

SADDLE UP

- Know parts and functions of saddle and bridle.*
- Know how to store tack correctly, and give at least two reasons for cleaning tack and equipment.*

OBJECTIVE: Learning to **correctly identify different pieces of tack and equipment** can be nearly as daunting as memorizing pony parts. Between bits, bridles, boots, and varying styles of saddle and girth, there are dozens of new terms to master, and to most beginners, all those straps look alike!

At HorseSense, we expect Red Level students to be able to identify and **explain the purpose** of basic pieces of tack: a **halter**, a **snaffle bridle**, and an **all-purpose English saddle**. (This is the tack our students are most likely to use in lessons; if you teach Western or saddleseat riding, the equipment you choose might look a little different!) This means correctly naming the different parts, such as crownpiece, reins, billet straps, pommel, etc., but it also means that students should understand why the tack is used and designed in this way. (The buckle guard, for example, protects both saddle and rider from girth buckles, which means it is useless if pushed above where the buckles sit!) Students should also **understand the necessity of protecting tack** through regular cleaning and careful storage.

Note that **these objectives are not quite the same as being able to tack up the horse independently**. Since tacking up is a fundamental riding skill, we include it in the Horsemanship Levels; while we prefer that students in our unmounted programs learn this skill, we do not require it.

CHECKING IT OFF: Students enrolled in regular riding lessons will gain weekly experience handling halters, saddles and bridles, and can practice naming the parts during the tacking up process. Be sure to include this vocabulary in mounted sessions, where students put their hands on the *pommel*, *cantle*, and *reins*, adjust *stirrup leathers* and place their feet in *stirrup irons*. Unmounted students will likely need several dedicated sessions to cover all of the requirements and gain confidence in their vocabulary.

You'll know they've got it: if they can name and locate most, if not all, parts of the saddle (including pad and girth) and bridle. Students should be able to discuss the purpose and mechanics of each part and demonstrate correct methods of storing the saddle, bridle and pad, explaining reasons for routine maintenance.

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

"What straps do you need to fasten when you put the bridle on? What do you think the buckles on the cheekpieces are for?"

"Do you know what kind of bit this horse wears? How do you think it works?"

"Many English saddles have three billet straps, but there are only two buckles on the girth. Why do you think there is a third strap? Which two would you use?"

"Leather is skin, which means that like skin, it can dry out and crack. What could happen to the tack if the leather is in poor condition? To the horse? To YOU?"

SADDLE UP!

PICK UP THE REINS

As when teaching pony parts, the more you can use the vocabulary associated with tack and equipment, the better. Remind students to hold halters and bridles by the **crownpiece**, to lift saddles by the **pommel** and **cantle**, to see if halters are adjusted correctly by looking at the **noseband**. **Good teaching is more than auditory, though; it is also visual and kinesthetic.** It's not a coincidence that throatlatch, noseband, bit and reins tend to be the parts of the bridle that students remember—those are the pieces they primarily interact with while tacking up and riding!

Besides tacking up and untacking, here are some ways you can get your students physically handling tack:

-  **Create a tack grab bag.** Include simple, recognizable pieces such as a bit, reins, stirrup iron, stirrup leathers, buckle guard, girth, saddle pad, etc. Challenge students to a game of blind ID.
-  **Take it apart and put it back together again.** At this level, you will almost definitely need to offer assistance! This can, however, be a good group activity, especially if you provide a fully assembled saddle and bridle as an answer key and award prizes for successful completion.
-  **Play horse.** Encourage students to place a bridle on their own head—the term crownpiece will make immediate sense—and hold the bit in their hands, so they can feel pressure transmitted through the reins. (Some kids actually love putting the bit in their mouth, but make sure you have a very CLEAN bit before allowing them to try this!) The exercise has the added benefit of encouraging empathy, which is always a quality we want students to develop, especially when working with tack. **ASK: How do you think it would feel if the bit was too high or too low in your mouth? How would you like it if the saddle was thrown roughly on your back, or the sweat flaps curled up, or the girth was too tight...?**
-  **Scavenger hunts** can include multiple tack terms. You may find it helpful to have a fully assembled saddle and bridle on hand so that students can point out parts without emptying the tack room.



READY FOR BATTLE

The games used to test recognition and vocabulary when teaching grooming tools and pony parts can also be used with parts of the saddle and bridle. A HorseSense favorite is the **Saddle Battle**, which requires no preparation and no special props, and can easily be worked into a lesson before a ride, during a rain delay, or as a mid-lesson break.

The concept is simple: **students take turns naming parts of the tack until they can't think of any more, at which point they are out of the game.** The goal is to be the last person to name a term. It is important to establish a time limit for answers, as many children will drag out an "Uhhhh" as they try to think of a part that hasn't been named yet. Make the time allowed reasonable, but not so long that it brings the game to a halt!

For an additional challenge, students can add their tack term to a growing list; if the first student says "Bit," the second student must say "Bit" before adding their own, with the third recites three terms, and so on.

Give students notice that the battle will be occurring in the next week's lesson, so they have time to be prepared. Offer a ribbon, badge or small prize to the winner.

Battles can also be used to practice naming terms in many other Levels! We have used them to test breeds, colors, markings, horse sports, bits, unsoundnesses, and types of feed. What other uses can you think of?

STICK WITH IT

The **sticker challenge** suggested for teaching Pony Parts also works well for parts of the saddle and bridle. The only catch is that stickers might not adhere to very soft or freshly oiled leather, so be sure to do a test before handing them out! Even if you are using spare pieces of tack, remove stickers promptly after the game to prevent them from leaving a residue.

Students can play all three variations: **Match** (with answer key), **Challenge** (without), and **Contest** (a race to see who can label their saddle and/or bridle first). Students who need additional repetition can practice with fill-in-the-blank worksheets (similar to **Pony Part Worksheets**) containing a word bank and answer key. Print extra labels and charts and keep them in a folder so you have them handy.



The Learning Levels Resource Library contains all kinds of **downloads** for teaching tack, including **worksheets, label templates,** and more information on our favorite **teaching games.**

<https://HorseSenseLearningLevels.com/resource-center/>

BRIDLE BOARDS

Challenge Boards - essentially giant, interactive flash cards - are a staple of our camp and quiz competitions, and a valuable learning tool. Disassemble a full snaffle bridle and jumble the pieces together before challenging students to match each piece to the labeled name on the board.

You can play this in several rounds: first with an answer key on hand, then without, and finally as a timed event. When timing the boards, decide ahead of time how you will handle incorrect matches; it is easiest to add five seconds for each wrong answer, but more educational if you continue timing while students make the corrections.

Once students are proficient with bridle pieces, expand the concept by devoting a whole table to **tack ID**. Include different types of stirrup irons, protective boots, several variations on snaffle and leverage bits, martingales, breastplates, etc. New riders are often astonished to discover just how much specialized equipment there is in the horse world!



On a rainy day... host a tack cleaning party. Students can clean school horse tack or bring their own pieces. You provide the saddle soap and conditioner, sponges and rags, family-friendly music or a horsey movie, and refreshments to serve after all the tack is clean. This gives students a leg up on Yellow Level skills, plus a lot of instant gratification as they see and feel the results of their cleaning and conditioning!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS TACK ROOM?

You know that tack is **expensive**, and that it must be cared for to **maintain its condition** and **remain comfortable and safe for horse and rider**. Beginners, on the other hand, don't always think about the needs of inanimate objects! Many of the mistakes they make—dragging reins in the dirt, tangling the bridle by holding it by the cheekpieces, lying saddles on their side or storing them with flaps curled up, and leaving sweaty saddle pads and girths face down on leather saddles, to name just a few!—occur because of a simple lack of attention.

Heighten your students' awareness by turning your tack room upside-down and topsy-turvy and challenging them to find everything wrong. (If you don't want chaos invading your organized set-up, you can use a stall to create a staged tack room instead, as though you were setting up at a show.) Leave girths buckled, reins trailing, stirrups hanging down, saddle pads on the floor, bridles hanging by a bit ring. As students point out infractions, ask them **why** each occurrence could **damage the tack, harm the horse, or make their life more difficult**. Then ask them to **fix** the problem by putting the tack away correctly.

SHOW AND TELL

No matter how well you look after your tack, you undoubtedly have a few old pieces lying around your barn that can serve as a cautionary tale for your students. Rather than tossing out broken reins, stirrup leathers with loose stitching, and dry-rotted leather, **keep a small collection in a plastic box to use as a visual** when teaching the reasons for cleaning tack. An stiff bridle in desperate need of oil can be a great item for show and tell, too—especially if students attempt adjusting the buckles! Not only will students be able to feel the damage the neglect has inflicted on the leather, but they may notice that many **signs of trouble** (such as rotted stitching, loose studs, cracked leather) are actually hard to detect until examined up close.

We hope that none of your horses have girth galls or bridle sores, but you may find it useful to keep a clear photograph of both on hand. This unpleasant visual can be a powerful eye-opener for students who can't quite comprehend how **dirty tack makes the horse suffer**.



Remind students:
Their life could be riding on a thin piece of leather!



Want a mobile-friendly way to encourage students to study on their own? Invite them to join our Quizlet classroom, which has three study sets covering Red Level tack and equipment.

For more information, including an invite link and a downloadable infosheet you can share with students, visit:

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