



# MENDING HORSES

by M. P. Barker

GRADES 5 UP

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Also available in e-book format.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

### M. P. Barker weaves historical fiction with gripping adventure!

After being granted freedom from indentured servitude, Daniel Linnehan is looking for honest work when he falls victim to prejudices against his Irish heritage. Daniel is accused of thievery and murder and held captive in a barn until Jonathan Stocking, a tin peddler, recognizes the boy and comes to his defense. Jonathan sees something special in Daniel and invites the boy to travel with him and Billy, another Irish child. It's not long before the three go to work for a circus—Billy, disguised as a boy, enchanting the crowds with her sweet Irish melodies, and Daniel mending the abused horses. Things get ugly for the threesome when Billy's real father, who is working on the Western Rail Road, recognizes Billy as his daughter, Nuala. Daniel gathers the courage to shield Billy from her father, and helps her to discover the truth about the fate of her beloved brothers.

★ “Barker skillfully evokes the realities of class, racial, and gender oppression in the nineteenth century through a **rich cast, lifelike setting, and complex, compelling plot.**” — Starred, *Booklist*

★ “An absorbing look into a patch of past not often examined. . . . Barker's characters are **nuanced, difficult, and real.**”  
— Starred, *Kirkus Reviews*

### PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Ask students to use books in the library, or sites on the Internet, to find out about indentured servants. Have them write down the differences between the lives of indentured servants and slaves, and then share their thoughts in class.

*Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 5-7.7; Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 5-7.4, 5-7.6.*

### THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

#### QUESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS

**FAMILY**—Jonathan Stocking tells Daniel how he got Billy. How is Jonathan a better father to Billy than Hugh Fogarty, her real father? At what point do Daniel, Billy, and Jonathan Stocking become a family? Discuss how Daniel might describe his “adopted family” in a letter.

**FEAR**—Discuss how Daniel deals with his fear when he is locked in Chester Ainesworth’s barn. How do “old” fears overtake Billy when she comes face-to-face with her father? Explain Daniel’s role in helping Billy deal with fear.

**COURAGE**—Discuss Daniel’s courage in *Mending Horses*. How do the horses help him gain courage? Explain how music gives Billy courage.

**PREJUDICE/BIGOTRY**—Discuss the difference between prejudice and bigotry. How does prejudice lead to bigotry? Daniel is called Paddy. How is this name a symbol of prejudice and bigotry? How is Daniel also the victim of prejudice at the beginning of *Mending Horses*? Explain the attitude toward the Irish among the circus performers.

**BULLYING**—Who are the bullies in *Mending Horses*? Chester Ainesworth grows to regret the way he treated Daniel. Who is responsible for his change in attitude about the boy? Explain what Jonathan Stocking means when he refers to the “other harm” that Daniel endured. Discuss this advice from Mr. Sharp: “Where the other fellow’s weak, that’s where you’ve got to be strong. You’ve got to be quick where he’s slow, brave where he’s cowardly, clever where he’s stupid” (p. 183). Describe how this advice helps Daniel when he faces off with Hugh Fogarty.

**FRIENDSHIP**—Discuss what Mr. Sharp and Daniel have in common in *Mending Horses*. What might they give to each other as a symbol of friendship?

**HONESTY/DISHONESTY**—Jonathan Stocking comes to Daniel’s rescue because he recognizes a “sense of honor” in the boy. How does Daniel prove him right? Jonathan says that he would never reveal Billy’s secret. “If anybody tells, it’s got to be her,” he says (p. 78). How does this make Jonathan an honorable man? How is Mr. Chamberlain, the owner of the circus, both a “good guy” and a “bad guy”? What is Jonathan Stocking’s role in keeping Mr. Chamberlain honest?

**FREEDOM**—Daniel is no longer an indentured servant. Explain what Daniel means when he says, “He’d never imagined freedom to feel this way” (p. 4). Why does Daniel feel unprepared for freedom? Discuss why Billy thinks that she will be losing freedom if she works for the circus. Trace the chain of events that finally sets Billy free. What is Jonathan Stocking’s role in helping Daniel and Billy find freedom?

*Above discussion questions correlate to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 5-7.1, 5-7.2, 5-7.3; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 5-7.1, 5-7.3; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas 5-7.4.*

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

**LANGUAGE ARTS**—Mr. Stocking gives Daniel and Billy a primer and asks them to convert it into Gaelic. Have students make a simple Gaelic/English picture dictionary ([www.irishdictionary.ie/home](http://www.irishdictionary.ie/home)) that might help Daniel and Billy learn English.

**Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 5-7.4.**

Write a poem called “Freedom” from Billy’s or Daniel’s point of view. Consider all that you know about their journey. Allow time in class for students to read aloud their poems.

**Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5-6.3; Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 5-7.6.**

Review the various types of figurative language. Ask students to explain why the following sentence from *Mending Horses* is an example of personification and simile: “Tonight Jonny’s fiddle whispered like the wind behind a ship’s sail” (p. 23). Then have them find other examples of simile and personification in the novel. Instruct students to write a simile that expresses Daniel’s fears in *Mending Horses*. Write a personification that describes his relationship with the horses.

**Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 5-7.5.**

Divide the class into small groups and ask them to discuss the structure of *Mending Horses*. Explain how Barker tells a story within a story. How does each story come together to create the novel?

**Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL.5-7.3; Craft & Structure RL. 5-7.5; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 5-7.1, 5-7.3.**

**SOCIAL STUDIES**—Ask students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to read about the role of women in nineteenth-century America. Have them compare this information to the way women are portrayed in *Mending Horses*. Then have them write a short essay called “Female and Irish in nineteenth-century America” for the National Women’s History Museum’s online exhibit ([www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits](http://www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits)). Instruct them to support their claims with specific scenes or quotes from the novel.

**Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 5-7.9; Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5-7.2.**

**MATH**—Ask students to brainstorm scenes from the novel that might require Daniel to use math skills, for example, the horse race between Daniel and Mr. Stocking. Then have students write at least two word problems for a math textbook that Mr. Stocking might use to teach Daniel and Billy fractions.

**Correlates to Common Core Mathematics Standards in Number & Operations-Fractions: Use Equivalent Fractions as a Strategy to Add & Subtract Fractions NF.A. 5.2.**

**DRAMA**—There are numerous scenes in the novel that are very dramatic (e.g., when Mr. Fogarty recognizes Nuala). Divide the class into groups and ask them to pick a favorite scene and write it as a one-act play. Instruct them to cast the parts and tape the production to be viewed via the school-wide network. Suggest that they use music and appropriate graphics to add to the drama of the play. If possible, conduct a live interactive chat with the actors via the network.

**Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5-7.3; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 5-7.6; Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 5-7.5, 5-7.6.**

**MUSIC**—Billy enchants audiences with her Irish music. Divide the class into small groups and ask them to search the Internet ([www.contemplator.com/ireland](http://www.contemplator.com/ireland)) for Irish songs from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Select a song that might remind Daniel and Billy of their families and their

hometown. Share the song with the class, and state why Daniel and Billy might find comfort or sorrow from the song.

**Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 5-7.7; Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 5-7.6.**

### VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

Encourage students to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them using clues from the context. Such words may include: *exultant* (p. 4), *canter* (p. 31), *veracity* (p. 41), *compensation* (p. 47), *menagerie* (p. 52), *sacrilege* (p. 71), *insipid* (p. 106), *erudite* (p. 111), *churlish* (p. 119), *perdition* (p. 150), *trepidation* (p. 176), and *contemptuous* (p. 223). Then have students use a dictionary to check the definitions of the vocabulary words.

**Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 5-7.4.**

### INTERNET RESOURCES

For more information about the books' time period, check out these sites!

**Massachusetts Historical Society**

[www.masshist.org](http://www.masshist.org)

**Irish Immigrants in America during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

[www.kinsella.org/history/histira.htm](http://www.kinsella.org/history/histira.htm)

**Circus Historical Society**

[www.circushistory.org](http://www.circushistory.org)

**Old Sturbridge Village**

[www.osv.org](http://www.osv.org)

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**M. P. Barker** has more than two decades of experience as a historian, an archivist, and a writer. She has worked as a costumed historical interpreter at Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, where she got a firsthand taste of nineteenth-century New England rural life by milking cows, mucking out barns, and doing other tasks that helped her bring realism and immediacy to the setting and characters of *Mending Horses*.

After Sturbridge, she became an archivist at the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, where she visited a different time and place with every diary, letter, and photograph she cataloged. M. P. Barker's first novel, *A Difficult Boy*, was an IRA Notable Book for a Global Society. Find out more about her at [www.mpbarker.net](http://www.mpbarker.net).

Photo Credit: Seth Kaye Photography

### GUIDE TO THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS CITED IN THIS GUIDE

#### Reading Literature

##### *Key Ideas & Details*

RL. 5-7.1 – Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

RL. 5-7.2 – Determine a theme of a story from details in the text; summarize the text.

RL. 5-7.3 – Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story, drawing on specific details in the text; compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story, drawing on specific details in the text.

##### *Craft & Structure*

RL. 5-7.5 – Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

##### *Integration of Knowledge & Ideas*

RL. 5-7.9 – Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.

#### Language

##### *Vocabulary Acquisition & Use*

L. 5-7.4 – Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on reading and content.

L. 5-7.5 – Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

#### Speaking & Listening

##### *Comprehension & Collaboration*

SL. 5-7.1 – Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led), building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL. 5-7.3 – Identify the reasons and evidence a speaker provides to support particular points.

##### *Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas*

SL. 5-7.4 – Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

SL. 5-7.5 – Include multimedia component (e.g., graphics, sound) and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.

SL. 5-7.6 – Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, using formal English when appropriate to task and situation.

### Writing

#### ***Text Types & Purposes***

W. 5-7.2 – Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic, and convey ideas and information clearly.

W. 5-7.3 – Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

#### ***Production & Distribution of Writing***

W. 5-7.6 – With some guidance and support from adults, use technology to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

#### ***Research to Build & Present Knowledge***

W. 5-7.7 – Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.

### Mathematics

#### ***Use Equivalent Fractions as a Strategy to Add & Subtract Fractions***

NF.A. 5.2 – Solve word problems involving addition and subtraction of fractions referring to the same whole, including cases of unlike denominators.