



HorseSense Learning Levels



HOW TO TEACH
HORSESENSE
USING OUR TEACHING GUIDES

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to HorseSense Learning Levels! Whether you have a few private students or a full-scale teaching and training operation, we hope that you find these lesson plans a helpful supplement to your curriculum. After fourteen years of running a full-time riding school, we know only too well that one of the greatest challenges for instructors, barn managers and camp directors is making time for it all—particularly if you wear all three of those hats! Our goal is to provide you with a program that has been extremely successful with our students, and hopefully reduce the amount of time you have to spend planning and producing educational materials.

ABOUT THE LEVELS PROGRAM

The colorful Levels program is our unique method of tracking students' progress as they develop into versatile, well-rounded riders and horsemen. Students work to master specific skills in each of the levels, and receive recognition for completion when they are able to consistently demonstrate each of the skills to their instructor. In many cases, achievement of one level is a prerequisite for learning more advanced skills.

The Levels are divided into two branches to reflect the main areas of study within our riding school curriculum. The Horsemanship Levels concentrate on the rider's ability in the saddle, culminating in a rider who is balanced, educated and confident, able to ride a well-schooled horse with skill and empathy on the flat and over fences, both in the arena and in the open. The HorseSense Levels focus on the extensive body of knowledge needed to care for and work with horses successfully, testing students on horse handling, veterinary and stable management skills.

We have found the Levels program beneficial for a number of reasons:

-  **It gives students clear, achievable goals**, and a means of **measuring achievement**.
-  It helps both **students and parents understand requirements for advancement**. Our students are allowed to canter when they achieve Yellow Level, join the show team at Blue Level, lease a horse after earning both Green Horsemanship and HorseSense ribbons, etc.
-  It **encourages students to devote time to fundamentals, flatwork, and their unmounted education**, all of which can be lost in the excitement of jumping and competing.
-  It **makes it easy to group students by ability level** during camps and clinics. We have also found that events devoted solely to helping students progress in their Levels are popular; our Level Up Clinics and summer Level Up Camps tend to fill to capacity.
-  It **helps instructors plan regular, progressive lessons** and chart their students' progress.

ABOUT THE HORSESENSE LEVELS

The Learning Levels curriculum has two tracks, teaching knowledge as well as hands-on skills.

The HorseSense Levels focus on the extensive body of knowledge needed to care for and work with horses successfully, testing students on horse handling, veterinary and stable management skills.



Our horses depend on us to keep them healthy and secure. Everyone involved with horses needs the knowledge to understand equine behavior and the skills to keep horses safe from harm.

Our unmounted curriculum provides a solid base of knowledge and ability, with obtainable goals to help students – and their parents – track their progress from level to level.

The HorseSense objectives, in particular, are designed to **reward motivated students** who actively commit to learning. While there may be many ways that you incorporate unmounted education into your program, HorseSense ribbons can be earned entirely through **dedicated practice** and **independent study**.

The HorseSense curriculum is written for horse enthusiasts of all kinds. Although the terminology is primarily based on English riding, it can be adapted to suit any discipline. (In truth, one of our goals for the HorseSense Levels is to broaden our students' horizons and demonstrate that **good horsemanship is universal**.)

HorseSense students might be regulars in your mounted program; they might be **new riders** eager for a comprehensive experience or **experienced riders** wishing to fill gaps in their unmounted education. They might be **future volunteers** or **interested in a career with horses**. They might be **parents** or **adults considering horse ownership**. They might be uninterested in riding or **unable to ride**, but still wish to interact with horses. Whatever their goal, we hope these Levels help them become informed, considerate equestrians.

We're here to help students keep their commitment to continuing education – and horse happiness!



USING THESE TEACHING GUIDES

Ask any great horseman or horsewoman what they'd like to see in the next generation of riders, and invariably, they wish for kids to go **back to the barn**. Their road to success was paved with a lot of hours wrapping legs, adjusting and cleaning tack, soaking beet pulp, and holding horses for the farrier - an experience that many students, sadly, just don't get.

As an equine educator, you have the power to facilitate an appreciation for horsemanship both in and out of the saddle. The specifics of how you do this, however, depend on a great many variables: Do you teach ground lessons along with mounted lessons, or as separate classes? Do you teach day camps, or school programs, or horse care clinics? Do you regularly train working students and volunteers? Are you presenting the material to adults or very young children? Your approach might need to be **flexible** and **unique!**

For this reason, **instead of creating traditional lesson plans** for the HorseSense curriculum, we've compiled our **favorite methods of teaching unmounted lessons**. The ideas shared here have all been used in our riding school and can be adapted to suit students of all ages. While a few topics are designed to be taught consecutively, in many cases you can mix in other lessons or rearrange the order in which the material is taught. We encourage you to use these ideas as **a general guideline and a source of inspiration**, and hope that you find strategies that work for *your* program and *your* students.

Each Level is broken down by topic and objective. These include:

- 🐾 An explanation of **why we think the objective is important**, and the **criteria** we use to determine whether or not a student has achieved it.
- 🐾 **Suggestions for how to teach the objective**, both as standalone lessons and as part of a mounted lesson or camp program. Includes directions for multiple **games and activities** as well as **impromptu rainy day lesson plans** and **discussion prompts**.
- 🐾 Sample **maps, diagrams and lists**, with urls for supplementary downloads.
- 🐾 Additional **thoughts and cautionary notes** covering scenarios you may encounter.

You may, of course, need to **add to this list of teaching tools** if your students have special needs, or you are teaching outside of a barn setting.



A FINAL NOTE

There are a few things which these teaching guides are **NOT**:

- 🐾 **They are not a how-to manual on how to care for horses.** We assume that if you are teaching an unmounted program, you have an extensive background in horse care and stable management; that you are not teaching to a level beyond your current ability; and that you are committed to your own continuing education.
- 🐾 **They are not a how-to manual on how to teach.** We expect that you have already devoted many hours to learning how to effectively communicate and interact with students of all ages, learning styles and ability levels.
- 🐾 **They are not a word-for-word script.** While many specific questions or points to address are suggested, of course you can convey information in whatever way works best for you and your class. You may have many points to make that we have not included, as well as specific feedback and commentary for your students as the lesson goes on.
- 🐾 **Finally, completion of these plans is not a guarantee of advancement.** Every student is an individual, and yours may need additional practice time or lessons tailored for their needs.

Please ensure that **all horses used for instruction are safe, sound, and have been trained to perform and/or accept the skill being taught.** While the Levels can be used to help students design goals for their project horses, we hope that all your beginners are able to learn basic horse care skills using patient horses with exemplary ground manners.

After all, most successful unmounted programs have the same basic mission: **to create confident, educated caretakers with healthy, happy horses!** We love hearing from other instructors who have used the Learning Levels to help achieve this goal. Please feel free to contact us at any time with comments, questions, or to share your experience.

Wishing you and your students happiness and success,

Nikki and Dana Surrusco
HorseSense Learning Levels, LLC.



MORE LEARNING LEVELS RESOURCES

We have a number of other materials we've used to teach HorseSense Levels. You may wish to use them alongside the Teaching Guides, or as a supplement to your own unique system.

Available through the **HorseSense Learning Levels** website:

-  **Boss Mare Blog.** We share lessons we've learned from our years of running a successful riding school, along with teaching tips and suggestions on how to make the Learning Levels work for you.
-  **Study Guides.** HorseSense Study guides outline each objective in one or more fully illustrated pages. Includes a practice quiz and a recommended reading list. (For Rainbow Level students, the study guide is presented in the form of a fun **coloring book** - ability to read not required!)
-  **Challenges.** Worksheets and games designed to test and reinforce concepts. Create a quiz bowl using Level Up Cards or Lists, or get your students talking through the *what-ifs* using Stuff Happens cards.
-  **Quizlet Classroom.** Invite your students to improve their recognition and horsey vocabulary by playing with the study sets in our free Quizlet classroom.
-  **Planners/trackers.** Download our Progress Booklets and achievement charts to keep track of your students' progress.
-  **Curriculum and Useful Lists.** Checklists for the Learning Levels curriculum and helpful lists (topic definitions, suggested reference materials, and more).
-  **HorseSense Ribbons.** Want to award official Learning Levels ribbons to your hard-working students? We have them available in our **Shop**.

We're always working on creating new material: everything from **lesson plan sets** and **camp materials** to **online courses** and a **video library**. Subscribe to our newsletter to stay in the loop!

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



Does your equine program include mounted instruction?

We believe that learning to ride starts with **safety**, develops into **competency**, and ultimately creates a **partnership with the horse**. To achieve this goal, riding lessons should be safe, progressive and **FUN!** Check out our mounted Horsemanship Levels and the **Horsemanship Lesson Plans**.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

We owe our appreciation for systems of progressive horsemanship to our years of involvement in **United States Pony Club**, as well as **4-H** and the original **Parelli Natural Horsemanship** program. Although the Learning Levels curriculum and the related lessons are our own invention, we have been influenced by and remain eternally grateful to countless instructors, trainers, and other equestrians who have generously shared their wisdom.

Continuing education is the foundation of the HorseSense curriculum and we have an extensive list of books, periodicals and other educational resources we have found invaluable. You can find the suggested reading list for each Level on the HorseSense Learning Levels website.

Our ever-growing library of recommended reading for instructors includes the following books which feature discussion on unmounted education:

Wallace, Jane, 2002. **Teaching Children to Ride**

Dawson, Jan, 2003. **Teaching Safe Horsemanship**

Troup, Melissa, 2010. **An Instructor's Guide to Teaching Children to Ride.**

Hassler-Scoop, Jill, 1993. **Equestrian Instruction.**

Harris, Susan. 2012. **USPC Manuals of Horsemanship. 2nd Ed.**

... as well as the manuals, videos and other excellent resources provided by the **Certified Horsemanship Association** and **American Riding Instructor's Association.**

**A special thank you to Rhonda Hagy for years of enthusiastic illustration;
to all the students who were the guinea pigs for these lessons and modeled for photos;
and our beloved and generous school horses,
who have taught countless new equestrians through Rainbow Level and beyond.**