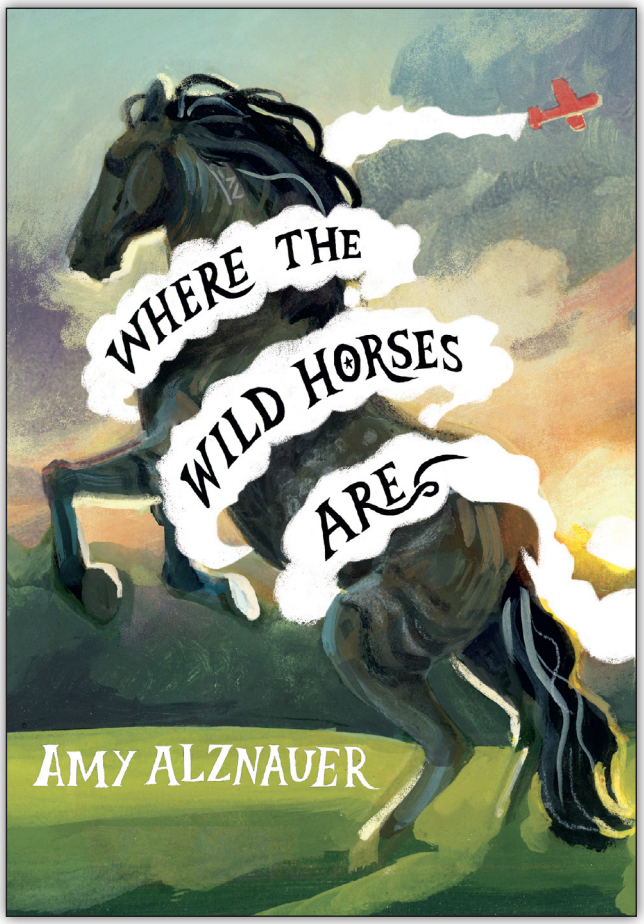
Ages
10 & Up

Neal Porter Books
HOLIDAY HOUSE
BOOK CLUB GUIDE



Neal Porter Books · 9780823462360

Where the Wild Horses Are
by Amy Alznauer

★**"Alznauer reinvigorates the classic horse story . . . Tender . . . warm."**—*Booklist* (starred review)

★ **"Emotionally satisfying."**
—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

★ **"Heartfelt. . . . A strong addition to middle grade collections."**—*School Library Journal* (starred review)

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

ABOUT THE BOOK

Nash Eliza West has been horseless her whole life, and she has one shot to turn things around.

Twelve-year-old Nash is a self-proclaimed cowboy. There's just one thing missing—a horse of her own. Enter the Extreme Mustang Makeover contest, a chance to receive and tame a newly captured mustang for the summer. It's the miracle Nash has been waiting for. But Nash's attention is divided when her cousin Benny arrives to stay for the summer. They were once like sisters, but Nash's family's move away has driven a wedge between them. Benny is everything Nash isn't: gentle and well-behaved, and Deaf like Nash's parents are. Sometimes she wonders if they'd rather have a daughter like that than a headstrong cowboy CODA like Nash.

Can a brave girl and a horse no one believes can be tamed work together? Cowboy bravado, growing pains, and Deaf culture inspired by life in author Amy Alznauer's Deaf-hearing family creates a debut middle grade novel that will lasso readers tight by the heart.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The book begins with Nash, self-proclaimed cowboy but horseless, telling the story of the summer of the miracle. What is a miracle? Why does Nash feel it is important to write the story of the miracle down? At the end of the book, there is another miracle. Explore Nash's feelings when she is in the arena after the horse show.
- Nash desperately wants her own horse and has dreams about it. Did you ever want something so badly that you could conjure it and feel like it's already yours? How might dreams and miracles be tied together?
- Nash is a strong, quirky, compelling character. The author chose to tell Nash's story as a first-person narrative. Why do you think she chose this perspective? What makes the first-person perspective work well in the story? What are the limitations of this point of view?

- Cousins Nash and Benny were best friends. How do you think they will feel about spending the summer together after not speaking for six years? What changes in their relationship so they become friends again? Have you had an experience with a good friend that changed your relationship? Were there circumstances beyond your control? Was there an opportunity to mend the friendship?

- Being stubborn is often seen as a negative trait. Nash is portrayed as stubborn many times throughout the novel. How does Nash's stubbornness work in her favor?

- Training a wild horse is a difficult task that takes a lot of work and responsibility. How does Nash learn to "talk" to her wild horse? Does she ever doubt that she can train him well enough to win the Extreme Mustang Makeover contest? How does Nash feel when Rev escapes from his pen? What are the steps she takes to find him and get him back safely? Is this something she could have done by herself?

- Mary D's Riding Barn and Tack Shop is run by Mary D, Nash's gruff riding instructor who softens over the course of the book. What do you think helps to change her manner and the way she feels? How does Nash feel when she learns about Mary D's family who is no longer with her?

- Nash's family is made up of Deaf parents, a hearing daughter, and a Deaf cousin, Benny, who has a hearing mother and a Deaf father. Nash's story is an example of "windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors," the phrase coined by renowned educator Rudine Sims Bishop. Discuss how the book gives you a view into another's experience, allows you to see a character like yourself, or allows you to enter the story and become a part of the world.

- Nash has a place where she goes when she's angry or sad to think, to be by herself. Her "cave" is the hull of a ruined plane in the corner of her pilot dad's hangar. What is the place you go to when you feel like Nash has? How does it help?

- Bravery is an important theme in the book. Nash often demonstrates bravery. Describe some of those times in the story. When is Benny brave? Nash's mom worries terribly about Nash's dad when he flies. How does she overcome her intense fear of flying? How do Nash and her dad respond when she says she'll fly?

- Belonging is a central idea in the novel. Describe the sense of belonging between various characters such as Nash's parents, Benny and Nash, the girls' mothers, who are sisters, and Mary D and the neighbors who attend the feast in the barn. Nash's feeling of belonging wavers at times, such as when Benny is making bread with her aunt, Nash's mom. What are some other times? How does her sense of belonging change throughout?

- Nash's cousin Benny performs a selfless act by using her prize money to buy Reverie for Nash. When do you think Benny made this decision? What motivated Benny? How does Nash feel when she realizes that Rev is now her very own mustang? How does Nash feel about Benny?

TEACHER BONUS!

Librarian Betsy Bird has conducted an illuminating Q&A with author Amy Alznauer. Visit https://afuse8production.slj.com/2026/02/19/and-where-the-sendak-isnt-a-where-the-wild-horses-are-cover-reveal-and-qa-with-amy-alznauer/ to learn more behind-the-scenes details about the writing of this debut novel, including overcoming stereotypes about Deafness, cowboys, horse girls, and more that will spark discussion with your students. Share interesting tidbits from Amy's life. Reading the epigraph from Maurice Sendak that Amy includes in the front of her book can be an excellent activity to set the tone for studying the novel in class.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Amy Alznauer has published a memoir, essays and picture books. *Where the Wild Horses Are* is her debut middle grade novel. Amy's work has won the Christopher Award and the Annie Dillard Award for Creative Nonfiction and has been selected as a *New York Times* Top 25 Children's Book. Her picture book biography *The Five Sides of Marjorie Rice: How to Discover a Shape* (Candlewick Press) was selected as a Best Book of the Year by Evanston, Chicago, and New York Public Libraries, *Booklist*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Kirkus Reviews* and won the 2026 Mathical Book Prize. Amy teaches mathematics at Northwestern University. She splits her time between Chicago, where she lives with her husband, teenage daughter, and two dogs; Pennsylvania, where she grew up and where her daughter's horse Dragonfly lives; Florida; Austin, TX; and more! Visit Amy online at amyalz.com.

Guide written by Theresa M. Borzumato-Greenberg, Children's Book Marketing Executive and Consultant, New York.