

# Introductory Lesson

## Before Reading

- 1 Anna Sewell wrote "Black Beauty" at a time when people were often cruel to horses. What was life for horses like then? What is it like now? Discuss.
- 2 "Black Beauty" is an autobiography. What is an autobiography? Can you name any famous people who wrote one?
- 3 In "Black Beauty" a horse talks about his life. Animals that talk are a common feature of children's literature. Do you like this kind of books? Why (not)? Do you know any other stories with animals that talk?
- 4 Read the blurb on the back of the book. Is the story you are going to read a happy one or a sad one? Why? How do you think the story ends?

Anna Sewell



Anna Sewell was born on 30 March, 1820 in Yarmouth, England. She had a younger brother, Phillip. Their parents were kind and gentle people. Anna's mother wrote children's books and poetry, and she taught Anna to love history, animals and nature.

Anna fell when she was a young girl and she never walked correctly again, but she could drive a horse and carriage. She loved horses when she was a child and, after she read an essay about animals, she wanted to do something to help them. So, she decided to write stories that could teach people about kindness to horses.

Anna also taught at Sunday school and helped her mother with her books. She was in her fifties when she had the idea to write a book about horses, and she wrote "Black Beauty" in 1877.

At that time, many people used a check rein on their horses. A check rein is a thin leather strap that keeps the horses' heads up very high. It was a cruel way to make the horses look handsome and it was very painful for them. Anna wrote "Black Beauty" in the last eight years of her life to show people how horses suffer from this. The book helped put an end to it.

Anna Sewell did not marry or have children. "Black Beauty" was published just before she died, on 25 April 1878.

5 Read about Anna Sewell and circle the correct answers.

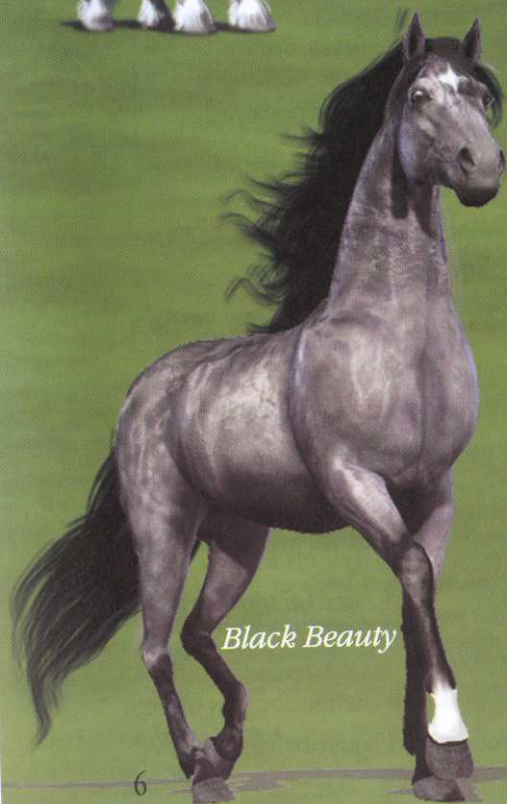
- 1 Anna Sewell learnt to love horses thanks to her...  
a father.    b mother.    c brother.    d teachers.
- 2 After having a small accident as a girl, Anna...  
a could not ride a horse.                      c had trouble walking.  
b did not marry.                                      d did not have children.
- 3 Anna decided to do something to help horses after she...  
a read about animals.                              c fell off a horse.  
b saw how horses suffered.                      d read her mother's books.
- 4 Anna Sewell wrote *Black Beauty*...  
a when she was fifty.                              c when she was fifteen.  
b in the last years of her life.                      d just before she died.



*Merrylegs*



*Ginger*



*Black Beauty*



*Captain*



*Joe Green*



*John*



*Squire Gordon*



*Jerry Barker*



*Reuben Smith*



*Willie*



*Mr Thoroughgood*

## *My Early Years*

When I was a young colt, I lived with my mother on a big farm. I remember a big green field with a pond in the middle of it and beautiful green trees all around. There was a small wood and a brook, too. On one side of the field, past the gate, was our master's house.

My mother and I ran together in the field, and when it was hot we stood under the trees where it was cool. Sometimes I ran with the other young colts in the field and we had great fun together. Some of them were almost as big as grown-up horses. But one time, when we kicked a little as we played, my mother whinnied to me to come to her.

"Listen to what I say to you. The colts here are good colts, but they do not have good manners. You do have good manners and I don't want you to learn bad ways. Do your work well and lift your feet high when you trot, and remember: never bite or kick – even when you are playing."

My mother, Duchess, was a wise horse, and we were the master's favourites. He called me Darkie because my colour was black, even though I had one white foot and a white star on my forehead. We had a fine and happy life in those days.

When I was four years old, my master sold me to Squire Gordon. He lived near our farm, and early in May a man came and took me there. My master said goodbye to me.

"Be a good horse, Darkie, and always do your best."

Then my mother said her last words to me.

"Remember, my dear son, there are good men like our master, and there are cruel men. I hope you will always have a good master, but a horse can never know who will buy him. Just do your best."

Squire Gordon's home was near the village of Birtwick. It was a great big house with a big iron gate in front of it and lots of apple trees. A long road went up to the house and gardens, and there was a big field where we horses could run and play.

John, the coachman, put me in a nice bright stable where I could talk to the other horses and see outside, too. In the box next to me, there was a fat little grey pony with a thick mane and tail, a very pretty head and a cute little nose. I said,

"Hello, how do you do? What is your name?"

He looked at me and held up his head.

"My name is Merrylegs. I carry the young ladies and sometimes I take our mistress out, too. If you are going to live next door to me, I hope you do not bite."

Then I saw a tall chestnut mare with a beautiful long neck. Her name was Ginger, and when she looked at me and spoke, she was angry.

"So it is you they gave my box to. It isn't very nice for a colt to send a lady from her home."

I was a little surprised.

"Excuse me, but I did not send you from your home and I do not like angry words. A man brought me here and put me in this box. And I am not a colt; I am four years old and quite grown-up."

In the afternoon, when Ginger went out, Merrylegs told me about her.

"I think she is unhappy, because she bites sometimes. Perhaps someone hurt her before she came here -- you know, maybe they used a whip on her. But John is very kind to her and our master never uses a whip, so she shouldn't say anything."

The next day the squire rode me. He was a good rider, and kind, too. When we came home, Mrs Gordon was at the front door.

