

SAMPLE # 1

HorseSense Learning Levels

FLATWORK SKILLS

BLUE LEVEL

BARRELS FOR BEND

OBJECTIVE: Students will improve ability to bend horse through turns while practicing a variation on the cloverleaf barrel pattern.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- 3 BARRELS
- 2 CONES
- STOPWATCH



PREP Set three barrels in a triangle, a minimum of 50' apart. Use the two cones to create a start and finish line at the A end of the arena.

INTRO As students warm up at the walk, discuss how learning to bend benefits riders of all disciplines. **ASK: How do you think correct bend helps a show jumping horse? A barrel racer?** 5 MIN

LESSON AND EXERCISES  **Review:** Aids used to ask horse to bend correctly through turn. Practice through a series of half-circles and serpentines at the walk and trot. **ASK: Can you tell if your horse is bending the right way? How? Which side do you think is easier?** 15 MIN

 **Review:** Cloverleaf pattern used in barrel racing. Allow riders to walk through cloverleaf single-file, with attention to use of aids and horse's bend in each turn. 5 MIN

 **Discuss:** Today, students will be learning a new barrel pattern to practice. As they may have guessed, it's all about that bend!

 **Demonstrate:** On foot, walk through the left rein **Full Circle pattern** (see next page). 5 MIN

Emphasize: The goal is not to scrape knees against each barrel in a time-saving turn, but to **place each barrel exactly in the middle of the circle**. Students should imagine that one end of a pole is resting on the barrel, and that they must hold the other end without pushing it off or dropping it.

 **PRACTICE:** One at a time, send students through pattern on left rein, first at walk, then at trot. **ASK: Is your horse's spine shaped like a carrot or a banana? Is your inside leg tilting toward the barrel or moving away? Can you see the corner of his inside eye?** Repeat on the right rein. 15 MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Gather students behind start/finish line. Challenge them to a race, **resuming the traditional cloverleaf pattern BUT adding the extra circle**. Students may choose which direction to start - encourage them to ride the extra turn on the horse's stiff side! 10 MIN

REVIEW ? Is it easier for you to bend to the left or the right? Why do you think this is? 5 MIN
? What happens when you pull too much on the inside rein? How could you correct this?

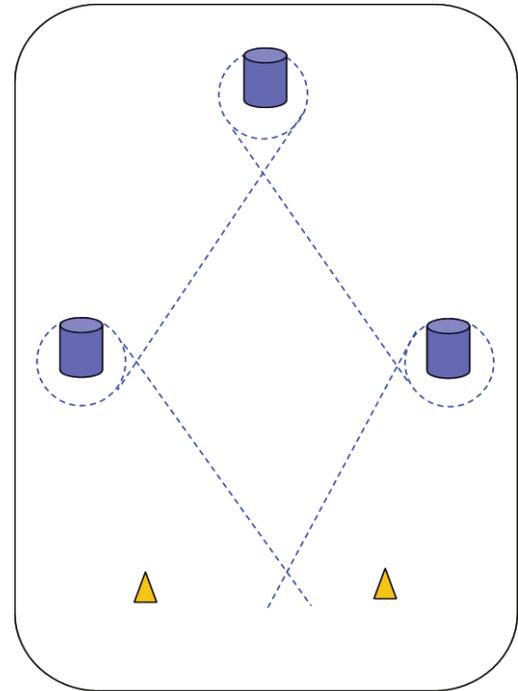
SAMPLE # 1

BARRELS FOR BEND

BLUE LEVEL

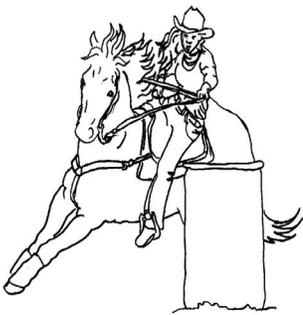
GROUP VS PRIVATE LESSONS

- Teaching this lesson to a large group? **Ride through all warm-up exercises single file**, encouraging students to remain precisely spaced one horse-length apart, like a drill team.
- Since the Full Circle pattern does not include a change of direction, you can **stagger starts, sending up to three riders at a time through the pattern**. This method saves several minutes, but can make it difficult to provide individual instruction. You can also omit the walk patterns and go straight to the trot if you are short on time.
- When it comes time to race, **make sure the start and finish line and the rail behind it remain clear!** Discuss protocol if a horse gets carried away on the exciting sprint to the finish line.
- Private students can race themselves, left rein vs right rein.** Which side are they faster on? On which side can they produce the most consistently balanced turns?



*Full Circle with three barrels.
Reverse to ride on the right rein.*

PREREQUISITES



To get the most out of this lesson, students should be consistently **trotting ring figures** with **correct posting diagonals**, and have a prior introduction to bend. We recommend this exercise as a follow-up to **Lesson #4 All About That Bend** and **#5 Lamb's Ears**.

It is also helpful if students have some previous experience with the barrel race pattern. Start with **Yellow Lesson #10 Barrels of Fun**, or invite them to watch a barrel race at a local show or rodeo. If your students really seem keen, you can even ask a pro barrel racer to give a demonstration at your barn. A skilled barrel trainer will reinforce the importance of bend, balance and patient slow work!

FINAL NOTES

- Use this lesson as an opportunity to further **highlight the difference between each horse's "hollow" and "stiff" side**. Emphasize the necessary teamwork between the rider's inside leg and outside rein, encouraging students to communicate with the **middle** of the horse before the head and neck.
- Bending can be a challenging and frustrating skill for a new rider to learn. In addition, lesson horses that are frequently ridden by beginners are often stiff and have developed poor movement habits like leaning in. **Keep the tone of the lesson light and positive**, and enthusiastically praise any hint of correct bend and balance.

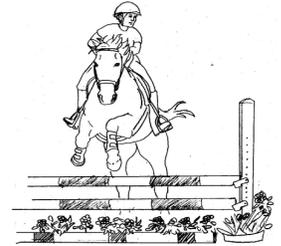
SAMPLE #2

JUMPING SKILLS

BLUE LEVEL

TAKE YOUR OWN LINE, WITH A TWIST

OBJECTIVE: For students to gain an understanding of logical course design and improve jumping skills by riding a course of their own invention.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- 5-8 INVITING STADIUM JUMPS, SET APPROXIMATELY 18" HIGH
- 2-4 CONES
- OPTIONAL STOPWATCH

PREP

Set jump course, with all fences at maximum height of 18". If equipment permits, include a variety of crossrails, verticals and tiny parallel oxers - ensuring all fences can be jumped in both directions. Place a pair of cones at the A end of the arena, or at A and C, to mark start/finish lines.

INTRO

As riders warm up at the walk, discuss how a well-ridden jump course makes sense to the horse as well as the rider. **ASK: How well does your horse see things directly in front of him or under his nose? How does this impact how we approach a jump?**

5
MIN

LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Using the whole arena by practicing changes of direction across the diagonal at the walk and trot. Ask students to **halt and touch rail** after each diagonal line, before riding through next corner. (Add a second halt after the corner for shortcut-takers!) Repeat in two-point position.

15
MIN

 **Review:** Warm up over fences by choosing a single fence to jump at the trot. Once all students are jumping comfortably, trot into a line and canter out.

5
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Put together a **full course**, with opening and closing circles. Send students through the course one at a time and **debrief** afterward, discussing any problems they may have had on course and how to prevent them from reoccurring.

10
MIN

 **Discuss:** The **logical flow** to a jump course. Point out a "good" possible turn versus a "bad" possible turn, highlighting the risk in sharp turns and short approaches.

5
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Assign each student the task of **creating their own course**, using each jump once, but with a catch: **no duplicates allowed, and they all must start with a different fence**. Once everyone has their course figured out, have students ride their courses, one at a time. You can turn this final round into a **timed event** - just make sure to establish ground rules, such as how many strides of canter are allowed after landing.

15
MIN

Emphasize: Bending lines, rollbacks, and other creative approaches are allowed - but students should talk you through their course before attempting to ride it, so that you can veto any turn you think is unfair or unsafe!

REVIEW

- ? What was the most difficult part of designing your own course?
- ? Did your horse jump differently than he did around the practice course? Why?

5
MIN

SAMPLE #2

TAKE YOUR OWN LINE

BLUE LEVEL

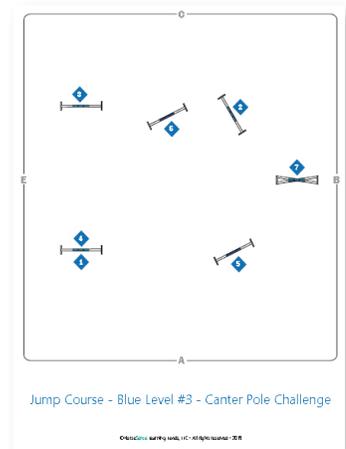
VARIATIONS

- 🐾 **Practice this game with ground poles first.** Allow cantering around the whole course, which really drives home the point that turns must be thoughtful and well-ridden to produce a smooth jump.
- 🐾 **Give out time penalties for turns trotted on the incorrect diagonal** - or, to make the exercise more positive, deduct "bonus seconds" for correct turns, or for every time you see a student remember to check their diagonal. **Orange Level** students can play a similar game at the canter, with time penalties for incorrect leads.
- 🐾 **Award prizes** for the fastest course, and/or for clear rounds.
- 🐾 Teaching a small group or have extra time? **Allow all riders to test drive each course**, comparing notes afterward. Which course was the easiest to ride? The most challenging? What was the difference? **Private students** can design and ride two different courses after jumping the initial practice course.
- 🐾 If teaching **a group of mixed abilities**, tailor the exercise to the *least* experienced jumper. Challenge more advanced students to return to trot after every fence (even in lines) or raise the fences a hole for their final round.
- 🐾 For a **quick and easy variation on Gambler's Choice**, allow students to jump each fence up to two times - assuming they make it over the fence cleanly the first time. See who can include the most jumps in sixty seconds. Remind students that courses must begin with passing through the start cones!

PREREQUISITES

Students should have previous experience **jumping a full course** at the trot, demonstrating consistent approaches and effective opening and closing circles. They should be **confident in their skill** so they can enjoy the puzzle of Take Your Own Line without worrying about clearing the fences!

A good set-up is a must for this lesson. Sketch out your course on paper ahead of time, and ask yourself how many courses YOU can invent. If you can't come up with more courses than you have riders in your class, you need a different course! We recommend **Blue Jump Course #3 Canter Pole Challenge**, available on the HorseSense Learning Levels website.



FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 **Encourage students waiting their turn to watch and engage.** When you are not actively coaching the rider on course, ask questions: how many strides did Buttons take between those two jumps? What about Zip? What lead did they land on? Is Kelsey on the correct diagonal?
- 🐾 Since students must jump each course one at a time, **this lesson can really eat away at your group lesson minutes if you're not careful.** Warm up efficiently but attentively, making note of any issues such as a pony getting strong toward the gate. Look for ways to safely work around the problem rather than confronting it directly, explaining to student that resolving it will be a goal for an upcoming lesson.