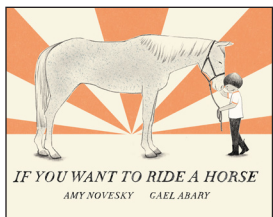
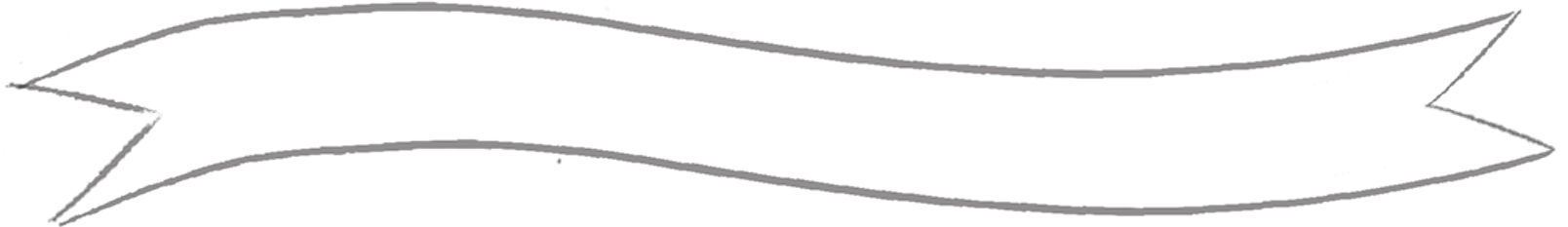
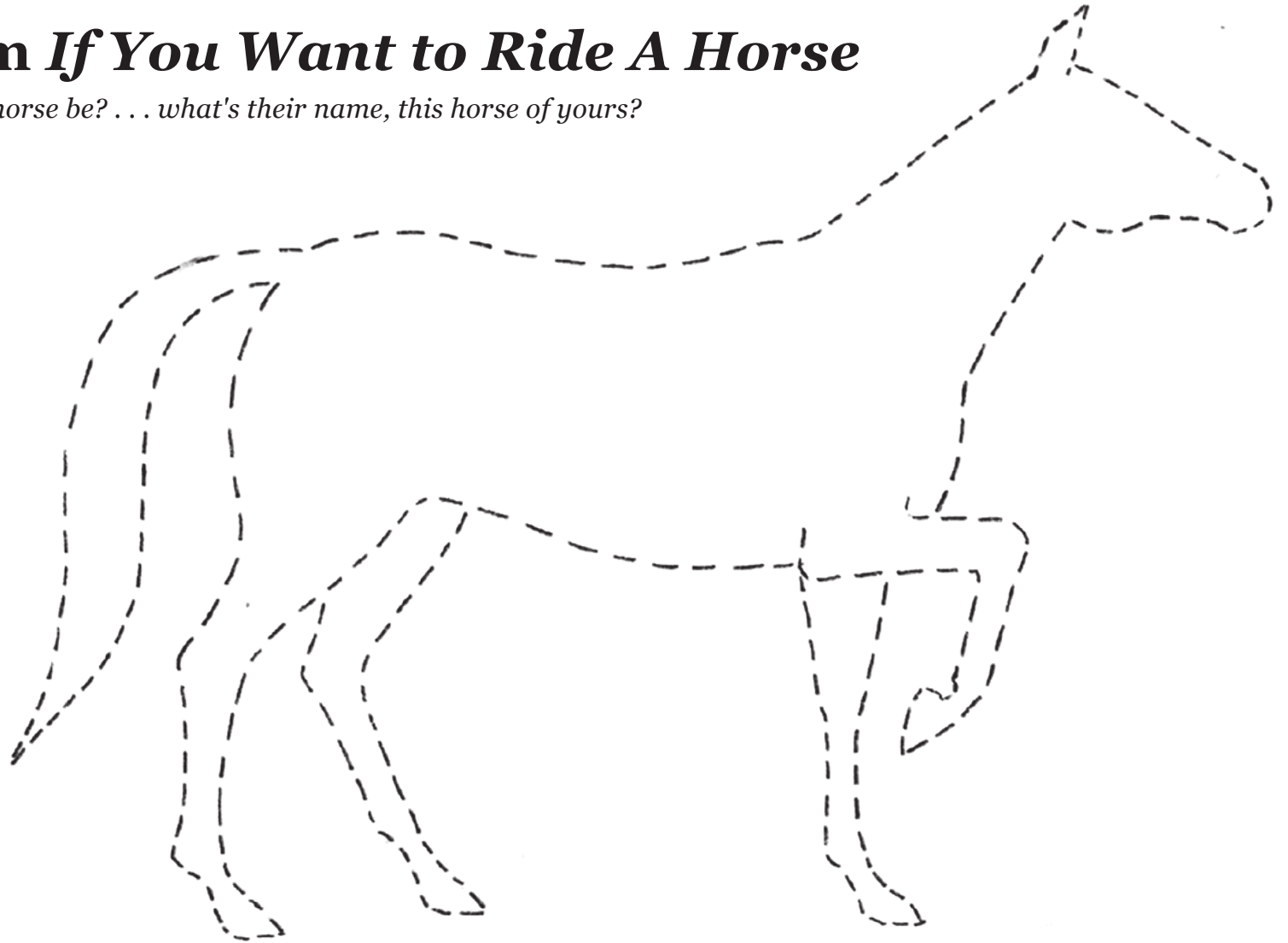


Facts from *If You Want to Ride A Horse*

What color will your horse be? . . . what's their name, this horse of yours?



Facts from *If You Want to Ride A Horse*

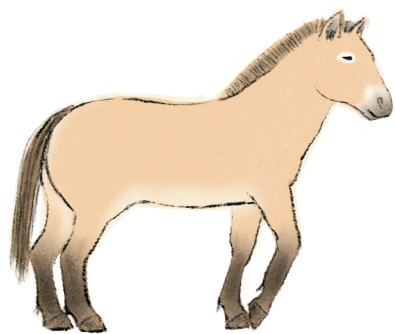
From Appaloosas to Arabians, ponies to paints, there are hundreds of breeds and types of horses to dream of.

Black or bay? Dappled like a starry sky, or gray?

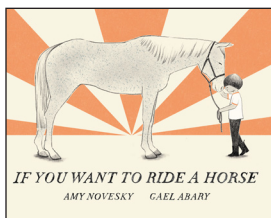
Horses come in many colors: black, bay (reddish-brown with black mane and tail), dapple gray (dark gray with star-shaped spots), gray, roan (black or red with some white), rose, blue, brown, chestnut (gold-toned and even metallic!), dun (yellow). Me? I imagine dappled horses and white horses. But white horses are rare—most are actually pale gray. And some, like the horse in this story, are fleabitten (pale gray with brown freckles). What color is your dream horse?

Wild horses are rare

We like to think of horses as wild, but there is only one truly wild breed: Przewalski's horse of Central Asia. All others have been domesticated. And those that run free, like the mustangs of the West or the Chincoteague ponies that live on an island off the East Coast of America, are feral, which means they descended from domesticated breeds or were formerly domesticated. Sadly, wild horses might become as rare as white horses; they are an endangered species.



PRZEWALSKI'S HORSE



Patches like a pinto or a paint

An Appaloosa's polka-dotted coat comes in five distinct patterns: blanket, frost, marble, leopard, and snowflake. How fun is that? Some pintos have large black-and-white (piebald) patches, others have patches that are a color other than black (skewbald). Paints can have a wide variety of patterns, including tobiano and overo. Appaloosas, pintos, and paints often have striking blue eyes.



Facts from *If You Want to Ride A Horse*

Shoes and socks, stockings and fetlocks

Horses wear socks and shoes? It's true. The solid white markings below the knees of the horse are called socks. If they start above the knee, they're called stockings. Fetlocks are knobby joints above the hooves, and some are covered in feathered fur, like fringe on a cowboy boot. While most horses wear iron shoes—made by a metalworker called a farrier and fitted to their hooves to protect their feet—many go barefoot or shoeless. What about you? Do you prefer going barefoot, too?



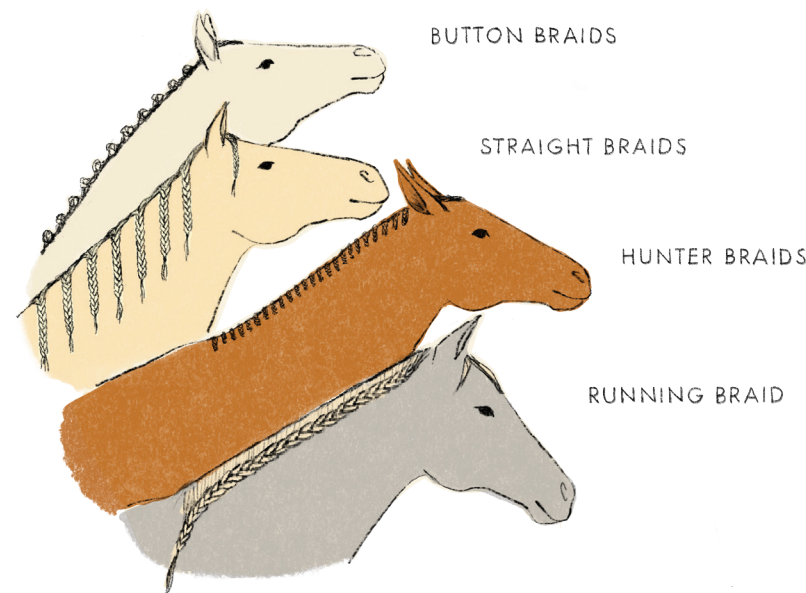
A stripe or a blaze or a star

Horses can have unique facial markings, as well, from a spot (or star) of white on their foreheads; to stripes or blazes of white down their noses; to a snip, or bit of white, on their muzzle tips.



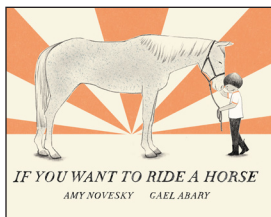
Braided or plaited

In folklore, manes were said to be braided by fairies! More traditionally, a workhorse's mane and tail are braided to prevent tangles and stop them getting caught in tack and equipment. The manes and tails of show horses are neatly braided and buttoned for equestrian competitions. Just as there are many ways to braid one's own hair, there are many ways to braid and button one's horse's. Matching French plaits?! Mais oui!



Whinnies, nickers, and neighs

A horse expresses itself in many ways: a whinny is a loud, high-pitched neigh. It can convey confidence and excitement or anxiousness when a horse is calling for her herd. A nicker (or whicker) is a soft, low, breathy neigh that means hello, come, feed me. A swish of the tail can suggest irritation, be it at friend or fly. Ears forward means he's content, engaged. Ears sideways means she's attentive. And if the ears are pinned back or down, pay attention: he's not happy and might spook!



Facts from *If You Want to Ride A Horse*

A smiling horse? Yes. Curling back the upper lip, a gesture called a flehmen response, helps a horse better discern an interesting scent or taste, like a peppermint. Horses aren't just expressive, they can sense and respond to our emotions, too—our nervousness, fear. That's why it's so important to remember to breathe around and on horses.



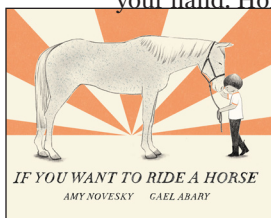
You'll take good care of her, I'm sure

Taking care of a horse is a messy, muddy business. You will get dusty. You will get dirty. Horses poop up to 50 pounds a day! Someone's got to pick that muck up. But it is also one of the best parts of being around and bonding with a horse. To safely groom a horse, you'll need to secure them in cross ties or by a quick-release knot. Your grooming bag will include the basics: a currycomb and hard-bristled dandy brush to remove dried mud and shed hair; a softer body brush to clean and shine the coat and use gently on more sensitive places, like a horse's ears and face, if he'll let you; a hoof pick to clean muck from her hooves; a comb or brush to detangle a horse's mane and tail.

Don't forget to throw apples and carrots into your tack bag. And did you know horses love peppermints? In moderation, peppermints are good for horses; they help with digestion. But always ask an adult before you feed a horse—horses have very sensitive stomachs—and always offer the snack in the flattened palm of your hand. Horses don't want to bite you, but they do have strong teeth!

Some good boots and breeches, too

Unless you are riding bareback and unbridled on a beach at sunset—lucky you!—most horses are wearing a bridle and saddle when you ride them. A bridle allows you to communicate with and control a horse, and a saddle, atop a saddle blanket and/or pad, makes sitting on a horse more comfortable for both of you. A girth, or belt, holds everything in place. Riding boots and breeches (riding pants, pronounced “britches”) are standard attire, and a helmet is essential—horses can be unpredictable and riding can be dangerous.



Facts from *If You Want to Ride A Horse*

Atop a dream

Just as there are many kinds of horses, there are many ways to ride a horse. Two familiar traditions are English and Western. Riding English includes dressage, show jumping, and horse racing. Riding Western is all about cowboys, ranch work, and rodeos. The details of how you ride, and even what you wear while riding, vary depending on the tradition and the many forms each takes. But true to both is having a good seat in the saddle (English and Western saddles are very different), a firm but yielding grasp of the reins (two hands for English, one for Western), looking where you are going, breathing, and, yes, beaming.



Walk, trot, canter, jump, fly!

Horses walk and they gallop—or run! In-between gaits go by different names, depending on the riding tradition. In an English posting (2-beat) trot, a rider rises rhythmically out of the saddle; in a sitting trot or a Western jog, your butt stays put. Riding a horse at a 3-beat English canter or a Western lope is divine. And jumping? Well, that's just plain fun.

In 1878, at a racetrack in Palo Alto, California, a guy named Eadweard Muybridge photographed a horse galloping in a famous series of images called “The Horse in Motion,” which not only captured movement for the first time—the world’s first GIF!—it showed that, while galloping, all four of a horse’s hooves leave the ground at the same time. A horse can fly.

Love your horse, you will

It’s no surprise that a horse’s heart is big—as big as a basketball! It weighs about 7 to 9 pounds, more if they’re a thoroughbred or racehorse. (Your heart weighs about 0.5 pounds, despite feeling much bigger whenever you see a horse.) And how tall is that horse, you ask? Horses are measured in hands, from hoof to withers, which is a pretty word for the highest point of a horse’s back—their shoulders. One hand equals 4 inches, so a horse that is 17 hands is 68 inches. That’s one tall, bighearted, dreamy horse!

