rules ahead of time—no running, no shouting—and clarify that to call time, equipment must be safely stored. Test each stall by raking the bedding from one side to another to ensure that no hidden manure or pee spot has been overlooked. If a stall proves insufficiently clean, time is “in” and students can continue with the race until the stall meets your standards.

Stall cleaning races can be a fun addition to a camp schedule or barn party. Play fair by assigning stalls of relatively equal difficulty—try not to pit the tidy mare's stall against one belonging to a messy stall-walker!

## PONY FOR A DAY

If students have already mastered their other Red Level skills, including catching and leading, tying, grooming, and feeding, give them the opportunity to practice a horse's entire daily care routine by giving them a **"pony for the day."** This can be taught short-format as an unmounted lesson (great for a rainy day), as part of an introductory stable management workshop, or spread out over a camp day. Students are responsible for performing all aspects of the horse's care UNDER SUPERVISION, to include **turning out/bringing in from the pasture, feeding, watering, grooming/hoof picking, and stall cleaning.** You may have additional tasks to include depending on the season, such as blanketing, applying fly spray and/or fly masks, or putting hay out in the pasture.



This exercise is a great way to show students the realities of horse ownership, and gives you a sense of how committed your students really are—some will love every minute of the process, while others may complain about the dirt/smell/workload. Ask students: **can you see yourself doing this every day? Even when the weather is bad, or you are tired/sick/busy with other activities?** While not all Red Level students have aspirations of owning a horse of their own someday, students and parents both benefit from a gentle introduction to the commitment involved in horse ownership, which emphasizes the need for unmounted education BEFORE they buy the horse!

## MAKING A LIST, CHECKING IT TWICE

**The Pony for a Day exercise can also be used as a means of testing and checking off the majority of Red Level skills.** If you are teaching an unmounted short course with the goal of students passing Red Level at the conclusion, make this your final lesson, and allow students to put their new knowledge immediately to work.

How much you include will depend on the time you have available. Here is a suggested format for a 60 minute session, with horses stabled for convenient access:

- 🐾 **Greet students** and explain **objectives.**
- 🐾 **Students catch horse in stall** and move to paddock.
- 🐾 Students **muck stall** and replace **bedding.** **Buckets/troughs** are checked, cleaned if necessary, and refilled.
- 🐾 Students **provide hay** and **prepare grain**, evaluating quality of all feedstuffs.
- 🐾 Students **catch horse in paddock** and bring in to **tie with quick-release knot.**
- 🐾 Students **groom horse** and **pick hooves**, visually inspecting horse for signs of injury.
- 🐾 Students safely **release horse in stall**, delivering grain *after* door is closed.

If the horse lives outdoors full-time, you can reverse the process by starting with stall cleaning, bringing the horse in for grooming, feeding him, and then turning him back out. If you have additional time, the grooming session can also be spent reviewing **horse safety concepts** and **pony parts.** Make sure all work is performed in sturdy boots.

**As always, helmets are recommended for hands-on work with the horse such as catching and hoof-picking, especially for young children!**

