Title: The Real Cowgirl
Author: Isabelle Duff

Illustrator: Susannah Crispe

ISBN: 9781922539687 | Publication date: June 2024

Audience age: 3-8 years

Key Curriculum Areas: English, Mathematics, Science / STEAM,

HASS, Health and Physical Education, Visual Arts



SYNOPSIS:

An inspiring story about the people – and animals – who make us brave, perfect for young readers who are struggling with nerves or anxiety. In *The Real Cowgirl*, Sal feels safe and strong at home, and out riding with her pony. She has big dreams of being a cowgirl; of being brave, smart and wild. But at school, where she feels anxious and isolated, those dreams seem very far away. How will Sal find her self-confidence and be her true self even when she is scared? Join Sal and her pony for this heart-warming story about friendship, and the way in which it can make you feel brave. Featuring beautiful, vibrant illustrations of Sal's life on the farm, it will delight young readers with an interest in animals and adventure. It will also provide inspiration and comfort for children who experience anxiety, showing them the power of small acts of bravery, and how our friends can build us up to feel all the wonderful things they already see in us. *The Real Cowgirl* was inspired by the author's own childhood, growing up on a farm in NSW, Australia with her pony as a source of support and comfort. It is a story about being yourself, finding bravery through friendship, and what it takes to be a real cowgirl.

THEMES:

• Friendship • Emotions - anxiety and isolation • Self-confidence • Animals • Adventure

SELLING POINTS:

- Addresses the common issue of feeling anxious about school, and shows young readers ways to cope with this feeling.
- The second book from a talented young author, based on her personal experience of her own struggles with anxiety.
- Ideal for use by parents, caregivers and teachers as a conversation-starter with kids about scary feelings, in particular feeling anxious.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION:

I grew up riding horses with my mother on my parents farm, my first pony, Bindi, was a huge part of my life and source of support, and I wanted to be a real cowgirl when I grew up. I often didn't like going to school, it made me very anxious and I would come home and go straight out into the paddock. This anxiety is something that I have carried forward throughout my teenage years and into adulthood. I wrote The Real Cowgirl about friendship and the way in which it can make you feel brave. It is still my friends that make me feel the most brave.

In *The Real Cowgirl*, Sal finds going to school scary and isolating, she feels safe and strong at home. Throughout the story, we see her friends, both her pony and her human friend, help her to feel brave and build her up to feel all the wonderful things they can see in her.

I wanted to emphasise a set of qualities that I think make a "real cowgirl" as the things my mum taught me it was the most important to be growing up: brave, strong, wild, smart, kind, fierce, a good friend. To help start conversations with kids about scary feelings, in particular feeling anxious. I think a huge part of improving the way we deal with mental illness is reducing the stigma in young kids and giving them the tools to empathize with themselves and others.

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND:

Isabelle Duff is a farmer, author, and student at the University of New South Wales, where she is studying Advanced Science and Commerce. She has worked on her family farm near Manildra, NSW, where they farm sheep and cattle, and crop. Isabelle is a self-proclaimed 'tree hugger', passionate about science and environmental agribusiness. She hopes to one day manage the family business. She has volunteered at her local primary school and is keen to facilitate discussions with children about mental illness, to help reduce stigma and ignorance.

Susannah Crispe is a Canberra-based children's book illustrator and author with a background in zoology and art history. She has travelled all over the world – from the Arctic to the Amazon and many places in between – and has volunteered with wildlife in wonderful places. She is passionate about books and inspiring curiosity and creativity with her work. Susannah illustrated Isabelle's first book, *Cookie*, as well as *Where the Heart Is* (also with EK Books).

INTERVIEW

AUTHOR:

What is the inspiration for this story?

The Real Cowgirl is inspired by my childhood, growing up on a farm, riding my little pony around and imagining I was a cowgirl. It is also inspired by my mother, the real-life Sal, and the kind of people she raised my brother and I to be. She taught me how to ride, and how to be all the things Sal is learning to be in the story: brave, kind, strong and a good friend. More directly, The Real Cowgirl is about friendship and the way in which it can make you feel brave. It is still my friends that make me feel the most brave.

What was the most rewarding part of this project?

I hope *The Real Cowgirl* can help some little cowgirls and cowboys feel brave and strong and fierce and wild. I hope this is a story that can make it easier to talk about being scared or feeling small, and help friends help each other to be brave.

What was the most challenging part of this project?

Writing from my own experience with mental illness is always pretty scary. But I hope that including anxiety in my stories can help reduce the stigma around mental illness, and make it easier to start conversations with kids about big, scary feelings.

ILLUSTRATOR

What media do you use to create your illustrations? Briefly describe your process.

I created the illustrations in this book using a combination of traditional and digital media. I painted the characters and backgrounds using watercolour paints and colour pencils, then scanned them into my computer. Using a special computer program called Photoshop, I created digital collages. I cut out all the objects and characters with a digital cutting tool – the same way you could do with scissors and a piece of paper – then layered them on top of one another to create each picture.

What was the most rewarding part of this project?

Seeing the deep connection between the characters come through in my illustrations was really rewarding. I also felt energised when I was painting the setting of the story. I think I captured the feel of the farm in the Australian bush, and I love the colour palette.

What was the most challenging part of this project?

Learning to draw horses was my biggest challenge. It took me a long time to design the pony character, to make it's shape and movements accurate while keeping it's style in line with the other stylised characters in the book.

TEACHER ACTIVITIES/NOTES:

N.B. These questions and activities can be adapted to suit the experience and ability of students.

DISCUSSION: BEFORE READING

- Ask students, what is a 'cowgirl'? List all the things they know about cowgirls. Eg. What animal do
 they ride? What is their purpose? What kinds of qualities do they need to do this job? What kind of
 gear / clothing do they need? What kind of location do they work in?
- Look at the cover of 'The Real Cowgirl'. What do you notice? How do you think the characters are feeling? How does the cover make you feel? What might be meant by the title? What do you think this story is about, and what does it make you wonder?

DISCUSSION: DURING READING

- Why do you think Sal doesn't feel like a real cowgirl? Is it because she doesn't have a hat and boots, or might there be another reason?
- Can you tell who is narrating the story? How does this character feel about Sal?
- Why do you think Sal doesn't feel brave or smart or strong or wild at school? How is this different to how she feels on the horse?
- What do you think is making her sad? What do you think Sal might do next?
- Do you think Sal has achieved what she wanted to achieve? Is there any way she could feel even better about herself?

DISCUSSION: AFTER READING

- What did you like / dislike about this story? How did it make you feel? What was your reaction to the ending? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- What did you learn about Sal? How did she change by the end of the story? How was she still the same?
- What did you learn about Sal's horse? Did the horse's feelings about Sal change throughout the story?
- Why do you think that Sal wants to feel brave, smart, strong and wild at school, like she does when she's riding? How do these things make her feel about herself, and what are the opposite feelings?
- What did Sal do to be brave? Did her horse help her to be brave? In what ways?
- Why is it important for Sal to have a friend, both at school and to ride with? What words can you think of to describe how Sal felt without friends? (eg. isolated, lonely)
- Why do you think Sal and her friend are on 'on a secret mission to save the world'?
- What else does this story make you wonder about? What would you like to know?
- How does the story show the importance of overcoming anxiety? How did Sal's anxiety affect her
- What other strategies can you think of for coping with anxiety? Think of a time that you felt nervous, small or scared. What did you do?
- What do you like about the illustrations? How does the colour palette help to show the atmosphere in this setting? How do the facial expressions and body language show how Sal is feeling in different parts of the story? Can you also notice the horse's expressions in these moments?
- How can you relate to this story? Have you had moments where you had to be brave, strong and wild? How have you connected with other people or animals? Why is this important?

ACTIVITIES:

ENGLISH

Vocabulary: Spelling digraph 'ow'

(AC9EFLY10) (AC9EFLY12) (AC9EFLY13) (AC9EFLY14) (AC9E1LY11) (AC9E1LY13) (AC9E1LY14) (AC9E2LY09) (AC9E2LY10) (AC9E2LY11)

The word 'cowgirl' contains the digraph 'ow'.

• Brainstorm, find and list other words with the same spelling pattern. Discuss the ways the phoneme 'ow' is pronounced with a different sound in some words.

Sound 1: cows, howl, prowl, now, fowl, down, town, towel, etc.

Sound 2: bowl, sow, crow, throw, snow, grow, etc.

- Students can also:
 - Say the words out loud
 - Clap the syllables in each word
 - Write the words broken up by syllables. Eg. pr/ow/l
 - Write the definitions of the words
 - Sort the 'ow' words by rhyme
 - Make the words with watercolour paints, natural materials like leaves, or spell them with your fingers or body with a friend.

Vocabulary: Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives

(AC9EFLA08) (AC9E1LA07) (AC9E2LA07) (AC9EFLY13)

• Locate in the book the nouns, verbs and adjectives relating to Sal being a cowgirl and her feelings in different parts of the story. Students could use **BLM 1** to sort the words into the columns.

Nouns: Sal (proper noun), cowgirl, boots, hat, paddocks, hills, school, cows, birds, trees, circus tricks, friend, fairy houses, etc.

Verbs: ride, gallop, flying, smiles, race, leaping, explore, save, skips, etc.

Adjectives: real, brave, smart, strong, wild, biggest, small, scared, fierce, kind, wonderful, fast, etc.

 Students could add to these lists and create sentences including some of these terms. Illustrate sentences with pictures of Sal and her horse, or themselves, during a time they felt either anxious or brave. See BLM 2.

Vocabulary: Compound Words

(AC9EFLA08) (AC9E1LA07) (AC9EFLY13) (AC9E2LY10) (AC9E2LY11)

'Cowgirl' is a compound word; made up of two or more words that come together to express a single meaning. 'Cow + girl = cowgirl'. Compound words can be closed, open or hyphenated.

- With 'horse' either as the base word or ending, students can brainstorm a list of compound words. For example, 'horse + power = horsepower', horsemen, horsewomen, horseshoe, horseback, horserace, horse riding, sawhorse, seahorse, hobbyhorse, racehorse, etc.
- Students might like to use the horse template to write their compound word equations. See BLM 3.
- Play other word games with these words, such as Memory, Snap, or make word puzzles to connect compound words.

Vocabulary: Synonyms and Antonyms

(AC9E1LA07) (AC9E1LA09) (AC9EFLY09) (AC9E2LA09) (AC9EFLY13)

Using the adjectives used to describe Sal as a 'real cowgirl', students can identify and add words that are **synonyms** (words with similar meanings), and words that are **antonyms** (words with opposite meanings). For example, the synonyms of 'brave' include *strong*, *spirited*, *adventurous*, *confident*, *courageous*, *daring*, *fearless*, *wild*, etc. The antonyms of 'brave' include *scared*, *small*, *cowardly*, *afraid*, *timid*, *fearful*, etc.



TEACHER NOTES: The Real Cowgirl

- Students can write their own sentences using synonyms and antonyms. They might like to fold a piece of paper in half, showing Sal riding her horse on one side, and Sal at school on the other side.
- Draw a picture that matches both sentences.

Comprehension: Cloze

(AC9E2LE02) (AC9EFLE05) (AC9E1LE05) (AC9E2LE05) (AC9EFLY05) (AC9E1LY05) (AC9E2LY05)

•	Students can write the following sentences, fill most sense.	ing in the gaps with words or phrases that make the
	'Sal wants to be a	, •

'Sal is _____ and ____ and ____ and ____ .'
'At school, Sal feels ____ and ____ .'
'Sal is a ____ , ___ friend.'
'We race the ____ through the trees. We are ____ in the ____ .'
'We are on a secret mission to ____ .'

Students can illustrate a sentence of their choice.

Comprehension:

(AC9EFLE01) (AC9EFLE02) (AC9E1LE02) (AC9E2LE02) (AC9EFLE05) (AC9E1LE05) (AC9E2LE05) (AC9EFLY05) (AC9EFLY05) (AC9E1LY05)

Through writing and discussion, answer comprehension questions relating to the story, such as:

- **Knowledge:** Who was in the story? What was the problem? Where did Sal feel small and scared? Where does she feel brave and wild? What does she do on her horse? How did she make a friend?
- **Comprehension:** Retell the story in your own words. What was the main idea? What are the similarities and differences between Sal and her horse?
- **Application:** What did Sal have to overcome to make a friend? Why was it important for Sal to be brave at school? How is being a 'real cowgirl' important for self-confidence?
- Analysis: What are the features of a cowgirl or a horse? Draw a diagram showing a horse saddled up for riding. How does Sal's feelings about herself compare at school and when horse riding? How did Sal's horse help her? Why was it important to Sal to be a real cowgirl?
- **Synthesis:** Predict how Sal might make friends in the future. What other ideas can you think of for overcoming anxiety? What might happen if Sal couldn't ride horses anymore? Can you think of funcircus tricks for Sal and her horse?
- Evaluation: Do you agree that Sal was always a real cowgirl? Why or why not? What is the most important thing the story is teaching us? What do you think about the way Sal made a new friend? How has Sal helped people and animals to come together? What places and organisations can we visit or research to learn more about horses, horse riding, the roles of horses on farms, or women on horseback in history?

Creative Writing: Descriptive Language – Innovation on Text

'We are on a secret mission to ______

(AC9EFLE01) (AC9EFLE05) (AC9E1LE05) (AC9E2LE05) (AC9EFLY06) (AC9E1LY06) (AC9E2LY06)

•	· ·	lists about either of the following ideas with their own words or phrases and 'SHOW not TELL' strategies, such
	'Lam a	friend I '



TEACHER NOTES: The Real Cowgirl

Narrative Writing

(AC9EFLE01) (AC9EFLE02) (AC9E1LE02) (AC9E2LE02) (AC9E1LY01) (AC9E2LY01) (AC9EFLY06) (AC9E1LY06) (AC9E2LY06)

- Students can write a narrative story based around a character with anxiety, or a cowgirl/cowboy. This could be real or imagined, heartfelt, funny or exciting.
- Ask students to think about who their characters are, and what might be the conflict or problem to solve (ie. How to deal with anxiety, how to make a friend, trying to ride a horse/herd cattle, how to perform circus tricks, etc). What events or situations might be experienced (real or imagined)? What is the tone of the story? What personal emotional or physical challenges might need to be overcome? How will they be resolved?
- Begin your narrative with a sizzling start, such as dialogue, onomatopoeia, action or scene setting.
 Think about using interesting figurative and emotive language.
- Set it out with a beginning, middle and end.

Recount / Reflective Writing

(AC9EFLE02) (AC9E1LE02) (AC9E1LY01) (AC9E2LY01) (AC9EFLY06) (AC9E1LY06) (AC9E2LY06)

 Encourage students to think about a time when they persisted with an emotional or physical challenge, or when learning a new skill, or when trying to make new friends. Students should include what happened, how they felt, how they managed the situation, the challenges and outcomes.

Thinking Tools / Graphic Organisers

(AC9EFLE01) (AC9EFLE02) (AC9E1LE02)

- Concept Web: Use the concept web diagram to flesh out ideas on a chosen topic, such as facts about horses or 'Ways to Make Friends'. The sub-headings could include; 'Introduce yourself', 'Talk about hobbies', 'Invite / Make an arrangement', 'Show your tricks', 'Introduce pets', 'Offer a gift', 'Give a compliment'. Write and/or draw short descriptions for each sub-heading. See BLM 5.
- Y-Chart: Students can imagine themselves as Sal in one of the scenes from the story. For example, when she flew through the wind on her horse, or when she felt sad about school. Complete the graphic organiser with the headings: Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like. See BLM 6.
- **Venn Diagram:** Complete a Venn Diagram to compare the similarities and differences between two different aspects of the story. These can include: Sal and her horse, Sal at school and Sal as a cowgirl, horses and cows, etc. See **BLM 7**.

MATHEMATICS

Space: Prepositional Language

Measurement and Geometry: (AC9MFSP02) (AC9M1SP02) (AC9M2SP02)

 Create an outback/farm/bush scene by drawing a variety of objects on a large sheet of paper, including a field or paddock, houses, hills, trees, rocks, cows, etc. Using horse/cowgirl toys or pictures, in partners, students take turns to instruct Sal and her horse in and around the scene. Students need to ensure they are using prepositional language.

Examples of terms to include: **through** the paddocks, **up** the biggest hills, ride **behind** the cows, **among** the leaves, leaping **over** logs, flying **in** the wind, **down** the road, **between** the houses, fairy houses **underneath** the trees. Other terms can include: to the **left** of, to the **right** of, **besides**, **next to**, **on top of**, **upwards**.

Extension: Grid Maps

Draw a smaller map of your paddock scene on grid paper using grid references / coordinates, a key and instructions on how to get Sal and her horse from one side to the other. See **BLM 8**.

SCIENCE / STEAM

Horse Riding and Inertia

Physical sciences: (AC9SFU02) (AC9SFU03) (AC9SFH01) (AC9SFH01) (AC9SFH01) (AC9SFH01) (AC9SFH01) (AC9SFH01) (AC9SFH02) (AC9SFH02) (AC9SFH03) (AC9SFH04) (AC9SFH04) (AC9SFH05) (AC

Sal and her horse felt like they were flying through the wind. An object flying through the air needs a force to act upon it to make it stop.

Isaac Newton's First Law states that an object stays still or keeps moving at the same speed and in a straight line unless it is acted upon by a force. In this experiment, students will understand how an object will remain still until the force of gravity acts upon it.

To demonstrate inertia, in this experiment you will need: a piece of cardstock folded and taped into a triangular column, an A5 piece of cardstock, an object (like a lemon or egg) that can sit on top of the triangular column, and a tall glass.

Place the A5 card on top of the glass, then the triangular column with the object balanced on top. Hold the glass and pull the A5 card out. The object should fall into the glass.

<u>Science involved</u> - The object is heavier than the cardboard column which means it doesn't move as easily as the column when the cardboard is pulled from underneath. There isn't a sideways force acting on the object, so it falls straight down because of gravity. Source: <u>Easy Inertia Experiment</u> (<u>science-sparks.com</u>)

- Extension 1: Try the experiment with different objects. Is the result the same? Why does this occur?
- Extension 2: How does inertia apply to other movements and forces, like if a cowgirl were riding a
 fast horse and it stopped suddenly. What would happen to the rider? Which way would the rider
 continue to move? Why? Try it with an object sitting on a fast toy car.

More information about inertia can be found at:

What is Inertia and How To Demonstrate It - STEM Little Explorers

Horse Life Cycle

Biological sciences: (AC9SFU01) (AC9S1U01) (AC9SFH01 (AC9SFH01) (AC9SFH01) (AC9SFI01) (AC9SFI01) (AC9SFI01) (AC9SFI02) (AC9SFI02) (AC9SFI03) (AC9SFI04) (AC9SFI04) (AC9SFI04) (AC9SFI05) (A

Depending on the level of students' knowledge, they can:

- Research a horse breed and write/present an information report, based on facts about its appearance, breeding, life cycle, male/female names, habitat, food, history, sporting/working/ entertainment roles, etc. See BLM 4.
- Label a diagram of the anatomy of a horse. See BLM 3.
- Complete a diagram or create a paper wheel with a split pin to demonstrate the changing stages of the horse's life cycle. These include:
 - 1. Foal. 2. Weanling. 3. Yearling. 4. Adult. See BLM 9.
- Make horse hoof prints with playdough or clay, or stamps and ink or make your own horseshoe.
 Discuss why horseshoes are needed and how they are maintained.
- Explore the properties of horse hair under a microscope. Discuss how horse hair is used in various products, like hair and paint brushes.
- More ideas and downloads can be found at:
 - Horse Life Cycle Parts of a Horse Anatomy Flipbook Printable Montessori Nature
- Watch videos to learn about horses. Some examples can be seen here:
 - <u>Horses! Learn about Horses for Children YouTube</u> Horse Facts for Kids - YouTube

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Inspirational Horseback Women in History

History: (AC9HSFK02) (AC9HSFK01) (AC9HSFS02) (AC9HS1S01) (AC9HS1S02) (AC9HSS2S01) (AC9HSS2S02) (AC9HSFS03) (AC9HSS2S04) (AC9HSS2S04) (AC9HSS2S05) (AC9HSS2S06)

- Explore famous women in history who rode horseback. Examples include:
 - Edna Jessop (Australia's first female boss cattle drover).
 - Michelle Payne (Australian equestrian athlete and first female Melbourne Cup winner 2015).
 - Terese Renz (first female circus horse performer from Belgium).
- How can they inspire us for the future?

Provide a list of several inspirational horse riding women for students to research.

- Research and write up a given number of short fact cards about their chosen inspirational woman
 in history. The cards should include a picture of the person, their place and date of birth (and
 death, if applicable), and a sentence explaining their accomplishments. See BLM 4.
- With a partner, students can play a 'Guess Who?' game, with each player asking questions to guess who is on the other person's card. Questions might include, 'Was she a circus performer?', 'Is she an athlete?', 'Did she win horse races?', 'Was she a pioneer?', and so on.
- Students could create a Bingo board, including either the inspirational women, or their achievements (winning athlete, performed extreme tricks, dangerous herding expeditions, etc.)

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Healthy Mind / Healthy Body Ideas:

(AC9HPFP01) (AC9HP2P01) (AC9HPFP02) (AC9HPFP03) (AC9HPFP04) (AC9HP2P02) (AC9HP2P03) (AC9HP2P04) (AC9HPPP05) (AC9HPPP05) (AC9HPPP05) (AC9HPPP05) (AC9HPPP06) (AC9HPPP06) (AC9HPPP06) (AC9HPPP06) (AC9HPPP06) (AC9HPPP06)

Mindfulness and physical activity are ideal for mental and physical health, as well as building relationships with family and friends.

- Dress up like a cowgirl or cowboy with a hat and boots.
- Role play riding a horse and herding cattle through paddocks, trees, up hills, over logs, flying through the wind.
- (Safely) perform circus tricks on your horse prop (or a low balancing beam).
- Do handstands and cartwheels on soft grass.
- Take a doll or toy or other item (like a lucky horseshoe) to school to remember to feel brave and strong.
- Talk to a friend or pet about your feelings. Write a journal or draw pictures.
- Read books and texts about horses, making friends or overcoming anxiety.
- Observe and listen to birds and other wildlife in nature.
- Visit a farm or horse stables to see horses, cows and other animals.
- Invite a friend to engage in an activity you both enjoy.
- Find and create fairy houses in your garden or local area.
- Create a secret mission to save the world!
- Remember that you are brave and smart and strong and wild!

VISUAL ARTS

Horseshoe Art and Crafts

(AC9AVA2E01) (AC9AVAFD01) (AC9AVA2D01) (AC9AVAFC01) (AC9AVA2C01) (AC9AVAFP01) (AC9AVA2P01)

Students can create their own lucky horseshoe pieces of art or sculptures with a range of materials.
 Learn to draw a horseshoe at: How To Draw A Lucky Horseshoe - YouTube



TEACHER NOTES: The Real Cowgirl

- Students can decorate the horseshoe with patterns, textures, or collage.
- Alternatively, students can create their own horseshoe sculpture with cardboard or clay, covered with papier-mâché or kiln dried and painted.
- Students can share their process and describe why they chose their design.

Horse Watercolour Art

(AC9AVA2E01) (AC9AVAFD01) (AC9AVA2D01) (AC9AVAFC01) (AC9AVA2C01) (AC9AVAFP01) (AC9AVA2P01)

- Show students images of famous artworks with horses, drovers, or cowgirls/boys. What do they notice about the subjects? The surroundings? The colours, medium used and techniques?
- Students can choose to create a piece of 'horse' art with watercolours (like in The Real Cowgirl) or their own chosen media and technique. How will the image and mood be represented?

NAME		DATE
Write in the headings and sort the words into the correct categories.		

NAME ______ DATE _____

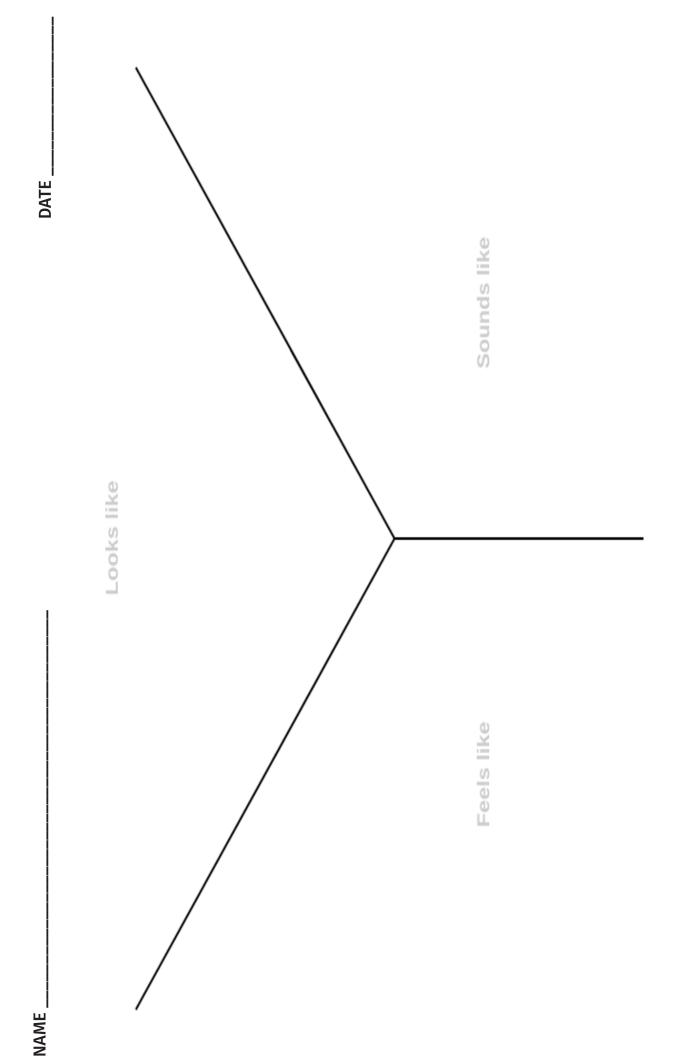


NAME_

NAME _____

DATE _____

Fill in the boxes to share information about your topic. This is what I do for fun: Draw a picture! I have: I can: I am: Things that help: Things that don't help:

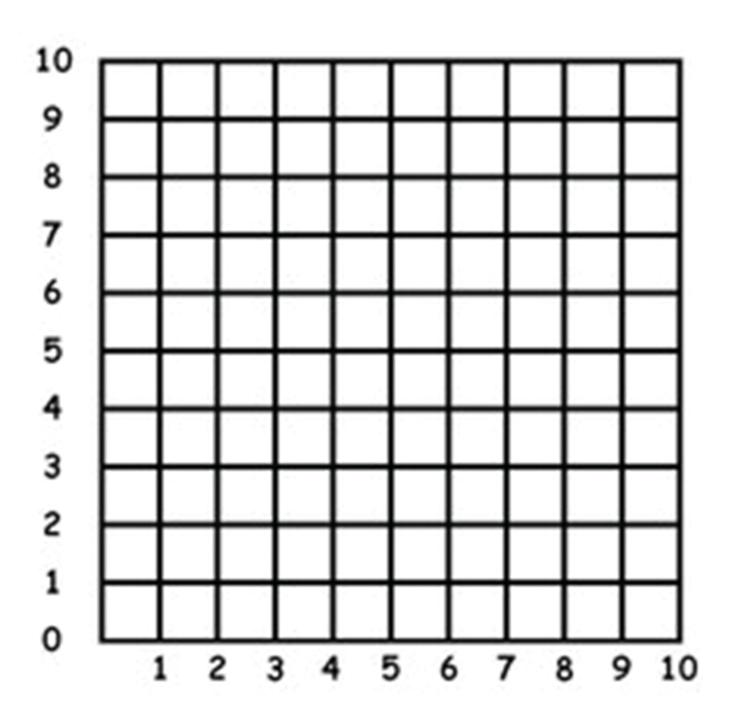


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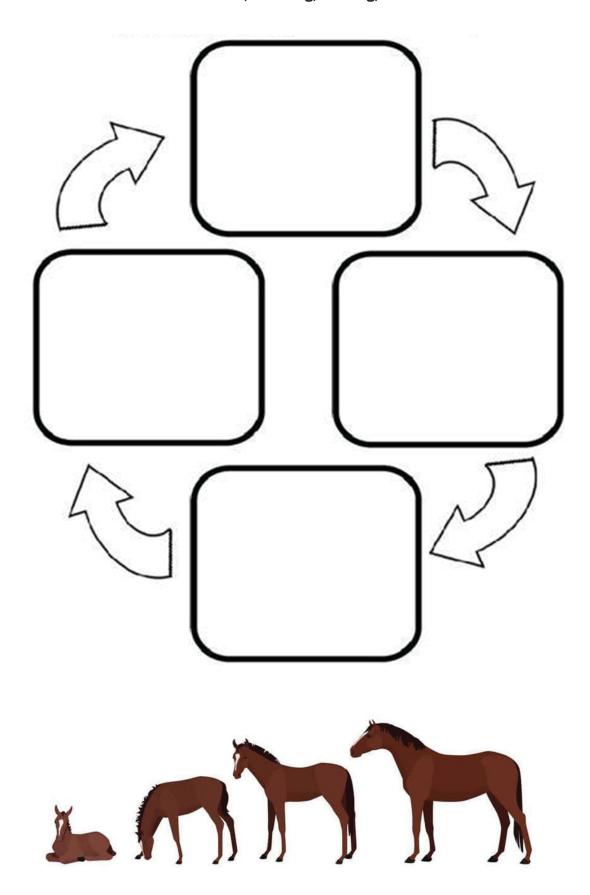
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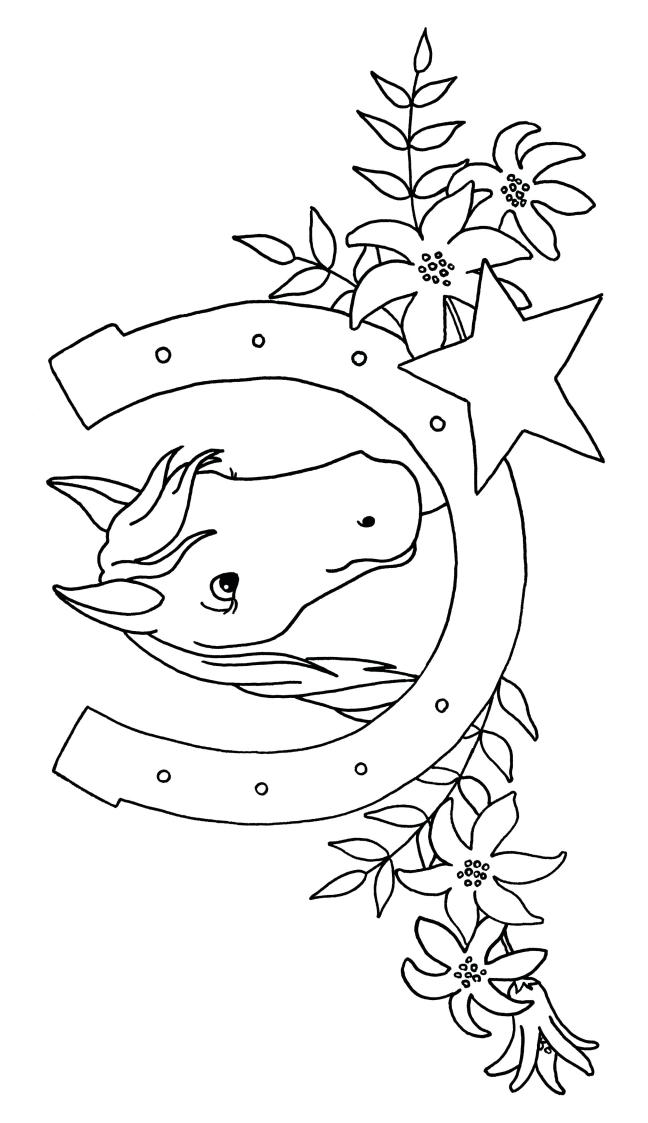
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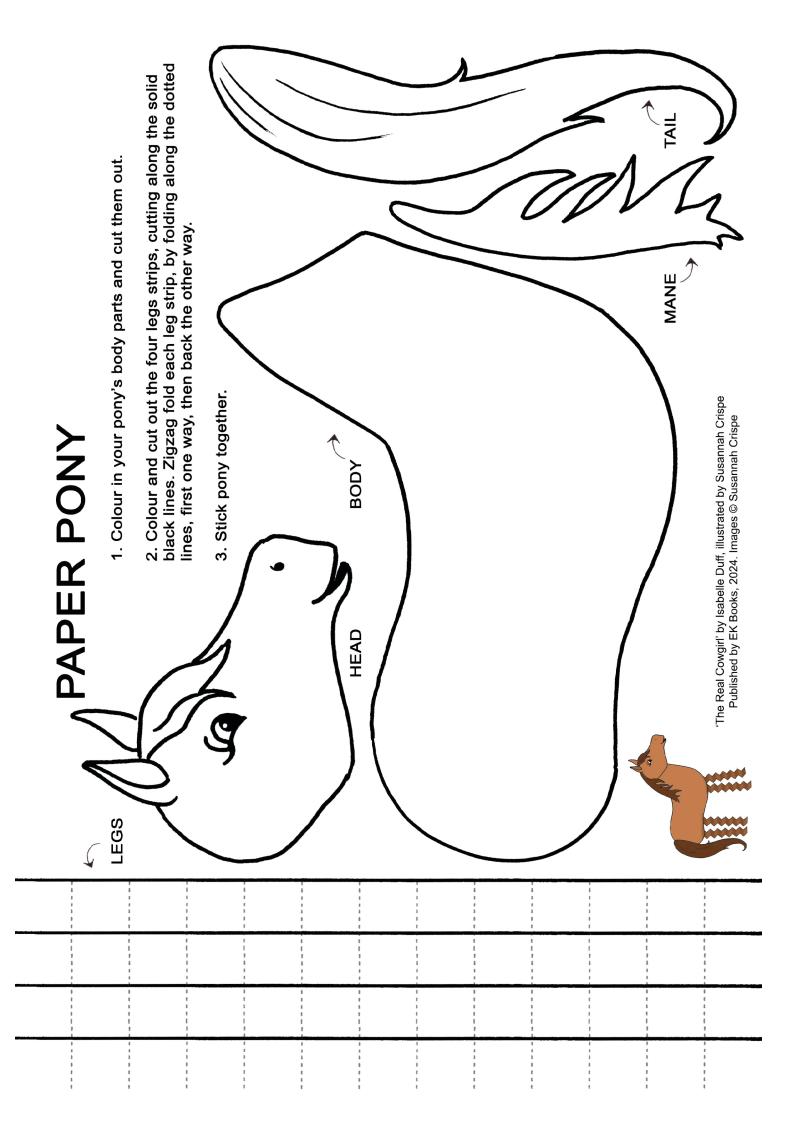
Cut and paste the horse pictures into the life cycle chart and label. Labels: Foal, Weanling, Yearling, Adult



THE REAL COWGIRL COLOURING



'The Real Cowgirl' by Isabelle Duff, illustrated by Susannah Crispe Published by EK Books, 2024. Images © Susannah Crispe



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