

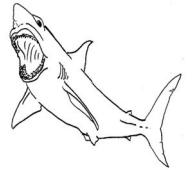
SHARK ATTACK

OBJECTIVE: *Students will develop a strong, secure safety seat, measured by their ability to resist a simulated pull on the reins.*

EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

☐ STUFFED TOY SHARK(S), OR SIMILAR THEMED DECORATION

☐ OPTIONAL FISH STICKERS AND PRIZES (SEE NEXT PAGE)



PREP

Ensure that the arena has several clear straightaways where riders can walk in a straight line (preferably the centerline or quarterlines). Set toy sharks (and/or other fishy decoration) in a prominent place, such as on a nearby barrel or jump standard.

INTRO

"You have already learned that it is very important to ride with bendy knees and heavy heels. **What can happen if your toes point down in a diving position? Do you think diving off a horse is a good idea?!** Let's see how well you can keep your heels down while we practice our warm-up stretches!"

LESSON
AND
EXERCISES

 **Review:** Safety check, mounting, and warm-up exercises at the walk, to include poll and croup touches, toe touches, and alternate toe touches.

5
MIN

Emphasize: Each rider's lower legs should stay "Superglued" to the horse's barrel, with toes lifted just enough to wrinkle their boots, through every moment of the stretch.

 **Review:** Have students ride down centerline and perform three halts, with an emphasis on low, quiet hands.

5
MIN

 **Discuss:** Sometimes even the gentlest horse can surprise us. **ASK: What does a horse do if it gets frightened?** Horses can spook, run, or buck unexpectedly. They can also trip, just like people, and put their heads down to eat grass! Luckily, there is a special position that helps us stay safe in an emergency.

5
MIN

 **PRACTICE:** Help all riders achieve a **safety seat** by bringing shoulders back, hips forward, and heels down without losing the bend in their knee. Transition back and forth between balanced seat and safety seat several times at the halt and walk. Have students practice low hands (with one on the pommel if necessary), and keep the reins long.

5
MIN

 **Discuss:** "Imagine you are in a fishing boat. Instead of a little fish, you hook a great big shark! What happens if you are in diving position? You fall into the water with the shark!"

 **PRACTICE:** Send each rider on a "**fishing trip**" by asking them to walk their horses from one side of the arena to the other while Ground Buddies hold both reins above the horse's bit. At any moment, Ground Buddies may tug gently (**little fish**) or sharply (**shark attack**). Riders must be ready with their safety seat or they will fall out of the boat! Any student who collapses forward "falls into the water" and must return to the start.

10
MIN

REVIEW

- ? A safety seat must be STRONG, not slouched! How can we make our bodies STRONG?
- ? Do you think it's a good idea to pull back if your horse tugs on the reins? Why not?

SAMPLE #2

HorseSense Learning Levels

SHARK ATTACK

RAINBOW LEVEL

FUN AND GAMES

- 🐾 Award **fish-related stickers** for each successful "fishing trip" across the arena. Stickers can be worn on the rider's clothing or placed on the horse's saddle pad. **Three fish are needed to earn a prize.** If you are teaching a particularly competitive group students, the first rider to catch three fish is the winner.
- 🐾 For an additional challenge, **create a "fishing line"** by attaching a small magnet to the bat of a riding crop, either by glueing it directly onto the bat or by tying it using a length of string. Attach additional magnets to the noses of fish cut out of cardboard or foam. (You can also purchase a magnetic fishing game designed for small children.) If students survive the sharks and reach the end of the arena, they can use their line to retrieve a fish from a bucket set on an overturned trash can. Fish can be "taken to market" or, for a more sympathetic crowd, passed off to a teammate who releases the fish back into the "ocean." Make sure to **desensitize horses** thoroughly to the fish and/or lines!



"Shark attacks" are the same as the Tug Test practiced in Red Level. Grasp the reins 6" to 12" from the horse's bit so the horse feels no pressure.

GROUND BUDDIES

Ground Buddies can assist with safety checks and mounting; walk at the horse's head during the warm-up exercises; and provide the tug tests during the "fishing trip." They should monitor the security of the student's seat - especially before and after a "shark attack!" - and assist with position corrections as needed.

As Rainbow Level students look up to *all* of their instructors, they may enjoy hearing stories about how Ground Buddies have employed their safety seats in a scary situation. Make sure to keep the tone of these stories light, especially with timid children!



On a rainy day... teach this lesson indoors with the assistance of a barrel horse (see **#17 Roly Poly Pony**). In a pinch, you can also have students practice on foot while standing with feet apart and knees bent, as the principles of a safety seat are the same on the ground as they are in the saddle. Combine this activity with a lesson on horse behavior and body language, reviewing signs of tension that indicate a spook might be coming.

FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 **A correctly administered Tug Test should have NO negative affect on the horse.** However, practice ahead of time and evaluate your horses' tolerance. Some horses find the placement of the Ground Buddy's hands and body uncomfortable and may become nippy or balky.
- 🐾 Small children are no match for a frightened, runaway horse. Keeping Ground Buddies close will minimize the risk of an accident, but otherwise, the best thing you can do to prepare Rainbow Level riders for this possibility is give them a secure safety seat. Teach it thoroughly and practice it frequently to develop muscle memory. Show students how to hold the pommel without dropping their reins, and emphasize that the **safety seat is also silent.** Frightened riders must **close their mouth and throw away the key** to prevent screaming!

SAMPLE #2

HorseSense Learning Levels

RIDING OVER OBSTACLES

BLUE LEVEL

RHYTHM POLES

OBJECTIVE: For students to practice maintaining a consistent rhythm at the lope, using vocal techniques while riding over a simple line of lopeover poles.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

❑ 2-4 GROUND POLES

❑ 2 CONES



PREP

Set a single ground pole on the inside track at B or E, placing additional poles off to side for easy access. If using a round pole, secure ends so it cannot roll. Set cones to mark approach and departure.

INTRO

"When we train a horse, one of the very first qualities we try to achieve is rhythm. Rhythm helps our horses stay in balance, which helps him stay happy and calm!" **ASK: How does a steady rhythm make it easier for YOU to ride? How could it help your horse navigate an obstacle, such as a pole?**

LESSON AND EXERCISES

 **Review:** Transitions between free walk and medium walk, counting along with the beats to see if the horse maintains a forward, marching rhythm. **10 MIN**

 **Review:** Using posting to speed up, slow down and maintain rhythm at the jog, along the rail as well as through large circles and changes of direction. Once students have established a good working pace, ask them to ride over the pole at the jog. **ASK: Did your rhythm change over the pole? If so, why do you think this happened?** **15 MIN**

Emphasize: Horses have a sweet spot where they can maintain a relaxed working gait. Once students find it, ask them to count out loud along with their horses' steps at the jog, as though their voice is a metronome setting the pace.

 **Discuss:** Counting or chanting in time with the horse's gaits can help riders keep a consistent rhythm and a regular breathing pattern. Although there are three beats to the canter, a two-syllable chant can be easier to synchronize. **ASK: Can you think of a food you like with two syllables in its name?** **5 MIN**

 **PRACTICE:** Ask students to develop a steady working canter along the rail, using the two-syllable chant of their choice in time with the horse's rhythm. (See next page.) Once students have practiced on both leads, send them over the ground pole one at a time at the lope. **ASK: Did your rhythm change? If so, what happened?** **15 MIN**

 **PRACTICE:** Once students can maintain a consistent rhythm and chant over a single pole, add a second pole to **create a line of lopeover poles**. Students should chant from the first cone to the second cone, in time with the horse's gait. Add poles as appropriate. **15 MIN**

REVIEW

- ? Does your horse get faster or slower over the poles? Why do you think this happens?
- ? Can you think of a song with a beat that matches your horse's lope?

SAMPLE #2

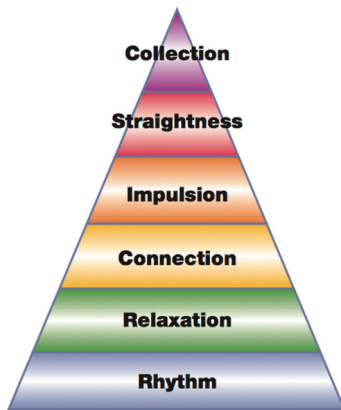
RHYTHM POLES

HorseSense Learning Levels

BLUE LEVEL

FUN AND GAMES

- 🐾 **Play music** with a strong jog tempo throughout the warm-up, encouraging students to try to match the beat. If the music has lyrics, make sure they are family-friendly!
- 🐾 Teach this exercise as part of a camp session and ask students to ride to the chant of "Pizza, pizza." **After the lesson, reward them with a pizza party**, and make horse-safe "pizzas" out of graham crackers, applesauce and shredded carrot or alfalfa. (Unless your horses are strictly sugar-free, of course.)



RELATABLE

You know that rhythm is the foundation of good training, and can make or break a horse's relaxation and rideability at every gait. But your Blue Level students may be less interested in this level of theory, especially if they are younger children or adrenaline enthusiasts.

Get ready to explain how rhythm is the "secret strategy" to running a smooth barrel pattern, jumping a horse over a pole/log/ditch, or scoring well in your riding discipline of choice. You can also discuss how moving with rhythm and balance helps the horse feel safe, making them less likely to surprise their rider with a (SCARY) stumble or spook. **Help your students appreciate basic principles of good riding by relating to each student's interests, goals and concerns.**

If your students are shy and reserved, or rhythmically-challenged, you may need to **count along with them**. Counting strides and maintaining a consistent rhythm over poles can both be challenging or frustrating at first - especially if students are new to loping over poles - so encourage students to relax and embrace the "silly" by choosing words that sound out of place in the arena.

Our students like to shout "**PIZ-ZA**" and "**TA-CO**", undoubtedly confusing anyone passing by! Try singing "*Ride, ride, ride your horse,*" to the tune of "Row Your Boat" or create a similarly rhythmic recitation.



FINAL NOTES

- 🐾 **Correct distances between poles are essential** for horses to maintain their gait and their confidence. In general, 7' is comfortable spacing for most horses working at the lope - but you may need to decrease that distance to 6' or increase to 8'-9' depending on the side and training level of individual horses in the lesson. **Working with a mixed group? Build two pole grids side by side**, clearly marking "lanes" with cones so students can keep the horse and pony grids straight.
- 🐾 **Watch spacing carefully**, and establish rules for circling and passing in group lessons. In general, students should allow the rider in front to clear the canter poles before starting their approach.

SAMPLE #2

HorseSense Learning Levels

TARGETING

PINK LEVEL

GO FETCH

OBJECTIVE: *Students will practice cue control through a series of targeting exercises using a lightweight cone.*



EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

- ☐ SMALL, FLEXIBLE SOCCER CONES OR SIMILAR PROPS
- ☐ TREAT POUCH(ES) WITH APPROPRIATE TREATS

PREP

Stack soccer cones (1 per horse) and set them in center of the arena. Fill treat pouches with fairly low-value, horse-healthy treats, such as timothy or alfalfa pellets.

INTRO

"Have you ever played fetch with a dog? Don't you think it would be fun if you and your horse could play fetch together, too? Our horses probably won't be retrieving objects for us any time SOON, but we can teach them to go after a toy we throw - and there are actually some great reasons to do so!"

LESSON AND EXERCISES

- Review:** Rules for using positive reinforcement safely, including use of a bridge signal and feeding in patient position. If necessary, have students practice cueing, clicking and treating on each other first, without horses present, to ensure safe mechanics. 5 MIN
- Review:** Cueing and rewarding the horse for patient position. Use protected contact or feed delivery buckets if needed. 5 MIN
- Review:** Introducing a stationary target: a soccer cone held in front of the horse, above the horse's blind spot. Practice behavior shaping until the horse will consistently touch the target when it is presented. 10 MIN
- Discuss:** The importance of **cue control**, or teaching the horse to touch the target ONLY when it is obviously presented. 5 MIN
- PRACTICE:** Have students alternate between presenting target for the horse to touch and cueing for patient position with cone lowered. Shape behavior until the horse will keep his muzzle away from the cone unless prompted to target. 10 MIN
- Discuss:** Ask students to brainstorm steps they might take between teaching the stationary target and the horse "chasing" a tossed target. Discuss benefits of teaching the horse to touch a target away from the handler. 5 MIN
- PRACTICE:** Apply sequence as discussed, working from a hand-held target to a ground target to the horse moving a few steps to reach the target. Periodically review patient position and/or allow students to step away for a brief "brain break." If all is going well, allow students to toss the cone away from their body for the final targeting session. 20 MIN

REVIEW

- ? How do you think you should respond if your horse declines to play with the cone?
- ? How could you use this exercise to help a horse gain confidence in a spooky environment?

SAMPLE #2

GO FETCH

HorseSense Learning Levels

PINK LEVEL



No soccer cones? No problem - just substitute the easy-to-toss toy of your choice.

FUN AND GAMES

-  **Students with strong leading skills can take their horses AND cones on an outing**, walking a predetermined route and occasionally stopping to target or practice a cone toss. This can be an excellent exercise to focus horses - and humans! - who tend to be nervous or distracted when working outside the arena.
-  **Turn two students loose in an enclosed area with a trustworthy horse and two soccer cones to play Ping Pong.** Student #1 engages the horse's interest and tosses the cone while student #2 stands in a neutral, "energy off" position with cone lowered. Student #1 rewards the horse for targeting and removes the cone, adopting a neutral position while Student #2 comes to life and tosses the cone. The goal is for the horse to bounce back and forth between students, responding to changes in energy and intention - and teaching students a lot about their own body language.

PREREQUISITES

This lesson is a frequently-requested favorite of our Pink Level students - and lesson horses! - but it is only safe to play after students have learned basic targeting and positive reinforcement skills. In particular, students should be comfortably and consistently able to use a well-timed bridge signal and deliver food rewards with the horse in a calm, default "patient position." **We strongly recommend teaching this lesson after #6 Carrot or Stick, #7 Food Factors, and #19 Target Training.**

The entire lesson may be taught with a single horse and protected contact if you wish. You can also ask students to click while you remain close by and deliver the reward yourself. (This can be a good choice for horses who can't reliably be fed by hand).

If you don't have a safe structure in place for food delivery, feel free to substitute the non-food reward of your choice - just don't be surprised if the targeting sequence takes a bit longer!



On a rainy day... play this game in the barn aisle with a single horse and cone. Students can take turns presenting the cone, passing off the cone once they have successfully achieved a specific stage in targeting. A single treat pouch can also be shared, teaching students how to use the pouch as a start signal to indicate "Game on" to the horse.

FINAL NOTE

-  Large group lessons can get a bit chaotic once students start tossing cones. **Consider using poles or cones to mark off different sections of the arena, assigning each student their own private workspace.** You may wish to use an assistant instructor to help coach students through their targeting sequence. Alternatively, you can divide the arena in half and have one student work at a time. This is recommended only when using horses with previous targeting experience, or you may find that it takes several lessons to get through the exercises.