



**Classroom Guide for**  
**Horse Song: The Naadam of Mongolia**  
 Written and illustrated by  
 Ted Lewin and Betsy Lewin

### Reading Level

\*Reading Level: Grade 4  
 Interest Level: Grades 1–5  
 Guided Reading Level: S  
 Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 5/1  
 Lexile™ Measure: 870

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

### Themes

Animals, Horse Racing, Traditional Festivals, Culture and Customs, Family Life and Traditions, Holidays and Celebrations, Modern-day Asia (Mongolia), Asian/Asian American Interest

### Synopsis

Every year, all over Mongolia, there are summer festivals called Naadam. Young boys and girls ride half wild horses across the desert in a race that earns the winner honor and glory. In this story, the reader follows young Tamir and his family as they prepare for the race while continuing to attend to daily chores.

Readers are introduced to traditional Mongolian food, including a fermented drink made of mare's milk called *airag*, traditional Mongolian clothing, and Mongolian living styles and traditions.

As Tamir and his family get ready for race day there is a sense of excitement all around. Horses and riders are dressed in traditional race day clothing making the steppe come alive with color and sound. As riders make their way to the starting line things don't go exactly as planned, but the race soon gets underway. When Tamir and his horse appear from the cloud of dust and cross the finish line first everyone shares in his sense of victory.

The back of the book contains additional interesting facts about *gers* (traditional Mongolian homes) and Mongolian life, plus a glossary and pronunciation guide.

## Background

Mongolia is a large country completely surrounded by Russia and China. Its geography is mostly mountains and plateaus, and its elevation makes it one of the highest countries in the world. Southern Mongolia is dominated by a desert called the Gobi. Genghis Khan's Mongol horsemen conquered much of Asia and Europe during the 13th century. Mongolia won its independence from China in 1921, and in 1924 it became a communist country. In 1990 and 1992, multiparty elections were held, and in 2004 a coalition government was formed. Poverty is a major concern, but copper, cashmere, and gold exports help the economy. Additional information about Mongolia can be found on the introductory page in *Horse Song* and on [National Geographic Kids](#) and other websites.

Ted and Betsy Lewin are an award-winning husband-and-wife writing and illustrating team. They have traveled the globe to bring back interesting stories that open up new worlds for the children who read their books. Readers will also notice two distinct styles of art within the pages of *Horse Song*. This combination has become a trademark of the Lewins' collaborations. Alongside the realistic paintings by Ted are the whimsical field sketches by Betsy.

*Horse Song* is based on actual events the Lewins experienced on a trip to Mongolia in 2004. The story combines the characteristics and stories of many of the children they met on their trip to create the character of Tamir.

### Teaching Tip

You may wish to include *Horse Song* on your reading table during May, which is celebrated as Asian Pacific American Heritage Month.

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

Before introducing the book to students, you may wish to develop background and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. Have you ever seen a horse in real life? What was the horse like?
2. Have you ever ridden a horse? Describe the experience for us.
3. Have you ever heard of the country of Mongolia? Let's find it on a map of the world (or a globe). What countries surround Mongolia? What is the capital?
4. What do you know about deserts? What do you think it would be like to ride a horse in the desert? Would you want to? Why?

### Exploring the Book

Write the title of the book on the chalkboard. Ask students what they think a horse song might be. Then ask them what they think the "Naadam of Mongolia" is. Encourage students to think about the subtitle and use the illustration on the front cover of the book as a clue in making their predictions about the subtitle and what the story as a whole might be about.

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: illustrated end papers, half title page, title page spread with dedication, map, introduction, illustrations, section headings, backmatter (Ger Facts and Other Mongolia Facts), and Glossary and Pronunciation Guide.

### Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to find out what a horse song is and to learn about Mongolian traditions (specifically the Naadam) and lifestyle. Have students also read to determine who is narrating the story.

### VOCABULARY

In addition to the vocabulary below, it might be helpful to go through the vocabulary in the back of the book. There is also a pronunciation guide there, which will be helpful before a read aloud.

Have each student write his or her own sentence using each word or, where appropriate, create a simple illustration to depict the meaning.

destination	herd	bridle	horizon
pampered	reluctantly	procession	bullhorn
pandemonium	envelops	atop	jubilation
ceremonial			

### AFTER READING

#### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and illustrations in the book to support their responses.

Literal Comprehension
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1. Who is telling the story? How do you know?
2. What is Naadam?
3. Who is Tamir? Where does he live?
4. What is a ger? What is it made of?
5. What are some traditional foods of the nomadic Mongolians?
6. What are some of the daily chores performed by different family members?
7. How do Tamir and his family take care of the horses before the race?
8. What does Tamir dream of doing?
9. How do the jockeys get their horses in shape for the race?
10. Why do the racers "start" at the finish line?
11. What problems does Tamir have with his horse before the start of the race?
12. What problem do all the horses have at the starting line?
13. What are the wooden pegs used for at the end of the race?
14. Who wins the race? How does he react?
15. What prizes are given to the riders?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking
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1. This story is an example of narrative nonfiction. What are some elements of narrative that you can find in the text? What are some elements of informational text that you can find in the text?
2. Why is it important for the authors to squeeze into the small tent of men they encounter on their way to the Naadam?
3. The authors are very good at creating vivid images with their words. What are some of the strongest images they've created? What are some of the adjectives and verbs

they use to create precise images? Cite passages from the story to support your answer.

4. Why is the Naadam such an important race for Tamir? For his family?
5. Why do the authors talk so much about the dust and pounding of the horses' hooves during the race?
6. How do the authors create a sense of excitement and anticipation? Find specific passages to support your answer.
7. What do you find interesting about the lifestyle of the family in the story? What do you think would be hardest about being a nomad?
8. How do you think Tamir feels when he wins? How do you think his family feels? Find passages in the story that show their feelings at this time.
9. Why is the book called *Horse Song*? Do you think this is a good title? Why or why not?
10. How did the authors choose to end the story? How did the ending image leave you feeling? Why?

### Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to the ones in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for the passages that describe the surroundings, focusing on the five senses.
- The **Illustrator** might create a poster to advertise the upcoming Naadam festival or an announcement celebrating the winners of the horse race.
- The **Connector** might find information about other sports festivals around the world.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might find more information about Mongolian nomads.

\*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *GETTING STARTED WITH LITERATURE CIRCLES* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *LITERATURE CIRCLES: VOICE AND CHOICE IN BOOK CLUBS AND READING GROUPS* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *LITERATURE CIRCLES RESOURCE GUIDE* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

### Reader's Response

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work, if they wish to.

1. Why do you think the authors chose to write about their experiences in Mongolia as a travelogue, instead of as an informational text? What were the advantages of writing the story as a travelogue? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.
2. How did this story make you feel? Were you nervous for Tamir? Why or why not?
3. Which parts of the authors' experiences did you connect to the most? Enjoy reading about the most? Why? Would you like to visit Mongolia to watch the Naadam? Why or why not? What would you most like to see and experience? Cite passages from the text to support your answer.

4. The book contains two very different styles of illustrations. Why do you think the authors chose to use both? What is the purpose of each style? How do both the nonfiction text features and the illustrations help you understand the information presented in the text?
5. What did you learn about the people and environment of Mongolia?
6. If you could take a trip anywhere in the world, where would you go? Why? Research the place you choose and write a piece in the narrative style the Lewins used, pretending you have taken the trip and are writing about your experiences.
7. Have students write a book recommendation for this story explaining why they would or would not recommend this book to other students.

### ELL Teaching Activities

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners.

1. Assign ELL students to read the story aloud with strong English readers/speakers.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they admire about a character or central figure in the story.

### INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas.

#### Social Studies

1. Mongolia is a landlocked but geographically varied country that packs within its borders mountain ranges, deserts, and steppes. Have students research these terms and label them on a blank map of Mongolia and the surrounding countries.
2. Students can read other books or articles you provide or may do online research to find out more about Mongolian nomads. Have students then create a chart of things they already knew from reading *Horse Song* and new information they learned from their research.

#### Science

Research Mongolia's climate and wildlife. After reading the authors' other travel stories—*Balarama* and *Puffling Patrol*—ask students to compare and contrast Mongolia's climate and wildlife with that of India and Iceland.

#### Math

In the Naadam race horses walk and trot to a starting line and then turn around and race back to the finish line, fourteen miles away. Have students create a reduced scale version of this race. Then, have students create a different fourteen-mile race using the same scale. The race may be run in a circle, rectangle, or a more intricate pattern.

### Language Arts

1. In the back of the book there is a page titled "Other Mongolia Facts." Have each student pick the fact she or he finds most interesting and then write a short dialogue between a tourist and a Mongolian that would illustrate or play out this fact.
2. Mongolians have no last names. Instead, a Mongolian child puts his or her father's first name before his or her own name. For example, a child named William Jones in the United States whose father is named Harvey Jones would be Harvey William in Mongolia. Let students recreate their names using the Mongolian system and then list all the new names on the chalkboard. Then have students figure out which name belongs to each child.

### Art

Using the descriptions of gers throughout the book, including the backmatter page, and on online sources, have students draw a panoramic view of a ger looking in from the door. Be sure they label the east and west side. Students who are interested may also attempt to build a model of a ger.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS/ILLUSTRATORS

**Ted Lewin** and **Betsy Lewin** have been traveling the world together for decades and have chronicled many of their wide-ranging adventures in books for young readers. In addition to *Horse Song: The Naadam of Mongolia*, their most recent collaborations were *Balarama: A Royal Elephant* and *Puffling Patrol*.

Ted and Betsy have both won countless awards and honors for their books. Ted was awarded a Caldecott Medal Honor in 1994 for *Peppe the Lamplighter*. Betsy was the recipient of a Caldecott Medal Honor in 2001 for *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type*. When not teaching, visiting with young fans, or traveling, the Lewins are usually drawing and painting in their Brooklyn, New York, home studios. You can visit Ted Lewin online at [tedlewin.com](http://tedlewin.com) and you can visit Betsy Lewin online at [betsylewin.com](http://betsylewin.com).

### Book Information

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### RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about *Horse Song* at: [http://www.leeandlow.com/books/172/hc/horse\\_song](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/172/hc/horse_song)

### Order Information

#### On the Web:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/order> (general order information)

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