

Phoenix (Ride On: Book 1)

KIMBERLY BRUBAKER BRADLEY

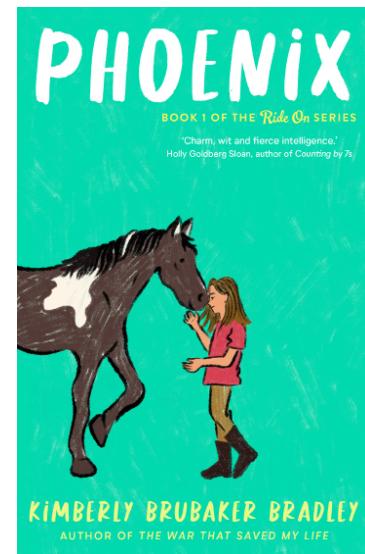
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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 9+

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CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kimberly Brubaker Bradley grew up horse-obsessed in a tragically non-horsey family. When she was eighteen, she took the reins in her own hands and hasn't stopped riding since. Kim ran a pony club for kids in her home town—a big part of her inspiration for this series—all while writing Newbery Honor-winning novels *The War That Saved My Life*, *The War I Finally Won* and *The Night War*. Kim is a fierce advocate for horses and the value of the human-horse connection. Photo by Amy MacMurray.

SYNOPSIS

Eleven-year-old Harper's life has just blown up. Her parents are divorcing, she isn't talking to her best friend Cat, and she and her mother have moved to Sommer Springs, where everything is different and hard. Their new house is tiny, there are no spare seats in the school cafeteria, and there are dead chickens hanging from the clothesline of a house around the corner. Nothing in Harper's life is normal, and it feels like her sadness might last forever.

Then a starving horse is dumped in the paddock between Harper's tiny home and the stables next door. Harper has never been interested in horses, but suddenly all she can think about is saving this neglected animal. Harper adopts the horse, names him Phoenix, and starts caring for him.

Harper's mom and Miss Chelsea—the owner of the riding school next door—aren't sure it's a good idea for Harper to keep Phoenix, or if he will even survive. But Harper refuses to give up on her new friend. She is determined to ride Phoenix one day, and starts working at Miss Chelsea's stables in exchange for riding lessons.

As Harper learns more about horses and riding, Phoenix slowly gets stronger. But Harper's life remains full of uncertainty. She still hasn't spoken to Cat about what happened between Cat's mom and Harper's dad, and her parents' divorce still feels messy and sad. Will Harper and Cat stay friends? Will Phoenix be okay? Will Harper be allowed to keep him?

Phoenix, the first book in the Ride On series, is a heartwarming and adventurous story perfect for middle-grade readers who love horses.

BEFORE READING

1. Look at the front cover. What clues does it give you about the story? Who do you think Phoenix is and why?
2. What do you know about horses? Have you ever met or ridden a horse? What was it like?



3. Have you ever moved to a new house and/or school? How did your old house differ from your new one? What about your new school? How did you feel when you first moved?
4. Think about your closest friends. How did you meet and become friends with them? What sorts of things do you do together?

WHILE READING

1. What does Harper see hanging from a clothesline when she arrives in Sommer Springs? What is her reaction?
2. How did Harper find out about her dad and Cat's mom? Why does she call this 'the worst possible way' to find out?
3. What doesn't Harper like about her new home? What does she think is nice about it?
4. What does Harper decide is the only thing worse than starting middle school for the first time?
5. What does Harper learn about the dead chicken house?
6. Who answers the phone when Harper calls her home landline in Knoxville? How does this make Harper feel? Why?
7. What is complicated about caring for a starving horse? What process does Harper have to follow?
8. What does Harper decide to name her horse? Why?
9. How long does Miss Chelsea say it will take Harper's horse to heal?
10. What does Harper realise the vet means when she says, 'This could go either way'? (p. 59)
11. Why does Cat hate horses? Why did Harper say she was scared of horses on the field trip with her old school?
12. Why does Harvey go into Phoenix's paddock?
13. Why does Night think Harper is good at handling horses?
14. Is Harper really only helping at the barn because she doesn't want to be home by herself? Why does she tell her dad this?
15. Why does Harper think her dad likes Cat better?
16. Why does Harper feel 'a wave of sympathy' for Carine in the riding lesson? (p. 108)
17. What makes Natalie spook at the end of the riding lesson? What effect does it have on the other horses? Why does Carine blame Dante when she falls off the second time?
18. Who does Cat think told everyone at school about her mum and Harper's dad?
19. What does Phoenix do when Natalie gets loose and canters down the road? Why is it beautiful and horrifying?

AFTER READING CHARACTER

1. Make character profiles for Harper, Dante, Night, Emma, and Carine. Include the following information: age, physical description, personality, interests/hobbies, favourite horse.
2. Make character profiles for the different horses in the book.
3. 'Harper had never been brave. Cat was the brave one.' (p. 58) Throughout the story, Harper compares herself to Cat. Why does she do this? Make a list of all the comparisons she makes. What are the differences between you and your friends? What are the similarities?
4. What is Harper's dog Harvey named after? Do you have a pet? How did you choose their name?
5. 'What are you into, Harper?' (p. 19) Harper isn't sure how to answer this question. What do you think Harper is into? How would you answer this question about yourself?
6. 'The difference between how this horse came off the trailer and how Phoenix had made Harper's heart hurt.' (p. 88) What are the differences between Phoenix and Carine's horse, Glory? Why do they make Harper feel this way?

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

1. 'She was tall and skinny with thin, straight brown hair tightly scraped into a ponytail.' (p. 85) How does this physical description of Carine mirror her personality?
2. 'The truck had been, in its own way, a kind of Bomb.' (p. 115) What truck is Harper referring to? In what ways did the two 'Bombs' in the story blow up Harper's life?
3. What does Harper decide she needs to do at the start of Chapter 25? Why do you think she makes this decision at this point in the story?
4. Re-read the last sentence of the book. What does it tell you about how Harper has changed?
5. What happens when Harper calls Phoenix's name at the end of the story? Why is this such a big deal to Harper? What does it tell you about how their relationship has changed throughout the book?
6. Phoenix is the first book in the Ride On series. What other book series have you read? How does the first book in a series differ from a second or third? What does a first book need to include to set up a series? What do you think the next book in the Ride On series will be about?
7. 'Night said they didn't do horse shows. Harper wondered why not but felt uncomfortable asking.' (p. 32) What other questions are left unanswered at the end of this book? Why do you think the author chose to do this?



THEMES

Friendship & Love

1. 'All at once she missed Cat so badly she could barely breathe.' (p. 23) Have you ever missed someone like this?
2. '"What are you going to tell them?" asked Harper. "About me?" "You already know," Emma said. "I mean, it's obvious. If you pay attention."' (p. 29) What do you think Emma means? What do you think she tells Dante and Night about Harper?
3. On Night's 'friendly' scale, what number does Harper rate herself? What number do you think you would be? Does this number change? Why?
4. 'How did you tell a horse you were a safe person?' (p. 37) How do you think you can show an animal that you are safe? How do animals show each other?
5. Harper remembers how she felt when she first met her dog, Harvey. (p. 55) She feels the same now for Phoenix. Have you ever felt this way about a pet?
6. Night tells Harper that horses need friends like people do. Harper wonders if Phoenix had to leave his friends behind. Who did Harper leave behind when she moved to Tennessee?
7. What does Harper say when Cat asks, 'Are we still friends?' (p. 121) Why?

Change

1. 'It would be hard forever. It would never not be hard.' (p. 4) Have you ever been in a situation that felt like it would never get better? How did you get through it?
2. What differences does Harper immediately notice between Sommer Springs and Knoxville?
3. 'I need you to be responsible right now—get yourself onto that bus in the mornings and get yourself home.' (p. 27) Harper struggles with this new responsibility. What kinds of things are you responsible for?
4. '"Have you ever in your life," her mom asked, "actually wanted a horse?"' (p. 43) Harper was never interested in horses before. What do you think has changed?
5. 'She burst into tears. Again. Right in front of Dante and Night. Without the least understanding of why. She'd never been much of a crier, before the Bomb.' (p. 60) Why is Harper more of a crier now? Why do you think she cries in this particular situation? If Harper had met Phoenix before 'the Bomb', do you think her reaction would have been the same? Why or why not?
6. Why is Harper angry when she sees her dad looking exactly the same? Why is she also comforted?
7. 'Five weeks ago, when she herself had seen the clothesline chickens, she'd burst into tears.' (p. 114) What has changed for Harper in those five weeks? How does she feel about the dead chickens now?

Uncertainty

1. 'Night said they weren't sure whether you were actually unfriendly or just really sad.' (p. 28) Have you ever acted in an unfriendly way to someone because you were sad? What clues might there be that someone is actually sad when they appear unfriendly?
2. 'Harper mostly felt like she was watching a YouTube video about her life instead of actually living it.' (p. 31) What do you think Harper means? Have you ever felt like this?
3. Miss Chelsea makes Harper say, 'Phoenix might not work out even if I do everything right.' (p. 56) Why does Miss Chelsea make her say this? Have you ever worked really hard at something you knew might not work out? What motivated you to do it anyway?
4. 'She missed Cat. She was so angry with Cat.' (p. 101) Have you ever felt this way about someone? How can both feelings be true at the same time?
5. 'There were so many things Harper didn't know. So many questions that couldn't be answered.' (p. 122) What are the things Harper doesn't know? How does she deal with this uncertainty? What uncertainty do you face in your life? How do you deal with it?
6. '"Whoever threw Phoenix away," Harper said, to all of them, "it was entirely their fault. Not his." They looked at her, puzzled. "Well, yeah," Carine said. "Duh. You know that." She did and she didn't. She didn't and she did.' (p. 129) Why didn't Harper know this? Why does she know it now?

Hope

1. What do Harper and her mother laugh about at the end of Chapter 3? Why do you think they find this so funny? Have you ever been in a situation where you couldn't stop laughing at something silly like this?
2. Why does Harper burst into tears when Phoenix first stands up?
3. 'Harper said, "You wanted me to be the Fearless Leader." Her dad nodded. "Yes." "I'm not," Harper said. "That's not who I am." Her dad gestured toward Phoenix. "Are you sure?"' (p. 97) What does Harper's dad mean? In what ways is Harper a Fearless Leader? In what ways do you show this quality?
4. Why was Tuesday 'Harper's first perfect day in Sommer Springs'? (p. 103) What would your 'perfect day' look like?
5. What is Carine surprised to learn about Harper? How does it make Harper feel?

RESPONDING

1. Do some research on the 'pukka' from Irish folklore, and the 'phoenix'. What other mythical creatures from folklore do you know?



2. 'The horse had talked to her, sort of, the way Harvey did, by the way it moved its body and the expressions on its face.' (p. 11) Have you ever had an animal 'talk' to you in this way? What did it say to you? Were you able to 'talk' back so it could understand? Choose an animal and do some research to find out how it communicates.
3. What did Harper think ponies were before talking to Night? What did you learn about horses from this book? What do you want to know more about?
4. Make a list of the horse terminology used in this book, such as 'turn them out', 'dressage', and 'posting'. Research and write a definition for each term.
5. Re-read the description on page 13 of Harper's house, the horse farm, and the distant mountains. Draw or paint a picture of this setting. How does it compare to where you live? Draw or paint a picture of your own home and its surroundings.
6. 'Having a dad who behaved badly, really, really, badly, versus not having one at all - that was math Harper couldn't do in her head.' (p. 78) Which do you think is worse? Why? Why does Harper think things would be simpler if her dad had been a jerk all the time?
7. 'Carine sniffed. "It's not what I'm used to."' (p. 115) Have you ever been in a situation you weren't used to? How did it feel? How did you react? How is the way Carine reacts different to the way Harper does when she's in a similar situation? Why do you think this is?