

A Kit for Educators

*Tools for teaching and learning
with the picture-book biography*

Perfect Timing - How Isaac Murphy became one of the World's Greatest Jockeys

By Patsi B. Trollinger
Illustrated by Jerome Lagarrigue

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Dear educator:

As your students read or listen to *Perfect Timing*, I hope they will enjoy the drama of Isaac Murphy's first ride, the excitement of horse racing, and some details of life in the late 1800s. This kit offers background information and teaching resources that may help you put the book to best use with your students. You are free to copy any portions and distribute them to your students for educational purposes.

Patsi B. Trollinger

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CONTENTS

Racing Vocabulary	1
What does it take to be a Thoroughbred?	2
Recognizing a Thoroughbred: Not a coat of many colors	3
What's in a name?	4
Love those silks!	4
Facts about Isaac Murphy	5
Resources for students: books, videos, and websites	6
Activities:	7
Broom Derby, Name that Horse, Design Your Own Silks*	
Writing prompts	7
Math problems	7
Mapping project	8
Questions for discussion	9
Lesson Plans created by veteran teachers	10 and 12-15*
Behind the scenes: The research and writing of <i>Perfect Timing</i>	11

**For best print quality on any line-art activity page at the end of this booklet, choose color printing rather than black-and-white.*

Racing Vocabulary

Colt - Male horse that is no more than four years old.

Derby - A stakes race for three-year-old horses.

Foal - Newborn horse not more than one year old.

Filly - Female horse that is no more than four years old.

Jockey - Person who rides the horse during a race.

Mare - A female horse at least five years old.

Oaks - A stakes race for three-year-old fillies.

Paddock - Area where horses are saddled and paraded before a race.

Pace - In horse racing, the word pace can mean either the speed a horse is running (a fast pace or a slow pace). But when someone says a jockey is a good judge of pace, it means the jockey is good at making decisions about when the horse should run fast or slow.

Purse - The total amount of prize money distributed to race winners (usually the top four or five positions).

Silks - The colorful jacket and matching cap worn by jockeys during races. Because each design is owned by a particular horse farm, you can tell who owns the horse by looking at the silks.

Stakes race - A race in which owners must pay a fee to enter their horses.

The Birthday of Thoroughbreds - January 1. (Many important horse races are open only to two-year-old horses or three-year-olds. To make it easy to calculate birth dates, every Thoroughbred is assigned January 1 as an official birthday. So, all foals born in March or April of 2007 will share an official birth date of January 1, 2007. All will officially become three years old on January 1, 2010, and can compete that year in the Kentucky Derby.)

Trainer - A person who teaches and prepares horses and jockeys for racing.

Triple Crown - An award and cash prize given if a horse can win three major races in the spring -Kentucky Derby (at Churchill Downs), Preakness (Pimlico track in Baltimore, Md.), and Belmont (Belmont Park in Long Island, N.Y.).

Yearling - A horse in the second year of its life, beginning January 1 after its birth.

What does it take to be a Thoroughbred?

To be eligible to race in the Kentucky Derby and other big races such as the Breeders Cup and the Kentucky Oaks, a horse must be a pure Thoroughbred. All these horses are registered with an organization known as the Jockey Club. So what does it take to be registered as a Thoroughbred?

1. Great ancestors

To be a Thoroughbred, a horse must be descended from one of three Arabian stallions that lived hundreds of years ago. These three horses had tremendous speed and great beauty, so they became the sires (male ancestors) of the entire Thoroughbred breed. They were known as the Godolphin Arabian, Byerley's Turk, and the Darley. Marguerite Henry's book, *King of the Wind*, which won the 1949 Newbery Medal, is compelling historical fiction based on the Godolphin Arabian.

For a contemporary, factual explanation of the three stallions, visit the website of the International Museum of the Horse (<http://www.kyhorsepark.com/imh/bw/tbred.html>).

2. Great height

Even when they are standing still, Thoroughbreds look impressive because they are quite tall. The average height is listed as "sixteen hands." What does that mean? The unit of measurement for horses and ponies is known as a "hand," which is equal to about four inches (the width of a man's hand). In contrast to the average Thoroughbred, the average Shetland pony stands about nine hands.

3. Great speed

Thoroughbred horses are some of the fastest animals on earth. They can run more than a mile in less than two minutes. The fastest humans take nearly twice as long to run a mile.

Recognizing a Thoroughbred: Not a coat of many colors

Although other breeds of horses come in a wide variety of colors, Thoroughbreds must be registered in one of six categories of color: bay, chestnut, dark bay/brown, roan/gray, black, and white. The most common colors are bay, chestnut, and dark bay/brown. The most rare colors are black and white. To those of us who don't see the horses up close, it may be hard to tell the difference between a chestnut and a bay, but here is how experts define these colors.

Bay: a yellow-tan or bright auburn coat with black mane, tail, and lower legs. One famous example of a bay: Cigar, the 2005 Horse of the Year.

Chestnut: entire coat is red-yellow or golden-yellow. Most famous chestnut: Secretariat, nicknamed Big Red, winner of the Triple Crown in 1973 (Kentucky Derby, Preakness, and Belmont Stakes).

Dark bay/Brown: Entire coat is brown with possible areas of tan on the shoulders, head, and flanks; mane, tail, and lower legs are black. A famous dark bay: Bold Ruler, a 1957 Derby contender.

Roan or gray: Up close, the coat may be a mixture of black and white hairs ("gray horse") or red and white hairs or brown and white hairs (roan). Example: Winning Colors, 1988 Kentucky Derby winner.

Black: The entire coat of the horse is black, unless some white markings are present. Example: Black Gold, 1924 Kentucky Derby winner.

White: The entire coat is made of white hairs. Only fourteen white Thoroughbreds are registered in the entire United States. The first one was a filly, foaled in 1963 and named White Beauty.

What's in a name?

At the time a Thoroughbred is registered with the Jockey Club, the owner also registers an official name. Owners can be very creative, choosing names that are dramatic, funny, historic, or personal. However, there are a few rules to follow:

- There can be no more than 18 letters, spaces, or punctuation marks.
- You need special permission to use the name of a famous person.
- You cannot re-use the name of a famous horse.
- You cannot use curse words or words with a bad meaning.

Here are some names of past Derby winners. Man O' War. Smarty Jones. Spend A Buck. Sunny's Halo. Genuine Risk. Tim Tam. Apollo. Azra.

Love those Silks!

On race day, every jockey wears white pants, black boots, and a brightly colored jockey with a matching cap. The jacket and cap are known as racing silks, and the color and design tells you who owns the horse. Owners choose and design their silks, then register them with the Jockey Club.

At the time Isaac Murphy was riding, racing silks tended to have a simple look - solid colors with a few strips or other small decorations. Today, silks come in every imaginable color and may feature designs inspired by polka dots, diamonds, zigzags, and other shapes.

Facts about Isaac Murphy

- **1861** - Born near Lexington, Ky., perhaps on Jan. 1, "the birthday of Thoroughbreds." Sometime after 1863, his father dies in the Civil War.
- **1873** - While helping his mother with her laundry business, Isaac is noticed by a horse owner and becomes an apprentice jockey.
- **1874** - Gets first win, on a filly named Glentina.
- **1877** - Beats veteran jockeys at Saratoga and begins to ride for bigger stables.
- **1879** - Finishes in the money at Kentucky Derby (second on Falsetto). In Detroit on the Fourth of July, wins all four races he enters.
- **1882** - Marries Lucy Osborn of Frankfort.
- **1884** - Earns first Kentucky Derby victory (on Buchanan). Also wins Kentucky Oaks and Clark Stakes. (This still stands as a record: Isaac is the only jockey to win three major stakes races in a single week.) Wins Latonia Derby, Illinois Derby, and American Derby.
- **1889** - Mentioned in Kentucky newspapers for his great wealth and lavish parties.
- **1890** - Wins Kentucky Derby on Riley. Wins the much-publicized Salvator-Tenny match race at Coney Island before 40,000 fans.
- **1891** - Sets a record by winning a third Kentucky Derby (on Kingman).
- **1892-95** - Struggles to maintain low weight required for riding. Rapid weight-loss methods damage his health. Acquires horses and tries his hand at training.
- **1895** - Wins on a horse named Tupto in the last race of his career. Career winning percentage is 44 percent, a record never equaled.
- **1896** - Dies in Lexington, Ky., and receives a hero's funeral. Grave later is left untended and eventually considered "lost."
- **1961** - Turf writer Frank Borries, Jr., fulfills a mission to locate Isaac Murphy's grave.
- **1967** - Grave is moved to an honorary location in Kentucky Horse Park.
- **1977** - Arlington Park in Illinois names a race for Isaac Murphy.
- **1995** - Gulfstream Park in Florida names a race for Isaac. Patsi Trollinger sees a news clipping about this race and begins research for a children's book about Isaac. The book is published in 2006.

Resources for student use

- **Books targeted to young readers.** Here are some titles I found when I searched the catalog at my local public library, using search terms such as "horse racing" or "Thoroughbred."

Bluegrass Breeze, by Dan Rhema. (Fiction; primary grade).

I Rode the Red Horse: Secretariat's Belmont Race, by Barbara Libby. (Nonfiction; intermediate or middle grade.)

King of the Wind, by Marguerite Henry. Winner of the 1949 Newbery Medal as best children's book of the year. Still a classic! (Historical fiction; middle grade.)

Little Freddie at the Kentucky Derby, by Kathryn Cocquyt. (Fiction; intermediate or middle grade.)

Perfect Timing: How Isaac Murphy became one of the World's Greatest Jockeys, by Patsi B. Trollinger. (Nonfiction picture-book biography; primary and intermediate grades.)

- **Color photos** copied from glamorous coffee table books will give your students some breath-taking glimpses of racing, horse barns, and jockeys. One of the best is: *The Jockey Club's Illustrated History of Thoroughbred Racing in America*, by Edward L. Bowen.

- **Video clips** from the award-winning movie, *Seabiscuit*, give a true picture of horse racing action.

- **Websites** are available that offer students information and entertainment with racing themes.

www.kyhorsepark.com/imh/bw/tbred.html - The Thoroughbred Home Page of the Kentucky Horse Park. Contains information and art about the three Arabian stallions that are the ancestors of all Thoroughbred horses.

www.racingmuseum.org/kids - A kid-friendly site sponsored by the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame. Students can play games about Thoroughbred names and "Fantasy Foals."

Hands-On Activities for Students

Broom Derby

Many primary schools in Kentucky have an annual Broom Derby in the week before the Kentucky Derby is run each year. Each student takes a broom and converts it into a stick horse by adding ears and a mane. Groups of students run races with their stick brooms on the playground.

Design your own silks

Invite students to design and color the racing silks they would use if they owned a horse farm. You can use a reproducible page from this kit that shows the outline of a jacket and cap, or allow the students to draw their own outlines.

Name that Thoroughbred

Using the information available in this kit, let students choose their own imaginary Thoroughbred and name it. They can decide on a color for their racehorse, based on the six basic colors allowed in the registry. Their name should follow the rules of the Jockey Club. Allow any interested student to draw and color their horse. (If your students are art-challenged, like me, they may find it very difficult and frustrating to attempt this art project. Horses are hard to draw, and many crayon sets don't have the colors needed to represent the details of a Thoroughbred!)

Writing prompts connected to *Perfect Timing*

- Write a brief paragraph explaining why you think Isaac agreed to try riding a Thoroughbred.
- Imagine that you are Isaac in his first race. Write about the race from beginning to end. Be sure to include details of things that happen.
- Pretend that you are a reporter assigned to write a brief news story about the race between Salvator and Tenny. Think about what facts you will want to include and how your story might have a beginning, middle, and ending. Write the story.
- Many of Isaac Murphy's best friends were other jockeys who raced in places all over the world. Imagine that you are Isaac and write a letter to a friend in Russia describing the race on Salvator.
- Isaac had at least three rules for living: No cheating, no swearing, no gambling. What are your rules for living? Write at least three rules you follow in your own life and explain how they have helped you.

Ideas for math teachers

Using the information on page 2 in the section “Great Height,” have your students measure items in your classroom using the measuring unit known as a “hand.” During racing season, you might also challenge students to use the racing times posted in newspaper sports pages to compute fractions or percentages that contrast the winning time with the losing time.

Did Isaac ride near your hometown? – A mapping project

Isaac Murphy competed on racetracks throughout the eastern United States. Look at the following list and try to find the places on a map.

Kentucky

Covington (old Latonia track)
Lexington
Louisville

Maryland

Baltimore

Missouri

St. Louis
Kansas City

New Jersey

Monmouth Park

Washington, D.C.

New York

Brooklyn – at old Gravesend track
Brooklyn – at Sheepshead Bay track
Bronx – at old Jerome Park track
Coney Island
Saratoga

Ohio

Cincinnati

Tennessee

Nashville

In addition to the above locations, some historians think Isaac also rode in New Orleans, La., and Jacksonville, Fla., and he probably taught younger jockeys at Lucky Baldwin's racing operation in Santa Anita, Calif.

Isaac's incredible achievements: Did it happen in your hometown?

- On the Fourth of July, 1879, Isaac Murphy amazed racing fans in **Detroit, Mich.**, by winning all four races he entered. Four out of four on the Fourth!
- In 1891, Isaac set a record in **Louisville, Ky.**, by becoming the first jockey to win the Kentucky Derby three times.
- Isaac set a record in **Covington, Ky.**, in 1891 by becoming the only jockey to win the Latonia Derby five times.
- Isaac won his first race in September of 1876 at the old Kentucky Association racetrack in **Lexington, Ky.**
- In 1884, a horse owner who admired Isaac Murphy decided to rename one of his best horses, and he called the horse ...Isaac Murphy! A few weeks later, fans at the old Arlington Track in **Chicago, Ill.**, laughed when the announcer called out: "And the winner is Isaac Murphy on Isaac Murphy."
- The following year, Isaac won again on Isaac in race in **St. Louis, Mo.**, but there was even bigger news. Isaac won every race he entered that day: four out of four.
- In 1890, Isaac and a big horse named Salvator were proclaimed the best jockey and best horse of the year after they won an exciting match race at **Coney Island, N.Y.**

Questions for discussion

These questions may be especially useful after an author's visit or book talk featuring *Perfect Timing*.

What are some of the reasons that the boy named Isaac walked around Lexington carrying a basket to collect laundry?

- Family circumstances: He and his mother needed to earn money.
- Inventions: At that time, there were no automobiles, no electricity, and no washing machines.

Isaac attended jockey school. How was it different from your school?

- The jockey school was inside a barn (different sights, sounds, and smells).
- Everyone in Isaac's school had to do chores and work hard.

Why was it so hard for Isaac to learn about pace?

- He had to remember lots of information about different horses.
- He had to figure out how to do several things at once: stay in the saddle on a galloping horse and keep control of the reins, count seconds in his head, and remember when to go fast or slow.

Isaac didn't win his first race. What do you think are some of the reasons?

- He was scared or nervous.
- The horse was nervous.
- The noise and excitement made it hard to think.

What are some of the reasons that Isaac thought the little horse named Tenny might be able to beat the big horse named Salvator?

- Tenny could run very fast.
- The jockey who rode Tenny was very good.
- In a race, you can never be sure which horse will win. Things can happen that are surprising.

Why did Isaac die as a young man?

- He used crash diets to control his weight, and eventually that made him sick.

Would you have liked to know Isaac when he was your age?

Do you think he was lucky or unlucky?

Lesson Plans created by veteran teachers

During my visits to several schools, I've encountered teachers and librarians who have devised creative ways to incorporate *Perfect Timing* into their on-going instructional plans. Here are some of their plans.

From Linda Woodward (fifth grade, Lee County, Va.)

Rules to Live By (*character education, language arts*)

After reading the book with her students, Ms. Woodward noted that Isaac Murphy had three basic rules to live by: No gambling, no swearing, no cheating. She gave students the following assignment: What are your rules for living? Write at least three rules and explain how they have affected your life.

Racing Themes as Graphic Organizers for Writing (*writing*)

Ms. Woodward also gave students several other writing assignment based on content in *Perfect Timing* and encouraged them to use graphic organizer for their pre-writing notes. She used the Jockey Silks sketch that is available in the back of this book and also used the standard four-square organizer and a webbing version.

Puppet Show Horse Race (*language arts, oral communication, art*)

The fifth-grade students at Ms. Woodward's school created a puppet show that depicted a horse race. Students worked in teams to develop the set design, script, and props.

From Sue Mielke (middle school special needs, Mebane, N.C.)

Elements of a Story (*reading comprehension, language arts*)

After reading and discussing *Perfect Timing* with her students, Ms. Mielke developed a worksheet that linked her recent unit on Elements of a Story with this particular text. (See assignment sheet in back of this book.)

From Lynn Erwin (elementary librarian, Roanoke, Va.)

Word Search and Vocabulary (*language arts, literacy*)

In addition to reading and discussing the book with students before the author visit, Ms. Erwin created activity sheets to reinforce students' knowledge. (See activity sheets at back of this book.)

Behind the Scenes: How did I write Perfect Timing?

The Idea

The idea for a book can come from anything - a picture, a memory, a news story. I started thinking about Isaac Murphy after seeing a small article in the newspaper on February 22, 1995. That news story contained just four sentences, and I knew I wanted to learn more about Isaac.

Research

To find pictures and information about Isaac, I visited seven libraries and museums. By the time I began writing, I had reviewed more than 4,000 pages of information.

Planning and Writing

The amount of information overwhelmed me, and I wasn't quite sure how to get started. I decided to read other juvenile biographies to see what I could learn from experienced authors. I also joined a writers' group - a sort of club where people read each other's stories and made suggestions.

Revising and Trying to Publish

Early in 1997, I thought my manuscript was ready to be published. I mailed it to seven publishers - and all of them rejected it! I tried to improve my writing and mailed to twelve more publishers in 1999. I got twelve more rejections. Finally, in 2001, after I revised many more times, I tried eleven more publishers, and one of them liked it.

A Book Contract

Even after I received a book contract, I had to rewrite many more times. I had been assigned an editor, whose job was to make sure my book was as good as possible. She asked me to double check many facts and rewrite many sections numerous times. She also asked me to find photos that might help the artist paint good pictures for the book. His pictures had to show clothing, hairstyles, and other details that would be accurate for the 1880s.

Proofreading

Before the book finally went to press, I had to proofread the text several times to make sure nothing had been confused or left out during all the revisions and typesetting.

Hurrah - A Book!

On September 21, 2006, more than eleven years after I got interested in Isaac Murphy, my book was published. I hope the future ones don't take so long!

Elements of a Story

An instructional activity based on *Perfect Timing*, by Patsi B. Trollinger

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

What is the genre of this story?

Who is the main character?

What are the time and setting for this story?

From what point of view is the story told?

Where is there conflict?

Where is there suspense?

What are some character education lessons in the book?

List two happy events in Perfect Timing:

What was the saddest event?

Terms to know: jockey

stallion

pace

filly

Kentucky Derby

Design Your Own Silks

What color and design would you want a jockey to wear if he or she was riding your horse in the Kentucky Derby? Almost anything goes -- stripes, dots, diamond shapes, solid colors. If you want to see the designs and color of some real silks, look through the pages of *Perfect Timing* or search the author's website (www.patsibtrollinger.com) to find sketches of some of the silks worn by Isaac Murphy and other famous jockeys.



Vocabulary Builder

Learn about horses and horse racing

1. _____ are the colorful jacket and matching cap worn by jockeys during races.
2. The _____ is the total amount of prize money distributed to the race winner.
3. The _____ is a stakes race for three-year-old fillies.
4. A male horse less than four years old is called a _____.
5. The area where horses are saddled and paraded before a race is called the _____.
6. A _____ teaches and prepares horses and jockeys for racing.
7. If a horse can win three major races in the spring, that horse wins the _____.
8. A newborn horse is called a _____.

Word list:

Triple Crown
foal
colt
trainer

silks
yearling
paddock
Derby

mare
purse
oaks
Thoroughbred
pace
filly

Instructional activity created for use
in conjunction with *Perfect Timing* by Patsi B. Trollinger.

Word Search

D	T	A	J	D	O	C	M	K	E	Y	K	R	S	I
D	E	R	E	S	E	T	H	A	E	H	E	O	K	R
S	E	R	I	H	O	R	S	E	R	D	N	U	A	R
I	N	G	B	P	A	K	B	R	A	E	T	T	O	C
E	C	A	P	H	L	E	R	Y	U	D	U	R	F	X
O	B	C	O	I	G	E	S	K	Z	P	C	O	C	E
A	I	K	S	W	N	U	C	J	P	B	K	L	W	U
A	Z	V	A	I	N	D	O	R	L	Z	Y	L	K	H
Y	F	Q	A	S	W	A	P	R	O	V	T	I	C	C
M	U	R	P	H	Y	O	U	J	O	W	U	N	O	F
F	T	E	S	R	U	P	K	O	U	H	N	G	D	I
G	N	I	L	R	A	E	Y	C	F	I	T	E	D	L
E	C	C	I	N	L	L	O	K	P	O	I	R	A	L
G	J	Z	T	R	L	L	W	E	B	Z	A	Z	P	Y
A	R	J	O	L	T	Y	Z	Y	P	W	K	L	O	B

COLT
FOAL
KENTUCKY
OAKS
PURSE
TRAINER
YEARLING

DERBY
HORSE
MARE
PACE
SILKS
TRIPLECROWN

FILLY
JOCKEY
MURPHY
PADDOCK
THOROUGHBRED
TROLLINGER