***The Horsecather*  by Mari Sandoz**

**A Study Guide & Classroom Resource**

*The following discussion questions were created and compiled by students in English 435/535, Native American Literature, in the Spring 2009 term at Chadron State College:*

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This study guide is divided into FOUR parts:

1. Major Themes/Issues related to the book as a whole

2. Discussion Questions related to EACH of the 15 chapters

3. Lesson Plans and Classroom Activities

4. Reader Testimonials: “Responding to *The Horsecatcher.”*

**Major Themes/Issues in *The Horsecatcher***

These prompts relate to the overall novel itself--and the larger issues, themes, images, symbols, concepts that emerge in the work as a whole. The goal is to help readers dig deeper in the Novel and develop more critical reading responses to the events in the narrative, and perhaps the larger issues surrounding the novel that Sandoz may have been exploring.

**Discussion Questions:**

* Elk found that he was different from the other young men of the Cheyenne tribe. While they dreamed of counting coup and going on war raids, he dreamed of catching horses. He was also firmly convinced that he should not kill. "My son wishes only to catch horses," the father said sorrowfully, "and now it seems that the only vision he has been given, the only medicine, leads to that." Old Horsecatcher replied, looking into the handful of coals "in such a choice it is more than wishes, sometime more even than strong medicine … How will it be for our son when the other young men are sung into the village for their coups against the enemy, and when the women make all their trilling cries of admiration for them, while Elk must ride in unwelcomed and unseen?" This conversation on page 51 and 52 of the book sets up one of the overarching themes of the book. How does Elk deal with it? Does being different make him a better or worse person? How does it affect his growth as a person? At the end of the story was he content with what the horses had brought him?
* Young Elk had a great respect for life and living things. He was careful not to kill the birds for food, because they were great helpers with the horses and alerted him to dangers in the area. "He regretted having to kill anything that walked or swam or flew, but...he would need his strength..." He would instead look for berries and older bird eggs for nourishment. But there were a few instances where he knew he had to have meat in order to have sufficient strength to do his work. How do you think his respect of life affected his success or lack of success in catching the horses? What feelings did the author describe as he killed for necessary sustenance?
* A motif is a dominant idea or central theme in literature. One motif found in Mari Sandoz's novel *The Horsecatcher* is the journey or quest. Briefly describe one of Elk's journeys in the story, and then explain its significance for Elk, as well as for his people. Where did he go, and how did he grow/change as a result of this journey? In your opinion, was the quest successful?
* Throughout the book, Young Elk tries to prove himself: to his family, to his tribe, to Old Horsecatcher and his wife, and to Red Sleeve. He was troubled because "everyone thought of him as Young Elk, the little son of the Elk." (p. 98) His own self-doubts plague him as well. In an early meeting with the Horsecatcher, he says, "I am foolish and changing as the wind. You can make nothing of such a one." (p. 53) What things does he do in an effort to prove himself "worthy"? How does he answer his own question of "...what had he to offer...?" (p. 98)
* One of the themes explored in *The Horsecatcher* is the relationship between parent and child. Young Elk has a different experience growing up than most of us. He has his blood parents, Elk River and his mother, but also has two other sets of parents, his second father and mother and Old Horsecatcher and his wife. Describe the role of each set of parents in Young Elk’s development as a man and as a horsecatcher. Include in your answer some advantages and disadvantages of this system.
* A symbol is a word or object that stands for another word or object. In this book, the White Horse becomes a symbol to Young Elk. What does it symbolize for him? What does his willingness to give up the horse in order to protect his people say about him as a person? Would you be willing to make that same sacrifice, especially when you consider that he was not always treated with respect? Why or why not? Go through the book and find another symbol (remember colors can be symbols, too). Explain what it means to Young Elk and what would have similar meaning for you in your life.
* Readers learn very early in the story that Young Elk dislikes to kill an animal, especially a person. Eventually, readers learn that Young Elk prefers to lead a peaceful and nonviolent life as a horse catcher, but his people believe that he is strange to want such an unglamorous life. There were several occasions that tested Young Elk’s resolve not to kill that left him feeling socially awkward and shameful. Name a few times when Young Elk had to say no when they asked him to be like a warrior. Instead what alternatives did he do to help his tribe? Do you think his pacifist attitude affected the way he handled the wild horses? Or do you think it would not have mattered whether or not he liked or disliked killing?
* Birds: As you read this novel, you will notice that Elk has a strong connection to the things of nature in general and specifically, birds. Often times, there is a bird or birds that serve as a warning system, either to herds of horses. As you read, keep a log of the references to birds. In what circumstances do the birds show up? How does Sandoz show that Elk has a connection to the birds? How do the birds help him? Do they ever give him away to the enemy? Why do you think Sandoz choose to include them in her novel and what was her overall purpose?
* A theme or issue prevalent in *The Horsecatcher* is that of sorrow. Throughout the book, the author mentions ways that the Cheyenne men and women mourned, and how vengeful they became once blood had been spilt. What are your thoughts on this? Why do you think, aside from what their culture demanded of them, women would gash at their arms and legs? What would you do in cases such as these presented in this book? What if it was your sibling, parent, or other relative? Would you too want revenge?
* Another issue in the book was about how Young Elk found comfort among the horses, and how this comfort brought much irritation to his parents. Think about what brings you comfort. Would you continue to find that consolation even though it anguished your parents? Why or why not? How can you relate this to Young Elk?
* If Elk had followed the desires of his father and taken the path of a warrior, do you think he would have appreciated the respect placed upon him when returning home with the scalps of those he had slain?
* Even though Elk felt guilt and shame at not being a brave warrior like his brother, do you believe his internal struggles would have been less severe if he had taken that path in life?

**Broader Themes and Issues Worth Exploring**

* The first time Young Elk slipped away from the tribe he returned very shame-faced. He had to stand before his father and the other councilors, accused of his lack of concern for the tribe. Again he left without anyone aware and joined Yellow Wolf’s party. The warriors were on a horse-taking expedition, and he longed to be among the horses. Still he had displeased the Tribe. “Your younger son shames us all with his coming where he has not been asked.” Young Elk would go his own way and did not share his thoughts. This theme continued thoughout the book. Elk was courageous leaving on his own alone. Another reason was ‘no Cheyenne could be told what must be done, except to walk in honor. It perhaps was difficult for Elk leave quietly but he found no other way. I found it interesting that on his secret departures he was only found out twice, once by his sister and again by his second mother, Horsecatcher’s wife. Young Elk was to acknowledge both of these beloved relatives. He told his sister he would be gone four days which would indicate to all that he would be making a fast. And as Young Elk looked back to his cherished second mother, he was to “slip into the crowd once more. From far off he raised his hand to her and then rode away southward alone.”
* One major theme/issue in *The Horsecatcher* is to "chase your dreams." Young Elk was looked down upon in his family because he would not kill and be a warrior like his older brother. Young Elk did not feel right killing because he wanted to become a horsecatcher. Young Elk kept disobeying and kept trying to impress his family be going out and attempting to catch the greatest horses or colt. Young Elk never gave up his dream and eventually his family and others, including the current Horse Catcher started to see him a different way. Little did people know Young Elk was very smart and brave (and usually very lucky) because things always ended up good for Young Elk for as many times as he was caught in horrible situations. In the end Young Elk never gave up and got exactly what he wanted plus the respect and happiness of his “village”.
* One major theme of *The Horsecatcher* is the idea of identity, or being comfortable in one's own skin. Since this is an issue that adolescents deal with on a daily basis, this novel is appropriate to teach to middle or high school students. Identity is a complex issue, and one that Young Elk wrestles with throughout the novel. He wants to fit in and be recognized by his tribe, yet he also has different interests and intents than the rest of the boys his age. Young Elk's bravery in following his heart is inspiring, and is an empowering and important message for young people to see. Despite his parent's attempts to persuade Elk to be more like those around him, Elk remains true to himself and refuses to conform to the constraints of society.
* In this story we find a universal theme: the conflict of following one's dream or calling versus succumbing to the expectations of others. Many young people face this challenge. Parents, families and societies often have ‘expectations’ for their children and attempt to manipulate them through the use of implied disappointment and emotional down grading. “He is like the pemmican before it has found its shape in the carrying bladder. Unformed,” Elk River replied somberly. He has made his fasting and the dreams but it is not clear to anyone what the dreaming meant.” (p 40) We can see how Elk's father, as well as the other tribal wise men, are unable to accept the path that Elk wants and is meant to take. The dream is “not clear” because it is not the dream they believed Elk should have had. He comes from a warrior family and to walk any other path is unconceivable. How many parents have forced their children into sports because they want to live through the lives of their children? How many fathers expect their sons to enter into the family business? In Indian terms, this is what was being done to Elk.
* “Looking down upon his crossed knees he had been ashamed that he was failing them all,…” (p 50) The shame that Elk experienced, for not living up to his families expectations, not becoming a brave warrior like his brother, is the same shame felt by many youth both of the past and present. Those he cares for and respects the most do not accept him for the person he is or the contributions he can make to the group. For even though he will not bring home scalps he will furnish the herds with needed strong horses. There is so much attention paid to what he wouldn’t do and not enough to what he can. Elk follows his dreams and lives his life true to himself, even though it causes him much emotional hardship. In the end he proves himself to his father and his second father when he catches and releases the Ghost stallion. Only after this great feat, do they realize that being a horse catcher is Elk’s true calling. Again, this scenario is played out in many families not of Indian origins. The child who veers from the desires of the family has to accomplish some great feat before he is accepted and appreciated. Though the setting of this story is that of a past Indian tribe, the theme that runs through it could be applied to any culture or society even in today’s modern technological society. If we want to put a moral to this story it would be something along the lines of: love and accept your children for who they are, for as long as they take the path of honesty they will make great things happen.
* The dominant element of *The Horsecatcher* is character. All other elements were skillfully addressed, and, taken together, all played an important part in the task of bringing the trials and triumphs of Young Elk to life. Character development is key in this particular story because everything revolves around who Young Elk was. There was certainly conflict in terms of what his family expected of him and what he expected of himself. I did not see the identity struggle as a dominant theme because, as I read the story, I never questioned whether he would follow his own path or follow the one that others wished for him. The theme that stood out for me involved the rewards, both tangible and intangible, one can expect by allowing the heart to lead the way through life’s journey. Young Elk was admirable because in spite of ridicule, alienation at times from his loved ones, and numerous solitary struggles, he remained true to his own beliefs. He remained faithful to his values throughout, and in the end was triumphant because he was given his father’s name as well as Horsecatcher’s name. He was internally torn at times between what he wanted and what others expected, but in remaining true to himself, he was able to earn the respect he desired without compromising respect for himself.
* The theme that I found to be the most prevalent and impactful when I read the novel was the theme of the search for identity. Obviously, the most important struggle for identity is within Young Elk. When the book first begins Young Elk often pursues his love of horse catching (or in most cases attempted horse catching). However this does not bode well with most members of the tribe. He is usually breaking rules and sneaking out in order to chase horses, and most people, especially the pretty ladies, want him to be a great warrior like his father and brother. His first big identity crisis comes when he kills the man from the other tribe that attacks Young Elk’s tribe. He does not want to be a killer, and his father even acknowledges this before he kills the man, but he does it for the good of the tribe. This is partially because he was the first person to see the attackers, and it was a matter of life or death. He is treated like a hero afterwards, which makes him even less proud of what he has done. Throughout the book Young Elk shows much compassion for all living things. Killing is just not an element of who he is, which is partly why he desires to be a horse catcher. He ends up having the dream which makes him go through the motions of becoming a horse catcher (after much deliberation and ceremony). I think the initial struggle in the first five chapters however is essential to the rest of the novel because it sets up and contrasts the person the Young Elk becomes in the latter half of the novel. Had he not going through the struggle and tribulations of shame, punishment, and even slaughter, he would not have been as strong or as sure of himself and his desire to be a horse catcher. I think Young Elk’s struggle for identity was a particularly important theme of the book that helped push the narrative from beginning to end.
* One of the themes that I find to be central to this book is one of self-awareness, and respect of that awareness. So often, we "raise up a child in the way (we want them to go)", rather than "the way they should go". It is especially difficult for young people who have expectations placed on their shoulders, when that is not the bent they feel they have. In *The Horsecatcher,* Elk has to fight this battle, while showing respect to his elders. Each of us has a responsibility to our community, while we still have a responsibility to be true to ourselves and our callings. We each much search for the proper balance in these two, while not being disrespectful of others and their needs. This could be easily worked into a book project...a compare and contrast project comes readily to mind.



**Chapter by Chapter discussion questions.**

Chapter One

* As the story opens, Young Elk is alone and seeking something, in this case, a particularly marked young colt. What insights into his character can the reader draw from this ?
* Usually horse capturing is a group effort, however Young Elk chooses to do it alone. Is he trying to prove something by doing things on his own? How so?
* How did Young Elk capture the Bear Colt? Why do you think he was so persistent in his chase of the strange-looking colt?
* What does the story about his grandmother reveal about Young Elk’s family? Do you have any family stories that give insight into your values or that you use to help you make every day decisions? Explain.
* This author does a good job of using imagery. Find two incidents of description that made your eyes, ears, nose, or skin feel as if you were in the story.
* How do you think Young Elk will be treated when he reaches home with his new colt? What things in this chapter make you think so? Be specific.
* The first chapter determined Bear Colt’s reputation with the tribe as a horse not worth capturing. However, through the course of the narrative the tribe starts to warm up to the strange-looking colt so that he winds up being trained as an important ceremonial horse. Do you think there are parallels between Bear Colt and Young Elk’s story? Explain.

Chapter Two

* What rules or laws had Young Elk violated? How was he treated when he returned? Why was it important to the group that he obey the rules? How is the way the group enforced the laws different from how we enforce our laws? How is it the same? Which way do you think is the most effective? Why?
* What danger did Young Elk pose onto his people? Do you think that the punishment inflicted upon Young Elk was more because of this danger than because of his disobedience?
* What is significant about the fact that Young Elk seeks solace in Bear Colt after his punishment has been handed out?
* What are the ways that Young Elk and his father are alike? How are they different? Which is most important to their relationship, their similarities or their differences?
* Young Elk uses hobbles to keep his horses from moving freely. How is *he* “hobbled’ in this chapter? Are the hobbles of his own making or do other people put them on him? Some horses learn how to move while wearing hobbles, figuring out how to move while still wearing them. Do you think he will find a way to escape from the hobbles, or do you think he will create his own way around the hobbles he wears? Why do you think so? Use specific examples from the book.
* As you read the novel, note the instances that Young Elk seeks out Bear Colt. What do you think that the colt could symbolize to Young Elk, to the people?
* During the horse raid led by Yellow Wolf, Young Elk is discovered and allowed to stay. Why did they allow Young Elk to go? Point to several reasons why the men allowed him to stay.

Chapter Three

* In chapter 3, Young Elk has the opportunity to prove that he is brave and kills a Kiowa, which is seen as a great accomplishment by the others in the tribe. What is his new ceremonial name? How does Young Elk feel about it? What actions does he take afterwards?
* Young Elk had a different set of values. How can you relate to the difficult situation Young Elk found himself? For instance, have you ever had to break a rule because it was necessary? Describe.

Chapter Four

* In Chapter 4, what did Young Elk have to accomplish in order to not be bothered with warring anymore? How did Young Elk feel about the task? What were the dangers he faced as he did this?
* Young Elk sets out to find the golden stallion in this chapter. At this point in your reading, how do you think he would feel if he did catch it? How would he feel if he did not? What goals in your life can you relate to with the impossible task he had to face and the determination it took to overcome?
* Family dynamics are explored somewhat in this chapter. How does the structure of Young Elk’s family differ from the modern family?
* How are gender roles different in the Cheyenne society? What are some reasons why Young Elk cannot directly talk to his mother and sisters besides the one given?
* What is the point of a second family? Is it better to support a stronger community or a stronger family in this society? Why?

Chapter Five

* When Elk went to bury his brother, Two Wolves, only bones were left at the battle site. How did he know which bones were his bother's?
* What factors really caused the Bowstrings to die in such a disastrous way? Please review each factor put forth in the chapter and either support it as a cause or refute it.
* In this chapter Young Elk describes the arrival of some young Sioux. He says, "They had been south to see a little of the world as was good before a man settles to village life." What other cultures send their young out into the world to explore before settling down? What benefit do you think this has to the individual and to the society?

Chapter Six

* Explain the foremost duty of the Arrow Keeper's wife. Why is this duty of such importance to the entire tribe?
* When Elk is captured by the Comanche he uses two items to help him escape. What are these two items? Which came from his "dreaming" and what is it's significance?

Chapter Seven

* In Chapter 7 Elk "was a little better prepared to go far from home this time." In what ways is he better prepared emotionally? How about physically? And what does Horsecatcher mean when he says, "You will need very strong medicine to make a returning"?

Chapter Eight

* The focal point of Chapter 8 is Sandoz's description of the battle between the stallions. How does her diction, syntax, and imagery create an accurate depiction of the violence in nature? What is Elk's reaction to what he witnesses?
* At the end of the chapter, Elk fears that more violence has occurred. "For a moment his heart seemed to stop, and guilt flooded over him." Explain.

Chapter Nine

* In Chapter 9 we join Young Elk in his adventure to bring home his first herd of horses. As Young Elk struggles to tame the dun and find a way to capture the other horses, he has a memory. “He remembered that the Horsecatcher said that there were things Elk must work out for himself.” What plan does Young Elk devise for catching the horses?
* As Young Elk faces his problems with the horses he wishes for guidance. “He wished Horsecatcher could be here to say what must be done.” What lessons did Young Elk learn from the Horsecatcher that helped him trap and care for the horses?
* The images of his return to the village that Young Elk imagines help foreshadow his return. What do you predict will happen in the next chapter after reading these thoughts?

Chapter Ten

* In Chapter 10 we share Young Elk’s triumph as his plan to capture the small herd of horses ends in success. Young Elk feels very lucky as he reflects on his adventure. “Not the stallion fight, the rattlesnake, or the Kiowas had touched him.” Describe one of these encounters and explain in what way Young Elk used his wits and his bravery to survive. What lesson did Young Elk learn about himself during the encounter you chose?
* Young Elk has captured two stallions on this trip, the blue and the dun. What are some characteristics of each of these horses that make them so desirable? Will Young Elk keep them for his own use, to build his herd? How will these horses contribute to his status as a horsecatcher for his tribe?
* “Elk’s uncle, Owl of the Bowstrings, made a little speech. “Perhaps our son should start a new society, the Horsecatchers!” he said, laughing a little. Imagine that there really is such a society. Create a list of rules for admittance to this society based on what you have learned while reading *The Horsecatcher.* Who would you nominate to be a member? Why would they be selected? What things do you think might be forbidden to the horsecatchers?

Chapter Eleven

* For what reason did Horsecatcher refuse the bay mare that Young Elk presents to him? Why did this refusal embarrass Young Elk?
* Why did Young Elk feel more at ease at Horsecatcher's lodge than he did at the scalp dance? What does this say about Young Elk and his sense of belonging?
* Why did Young Elk journey to the land of the Northern Cheyenne?

Chapter 11

* How does Elk struggle in this chapter with what he believes about who he is and the outside pressure from his father and his brother's memory?
* The *circle* is an archetype or symbol often seen in Native American Literature. In this chapter we see this archetype in relation to a Elk's reflections on his relationship with the earth. Explain.
* What examples do we see of cultural diversity from tribe to tribe in this chapter?

Chapter Twelve

* Why is the story of Young Elk killing a Kiowa brought up right away to the Northern Cheyenne warriors? How does Young Elk feel about the killing, and how is that different than how the warriors feel about it?
* Soon after arriving among the Northern Cheyenne, Young Elk is asked to join a war party attack against the Crow. He awkwardly refuses, but then feels bad for doing so. In an effort to comfort him, Horsecatcher's sister says, "Do not let your heart be on the ground, my nephew. You have selected the harder road." What does she mean by these lines? Do you think they were helpful to Young Elk?
* What assumptions are spoken about Young Elk after he refuses to join the war party? Think to the buffalo butchering party.
* Did Young Elk enjoy his time with the Northern Cheyenne? Provide evidence from the text to support your answer.
* Elk's visit to the Northern Cheyenne is a learning experience; what were some things that he learns during his time with his northern relatives?
* Compare the horse-catching scene in this chapter with the horse-catching scenes of chapters 8,9, and 10. How has Young Elk progressed in his profession and how has he changed?

Chapter Thirteen

* When Elk returns from the North, how is he treated with respect? How does this contrast with the same respect given to a returning warrior?
* Why do you think Elk only tells Horsecatcher's wife where he is going?
* The Cheyenne and the Comanche are sworn enemies, but Young Elk wants to see if the tales of the Two Sisters are true or not. How does Young Elk manage to accomplish getting into Comanche territory to watch the Two Sisters?
* How does Elk show courage and intelligence in order to gain a place amongst the Comanche?
* The Two Sisters wanted to do everything together as well as having the same identical things. Name at least three of the Sister’s wishes.
* Why was Young Elk so impressed with the Two Sister’s horse catching skills? What does Elk admire about the sisters?

Chapter Fourteen

* Why does Elk choose not to tell the Comanche sisters about Bear Colt and the Pelousy horse? Do you think this is a wise decision? Why or why not?
* Why are the girls so interested in Elk? How does he respond to this attention?
* Why do you think the Comanche men suddenly decided to attack Elk? How did they know that he was Cheyenne?
* Elk's idea to visit the Comanche camp is similar to a foreign exchange student coming from another country to study at our school. Compare and contrast the way that Elk is treated in the camp with the way foreign exchange students are treated.
* When Elk is hiding in the desert, what are some methods he uses to try to get water?
* How does Elk kill the buffalo calf? What does he use the calf for?
* Elk demonstrates his appreciation and kind-heart towards animals numerous times throughout the book. Give two specific examples of this kindness from chapters 14 and 15.

Chapter Fifteen

* What challenges does Young Elk face on his final horse raid?
* How does Elk capture and tame the White Horse?
* Why doesn't Elk make it back to camp with the White Horse?
* When Young Elk returns from his final horse raid, he returns to Bear Colt for comfort. Why do you think he does this?
* At the end of the story, Elk is given a new name. What is this name, and why is it significant?
* Even though Young Elk does not return with his full catch of ponies, he still has a sense of pride at the end of the novel. What is the source of this pride and how do the Cheyenne react at end of the novel?
* What do you think happens to Elk after the story ends? Write an afterward for the book, where you summarize Elk's life as an adult.



**Lesson Plans and Classroom Activities**

Here are some teaching activities for use with this novel, offering some specific ways to make *The Horsecatcher* come alive in the classroom for, perhaps, reluctant students/readers.

**Melinda Wright**

*The Horsecatcher* by Mari Sandoz

(2/23/09) by Mindy Wright, English teacher-Lincoln Southwest High School

A One (90 min. block) or Two Day (45 min. class) Web-based Lesson Plan On Horses and *The Horsecatcher*

Some of the web sites I have used in my lesson plan will change with time; however, you may still find success with the plan because you can use my key phrases, then simply update the various web sites you find for your students to search.

Objectives:

To help students understand the history of the horse in North America

To help students understand the location and interactions regarding horses between various Indian tribes on the Plains

To help students understand equine (horse) terms used in the novel

To help students connect the significance of horse catching to the main character, Elk, in the novel.

What You’ll Need to Prepare Before the Day of this Lesson:

1. Reserve a computer lab at your school for your class or prepare your students to access the Internet as homework.

2. Run off copies of the individual handout provided or make an overhead or ELMO copy to use with your entire class.

3. Decide if you are going to use this lesson as a graded assignment (summative) or an ungraded (formative) learning activity. If you decide on taking a grade, you will find a rubric you are welcome to use after the handout.

Lesson Plan

(my cooperative learning version, you may set the lesson up individually as well):

1. On 3X5 index cards write the name of as many of the following color types of horses as you need to create student groups: Example: if you want 6 groups of 4 students, then mix up 4 bay, 4 sorrel, 4 roan, 4 white, 4 dun, 4 claybank, gray, black, pelousy (Appaloosa) are extra if you prefer the name/color or if you need more groups.

Now I even go so far as to color coordinate my 3X5 notecards by major horse color to help students who are more visual, but then I LOVE that kind of detail connection, so my bay cards would be a red b, a black a, a red y, my sorrel would be a red s, a brown, o, a yellow r, a red r, a brown r, a yellow, e, a red l and so on (you just have to check out the actual color combinations of your horses. Spread index cards in your hand or on a desk/counter, and have every student choose a card. Their card determines their group randomly. (Pick your beautifully made cards up and rubber band them so you can use them again next year!) Tell students where in the classroom to sit as a group. (Approximately 15 min. with a class of 30)

2. Give each group one copy of the Horsecatcher Handout and read through the directions at the top. Tell students they should read over the entire handout and assign different questions to different people to find answers, then they can come together later in the class, or tomorrow to go over what they have found. (Approximately 15 min.)

3. Go to your school Computer Lab to allow students research time as you walk around offering suggestions or answering student questions. Or, this part of the lesson plan can be offered as homework.

4. In a school lab, have student groups sit in close proximity to one another so they can converse without other groups copying their answers. If on students are on their own or with their group outside of school, remind them their job is to find the information their group needs to function as the best/most cohesive (working together well) group.

*The Horsecatcher* Horse Handout

Turn in one of these handouts per group

Names of group members who contributed their “fair” share of information: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Depending on your group assignment, check out the following web sites to find the

information you need to do YOUR JOB for your group!

<http://www.thefurtrapper.com/indian_horse.htm>

(Spanish Colonial Horse and the Plains Indian Culture)

<http://www.equusite.com/articles/basics/basicsColors.shtm>

(Colors and types of horses)

<http://www.pryormustangs.org>

(a modern day mustang preserve in Wyoming)

<http://www.accessgenealogy.com/native/tribes/cheyenne/cheyennehist.htm>

(Cheyenne history)

<http://www.bigorrin.org/cheyenne_kids.htm>

(facts on the Cheyenne Indians)

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/WWcheyenne.htm>

(another history of the Cheyenne)

<http://www.greenhorn-horse-facts.com/indian-horse-names.html>

(Indian names for horses)

Questions for Your Groups/With Answer Key

1. What is a feral horse? A feral horse is a horse that has never been domesticated.

2. If Cortez did not introduce the horse to Plains tribes, who did? The tribes of the Southwest.

3. Where did Eohippus originate? North America

4. What is the Przewalski horse? The Przewalski horse is the last remaining specie of wild horses. All other horses have been domesticated, or descended from horses that were once domesticated. Until the mid-1990's, the Przewalski was extinct in the wild. Through efforts of the Przewalski Foundation in the Netherlands and breeding preserves in Askania Nova, Ukraine, two breeding groups of Przewalski horses were reintroduced to Mongolia. The ultimate goal of the Przewalski Foundation is to have the Przewalski horses running free on the Mongolian steppe

5. Describe a bay horse. Bay horses run from light reddish or tan shades to dark brown and mahogany/auburn shades. Bay horses always have black points (legs, muzzle, mane and tail, and the tips of their ears are black). Many bay horses have black legs that are covered by white markings.

6.. Describe a dun horse. Dun horses have a sandy/yellow to reddish/brown coat. Their legs are usually darker than their body and sometimes have faint "zebra" stripes on them. Dun horses always have a "dorsal" stripe, which is a dark stripe down the middle of their back. Sometimes the dorsal stripe continues down the horse's dock and tail, and through the mane. Many dun colored horses also have face masking, which makes the horse's nose and sometimes the rest of the face a darker color than the horse's body.

7. Describe a roan horse. Roan horses have otherwise solid colored coats, but with white hairs interspersed. The white hairs are not actual spots, but single white hairs mixed with the darker coat color. You'll find descriptions and pictures of some common roan colors below.

The Roan Gene can be applied to any color of horse. The most common are Red Roans, Bay Roans and Blue Roans. There are also Palomino Roans, Red Dun Roans, Dun Roans, Buckskin Roans, etc. The Roan gene adds white hairs into the body of the horse. The legs and head are not affected and will remain darker then the body. The mane and tail are usually not affected, but some may have some white hairs mixed in.

8. Describe a buckskin horse. Buckskin horses are a light-to-dark sandy yellow or tan color with all black points. Buckskins are very similar to duns, however, buckskins do not have a dorsal stripe or other "primitive" markings that are shown in the dun color.

9. Describe a white horse. There are a couple of different types of "white" horses. Dominant Whites are very rare and must have a white parent. They have pink skin, usually hazel or brown eyes and white hair. There are also Sabino Whites which can pop up in any breed that has the Sabino gene, this includes Arabs, Thoroughbreds, Quarter Horses, Paints, Tennessee Walkers, Saddlebreds, and more. A Sabino White is what we call a maximal pinto, just imagine that the white markings on the horse are so big they cover the entire horse. Sabino Whites also have white hair, sometimes with a few dark hairs on the poll or ears, pink skin and dark eyes.

10. Describe a sorrel (chestnut) horse. Chestnut, (also known as "sorrel"), is reddish brown. The points (mane, tail, legs and ears) are the same color as the horse's body (other than white markings). Chestnuts range from light yellowish brown to a golden-reddish or dark liver color. All chestnuts have shades of red in their coats.

11. Describe a black horse. Black horses have pure black coats with no signs of brown or any other color. Many horse-people mistake dark bays or liver chestnuts for black. If you can see any other color (with the exception of white markings) on the horse's coat in the winter, he is not a true black. The reason I say "in the winter" is because the sun tends to lighten a dark horse's coat in the summer, and the exception is when the hair has been sun-burnt.

12. Name the town and state closest to the Pryor Wild Mustang Center. Lovell, Wyoming

13. What is Shane vs. Red Cloud? It is a photo of two Pryor Mountain Stallions fighting.

14. Who are the Pryor Mountain Mustangs related to? The Spanish Conquistador’s horses.

15. How many feet are recommended for visitors to maintain between themselves and the wild horses they are viewing? The Pryor Mountain Wild Mustang Center and the Bureau of Land Management ask that visitors never get closer than 100 feet to the wild horses. We have found that this is a generous distance for viewing and photographing the horses.

16. What tribe drove the Cheyenne west? The Sioux

17. What treaty separated the Northern and Southern Cheyenne? This separation was made permanent by the treaty of Ft Laramie in 1851, the two sections being now known respectively as Southern and Northern Cheyenne, but the distinction is purely geographic, although it has served to hasten the destruction of their former compact tribal organization.

18. A famous chief of the Northern Cheyenne was \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Dull Knife

19. Who were the Cheyenne Dog Soldiers? The Dog Soldiers were the most famous of the Cheyenne warrior societies. They were also known as the Dog Warriors or Dog Men. They had this name because of a Cheyenne legend about dogs who turned into fierce warriors. Cheyenne Dog Soldiers were especially brave and honorable. When he was defending a Cheyenne village, a Dog Soldier would stake his long belt to the ground, to show that he would not run away but would defend his people to the death.

20. Who wrote a journal entry that was “A Report of an Exploration of the Country lying between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains (1842)” and dealt with the Cheyenne? John C. Fremont

BONUS: Name your imaginary group horse with the coolest first, middle, and last name you can all come up with, and you may use the Greenhorn Web Site to give you ideas.

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**Chyrel Remmers**

The Legend of the Horsecatcher

I teach at Madison Public School (Nebraska)  
English 1010/1020 and World Literature

Nebraska Reading-Writing Standards: Grade 8

8.1.3 By the end of the eighth grade, students will identify and classify different types of text.

8.1.4 By the end of the eighth grade, students will identify and apply knowledge of the structure, elements, and literary techniques to analyze fiction.

8.2.4 By the end of the eighth grade, students will demonstrate the use of multiple forms to write for different audiences and purposes.

8.2.5 By the end of the eighth grade, students will demonstrate the ability to use self-generated questions, note taking, summarizing and outlining while learning.

8.3.2 By the end of the eighth grade, students will use multiple presentation styles for specific audiences and purposes.

Teacher Directions/Notes:

Using a chapter (or partial chapter), each student (or pair of students) will create a legend of Young Elk and his exploits as a Horsecatcher. In order to create the legends, however, students must elaborate the imaginative details to create a character “larger than life.” It may be necessary to differentiate between a myth (supernatural forces, less “truth”) and a legend for students. Students should be able to clarify the “local lore,” a message and a theme for the legend.

Website Resources offer examples of legends.

Circle of Stories: <http://www.pbs.org/circleofstories/storytellers/index.html>

and <http://www.pbs.org/circleofstories/voices/index.html>

Native American Lore: <http://www.ilhawaii.net/~stony/loreindx.html>

First People: The Legends: <http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Legends/>

Technology Links

Students could record their legends using technology to incorporate music and digital pictures. (Caution: Authenticate student music and picture choices to ensure accuracy of storytelling information!)

Procedure:

1. Develop a list of characteristics of “legend.”

a. Orally passed.

b. Based on historical events.

c. Can explain natural phenomena.

d. Can be “embellished” with imaginative, but not supernatural, details.

e. Portrays the importance of the spirit of the individual or the cultural group.

2. Examine familiar legends of our culture.

a. Possibilities: George Washington and the cherry tree, Abe Lincoln’s returning change to customer, etc.

b. Websites will provide additional examples of Native American legends.

3. As a whole class, read the first half of Chapter 1 of *Horsecatcher*. Use that section to create a legend of Young Elk to model the process of creating and developing the legend.

a. What important characteristic might the class want to develop? (stealth, intelligence, patience, planning).

b. What additional details might be used to make Young Elk “larger than life”?

c. How can we create a story of conflict, rising action, and climax?

4. Each student (or cooperating pair) should choose a section of Young Elk’s experiences to create the legend of the “Horsecatcher.” Possibilities include these incidents from these chapters:

a. Being punished for sneaking out of camp. (2)

b. Catching Bear Colt (1-2)

c. Traveling with Yellow Wolf and catching several horses (2)

d. Delivering horses to others in the camp (2)

e. Killing the Kiowa (3)

5. Allow time for re-reading the text to choose a story for creating the legend, writing imaginative details, revising the legend, and practicing the story-telling for presentation.

**Amber Maire**

Even though I am not becoming a teacher, I just wanted to be a day in the plans. One lesson plan I would enjoy doing would be to have each student write down either a dream or something they want, whichever. After they decide their “dream”, whatever it may be, have the students write out a course of action or their plans on how they plan on getting what they want. Then have them correspond what they did to get what they wanted to what Young Elk did. Students can share their dreams and their plans if they wish.

**Stefanie McCain**

Theme Role-Play Activity- to be completed prior to reading novel.

Students will be assigned to groups to be determined by the instructor. Students will improvise skits in small groups about one of the following situations that are similar to situations in the novel.

Situation 1: A time you had to prove yourself to someone.

Situation 2: A time you wanted something that your enemies had or you had to overcome obstacles to gain what you wanted.

Situation 3: A time you may have had to take a risk for something you believed in.

Situation 4: A time that you hade to make a choice that caused disappointment from others.

Situation 5: A time you had to work to gain recognition from others.

During reading of novel students can come back to these situations and record in a reading journal examples that illustrate these situations. After reading students can reflect on how they dealt with the hypothetical situation their group acted out at the beginning and compare it to how Young Elk reacted to the same situations.

**Gina Burke**

"TRAIL DAY" field trip

Classroom or group activity to accompany the reading of *The Horsecatcher* by Mari Sandoz

TRAIL DAY FIELD TRIP:

Plan a field trip for your students. This trip will be a day at a local park and nature trail or some other known area that is abundant with plants and wildlife. Have a nature hunt scavenger list prepared. It should include plants and animals that could be seen on your trail. Prior to leaving for your trip, talk with your students about how they will get the best results in experiencing wildlife. Give them examples from the book *Horse Catcher.* Discuss the different ways that Elk hid while on his journeys so as not to been seen by enemies or scare off the horses. This would be a good discussion to have the day before the trip, allowing the students to find examples from the story. Along with learning about ‘behavior’ in the wilderness the students can make a parfleche and water bladder. The directions follow. After your walk through nature, find a quiet clearing where you can sit with your students and discuss the items they found, saw or heard while on their journey.

Once back in the classroom, have your students write a paper about their adventure. Encourage them to try and draw pictures of any plants or animals they saw along the way.

(I did this activity with a multi-level Girl Scout troop, ages 6 to 16. We paired the girls off, a younger one with an older one. It proved to be a wonderful day. We ended it with a campfire, singing, dancing and a camp out. I had 33 girls and 7 adults. The Girl Scout camp site here, in North Platte was a perfect place for this activity. There is another awesome camp site in Grand Island. Try it. I think you will really enjoy it.)

MAKING A PARFLECHE:

Directions for preparing material:

Give each student an 8" x 18" sheet of brown paper. To simulate the look of buckskin, the paper should be crumpled up tightly and then carefully opened and laid flat. Using an electric iron, press the sheets flat. Ironing does not remove the wrinkles, but causes the material to lay flat so that it can be folded and worked.

After flattening, fold each edge over about 1/2 inch and glue it down. This reinforced the edges (real buckskin would not have been folded at the edges). Then fold the sheet up about 7 inches from the bottom. The remaining portion forms the top flap of the parfleche and is folded down. The flap is reinforced by folding the corners over to form a pointed tip, which is then folded down and glued in place.

Students are provided with a variety of visual sources for designs. Many will chose to use the traditional Plains-style designs as a source of inspiration for their own. On a separate sheet of paper, they developed their designs. Using rulers and pencils, they lay out their designs on the front of their parfleches.

The designs are to cover the front of the parfleche, extending under the flap. The part of the design that is covered by the flap is to be repeated on the flap so that the entire design would be visible with the parfleche opened or closed. The pencil lines are then traced over by fine-tipped markers, and color is added. The color of the material is included as one of the colors of their designs.

With the design completed, the students fold the parfleche together, leaving the flap up, and measured for holes through which to string the raffia/sinew. The holes are laid out 1/2 inch in from each edge and 1/2 inch apart along both sides.

Holes can be punched with standard hole punches, or blunt tapestry needles could be used to punch more realistic holes in the material. Two holes are then punched in the flap 1/2 inch from the end and about 1 1/2 inches apart. Corresponding holes in the front of the parfleche are punched with a tapestry needle.

One strip of raffia about a foot long is slipped through the holes in the front of the parfleche from the inside, pull even and glue into place. This will form the tie that will hold the parfleche closed on those long treks. Using a plastic tapestry needle as a substitute for a bone needle, the sides of the parfleche are stitched with raffia using any number of stitching techniques.

Once the students have their parfleche finished, they can use them to pack a lunch that they will take with them on a “Trail Day” field trip. Students can also make raw string pouches to carry their juice/water bottles. These would be substitutes for the buffalo bladders that the Indians used.

Give each student 2 circles of brown paper about 18-24 inches in diameter. Follow the crinkling and ironing procedures in the parfleche instructions. Glue the two circles together at the edges. This will give them added strength. Punch holes ½ inch from the edge of the circle and ½ inch from each other. Be sure to go all the way around the circle. Weave a strip of raffia through the holes, leaving two knotted ends. When these ends are pulled taught the circle will fold up into a pouch. 8 to 10 ounce bottles should fit inside, nicely.

**Janelle Wallinger**

These are the directions I would give my class when we begin the reading.

Within each chapter of *The Horsecatcher* Young Elk has new experiences. In order to better visualize the events, we, as a class, will create an illustrated storyboard for each chapter. Each of our four walls will have a large piece of paper hung on it. Upon completion of each chapter we will all work together to create pictures which tell the story. Each paper will cover 3-4 chapters dependent upon the events. When we finish the book we should be able to look at our illustrations and follow the experiences and growth of Young Elk. So, pull out your drawing pencils, put on your creative cap, and let’s surround ourselves in the images of this coming of age story.

**Amy Prince**

*The Horsecatcher* Lesson Plan/Activity

Audience: Middle School/ High School aged students

Objectives:

1) To gain a better understanding of the Cheyenne Native Americans and their culture.

2) To exercise creative writing, and improve the techniques used

3) To enhance critical thinking skills

Steps:

1) Reserve a computer lab

2) Create scenarios that kids will go through based upon incidents that happened within the book. Scenarios will likely have to be doubled in order for every student to get one.

3) Have students research Cheyenne lifestyles and customs

4) Once this is complete, have each student draw from a hat or bucket the scenario that they will have to deal with.

5) After the students have received their scenario, hand out the rubric for their project.

6) Basic rubric qualifications:

a. They have to write a paper, journal and something extra dealing with how they would handle the situation presented to them while staying true to the Cheyenne culture.

b. Students may choose to do an artistic project for an extra effect, but mostly the goal is to get them to write about how they would feel during the situation, how they would handle it, etc.

c. You can be creative as to other aspects you want the students to complete.

**Virginia Post**

One of the major projects I would do with this book is have students design an artifact for the story. I think it lends itself quite well to this method of presentation. I like this because it gets students thinking about symbolism, and allows them to select their own preferred style of learning. I would discuss it with the students prior to the reading, with it being due at the end of the book.

ARTIFACT: Present a real, 3-D, tangible object that represents the story *The Horescatcher.* Be prepared to present this to the class. You need to have a typed explanation of why you selected the artifact you did, and how it represents the events and feelings in the book. (Examples: Rock Pyre – Japanese internment camp (rock gardens are part of culture). “Night” – chimney, fence, dead people, fence with an open gate, broken violin, bread & water, etc.) "Speak" -- custodial closet, two-sided face (speaking/non-speaking), tree.

**Judith Johnson**

Anticipation Guide for The Horse Catcher

Name: Period: Date:

Directions: In front of each of the statements, pick one of the statements to write. Be prepared to defend and support your opinions with specific examples. ( Write the examples on the back of the worksheet.)

After reading the text, compare your opinions on those statements with one of the characters from the story. Do you agree or disagree with the character? Why or why not?

Have any of your opinions changed? If yes, why do you think so? If no, why not?

Strongly Agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

1. Families always have their members’ best interests at heart.

2. Hard work always guarantees success.

3. Setting a goal and working to achieve it is an honorable way to live.

4. Traditions should always be followed.

5. Animals are easier to work with than human beings.

6. Pride is a good thing.

7. Courage comes in many different forms.

8. Education only happens in school.

9. Society’s rules (laws) should always be obeyed.

10. It is easier to be physically brave rather than emotionally brave.



**Reader Testimonials**

Share your reactions and responses to *The Horsecatcher.* These can be both personal and critical responses, formal and informal. Think of book clubs, blogs and other places were people express their responses to what they read. Here are some specific areas you might respond to:

* What were your most favorite/least favorite parts of the novel?
* Is the novel well-written? Point to specific examples to illustrate, yes or no.
* Can you relate to the characters in the narrative? Howso?
* Can you relate to the setting of the narrative? Howso? (does living in Nebraska affect your response)?
* What larger issues do you think Sandoz was trying to investigate in the novel?
* Do you see any of the themes and issues that we ourselves have been exploring in this course at work in this novel?

Your responses should be focused, specific and detailed (supported with evidence from the text) and accurate and error-free (don't forget, that these may be exhibited on the Sandoz web site).

**Amber Maire**

I really enjoyed readying this book because it discusses the ways of the Indians many years ago and helps me grasps the idea of all the fighting that went on. I also enjoyed reading about how Young Elk tried to catch all the wild horses while staying away from “the bad guys”. I felt many different emotions while reading *The Horsecatcher* because Young Elk had some very close calls, which made the book intense, but also sad because his colt had to suffer at times. Also the fact that people would not even look at him in the beginning because he would not become a big strong warrior like he should, but he wanted to be a horsecatcher, then in the end they all praised him. Young Elk had to work very hard to get what he wanted, but in the end he got it, so never let go of your dreams.

I think anyone can relate to this novel no matter your age or gender because it points out great life lessons for anyone and everyone.

**Judith Johnson**

For me, this is a very powerful book. My favorite part of the novel exemplifies this. When Young Elk finally captures the White Horse, he is everything that we all want to be: successful, at the pinnacle of his craft. He has achieved his goal; he will be able to come back to the village with his head held high, and he will finally receive the accolades of those who matter most to him. At the height of his success, he must make the choice to let it all go in order to protect his people, and he does. He chooses to make that sacrifice in order to care for his friends and family and even those who couldn’t understand his way of life. He chose his love for those people over his own success.

People have talked about Mari Sandoz as being a difficult author, but I think this novel for the young adult audience is well written and accessible for young people. The plot line is something to which young adults can relate, the struggle to find his/her own identity. Young Elk struggles with following the direction his heart wants to take him and doing what the rest of his world believes is the right thing. With the help of his mentor, he does find his way in the world, creating his own place in that world, a place no one else has occupied in exactly the same way before, which is symbolized at the end when he receives the names of both his father and his mentor.

I could relate to the characters in this novel. I grew up working with horses, and I loved reading the passages where he was using the horse’s own curiosity to draw him closer. I loved experiencing the joy of riding a fast horse like his Blue Runner as fast as he could go and doing it for the pure exhilaration that it gave. I knew his frustration and worry as I have worked with orphaned colts, hoping they would learn to drink and would survive the loss of their mothers.

I could relate to the setting of the narrative, but I am sure that living in Nebraska has affected my response. My heart swells when I see the long grass rippling in the breeze. I love the smell of the prairie after a thunderstorm has passed through and the golden light is shining out from under the clouds and hitting the dark midnight blue of the retreating storm. Sandoz does an incredible job of capturing that imagery on the printed page. I can hear the little bird twittering at Young Elk; I heard the horses whinny during the stallions’ battle; I felt the extreme cold and hunger of the winter.

I believe that Sandoz was exploring several issues, but I think one of them was near and dear to her heart: what path do you follow when your heart’s desire makes your family unhappy with you? Mari’s strained relationship with her father and his well-known dislike of ‘writers of fiction’ combine in this narrative, but she explores it in such as way to be accessible for younger readers. Along with this theme, she is also exploring what it means to be a good citizen. Which laws do we follow? Why do we follow them? What are the consequences for other people when we don’t?

All through this book, Mari’s knowledge of Indian ways shines through. Her deep rooted respect for those who were her friends during her childhood enables this book maintain its integrity. In this book, she explores the joy that Young Elk felt in being a Cheyenne and an Indian. He feels pride in the accomplishments of his people and is glad that he is part of them. In this book, set largely before the time of white control, she examines the daily life and gives a certain insight that many other books can’t give even though she is not of Indian descent herself.

**Chyrel Remmers**

Sandoz's *The Horsecatcher* is a literary accolade to the power of the individual. Young Elk's quests were undertaken singularly; he depended only on his own power, his own wit, and his own ingenuity to snare his beloved horses, to escape his captors, to overcome setbacks that befell him. Although Young Elk is "lonesome" at times on the stark Nebraska prairie, he is not lonely. Rather he is comfortable in his own solitude.

Young Elk's singularity is evident in his sensitivity to killing/harming animals. He vows early in Chapter 1 to "harm no living thing." He is ashamed to kill even a snake (p.115.) Even at the risk of his own safety, Young Elk has, as his foremost concern, the welfare of his horses. He calls it a "grieving thing to see the hurts" of the dun stallion (p.102). He is pained to hobble the horses (even when it is only to tame them) because hobbling them leaves them defensive against their enemies. At a time when Young Elk is encouraged to conform to the reputation of his warrior family, he is cognizant of the "softness" within his own heart for all living things.

Although his family does not necessarily understand him, he carefully balances their hopes for him with his own vision of himself. He is his own man, dedicated to his own vision. He can not be corralled into being the warrior for the sake of his family; he has a duty to himself. Just as the White One cannot be captured, so too, does Young Elk remain free to follow his own path. As Henry Ward Beecher said: "A man in the right, with God on his side, is in the majority, though he be alone."

**Penny Wikum**

“Earth, we are a part, of you,” the Arrow Keeper’s wife said softly over and over, Earth, we-” Gray Thunder, Keeper of the Sacred Arrows was killed. When this man of peace, who kept the Arrows of great power, fell in battle his wife was nearby as was her duty. She could not stop to mourn or even compose the face of her man. She had made a vow to protect the Arrows with her life and deliver them safely into the hands of the headmen of her people. Young Elk rode to protect her as she fled to the prairie. Sandoz writes, “And as he ran he saw that not all the courage, all the brave heart, was back there among the fighters. Perhaps this was a stronger thing here, and done without fighting, without blood upon the ground…” Young Elk had yet another female relative that was to have great impact on forming his mind and spirit. The Keeper’s wife in breath-bursting runs moved fast and long over the exposed ground. Nothing would hold her. Her legs would give way. She would sink down only to rise a few minutes later like a startled deer. The next evening Elk again rescued his aunt. He found her in ‘an aimless shamble as though wounded to dying…face gaunt and sunken…feet bleeding and swollen thick with cactus thorns. This is universal a commonality among women of all culture the Young Elk returned with his aunt to Fort Bend. The Sacred Arrows handed over for renewal and transferred to a new Keeper. Perhaps Sandoz related suffering and self-sacrifice to her audience knowing the strength that comes of from such hardships. The reader is involved with Young Elk emergence into self. Body, soul, and spirit Elk evolves and becomes. He explores the natural world of creation and creatures, and the supernatural as all this is considered important by Sandoz. I appreciate the way she portrays strength in this older Indian woman, as a duty and a belief. Even though the task was demanded of her by the culture it was still her personal or interior response to mankind to run the ‘Arrows ‘. All the women in the book taught, ministered, and encouraged Elk. They were strong, had great impact and influenced the formation of his ideals. Sandoz endured many hardships and perhaps some are revealed on the pages of the “Horsecatcher.” She was burdened with heavy responsibility at a young age. She understands that generosity, determination and courage are glad companions. I recognize these women of the prairie and give them love and honor.

**Melinda Wright**

Mari Sandoz’ novel *The Horsecatcher* definitely caught me! I was engrossed in Sandoz’ characterization and setting from the beginning of the novel. Young Elk moved as “the wolf travels, where he would not be silhouetted against the sky and yet where he could search the wide slopes of prairie on both sides, and vanish quickly in either direction if need be” (7). I am always intrigued by prairie or Plains settings because I enjoy reading unique and varied descriptions of where I actually live. The connection I made with the young, Cheyenne, main character occurred during his first capture of a wild foal with the bear marking on its side. The scene description and the young man’s tenacity were enough to pique my interest for the rest of the book. I had to find out what happened next!

Sandoz’ writing style makes the novel as straightforward as possible in the telling of her tale. She relates the story directly. Her third person limited narrator is believable in sharing characterization, plot, and setting. “The smoke from the evening fires crept in long blue layers under the golden sun. It was the time for laughter and games, but Young Elk had to stand before his father and the other councilors, be shamed by their reminding words, . . .” (22). Sandoz also uses colorful imagery that’s not overdone, yet depicts the beauty of a prairie sunset, just what she wants the reader to visualize.

My favorite and least favorite scene in the novel *The Horsecatcher* was Young Elk’s witnessing of the battle between the wild stallions. The scene fascinated and repelled me at the same time, and I wondered what Young Elk thought. “It was the wildest, fiercest battle Young Elk ever saw, with the air full of dust and flying earth, the horses cut and torn, covered with dirt, blood dripping” (99). I also appreciated the scene with the gentling of the bay after the blue roan beats him. For Young Elk “It was a grieving thing to see these hurts, these woundings. His skin, which had been a dun rich as sunlight on fall bunch grass, was torn and scarred and swollen so that barely one spot the size of the palm remained sound” (102). Sandoz’ description of Young Elk’s care of the bay made me think carefully about the time, effort, and energy the young man puts into capturing the small herd of wild horses. His motivation and goals were clarified for me in this scene.

Sandoz clearly tells a coming of age story in this novel. Young Elk becomes “Elk River, the Horsecatcher!” by the last page of the story (192). The two adults who have the greatest impact on the young man’s life are his two fathers, and they are the ones who give him his new and honored name. The theme of finding oneself and coming of age in The Horsecatcher reminds me of Zitkala-Sa’s stories of her childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. She doesn’t always see eye-to-eye with her mother, just as Young Elk doesn’t always agree with Elk River. Another similarity between Zitkala-Sa and Young Elk is that neither one is willing to compromise their strong beliefs to reach a goal. The young woman continues to pursue rights for Indians and leaves her teaching post because she knows she cannot change the Indian School by staying there. Similarly, Young Elk has to give up his dream of bringing home a white stallion because he is not willing to take a human life in exchange for it.

**Leah Church**

I enjoyed reading Mari Sandoz's *The Horsecatcher.* In fact, this was the first book I read that was written by this acclaimed author, and now I would like to read more of her stories. This novel's recommended audience is juvenile; however, the book's straight-forward language as well as the author's knowledge has made *Horsecatcher* an easy read for adults. Adolescents and adults will appreciate Sandoz's frank style of describing Young Elk's many adventures of capturing wild horses and to read her insightful portrayal of life and culture among the Cheyenne and other notable Mid-Western tribes. Also, the story's themes were not hard to grasp and many readers would like how the main character, Young Elk, balanced his individualistic values with the needs of his tribe.

The amount of detail the author put into each one of the Young Elk's successful horse catches almost ran the risk of being tedious as reading a how-to manual. Then just in time, she would transition smoothly into a new suspense or into Young Elk's tribe. Also, Mid-Western people could relate to Sandoz's freely expressed details about the landscape and climate of the prairies. As a native Nebraskan I am very aware of the drastic weather patterns of this area and since I use to live near the Platte River, I liked it whenever Sandoz mentioned it. Overall, this was a good story.

**Janelle Wallinger**

Sandoz's *The Horsecatcher* is an easy and enjoyable read for individuals of all ages. As a native Nebraskan I felt connected to the landscape Young Elk explores as he pursues the wild mustangs. The description of the water pool in Chapter 9 reminded me of the flow well which bubbles with cold, clear water. My imagination was able to run through the hills as Young Elk is trying to avoid being caught by enemies. I also felt the sting of the sand burrs as Many Moccasins ran with the Sacred Arrows.

While there were several themes Sandoz wove throughout her narrative, I felt this is a great novel about perseverance and discipline. Each time Young Elk goes out to capture horses he learns valuable lessons which force him to better discipline himself. This is a valuable theme for our modern world and for readers of all ages. Despite pressure from his family and tribe, Young Elk pursues his goals and does not compromise his innate value for life.

**Julie Hoadley**

In *The Horsecatcher,* Mari Sandoz gives readers a skillfully crafted story with vivid descriptions of both the physical setting and the daily activities of Native Americans. She gives us a human account of a group of human beings who have historically been misunderstood, misrepresented, and stereotyped. Young Elk is not only a likable character, but admirable and lovable. We are allowed to travel with him as he searches for the best way to earn respect from his tribe while conducting himself according to his own personal morals and values. I was drawn to this story because of Young Elk’s integrity. I appreciated that he had the courage to stay true to his heart, pursue his dreams, and at the same time consider the needs and safety of his people. He was teased and belittled for his beliefs but never abandoned them. In some ways, Young Elk was the embodiment of Native Americans as they should be portrayed, as well as a positive role model for everyone. His love and concern for his family and tribe, his connection to and appreciation for nature, the care he uses when interacting with all things he shares the earth with, and his devotion to his principles are all qualities everyone could use more of.

**Megan Horn**

For the most part, I enjoyed reading Mari Sandoz’s *The Horsecatcher,* and found it to be an engaging and exciting work. Not only did I like the main character, but thought his progression was realistic. My favorite parts of the book were the horse-catching scenes and the general information given about the horse aspect in the Cheyenne society along with other tribes (Kiowa, Sioux, and Comanche). The importance of horses to these tribes was unspeakable, and the dynamics of the warrior societies depended on the training and use of horses. Without the horse-catchers, there would have been no warriors, and I think this point was made clear through Young Elk’s infatuation with the horses and also the description of day-to-day life. In scenes like the butchering of the buffaloes in the northern country, there could have been no way to kill and butcher as efficiently as they did the vast number of buffaloes killed. The horses, though not valued as they should have been, keep the warrior societies going.

My least favorite parts of the novel were probably any mention of Red Sleeves. To me, she represented the vast portion of his tribe that was grossly ignorant to the way in which their tribe is sustained. She wants him to be a warrior, but he is (and I think for the sake of the tribe) must be the next horse-catcher.

For the most part I relate to Young Elk and his desire to find himself. I think anyone can identify with this universal theme, especially those of its target audience. I did have a few problems with Sandoz’s writing, basically her lack of emphasis on any subject. She seems to treat everything the same in terms of description or explanation. More important scenes seem to get just as much emphasis as lesser scenes. The horse-catching where he gets the blue racer and the whole pack of wild horses get three chapters devoted to it while the other horse-catching expeditions get maybe one or two pages devoted to them. It might just be me wanting more details, but it is frustrating reading something that seems important to the story but is given only a few sentences.

**Thomas Oleksy**

In my opinion, keeping in mind that this work fits under the umbrella of “adolescent literature,” I believe it is well written. It is a very effective novel for adolescents for many reasons. The main reason that it is effective and therefore well written for adolescents in my opinion is because many aspects make it a good transitional novel for adolescents into “adult” literature (for lack of a better word). I thought the actual writing was pretty mature for being considered for adolescents, as well as some of the thematic elements. The major theme that I thought could be a nice transition for adolescents is the idea of the internal struggle for identity. This is a theme that is mature and is prevalent in many adult pieces of literature, such as “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” by Tolstoy or even more contemporary work such as “The Joy Luck Club” by Amy Tan. The fact that this theme is still very prevalent in literature today, especially in more mature literature, means that Young Elk’s struggle would be a great way to introduce such a theme to the adolescents that read the book. A second way that “The Horse Catcher” is a good transitional novel for adolescents into more mature literature is though the writing itself. I am sure that for many of us this work was a moderately easy read. However, if you take time to really examine the language it is not only pretty substantial for an adolescent, but it is also very poetic. A line from even the very first paragraph of the novel will demonstrate this. An example reads “He [Young Elk] moved as the wolf travels, where he would not be silhouetted against the sky and yet where he could search the wide slopes of prairie on both sides, and vanish quickly in either direction if need be” (7). Wow, this sentence is not only packed with beautiful, intelligent language, but it also has poetic images such as traveling as the wolf, or trying to avoid being silhouetted. I think it is important for adolescents to be exposed to this intellectual, poetic language at a young age not only to be ready for the more mature work that is assigned in college, but also just to improve one’s own speech and comprehension. With these elements in mind, I think that “The Horse Catcher is a well written novel that serves its purpose for adolescents. I am glad that we read it for class