

Leroy Ninker Saddles Up

KATE DICAMILLO

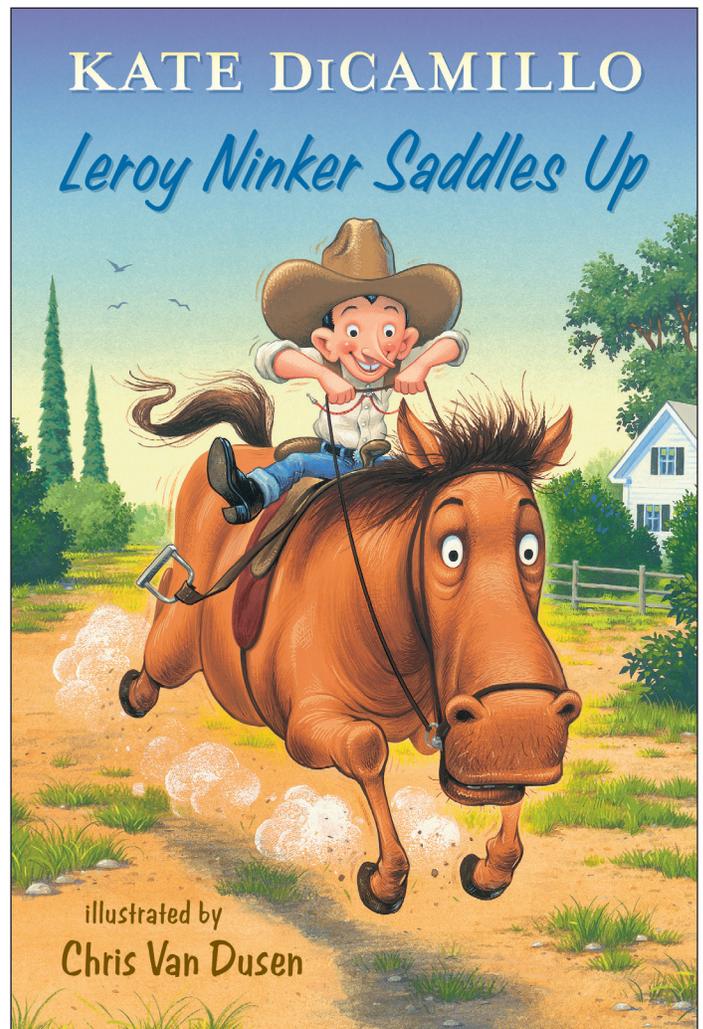
illustrated by CHRIS VAN DUSEN

ABOUT THE BOOK

Leroy Ninker has a hat, a lasso, and boots. What he doesn't have is a horse—until he meets Maybelline, that is, and then it's love at first sight. Maybelline loves spaghetti and sweet nothings, and she loves Leroy, too. But when Leroy forgets the third and final rule of caring for Maybelline, disaster ensues. Can Leroy wrestle fate to the ground, rescue the horse of his heart, and lasso loneliness for good? Join Leroy, Maybelline, and a cast of familiar characters—Stella, Frank, Mrs. Watson, and everyone's favorite porcine wonder, Mercy—for some hilarious and heartfelt horsing around on Deckawoo Drive.



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Common Core Connections

With *Leroy Ninker Saddles Up*, Kate DiCamillo kicks off her newest sidesplitting chapter-book series, *Tales from Deckawoo Drive*, spotlighting characters from her *Mercy Watson* books. This teachers' guide, with connections to the Common Core, includes an array of language arts activities, book discussion, vocabulary instruction, and more to accommodate the learning needs of most students in grades 1–3. Students are called upon to be careful readers without jeopardizing the pleasure they gain from reading. It is best to allow students to read the entire story before engaging in a detailed study of the work.

Notes throughout the guide correlate the discussion and activities to specific Common Core Language Arts Standards. For more information on specific standards for your grade level, visit the Common Core website at www.corestandards.org.



COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

SL 1.1 and 2.1

Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade level topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.



COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

L 2.6 Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts, including using adjectives and adverbs to describe.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. On page 8, Beatrice tells Leroy to “take fate in your hands and wrestle it to the ground.” What is fate? Can you physically wrestle it? What does she mean by this advice?
2. On his way to respond to the ad about a horse, why does Leroy imagine that he is on the open plain (page 12)?
3. When Leroy meets Maybelline, he follows Beatrice’s earlier advice to inspect her teeth and hooves. Do you think Beatrice would consider four teeth an indication of a good, healthy horse? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think Patty LeMarque keeps calling Leroy “Hank”?
5. Is *instinctuals* a real word (page 21)? What about *poeticals* (page 28)? What does Patty mean when she uses these made-up words? What are some real words she could have used to convey the same meaning?
6. What are the three rules Leroy needs to remember about Maybelline? How well does he remember them?
7. When Leroy first gets on Maybelline, the world feels different to him: “The colors were deeper. The sun shone brighter” (page 24). Why do you think Leroy feels this way?
8. Is an apartment a good place for a horse? Why or why not? What are some of the problems Leroy encounters when he brings Maybelline back home with him?
9. Do you think Leroy wants to be a cowboy and “fight injustice” (page 2) because he once was a thief?
10. How does Leroy feel about Maybelline? How does Maybelline feel about Leroy?

LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITIES

A HORSE IS A HORSE, OF COURSE

Leroy named his dream horse Tornado because he wanted him to be fast and strong, like a tornado. Ask your students: Do you think Maybelline is an appropriate name for Leroy’s horse? How would you describe Maybelline? Encourage your students to use as many adjectives as they can. List them on chart paper as the students call them out.

Then combine this activity with an arts-and-crafts project by having students make a horse out of two different-size paper plates, construction paper, yarn, and markers or crayons. Have students staple the two plates together



to form a body and head. Then have them cut four long rectangles from the construction paper for the legs and cut lengths of yarn to be used as a mane and tail. They may then staple or glue on the legs, mane, and tail, and, if they'd like, color in their horse with the markers or crayons.

Once each horse is complete, ask the children to think of a horse they would like to own. What would they name it and why? Have them each write their own list of adjectives to describe their horse. Ask them to write the name of the horse in large letters and cut it out to glue on the back of the horse's paper-plate head. Then have them cut out their list of adjectives to attach to the back of the paper-plate body. When the horses are finished, display them by hanging them on a clothesline around the classroom.



COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

RL 1.9 Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.

RL 3.9 Compare and contrast the themes, setting, and plots of stories written by the same author about the same or similar characters.



COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

L 2.5 Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

- a. Identify real-life connections between words and their use.
- b. Distinguish shades of meaning among closely related verbs and closely related adjectives.

MAYBELLINE AND MERCY

Use the students' handmade horses to discuss the parts of a horse and what a horse typically eats. Ask the students, Do you think a horse eats spaghetti? What do you think a horse eats? (Possible answers include hay, oats, barley, and corn.)

Then turn the focus to Mercy Watson, the porcine wonder, asking: What food in the story is Mercy's favorite? What do pigs usually eat? Demonstrate how to research the answer using the Internet, or ask students to research it themselves. Note that pigs have been known to eat worms, leaves, insects, and dead trees. Ask: Would pigs really eat buttered toast? Why or why not?

Have the students draw a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the characteristics of Maybelline and Mercy. The intersection of the Venn diagram should include what is common to both: has four hooves, has a tail, eats human food, is a character in Kate DiCamillo's books, and so on. Differences may range from activity level to appearance. Leave room for lots of creative answers!

FLATTERY WILL GET YOU EVERYWHERE

Maybelline likes to be complimented. Ask students what it means to compliment someone. Note that there are many words for complimenting: flattering, showing praise, expressing admiration, and so on. Ask the children, How does a compliment make you feel? Have you ever complimented someone? Invite the students to practice their flattery skills in Leroy Ninker fashion. Have them select a character from the book — Maybelline, Mercy, or Leroy — and give that character a compliment based on his or her behavior in the story. For example, they might say, "Leroy, you are the most pint-size, rootin'-tootin' little cowboy I have ever seen." This exercise is likely to provide some laughs and exemplify how to give a genuine compliment.



COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

W 2.7 Participate in shared research and writing projects.

W 3.7 Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.



COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

W 3.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

- a. Establish a situation and introduce a narrator and/or characters; organize an event that unfolds naturally.
- b. Use dialogue and descriptions of actions, thoughts, and feelings to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations.
- c. Use temporal words and phrases to signal event order.
- d. Provide a sense of closure.

EVERY COWBOY NEEDS A HORSE . . . AND BOOTS AND A HAT!

Leroy dreams of being a cowboy. He knows that cowboys wear boots and ten-gallon hats. They carry lassos and ride horses. Ask your students, Did you know that each of these items plays a very important role in the life of a real cowboy? Ask if they know what a cowboy actually does. Does a cowboy fight injustice? Have students explain what *injustice* means. (See the vocabulary exercise on the next page.)

Note that cowboys ride horses to help them drive cattle. They wear special boots for riding, and their lasso is a rope used to collect the cattle. They wear bandanas to keep the dust out of their mouth, and their hats are also for protection. Ask the students, Do you think a ten-gallon hat really holds ten gallons? (The answer is no!)

Have students break into groups and go to the school library or use the Internet to research the role of cowboys in America. Ask them to find answers to such questions as: Do cowboys still exist? If so, in what parts of the country? Do you think there are more cowboys today or in the past? What is the “open plain” that Leroy yearns to ride? Where might one find an open plain, and what does it look like?

Determine the preference of presentation—on paper, orally, PowerPoint, and so on—and have each group present their findings to the rest of the class.

THE ADVENTURES OF LEROY AND MAYBELLINE

In this first book of Kate DiCamillo’s series, readers are introduced to the character Maybelline. Invite your students to write a short story describing Leroy and Maybelline’s next adventure. Encourage the children to think like an author and brainstorm the kinds of escapades Leroy Ninker might have with Maybelline. Here are some possible story starters:

Do Leroy and Maybelline stop a robbery at the Bijou Drive-In Theater?

Do Maybelline and Mercy become good friends?

Will Leroy get kicked out of his apartment because of Maybelline? If he does, where will they go?



COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

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YIPPIE-I-OH AND GIDDY-UP

As an introduction to teaching vocabulary and discussing onomatopoeic words, explain to students that *yippie-i-oh* is thought to be an old Western exclamation to express excitement or happiness and that *giddy-up* is a command to get a horse moving.

Begin the lesson by saying to the class: “Giddy-up! Now our horse is moving. What kind of sound does it make?” An appropriate response might be *clip-clop*. Then ask the children what sound a bee makes (*buzz*). A strong breeze? (*Whoosh*.) Keep going and write the words on chart paper. Explain that all these words are called something special: *onomatopoeia*. Ask your students if they can figure out the meaning of that term by looking at the list of words they’ve come up with. Define *onomatopoeia* as a word that imitates its sound. Challenge the students to come up with several more examples and write them on chart paper. Hang the list on a wall where words can continue to be added.

VOCABULARY

Review the list of vocabulary words below. First ask students if they can guess the words’ meaning by rereading each word in the context of the book. Then have them use dictionaries to check themselves and/or define the word. Have students use each word in a sentence of their own. You may wish to make this a homework assignment.

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|------------------------|--------------------|
| agitated (page 13) | procure (page 12) |
| consulted (page 11) | reformed (page 46) |
| exceptionally (page 7) | regret (page 23) |
| injustice (page 2) | rue (page 23) |

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kate DiCamillo, the author of six books about Mercy Watson, is the beloved and renowned author of many books for young readers, including *Flora & Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures* and *The Tale of Despereaux*, both of which won a Newbery Medal. In 2014 she was named the National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature. She lives in Minneapolis.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Chris Van Dusen is the author-illustrator of *The Circus Ship* and *King Hugo’s Huge Ego* and the illustrator of all six books about Mercy Watson. He lives in Maine.

Teachers’ guide written by Karen Cardillo, freelance writer and educational consultant