

# **The Black Stallion Study Guide**

## **The Black Stallion by Walter Farley**

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## Plot Summary

The Black Stallion is a young reader's fiction novel about the relationship between the teenage Alec Ramsay and the wild stallion called the Black. As a result of their time together on a desert isle, the two build trust in each other. After surviving on the island by relying upon each other, a passing boat stops and its sailors save the two. After being away from his family for five months, Alec and the Black make it to Flushing, New York where Alec's story soon gets picked up by a newspaper. With the help of his neighbor, Henry Dailey, Alec trains the Black to race and a reporter named Jim Neville manages to get the Black into a race against the fastest horses in the world. The Black and the boy win the race.

Walter Farley's novel, *The Black Stallion*, opens with Alec Ramsey and his trip back from India. Alec boards a ship called the Drake which is set to sail to London where Alec will then board the Majestic and return to New York. Along the way, the Drake stops at an Arabian port where a massive, black stallion boards the ship. Each day, Alec feeds the horse a sugar cube and slowly gains its trust. When a storm hits and the Drake capsizes, only the boy and the horse survive. The two land on a deserted island where they must rely upon each other to survive. After the Black saves Alec from a poisonous snake and the boy begins to feed the horse dried carrageen, Alec decides to ride the beast.

After a little less than a month, Alec's shelter catches fire and a passing ship stops to rescue the pair. They journey to Rio de Janeiro and then to New York City where, after five months, Alec finally reunites with his parents. At home in Flushing, a suburb of New York City, the Black stays with Alec's neighbor, a retire horse jockey named Henry Dailey. Henry convinces Alec to train the horse to race and the two begin breaking the Black to the saddle and exercising him regularly. Eventually, the reporter who wrote about Alec's story introduces him to another writer at the Daily Telegram named Jim Neville. Jim who had just organized a race between the world's two fastest horses, sees the Black race and decides to try to get the wild horse into that very same event.

Weeks go by and finally both owners of the two racing horses, Sun Raider and Cyclone, allow Jim's mystery horse to race. Alec, Henry, and the Black travel to Chicago where the race is to be held. Once there, Alec sees the other two massive and muscled horses and Henry warns him that the race will not be easy despite the Black's superior size and immense speed. Alec tells his mentor that he trusts the Black to win the day.

At the race itself, the three horses line up to start, but the Black and Sun Raider begin to fight. Eventually, Alec is able to get the Black under control and line him up again. Just as the horse calms, Sun Raider rushes over and kicks the Black in the leg, leaving the horse bleeding. When Alec moves to check the wound, the race starter fires and the race begins. Alec leaps onto the Black and the two rush after the other two horses who have a 100 yard lead on the wounded horse. Despite the distance, the Black beats Cyclone and Sun Raider with record breaking speed.



# Section 1, Chapter 1 - 4

## Summary

The Black Stallion by Walter Farley is the story of the emotional bond between a boy, the young Alec Ramsay, and a stallion, a fierce and untamed beast called the Black. Alec Ramsay was a young student who spent two months with his uncle in India. On his journey home, the Drake, the boat upon which Alec traveled, stopped in the Middle East to pick up both passengers and cargo. It was here that Alec first laid eyes upon the Black.

The steamer called the Drake left the coast of India and headed towards London through the Arabian Sea. Alexander Ramsay had spent two months with his Uncle Ralph, a missionary in India. With his uncle, Alec had learned to do what he had been looking forward to his entire young life: ride horses. Alec sadly looked over the rail of the Drake because opportunities to ride back home in New York City were few. As a token of his time in India, he clutched the pearl pocketknife that his Uncle had given him on his birthday. Alec's trip home was set to take four weeks and get him home just in time for school.

The days passed aboard the Drake until it docked at a small Arabian port where a crowd had gathered. A piercing whistle cut through the air and Alec saw a mighty black horse rear onto its hind legs in defiance. The massive animal was the biggest horse Alec had ever seen and its temper was fierce. The stallion fought and kicked one of the four men around him. The man crumpled and lay still. Eventually, they force the Black onto the ship under the direction of the Drake's Captain Watson and the stallion's owner, an Arabian man.

Chapter 2 began with the stallion aboard the Drake as the ship continued on its way to England. Alec had been feeding the Black a cube of sugar a day, building a relationship with the animal. Just a few days from London, a storm hit. The storm subsided slightly, but then a bolt of lightning hits the ship and nearly cut it in half. Alec lost consciousness for a moment and woke to the sticky feeling of blood. Alec rushed to the line of lifeboats where the dark-skinned owner of the Black ripped at Alec's life jacket, but Captain Watson shoved him away. The frantic man saw the departing lifeboat and jumped for it, but he fell into the sea. Reminded of the Black, Alec freed the horse from its stall and the horse jumped into the water, knocking Alec into it as well. While battling the waves, Alec clung to the Black's rope until the two finally reached the shore of a small island. The Black dragged Alec along the rough beach until Alec used the pearl pocketknife from his Uncle to cut the rope.

In Chapter 3, Alec awoke on the island with an empty stomach and a battered body. Following the Black's hoof prints, Alec found the island's only freshwater, a small spring-water pool. The Black, threatened by Alec's presence, charged at the frozen boy. Just short of him, the Black stopped, whistled sharply, then cantered back to graze on the



sparse island grass. Exhausted, Alec drank his fill and fell asleep beside the water. The next day, Alec built a makeshift shelter out of the driftwood from the Drake's hull. For food, he lived mainly on carrageen, a type of seaweed, that he dried before feeding to the Black and eating it himself.

Chapter 4 started with the next day. Alec walked along the beach and the Black charged him. Alec fell and the Black pounded his hoofs around the boy's head. Eventually, the Black moves on and Alec realized the horse had stomped a venomous snake to death and saved him. In gratitude, Alec pat the Black for the first time and the friendship between them slowly grew until Alec finally worked up the courage to ride the Black. After the beast bucked Alec off a couple times, the pair rode together for the first time. The Black's wild speed terrified and exhilarated Alec. After a reckless few minutes, the Black calmed and Alec fell to the ground exhausted. Each subsequent day, Alec rode the Black until the animal responded to him enough to turn and change pace. After a day of riding, Alec fed his fire then fell asleep in his shelter only to awake to the Black's scream and a cascade of flames. Terrified, Alec burst out of the burning shelter as the trees around his hut caught fire as well. On the edge of despair, Alec pushed himself to search for more wood along the beach. Instead of wood, he found a ship and five men in a rowboat who had seen the fire.

## Analysis

The book's opening chapters introduce and establish the adventurous and exciting mood that Farley cultivates throughout the rest of the work. Chapter 1's initial setting in India introduces the theme of the exotic. For Farley's Western readers, the east is an unfamiliar place. As Alec reminisces about his time with his missionary uncle, he recalls the screams of panthers and the eerie jungle sounds of his time abroad. It was in this unfamiliar setting that Alec grew and changed as a person. Farley describes the physical changes in Alec's muscle and tanned skin, but these features are indicators of the nonphysical changes that emerge in later chapters. Another physical reminder of Alec's internal changes is the pearl pocketknife that his uncle gave him for his birthday. His uncle's foreshadowing words, "A knife...comes in handy sometimes", hint at the knife's later use when the storm strands both Alec and the Black on the island. When the Black charged along the beach, dragging Alec by the rope to which he had clung at sea, Alec saved himself by cutting the rope before the Black drug him to death.

Alec himself has changed in his time in the East and it may be these changes that allow him to connect so well with a product of that Eastern environment, namely the Black. The exotic setting of the opening chapters allows Farley to play with the unknown. Since the Arabian countries are unknown, strange places, an exceptional animal can exist there. The Black is such an animal. The wild, unpredictable, and massive horse cannot be tamed by his Arabian master nor by the European sailors. When Alec first sees the Black, the horse bears his teeth and fights against constraint. It is in this first description of the Black in Chapter 1 where Farley describes the horse as having a "small, savagely beautiful head." Again, the text subtly draws a distinction between the refinement of the European and the savageness of the East and all places outside the West. The horse is



a savage. What goes unsaid, but is certainly understood, is that the people must be savage as well.

It is in Chapter 2 that the reader sees the defining instance of the Eastern man's savagery. As Alec rushes to the lifeboats in an effort to escape the sinking Drake, the dark-skinned owner of the Black grabs him and tries to rip Alec's life jacket off to wear it himself. The man is "half-crazed" and he was "waving his arms and babbling hysterically". In this way, Farley presents his double-edged conception of the East. On one hand, the near-mystical place can produce majestic animals like the Black, but hysterical people populate it. After the struggle against the waves of the storm, the two land on an uninhabited island where Alec acknowledges his Uncle Ralph's wise and foreshadowing words saying that the knife did in fact come in handy.

As Chapter 3 begins, Alec's growth becomes evident. While he has already displayed his unique ability to think quickly and act courageously, it is on the island where the differences between a normal, schoolboy and the protagonist become clear. After assessing his situation and exploring the island, he begins prioritizing his survival tasks. He immediately finds water by tracing the Black's footprints. Later, he builds a shelter out of the wreckage of the Drake, symbolically re-purposing the effects of the disaster and creating something useful. Another point of growth occurs in the story's central focus: the relationship between the boy and the horse. From almost being charged by the Black on their very first day on the island, to fully mastering the animal and riding it, Alec skillfully works through the Black's unruly character and earns its trust. Along with the growing trust, Alec and the Black begin evening each other out. Alec becomes more wild and at one with his fierce struggle to survive and the Black becomes less wild and more tame. Just as Alec learns to spear fish, the Black learns to run to Alec when called.

Although Alec adapts to his dangerous environment and matures, it is ultimately luck that saves the two from a ignoble death upon the island. When Alec falls asleep and his shelter catches fire, a passing ship stops to rescue them. Rather than using the skills he learned on the island and cleverly figuring a way off it, mere chance decides their fate. It is in this moment that Farley introduces the motif of luck and happenstance. Alec and the Black happened to be on the same ship. That same ship happened to hit a storm. The only survivors of that storm happened to be the boy and the horse and they fortunately landed on a habitable island that created a unique setting where the two could bond with each other and foster a relationship. All in all, the author has explored the exotic and the hero has overcome his trial. Alec's odyssey draws nearer to a close.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Alec treat his being stranded on a deserted isle? Does he cope with his surroundings well or poorly?



## Discussion Question 2

How do you think the author feels about the value of Alec's exotic experiences? Are these trials generally positive for the boy or negative?

## Discussion Question 3

If not for the passing ship and the lucky fire, would Alec have been stuck on the island? If so, how would his relationship with the Black been affected? Think about the time Alec considered the Black as a possible source of food.

## Vocabulary

bureau, diminished, quiver, consciousness, broadside, murmured, anxiously, instinct, occupants, barren, monotonous, void, prow, fury, peered, hysterical, piercing, hypnotized, cove, famished



## Section 2, Chapter 5 - 7

### Summary

Seeing the sailors, Alec rushed forward to a man called Pat. The dumbfounded sailors learned Alec's story, but did not believe that a massive, wild stallion was also on the island until Alec freed himself from them and whistled for the Black. Eventually, the animal screamed and rushed to its master. Unwilling at first, the captain then allowed Alec and the Black onto his ship after much struggle. The Black had to swim, following Alec towards the boat. Together, the sailors hoisted the bucking stallion onto the ship by a band. After fighting to get the Black calm, the Alec, his leg swollen from the horse's kick, and the Black made it onto the ship. Alec fell unconscious and woke to the Irish sailor named Pat urging the boy to eat. Pat recounts how the seamen eventually had to choke the Black to get it under control after he attacked one of the sailors. Pat then left to radio Alec's parents to tell them their son was coming home.

In Chapter 6, Alec had recovered enough to rise from his bed. The Black had recovered enough to begin savagely kicking his stall, but Alec calmed him with a pat and an apple. The sailors could not understand the friendship between the boy and the stallion saying that it was uncanny the way the fierce beast calmed when Alec was around him. After some time, the ship landed at Rio de Janeiro in South America. Here, Alec bought passage for himself and the Black with money that his parents had wired him. Alec wished to repay the captain for his kindness, but his parents, not knowing about the Black, had not given him enough money. The captain graciously declined Alec's attempt to pay for the voyage saying the excitement the Black caused was worth the trouble.

Pat said farewell to Alec and the Black before the two board the ship set to take them to New York. Before leaving, Pat remarked that, as a past horse trainer, he bet the Black could tear up a track. As the two board the ship, the Black suddenly screamed and tore away from Alec because he had seen another stallion, a chestnut-colored, male horse. The two beasts thundered towards each other then fought savagely, biting and kicking. The Black gained the upper hand and fought the chestnut to the ground. The triumphant Black shrieked and stood over his defeated foe. Bleeding and fierce, the Black could only be calmed by Alec who approached slowly. After gently coaxing the Black up the gangplank, Alec led him to a stall away from the other horses. A young sailor approached Alec with antiseptic and bandages for the Black and remarked that he had never seen anything like the fight between the two animals.

Chapter 7 found Alec and the Black on their way home to Alec's house in Flushing, New York. During a storm, the Black pounded against his stall even with Alec sleeping just outside the stall. Reminded of the Drake's fate, Alec feared the Black would tear down the stall walls. He opened the gate, fed the Black sugar, and soothed him until the storm passed. Two days after the storm, the ship pulled into Quarantine, the inspection station for New York City's harbor. Inspectors examined each horse and the papers associated with the animals. Before Alec could stop him, one of the inspectors opened the Black's





door and the animal lashed out, kicking the man off his feet. Alec began to explain his story to the officer in charge, but the man said that he had heard of the pair and let them through without any trouble. The ship pulled into the dock opposite Brooklyn and Alec led the stallion out towards the silent crowd. All eyes turned to the Black who flung Alec from his feet and pounded back onto the ship. A policeman ran up with a gun in hand, but Alec said he could handle the Black. Alec blindfolded the animal with sweater, then led him out onto the pier where Alec's mother and father greeted them.

The Black astonished Alec's parents. His mother, frightened after seeing her boy nearly trampled by the beast, nearly refused to let Alec keep the horse, but she saw the calm, self-reliant look in his eyes and faltered. His father agreed to let him bring the horse home, but the animal was to be Alec's sole responsibility. Joe Russo, a young reporter from the Daily Telegram, approached the family asking to take pictures of the horse and the boy and interview the only two survivors of the Drake. Russo lent his van so the family could take the Black home in exchange for Alec's story.

## Analysis

This section ends a major arc of the story. Alec and the Black finally return to civilization and structure. After being stranded on an island, rescued and brought to South America, the pair finally make it back to Alec's family and his home. Chapter 5 begins with a character who Farley typifies. Pat, the Irish sailor, exclaims his first words in the novel: "For the love of St. Patrick." After moving past the exotic nature of India and the rest of the East, Alec finally meets a European person. Just as Farley painted the dark-skinned man in one brush, so too does he treat Pat in a flat manner. Farley's treatment of Pat seems to say that all Irishmen must say St. Patrick's name by way of identification. Farley does give the reader another flat, foreign character in the later Chapter 8 with Napoleon's Italian owner, Tony. Chapter 5's rescue scene also highlights the changes in Alec by giving the reader a view of the boy through the sailors' eyes. The sailors find a wild looking boy with long, hanging red hair and a body so brown that they would have thought him a native if not for his tattered bits of Western clothing. This insight recalls the novel's major theme of the wild and its effect on those who inhabit it.

Another point of interest is the moment of hesitation when Alec whistles for the Black. Alec is terrified that the animal that saved his life, once by dragging him to land and again by killing a poisonous snake, will not come to him. Like a madman, or a savage, Alec jerks himself free of the sailors and runs up the island's shore because he would rather stay stranded than leave his friend, the Black, behind. This moment reveals Alec's deep affection and love for the animal that he has befriended. This insight into Alec's mind also shows readers a frightened young boy who has clung to the only thing that has kept him sane.

Throughout the story, circumstances force Alec to be independent and self-reliant. The boy's parents expected him to travel alone from India to New York City. It is in the moment when Alec is prepared to reject rescue and salvation that the reader sees the boy behind the hero who braved the storm and bested the harsh island. In reality, Alec



clings to the one friend that he has. Even when he returns to school in the later chapters, his relationship with his schoolmates is superficial at best because he must rush home to take care of the Black.

While still a boy, Alec is also the hero of the story. He is young, but he can do what no grownup can do: he can control the Black. The hero's special ability to do what his elders cannot is a typical young reader's novel feature, but what makes Farley's novel interesting is the vulnerability that Alec displays through his affection for the Black. The two depend on one and other, not only for survival, but for companionship as the reader sees in this section.

Chapter 7 highlights Alec's vulnerability as, just after Quarantine, the boat moves past the Statue of Liberty. Alec's eyes fill with tears at the sight of the "symbol of freedom and home." Like the good American Alec is, he becomes emotional before the symbol of America after being away from home for five months. Rather than accepting his emotional response as natural and feeling relief, Alec berates himself thinking he was "too old to become emotional." To understand the significance of this moment, one has to look back upon the novel to this point. So far, there has not been a single female character in the whole novel. To this point, every person who says anything to or interacts with Alec in anyway is male. While one assumes that in the crowds and upon the passenger boats there must be women, none merit even passing description. In this male-centered novel, Alec's feeling that he is too old to be emotional may come from his experiences with other characters, specifically his hardy Uncle Ralph and the gruff sailors that the boy meets.

Notably, at the end of Chapter 7, the reader meets the first women of the story: Alec's mother who cannot control herself because she is justifiably nervous about her son near-fatal experience with the Black. Alec's mother gets only the incomplete sentence, "But he's so dangerous, son- he threw you down-." After saying these few words, she trails off because she is overwrought with the same type of emotion that Alec so desperately tried to throttle down when he saw the Statue of Liberty. Throughout this section, the author delves further into the theme of the wild and its effect on the individual, namely Alec.

## Discussion Question 1

The sailors do not initially believe Alec's wondrous tale of a dangerous stallion that became his friend. If you were in the sailor's shoes, what would you think of the story that the wild-looking boy tells?

## Discussion Question 2

How does the author represent Pat the sailor? What does this representation say about the author's own sentiments?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does the Black trust Alec? What has brought the two together and allowed them to become friends?

## Vocabulary

coaxed, freighter, descending, remnants, jumbled, searing, gnarled, choke, bedlam, unconscious, uncanny, astonished, courageous, thunderous, cargo, tremble, supremacy, journey, constitution, torrent



## Section 3, Chapter 8 - 10

### Summary

Chapter 8 began with Alec and the Black heading to Alec's home in Flushing, a suburb of New York City. Afraid that the horse would get nervous, Alec stands in the rear of the truck that Joe Russo, a reporter from the Daily Telegram, had secured for them in the hopes of getting Alec's full story. The group reached Alec's home and the boy ran over to his neighbor's home to ask her if the Black could stay in their barn. Mrs. Dailey, the neighbor, agrees to let the Black use the rundown stall next to a horse named Napoleon. A short man named Henry Dailey, the husband of the woman to whom Alec spoke, met the group by the stables to set the Black up in the stall next to the elderly workhorse, Napoleon. The two horses got along well and Alec used the feed that Tony, the peddler and owner of Napoleon, used for his horse.

Alec sat down with his family and the reporter Joe Russo to tell his story. After the story, his parents understood why the Black meant so much to the boy. Joe Russo left and the family went to bed. Soon after Alec fell asleep, the Black's shrill whistle woke him. Rushing over to the barn, Alec found Tony, Napoleon's owner, a frightened mess. The scene drew a police officer and a small crowd formed, but after Henry and Tony explain what happened, the crowd dispersed along with the officer. Finally, Alec got to bed at 2:15 in the morning.

In Chapter 9, Alec woke early and ran to the barn to find Tony singing and feeding the horses as the animals nipped playfully at each other. Grudgingly, Napoleon left the Black in his stall to start the day's work with Tony. Alec took the Black out for a wild ride through Henry's field. Henry himself watched the affair and remarked that, as a former jockey, he had never seen a faster horse than the Black. After showing Alec his former championship awards and newspaper articles depicting his victories with his racehorse, Chang, Henry convinced Alec to start training the Black to race. As Henry finished speaking, a low-flying plane swooped by the barn and startled the Black who leaped seven feet over the field's fence and charged away. Henry and Alec hopped in Henry's car and chased after the stallion.

In Chapter 10, after searching for the Black for over half an hour, the worried pair decided to split up and search for the horse. Alec, afraid a cop will shoot the Black, rushed off toward the golf course where the Black had been headed. After searching for a while, Alec ran to the Hole, a place with the only pool of water in miles. After not initially finding the Black, Alec despaired and thought of the Black lying dead in the street from a car or a policeman's bullets. As he turned, Alec heard a stick crack and saw the Black looming in the shadows. Alec soothed the horse then rode him back to Henry. Alec rode the horse back to the barn with Henry leading in his car. Alec decided to build the fence higher and finally got home to eat breakfast to find his worried mother waiting for him. Alec promised her that his caring for the Black would not interfere with his schooling.



## Analysis

Each time the Black experiences civilization, he balks. The wild nature of the horse appears to be incompatible with the streets of New York City. The major event of this section is the stallion's escape from the barn. Here, the novel's major theme of the wild and the civilized clashes in a realistic way. The Black, which in itself becomes a symbol and the embodiment of the wild, bolts when it hears the shuddering roar of an overhead plane. The plane sparks some primordial fear in the animal and it flees from the constricting pen in which Alec and Henry try to contain it.

From the top of Chapter 8, Farley rights "Noise, noise, noise - this was the Black's introduction to New York." The Black's introduction becomes a symbolic clash between the civilized and the uncivilized, the tame and the wild. Without Alec, the horse would never have been able to handle the loud and frightening city. Through their unlikely friendship, the Black's nature can be tamed.

After Alec installs the Black into Henry's barn, he runs back home to find his mother crying in relief at her son's return. Rather than crying from relief as well, Alec plays the role of the comforter. In a reversal of the traditional roles of mother and child, it is Alec who soothes his mother rather than the opposite. This scene displays Alec's emotional growth and Farley follows it with a physical act that highlights his growth. He puts his "lean brown arm through his mother's soft plump one." This act is interesting for a couple reasons. Firstly, it introduces a dichotomy, a difference, between the boy and his mother. He is now weathered and experienced, while his mother has not been out in the sun and has not endured the trials that Alec himself has. Secondly, the color of Alec's skin is important as well. He is tanned and lean. Just as the sailors almost mistook Alec for an island savage, when Alec first runs into the house his mother seems to question whether it really is her son who has entered the home. She asks "Alexander, is that you?" and he responds "yes, Mom, it's really me" as if he felt the need to reassure her that he truly is her son and not some island native.

Another interesting part of the section are the characters that Farley introduces. The first is Henry Dailey, who enters into a pact with Alec to train the Black to race. Henry, a man looking to relive his youthful jockey days through Alec, reiterates the sailor Pat's foreshadowing words. Henry says that the Black is a horse that will never let another animal pass him and that he would like to see the Black on the track. At these words, Alec responds asking if Henry means a race. The exchange is an almost perfect repetition of the talk between the Irish sailor Pat and Alec. Pat says he would love to see the Black on a track and Alec asks if he means a racetrack. To have this repetition occur within a couple chapters of each other highlights Pat and Henry's words as being important and prophetic. The reader can look ahead to see if their words will prove true.

The second character that Farley introduces is Tony, the huckster who owns Napoleon. Tony, like Pat and the dark-skinned erstwhile owner of the Black, are flat, immigrant characters. The novel's representation of America and its fondness for the American symbol of freedom, the Statue of Liberty, provide the novel with an interesting bias. In



keeping with this American-central perspective, Tony is the epitome of a goofy, friendly Italian immigrant. He is the only character in the novel to have lines written with an accent. The first words he says are "Dio mio" when the Black frightens him. Tony's responses mark him as different from Alec and his family. He says things like "that's-a right" and "I ver' busy make-a better". Through this portrayal, the reader gains and insight into Walter Farley's, perhaps unconscious, ideological stance on America. While the novel features exotic settings like the Middle East and India, it is a distinctly American novel featuring an American, Alec, mastering a product of the wild, uncivilized world of Arabia, the black stallion.

## Discussion Question 1

Why would the strong and fierce Black be afraid of New York City?

## Discussion Question 2

Why would the Black like Napoleon? What makes the horse that has just fought a chestnut stallion so friendly to Napoleon?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Henry decide to help Alec with the Black? What characteristics do Henry and Alec share?

## Vocabulary

nuisance, gravely, roamed, huckster, pressure, suspiciously, halter, familiar, accustom, spectator, questioningly, encircled, slackened, scrapbook, tiptoed, astride, interrupted, caught, hastened, staccato



## Section 4, Chapter 11 - 14

### Summary

Chapter 11 began with Alec chatting with his mother and then running over to Henry's to groom the Black. Henry pulled out a box containing a racing saddle and bridle and his old jockey uniform bearing the number 3. Henry reminisces about winning the International Cup upon the massive horse, Chang. After winning the race and breaking the Cup record, Chang staggered and dropped dead. Henry said he had never thought anything could beat Chang's record until he saw the Black, but, without a pedigree recording the Black's parentage, the horse could not compete. Henry paid for the Black's feed over Alec's protest saying that the two of them were partners.

The next day, Alec attended school until 12:30 then brought his two friends, Whiff Sample and Bill Lee, home to see the Black. Alec's friends balked at the frightening beast and watched as Alec and the Black played a thunderous game of tag. Months go by and Alec worked like a clock, waking at 5 in the morning to feed the Black, then running back from school to train. Alec worked around the house to earn his allowance in order to feed the Black. In the winter, the Black saw his first snowfall and Alec rode him through it. Henry remarked that spring was only a few months away and that they would begin training the Black for real with the saddle and bridle.

Training began in Chapter 12 on April 1st. Fifteen minutes passed as Henry and Alec tried to get the saddle on the fidgeting Black. Once on, the Black tried desperately to dislodge the saddle until Alec gave him a cube of sugar and hopped on the horse who promptly bucked Alec off his back. After calming the Black, Henry and Alec get the racing bit in the animal's mouth and Alec was finally able to ride the Black with a saddle and bit.

In Chapter 13, two weeks after breaking the Black to the saddle, Alec and Henry sneaked out for night ride at the Belmont race track where Henry's friend Jake let them into the field. Jake saw the old gray Napoleon, who had come along to keep the Black calm, and the caretaker remarked that he hoped he was not risking his job for that gray imitation of a horse. In awe of the Black, Jake said he had not seen a horse like that since Chang. Jake pulled out a stopwatch and timed the Black as Alec rode him around the track. After a wild ride, Alec climbed down from the saddle, his hands bloody from the reins. Jake agreed with Henry that no horse could beat the Black. Sun Raider and Cyclone, two renowned racehorses, would give him a race, but Jake said that the Black would beat them. Jake bade farewell to his old pupil and Alec and told Henry that, despite Mrs. Dailey's wishes, Henry was just like Jake and had to be around horses. At home, Alec cleaned the cuts on his hands then fell into bed, still feverish with the excitement of riding the Black around the track.

In Chapter 14, Alec rode the Black on the racetrack two nights later in front of Henry and Jake who both timed the horse. On the homestretch, Napoleon leaped onto the track



and the old horse tried to race alongside the Black. Word from the Arabian horse pedigree holders came and Henry tore the letter open in front of Alec only to find that no horse matching the Black's description had been found. Henry declared that he would see the Black in a race even if he had to stage the race himself.

Newspaper buzzed about the two racehorses of the day, Cyclone and Sun Raider, that Jake had mentioned at the track. Critics said that both were the greatest horses of the day and every person had formed an opinion on which horse was faster. Jim Neville, a reporter from the Daily Telegram just like Joe Russo, wrote that no matter how much everyone may say one horse was better than the other, the two would never race because one horse was from the East and the other the West and their owners were not true American sportsmen. In response, Sun Raider's owner Mr. C. T. Volence and Cyclone's owner Mr. E. L. Hurst agreed to race their horses on June 26th in Chicago. Joe Russo visited Alec and Henry who explain that the Black could beat both horses, but, without a pedigree, he cannot compete. Joe promises to bring his coworker, Jim Neville, to the track the next night to watch the Black run.

## Analysis

In this section, the author begins to set up the climax. Despite the Black's lack of a pedigree, Farley quickly hints that, through the reporter Jim Neville, there may be a way that the Black could compete against the greatest racehorses of the day, Sun Raider and Cyclone. Consequently, this section can be defined as the novel's rising action in that it sets the stage from the climax and foreshadows the events that are to follow.

The beginning of this section, Chapter 11, gives the reader insight into Henry's personality and his motivation for training the Black and Alec. While one might say that since he is retired, training the boy to ride and the horse to run is simply something to pass the time. It is in this section though that Henry's purpose becomes clearer. When Henry pulls out his memorabilia box from his riding days, he reveals his own past and, by doing so, he hints at Alec's possible future. The reader learns that Henry was a successful jockey who won the International Cup riding the horse named Chang who broke the Cup's record. Just after crossing the finish line, the horse staggers and drops dead from what the doctors guess might have been a blood clot. While Chang's death jarred Henry who had loved the animal, Chang's legacy still stands. He was the fastest horse to run in the International Cup and Henry was able to be a part of that victory.

In this light, one realizes that Henry sees much of himself and Chang in Alec and the Black. On one hand, Henry might selfishly wish to relive his championship, glory days through Alec, but on the other, Henry may just be trying to help Alec and the Black achieve that which he believes they are capable. Consequently, it is in section 4 that Henry becomes a round character whose complexities begin to surface and the reader is able to judge him according to which light they see him in.

Chapter 12 sees the Alec finally broke the Black. While throughout the novel, Alec and the Black grew to love each other, the animal remained unpredictable and inherently





wild. In each subsequent chapter, Alec trained the Black to be more and more tame. In Chapter 12, the Alec finally saddled the Black. Consequently, the novel's major theme of the wild versus the tame comes to a head. The difficult task of saddling the Black becomes a symbolic battle between the constricting training of taming the animal and the Black's wild and supposedly indomitable spirit.

The author introduces another character to the story in this section. Jake, the Belmont racetrack caretaker, was the man who taught Henry to ride and trained him to be a champion jockey. In a book of relatively few characters, each new addition to the cast is important to note. What makes Jake interesting is not the man himself, but his relationship with Henry. Jake was the teacher and Henry the student just as Henry is now the teacher and Alec the student. This relationship of teacher and student is then a cyclical system. It also raises the question of whether or not Henry will be able to train Alec as well as Jake trained Henry. Farley also uses Jake to propel the reader to look forward to the end of the story. Jake says that, if Henry can get the horse into a race, he would be anything, even Cyclone and Sun Raider. This statement foreshadows the same climax that the section as a whole begins to set up.

Another unique facet of this section is its continuation and representation of the American ideal. Jim Neville, another new character, disparages Cyclone and Sun Raider's owners saying they are failing in their duties as true American sportsmen. After Alec's emotional response to the Statue of Liberty in section 3, Jim's comment continues the novel's subtle discussion of what it means to be American. Alec sees the Statue of Liberty as a symbol for freedom and all that is great about America. Jim's comment furthers Alec's ideas about America by applying them to the American people themselves, specifically sportsmen. Jim's taunt that the horses' owners are bad Americans is so powerful that, the very same day, the two owners agree to race their horses against each other. Jim's remark stings and shames them into risking the health of their most valuable possessions only to prove that they are in fact upstanding American citizens.

With his comment, Jim has insured that Cyclone and Sun Raider will race each other in an unofficial match. At the end of Chapter 14, Joe Russo agrees to bring the very same man that convinced the two owners to compete their horses to see the Black. In only reading this section, the reader can predict the climax both through observing Jake's foreshadowing and the power that Jim Neville wields. If Jim is astounded by the Black's nightly race around the Belmont track, he may be able to use his influence over the sporting community again to help the Black compete.

## Discussion Question 1

How much can Alec tame and make the Black his own before the wild horse is no longer its own master?



## Discussion Question 2

If Jake was able to train Henry to be a champion jockey, will Henry be able to do the same with Alec?

## Discussion Question 3

Are Alec's parents in favor of his keeping the Black as a pet? What might show their support or their disapproval?

## Vocabulary

registered, pedigree, sheepishly, newcomers, withdrew, contrary, feverishly, jarred, saddle, crept, skittishly, thoroughbred, iodine, advantage, backstretch, skeptical, momentum, ponderously, determination, retaliated



## Section 5, Chapter 15 - 18

### Summary

Chapter 15 began with Alec and Henry driving to Belmont and meeting the reporters, Joe Russo and Jim Neville. Jim recognized Henry as the man who rode Chang to victory twenty years earlier and he began to take the possibility that the mystery horse could beat Sun Raider and Cyclone. Alec displayed the Black to Jim. The Black, nervous around all the people, slashed Henry's arm open by kicking it. The Black bolted around the track and Alec desperately held onto the animal's mane. When the Black finally stopped running, Alec would not let go of the mane and Henry had to pry him off the horse. Jim Neville left the track after the exhibition to write his next column which declared that there was a mystery horse that could beat both Cyclone and Sun Raider. The sporting world guffawed at Jim's idea calling it Neville's Folly. Eventually though, Mr. Volence and Mr. Hurst, Cyclone and Sun Raider's owners, agreed to let the mystery horse race.

In Chapter 16, Alec's father mentioned that Alec's mother was enjoying spending time in Chicago with her sister. Alec's father, reading the newspaper, said that the only thing people could think about was the mystery horse. Alec then told his father that the Black was the mystery horse and that Alec himself would ride him in the Chicago race. Alec pulled back the window's curtain to signal Henry who immediately knocked on the door and convinced Alec's father to let his son race the Black.

Alec, Henry, and Jim planned out the trip around Alec's exam schedule. After Alec's final exam, he ran out of the classroom with his friends Whiff and Bill following talking about the big race and wondering what it would be like to ride in it. As Alec tried to get the Black into the truck to take him to the train, the Black refused because Napoleon was not with them. Eventually, Tony and Napoleon got back from work and Henry explained the situation. Tony agreed to let Napoleon go with them to the race saying that the horse deserved a vacation.

In Chapter 17, Jim, Joe, Henry, Alec, and the two horses made it to the train just in time to leave. On the train, Alec fell asleep just outside the Black's stall only to wake up in Chicago. Once they set the Black up in a stall at the Chicago racetrack, reporters crowded the Black for pictures, but Henry kept them at bay. The crowd sneered at the Black's temperamentality and a stable hand said that Henry would not be so cocky after the race the next day. Once the crowd dispersed, Alec and Henry appraised Cyclone, a red horse almost as big as the Black, and Sun Raider, a chestnut gold animal just as big and powerful as the Black himself. Henry warned Alec that these horses were the fastest in the world, but Alec said that the Black could still beat them.

Chapter 18, the Match Race, began with two policemen talking about the race. One said Cyclone would win and the other said Sun Raider had the match, but that the mystery horse was a joke that would not even figure into the race at all. In an apartment close to



the track, Alec's Aunt Bess had bought box seats to the match and was taking Alec's mother to see the race. A plane landed on the Chicago tarmac and Alec's father emerged to charge into a bus that was headed directly to the track. Everyone had discounted the mystery horse as either a farce or a publicity stunt.

Back at the track, the Cyclone and Sun Raider's jockeys disparaged the Black to Alec who was wearing Henry's old jockey uniform. Cyclone and Sun Raider entered to a cheering crowd then Alec rode the Black onto the track with the old horse, Napoleon beside him. The fearsome sight of the Black was enough to shock the crowd into silence. Remembering the way the Black had fought with another horse back in Rio de Janeiro, Alec kept a tight hold on the horse. The announcers remarked that the Black was the biggest horse he had ever seen. In front of a crowd of more than 80,000 people, the Black struck at Sun Raider and the two fought until their jockeys got them under control. The three horses lined up, but then Sun Raider broke out of line to kick the Black's leg. The leg bled badly, but Alec did not allow the Black to fight back and the horses lined up again. As Alec dismounted to check the Black's wound, the starter began the race. Cyclone and Sun Raider tore down the track leaving the Black at the post. Alec quickly hopped back on the horse to give chase. 100 yards behind the other horses, impossibly, the Black charged past Cyclone to run beside Sun Raider on the homestretch. The Black's ears went flat and he bared his teeth, preparing to attack Sun Raider, but Alec, for the first time in the race, smacked the Black's side. In response, Alec and the wounded Black roared through the finish line to finish first place.

Not caring about his victory, Alec worried over the Black's leg, but the track's veterinary told the boy not to worry about the superficial wound. Overcoming his worry, Alec looked around to finally realize that he had won the race. The crowd exploded in cheering and the governor gave Alec, astride the Black, the Gold Trophy. Alec was shocked to see his father and mother standing with Henry. Jim Neville led Napoleon out to calm the nervous Black. After breaking the world record set by Henry and Chang, Alec led the Black through the crowd to the horse's well-deserved, victory oats.

## Analysis

This section covers the end of the rising action, the entire climax, and the immediate resolution. Chapter 15 features the reporter whose column instigated the Chicago race in which Alec and the Black participate. On his way to the Belmont track, Jim recognizes Henry as the jockey who rode Chang to victory twenty years earlier. After recognizing him, Jim becomes a "reporter on the scent of a story" as Farley puts it. While this statement may seem insignificant, it highlights Farley's subtle gesturing to the nature of the novel itself. The technique of gesturing to the creation of a piece of art is called metafiction. Farley knowingly refers to Jim's interest in Alec and the Black as the source of a story. In calling the the story interesting, Farley legitimizes the importance of his own tale by featuring a character like Jim who, as a journalist, can recognize the Black's tale as intriguing. In this way, Jim is calling Farley's novel interesting.



Jim's remark is representative of Farley's larger interest in the idea of a sensational story. Alec and the Black are an exceptional pair and, especially after the Black wins the race, the two capture the imagination of the American people in the same way that Farley must hope his own novel will capture the reader's imagination. The author's interest in storytelling and aspiration for the Black stallion's tale to be successful is a reflection of Jim's interest in the Black's story.

Another notable event in Chapter 15 was the Black's temperament. When Jim gets close, "the Black's teeth snapped as he tried to reach him." This incident shows the reader that although Alec was able to saddle and bridle the Black, its wild nature has not entirely been subdued. The Black is still very much a wild animal except in its interaction with Alec who is able to control and soothe the beast. Just after snapping at Jim, the Black kicks Henry, cutting deeply into his arm. When the animal finally runs around the track, the Black got his head and became "a wild stallion that had never been clearly broken, and never would be!" as Farley's narration puts it.

Also, it is during the Black's wild race around the Belmont track that an allegory comes into focus. As seen in the above analysis of Farley's interest in metafiction, the novel is more than a simple story of a boy and a horse. The boy, like the horse, come to represent something more than just themselves. In this manner, Farley creates an allegory. Strikingly, just after the chapter involving Jim's notions of a story, the reader gets Alec's description of his feeling when he rides the Black. When, in Chapter 16, Alec says that when astride the Black, he always feels different. He forgets his problems and the city around him and says riding the horse is like "flying in the clouds." This feeling of escape is also present in literature. Escapism, in regards to literature, is the enjoyment of a book for its power to distract the reader from their troubles. Alec's description of riding the Black is an almost exact definition of escapism. With Farley's interest in storytelling in mind, it is not far fetched to believe that, as an allegory, Alec's black stallion is also *The Black Stallion*, Walter Farley's novel. In this allegory, Alec is the reader and the Black is the book. One reads the text to escape and enjoy just as Alec rides the Black to escape and enjoy.

In this conclusory section, Alec's growth becomes apparent. As a reader who has been with Alec throughout the novel, his growth has been a gradual thing, but to the other characters, especially his parents, the changes in Alec are startling. In Chapter 16, when Alec and Henry are preparing to bring the Black to Chicago, the pair ambush Alec's father to try to convince him that Alec should be allowed to ride the Black in the race. Alec signals to Henry who is waiting outside the window and Henry comes to speak with Alec's father. In convincing him, Henry says to Alec's father that "Alec isn't the same boy that you sent to India last summer." While not much time passes between the start of the book and its end, Alec goes from being a regular schoolboy to a champion jockey whose horse breaks the world record for racing.

One of the key figures in the story's final arc is Jim Neville. Jim is the man whose writing convinces Sun Raider and Cyclone's owners to race and even to allow a mystery horse to compete against them. Before the team leaves for Chicago, Jim urges Alec and Henry not to race the Black at Belmont anymore because reporters, like Jim himself,



would swarm them and make the days before their departure hectic. While one may see these words as a friendly warning, Jim may be trying to keep Alec and the Black to himself. If other reporters caught the scent, the story would no longer be Jim's alone. In this light, Jim selfishly tells the two not to keep training the horse at Belmont. Also, not allowing the Black to train could be a possible detriment to animal's performance at the race, but Jim apparently is willing to risk the Black's conditioning in order to keep the story in his possession alone.

Perhaps one of the novel's most humorous moments also occurs in this section. In Chapter 16, Alec tries to run home after his final exam, but his friends Wiff and Bill stop to talk to him about the big race in Chicago. The reader knows that Alec is racing in the event, but Bill and Wiff do not. Bill asks Alec "how'd you like to be ridin' in that big race" then Alec's two friends bet on which horse will win and say that the mystery horse has no chance at all. The literary device which Farley employs is called dramatic irony. Dramatic irony is a technique in which the reader knows the full significance of a character's words, but some of the characters do not. In this case, the reader knows that Alec is racing while the boy's friends do not.

The final point of interest in the section is the way that the match race is narrated in Chapter 18, the book's final chapter. Throughout the story, the reader follows Alec in a close third person. That is to say that all the information the reader receives comes through events that involve Alec. The author treats the race through a different lens, that of the track announcer. Instead of staying with Alec and learning his emotions in the moment, a radio announcer yells events into a microphone and the reader becomes one of the audience. In this moment, the reader is no longer privileged with knowledge that other characters lack. It is as if the reader is simply another person in the crowd watching the event and listening to the announcer.

All in all, Alec Ramsay grows throughout the novel through his experience with the wild horse he calls the Black. Through his interaction with the horse, he matures and gains experience that none of the other characters in the novel possess. Through the horse's interaction with the boy, the animal becomes as close to being civilized as any wild thing can.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Jim Neville asks Henry and Alec not to race the Black at the Belmont track before they leave for Chicago? Is Jim looking out for the pair or is there another possible reason for his request?

## Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Sun Raider and the Black. Are the two horses more similar than they are different? Compare specifically the degree of wildness of the two animals.



## Discussion Question 3

Have Alec's experiences changed him throughout the novel? If so, which events most change him, and do these events change him for the better?

## Vocabulary

quizzically, brusquely, ridiculing, hullabaloo, delirious, faltering, stammered, stupendous, identity, condition, gear, clattering, rhythmic, gatekeeper, temperamental, carnival, peak, publicity, concealed, emblematic



# Characters

## Alexander "Alec" Ramsay

Alec is the red-headed, freckled, young protagonist of the story. Alec loves horses and forms a bond with the black stallion that no other person can understand. He is a quick thinking boy whose courage and intelligence help him overcome the difficult challenges that face him throughout the novel. Alec's parents send him to visit his Uncle Ralph, a missionary in India. While visiting, Alec develops lean muscles and tanned skin. Most importantly, Alec's uncle teaches him something that Alec had been looking forward to his whole life. Uncle Ralph teaches Alec to ride horses.

After his time in India, Alec boards the Drake, a ship headed to London, England. During the trip, Alec becomes fascinated by a wild stallion that one of the other passengers brought onto the vessel. Alec is kind to the animal and brings it sugar cubes each day in the hopes of befriending it. This act shows Alec's curiosity and love of animals, particularly horses. When the Drake sinks, Alec and this horse are the only survivors and Alec must survive on a deserted island with the beast. While on the island, Alec displays his smart thinking and his ability to adapt to his surroundings without despairing. Instead of moping, Alec gets to work feeding both himself and the Black, the name he gave the horse, and builds a shelter for himself.

Finally, a ship headed for Rio de Janeiro passes the island upon which Alec and the Black live upon. Instead of leaving without the horse, Alec stubbornly refuses to go with the sailors. Alec's loyalty to the horse is an indicator of his worth as a friend to the Black's. Although Alec's age is never given, he is young but not a child. As an estimate, he is in his early teens. This episode with the Black reveals the depth of both his love for the Black and his capacity for sympathy although he is still a boy.

Alec's precocious nature allows him to survive on the island and his caring allows him to ride the Black. With a bond that none of the other characters can understand, he and the Black not only survive the island, but escape and become champion racers. Despite Alec's even-head and apparently cheerful appearance, he is also profoundly determined when it comes to his horse. In these ways, Alec grows in emotional maturity and gains an understanding of the wild from his experience with the Black that none of the other characters can comprehend.

## The Black Stallion

The Black is a black, Arabian stallion who becomes one of the novel's most important characters. While the reader never receives the Black's perspective, the Black represents a force of nature. While Farley refrains from anthropomorphizing the Black, the horse's actions reveal that, physically, he is strong and wickedly fast. The Black itself is temperamental, fierce, and loyal to Alec Ramsay. Because the Black never





speaks and his emotions are never represented through the narrator, the reader can only surmise his demeanor from the detail that Alec himself notices about the Black.

The Black's past is unknown. The novel first introduces him as workers force him onto the Drake, the boat upon which Alec also travels. The wild horse fights four men and one of his kicks drops a man in a single blow. While no background information on the Black is available in this book, the first in the series, the reader can guess at his past. The horse is obviously wild and has never been broken by humans. Thus, he must have been captured from the wild and kept in captivity. Alec notes that the animal's owner appears to be a dark-skinned man who pays the Drake's captain to transport the horse.

While very little can be guessed about the horse's past, he is mistrustful of humans and uncomfortable around machines and loud noises. Consequently, for him to take to Alec is incredible and striking. The animal, initially wary of Alec, allows the boy to feed him sugar cubes each day upon the Drake. Once they are stranded on the island, their bond deepens and Alec begins to ride the horse. It is on the island that the Black develops his most pervasive trait. He is loyal to the boy. The Black risks his own life to kill a poisonous snake that was waiting to strike Alec. Through his love of the boy, the two become an impossibly balanced racetrack team. The Black provides unmatched speed and Alec checks the horse's wild temper. Eventually, the two race against the fastest horses of the day and beat them both.

## Henry Dailey

Henry is a former champion jockey who rode Chang to victory at the International Cup. Alec comes to Henry's home in order to stable the Black. Upon seeing the incredible animal, Henry's passion for horses reignites and he convinces Alec to train the Black to race. Under Henry's tutelage, Alec learns to control the horse better and the Black becomes even faster.

## Joe Russo

Joe is the first reporter to recognize the interesting story of Alec's young life. When Alec and the Black debark in New York City, Joe introduces himself and lends a van to help transport the Black. In exchange, Joe gets to hear Alec's story and report upon it. Later, it is Joe who convinces the sportswriter, Jim Neville, to try to include the Black in the most anticipated race of the day.

## Jim Neville

Jim Neville is a broad shouldered, middle-aged man who writes a sports column for the Daily Telegram. He is a respected reporter whose influence instigates the race between Sun Raider and Cyclone, the two fastest horses of the day. Once Jim sees the Black race, he begins a campaign to involve the Black in the race as well as a mystery horse.



## Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay

Alec's parents are minor characters in the story. They both warmly greet Alec once he returns home and even allow him to keep the Black, even though his mother has reservations. When Alec's mother visits her sister in Chicago, it is Mr. Ramsay who decides to permit Alec to race the Black. Both parents attend the race and are shocked to see one another there.

## Tony

Tony is an Italian huckster who owns Napoleon, an old workhorse that also resides in Henry's barn. During the day, Tony peddles his wares throughout Alec's home of Flushing. The first night the black stays at Henry's, the massive horse's presence shocks him. Eventually, the amicable man takes a liking to the Black and even allows Napoleon to travel with the Black to Chicago.

## The Black's Arabian Owner

While the author gives no name to the dark-skinned owner of the Black, the man plays a significant part in the novel through his presumed ownership of the Black. When the Drake begins to sink, the man tries to rip Alec's life jacket away from him in order to survive the storm. When the Drake's captain intervenes, the man leaps off the ship in an attempt to jump into the already crowded lifeboat only to fall into the sea.

## Bill and Wiff

Bill and Wiff are Alec's two friends from school. The pair visit Alec's house to see the Black who scares the boys into hiding in the barn. After this occasion, the two do not visit again.

## Jake

Jake is Henry's old riding teacher and a caretaker at the Belmont racetrack. Jake risks his job to allow Henry and Alec to race the Black at night.

## Mr. Volence and Mr. Hurst

These two men are the respective owners of the famous racehorses Sun Raider and Cyclone who agree to race their horses in Chicago at a charitable event in which the Black also competes.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Pearlhandled Knife

Alec's Uncle Ralph, the missionary in Indida, gives him this knife telling him that it might be useful one day. Alec later uses this knife to cut the rope that he tied attaching himself and the Black in order to survive the storm. Rather than being dragged to death by the horse when they come to land, with Uncle Ralph's present, Alec cuts the rope. The knife represents Alec's ability to use what he is given and adapt to his situation. With the correct tools, Alec can overcome difficulties.

## The Drake's Driftwood

When the Drake sinks, some of its driftwood makes it to the deserted island upon which Alec and the Black live. When Alec walks the shore looking for shelter-building materials, he finds wood with Drake written upon it. When Alec uses the wood to build his shelter, he symbolically overcomes the tragedy that the Drake represents and finds the silver lining of a very dark cloud.

## Sugar Cubes

Alec gives the Black a sugar cube a day while they are upon the Drake. This simple object is evidence of Alec's good intentions towards the horse. This exchange is the first interaction that the two have.

## Saddle and Bridle

Although Alec masters riding on the Black bareback, he tries to saddle the horse as well. The Black fights Alec and Henry as they try to get the saddle on him. The saddle becomes an example of Alec and Henry's efforts to civilize and tame the Black.

## Green Jersey

When Henry won riding Chang to a record-breaking victory, he wore a green jockey's jersey bearing the number 3. He gives Alec this jersey to wear when he rides the Black to victory in Chicago. In this way, it represents the love for horses that both Alec and Henry bear and the accomplishment that horses and humans can make together.



## Daily Telegram

Joe Russo and Jim Neville both write for the newspaper called the Daily Telegram. Through their writing, the two unite the nation by disseminating news to the American people. By reading this paper, readers become connected to other people who read the same newspaper and form a basis of common ground.

## Fire

While on the island, one of Alec's first priorities is to build a fire. The fire is a symbol of man's power over nature. Alec harnesses the materials around him in order to survive upon an inhospitable island. Alec also finds comfort in the fire because it lights up the night and allows him to see what would be hidden from him otherwise. Eventually, this same fire burns down his shelter and catches the attention of a passing ship whose sailors then rescue Alec and the Black.

## Carragheen

Carragheen is a type of seaweed that Alec dries while upon the island. With the dried and washed seaweed, he is able to sustain both himself and the Black. The only way he knew how to prepare and eat the carragheen was because he learned about the plant in school. The seaweed is an example of Alec's use of his education to survive upon the island.

## Snow

The Black sees his first snowfall while stabled in Henry's barn. The new experience is just one small difference in the Black's life, but it also brings to mind all the new things that the Black experiences through his relationship with Alec. The Arabian stallion would never have seen snow had he remained in his place of birth.

## Plane

The low-flying plane that passes over Henry's barn one day startles the Black who then leaps an almost seven foot tall fence to run away. The machine is foreign to the wild stallion who cannot cope with the surprise. The horse has trouble with ships, trains, cars, and planes. All these are mechanical examples of human invention. Civilization is a strange and frightening place for the Black whose wild nature rejects the mechanical and loud.



# Settings

## India, Early 20th Century

While the reader never knows Alec during his time in India with Uncle Ralph, a missionary, the fact that Alec was in India introduces the idea of the exotic and the unknown. The missionary is a sort of pioneer who travels through an unfamiliar land spreading religion. Since Alec partook in this work, he learns to live in jungles and survive traveling through a strange place. Although the author does not reveal the novel's time period specifically, the modes of available transportation and the use of horses indicates that the action of the story takes place in the early 20th century.

## The Drake

The Drake is the steam ship that sinks while Alec and the black stallion are aboard. After exploring a dangerous country with his Uncle, Alec presumably knows how to take care of himself, but the fact that his parents trust him alone aboard a ship set to cross multiple oceans is revealing. The large ship is laden with spices, incense, and other exotic pieces of cargo set to go to London.

## Arabia

Before the Drake sinks, it visits a small port in Arabia to restock and to pick up passengers. The most notable addition is a fierce, black stallion that fights its handlers on its way to the ship. The scene conjures notions of the, at that time, near-mythical east.

## Island off the Coast of Portugal

Alec and the Black, the only survivors of the Drake's sinking, land on a tiny, deserted island that becomes their home for almost a month. While sparse, the island holds its share of hidden dangers, including poisonous snakes, but it also has enough to provide for the pair. A freshwater pool at its center, a few trees, a berry bush, and coarse grass are the island's only notable features.

## Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Once rescued, Alec and the Black gain passage upon an unnamed vessel even larger than the Drake which takes them to Rio de Janeiro. Although the two do not spend much time in the South American city, the location is foreign to Alec and reinforces the theme of exoticism.



## Flushing, New York

Flushing is Alec's home. The Ramsay family lives in this suburb of New York where farms are present. This rural area is the location where the Black finds a home in Henry's stables and where the two train the horse to race. Alec attends school in the same area and Belmont, the track where they eventually train the Black, is a short car ride from Alec's house.

## Chicago, Illinois

Chicago is the bustling city where Alec and the Black travel to race the two fastest horses in the world. On the track and under Alec's guiding hand, the Black proves to be the fastest horse in the world in front of more than 60,000 fans. The large city is a hub of sport and travel and is also the place where Alec's aunt lives.



# Themes and Motifs

## Coming of Age

A bildungsroman is a story in which the protagonist grows and time passes. Farley's novel is not an extended bildungsroman in that it only covers about seven months in total, but that time witnesses Alec grow from being a young schoolboy to a world traveler and champion jockey. Alec travels to India to spend time with his Uncle where he hikes through jungles and rides horses over vast areas.

After that, he boards a large ship that capsizes and leaves him stranded on a puny island. Finally, he returns to his family in New York, but does not stop to rest. He trains his horse, the Black, into a champion and, along the way, he becomes a world class jockey. Despite the novel's condensed time arc, Alec matures emotionally and changes physically.

Throughout the story, Alec adapts to each new obstacle and overcomes them through perseverance and the support of others. Alec's coming of age is not a story of inheritance or the gaining of power, but of emotional maturity. His friends Bill and Wiff notice the changes in Alec the same way that Alec's parents recognize his growth. Alec does not see his two friends except at school and once when they saw the Black. For a young schoolboy, he spends very little time around people his own age.

The distance between himself and his friends grows out of Alec's vast experience. Although a child, Alec has endures things that few people ever experience and the difference seems to force him out of childhood faster than his friends. Henry tells Alec's father that Alec is not the same boy that Mr. Ramsay sent to India all those months ago.

## Exoticism and Civilization

The first half of the book occurs in exotic locations like India, Arabia, and an almost Mediterranean island. Farley's treatment of these locations marks the book as something of a touristic novel. Alec, an American, is a foreigner in the places he visits, but, through his interaction with his surroundings, he acclimatizes.

The author plays with the long practice of representing the protagonist going native by placing Alec upon a deserted island where he must live as if he were a native. When the sailors of a passing ship finally see Alec, they almost mistake him for a native because his skin is deeply tanned and his hair is long and unkempt.

The relationship between the exotic and the civil is most perfectly exemplified in the Black and Alec. The Black represents the wild and the exotic because he is an unbroken stallion from Arabia. The temperamental beast fights every human that he comes into contact with besides Alec. Even when Alec finally gets a saddle on the Black, the racetrack announcers in Chicago remark that the beast will never fully be broken.



On the opposite side of the exotic sits civilization and Alec. Farley heavily represents vehicles and modes of transportation, perhaps because when the book was published in 1941, technological innovation was rapidly spreading through the United States. Planes, trains, and automobiles terrify the Black and the only thing that gets him over his fear is Alec. In this way, the exotic and the civilized come together in a largely harmonious manner.

## Survival and Competition

These two basic human motives drive the story's plot. Alec and the Black must survive first the sinking of the Drake and then the island. During this period, the two become close because they must rely upon each other to live through the trials of the island. Although friendship eventually grows from this forced cooperation, the underlying reason for the Black's actions is survival.

Alec feeds the Black carrageen each day and the horse begins to rely upon him. The need for food provides the Black with a reason to help the boy and allow Alec to ride him. On the other hand, Alec, as a person, is able to make a conscious decision to help the Black rather than kill and eat him. Had their places been switched, the Black's instincts to survive would have overridden his love of the boy.

Even though their instincts and drive to survive may differ, there is common ground between Alec and the Black. Both understand the need to compete. The Black is obsessed with proving his superiority over other horses as he proves when he attacks the chestnut stallion in Rio and Sun Raider in Chicago. He cannot allow other stallions to appear superior to him.

Alec shares this competitive drive as seen in his willingness to train the Black to race. Henry has only to say that the Black is a fast horse to convince Alec that the two should compete together as horse and jockey. At the race in Chicago, the other two jockeys joke at Alec and the Black's expense and the boy grows furious with the need to prove himself, just like the Black felt the need to prove himself against the other two horses.

## Youth and Experience

Alec's story is exceptional. He survives a capsized ship, a deserted island, and he wins a championship race. For a person of any age, these are incredible achievements, but Alec's youth distinctly marks him as noteworthy. Both the reporters Joe Russo and Jim Neville realize that Alec's tale is one that makes for a fine story.

Alec is the only character worth remembering who is young in the novel. His friends Bill and Wiff have few lines between them and are nothing more than a litmus test to show the reader how incredible Alec truly is compared to his innocuous classmates. The fact that Alec is the only character in the book that is young is notable because it highlights a central theme of experience and youth in the story.





While all the other characters are older, Alec is able to converse and interact with them almost as if he is their own age. Despite his age, it is Alec's experiences that allow him to behave as an equal of the other characters. As a children's novel, the message that Farley gives is obvious. Children can do extraordinary things.

This idea is a common practice in children's literature because it makes the generally younger reader feel special. Another point that enforces the value of youth are Henry's own accomplishments. Besides Alec, the only other champion in the novel is the boy's mentor, Henry Dailey. Although he is older, Henry achieved victory upon his horse Chang when he was a young man just like Alec.

## Friendship

If limited to only one theme, the novel's overriding and overwhelming theme is the value of friendship and the bond between horse and human. The book's very premise revolves around the relationship between the Black and Alec. No part of the novel lacks Alec and, once Farley introduces the horse, no part of the novel lacks the Black.

During the story's watershed moment, the Drake capsizes in a storm. Alec survives only by tying a rope to the Black and allowing it to drag him along. The only way that the two survive is by working together. The Black saves Alec's life in that moment. Later, Alec saves the Black's life by providing him with dried carrageen as food on the island.

Through their friendship, the two survive. Working together and coexisting is the only way that the two lived through their isolation on their deserted home. The theme of friendship, a common central theme of young readers' novels, pervades Farley's story and extends past the pair's time on the island.

The Black acclimatizes to Alec's civilized and urban setting only by relying upon the boy for support and comfort just as the boy only survived the island with the Black's help. Once the two enter Alec's world though, the balance of their relationship shifts. No longer are the two symbiotically involved because Alec does not need the Black to provide for his physical safety the way he did while they were on the island. Instead, it is only the Black that needs Alec to feed him and exercise him. The only thing that keeps this shift in setting from destroying their friendship is Alec's love of the animal.



# Styles

## Point of View

The novel's point of view is, for the most part, straightforward, third person omniscient. The narrator follows the story through Alec Ramsay. In every scene and in every moment, Alec is present. While this limits the scope of the narrative, the narrator still gives the reader insight into other characters' perspectives and moods. Also, the narrator gives bird's eye descriptions of some settings making it something of a voluntarily limited third person omniscient story. Consequently, the narration cannot be third person limited.

The narrator begins with a description of the tramp steamer called the Drake as it makes its way into the Arabian Sea. In opening this way, the narration starts with a broad scope that then narrows and focuses in on Alec Ramsay. While examining the boy, the narration only rarely ventures past its focus upon Alec and his situation. Because of the heavy interest in Alec, the plot of the novel progresses at a fast pace in order to compensate for its lack of multiple story lines.

The only time that the narration leaves its closely focused narration of Alec occurs at the race in Chicago. After describing the scene in which the two other jockeys laugh at Alec, the narrator shifts his focus to the surrounding fans who perch on every fence and rooftop they can for miles around the track. Alec himself may see many people surrounding him, but he cannot see through the stadium's walls and observe that, for miles, people are on rooftops. In this way, the narrator begins the shift away from Alec to the sportscaster.

The well-known sports commentator who then gets the narrator's attention takes on the role of narrator as he describes the action leading up to the race and then the race itself. To recapitulate the close, third person movement. The narrator moves from Alec to the crowd and then to the sportscaster. In doing so, the narration no longer privileges the reader with insight into Alec's emotional state. During the race, the reader knows no more than the average audience member in the stands or someone sitting at home listening to the radio.

## Language and Meaning

When examining the language of *The Black Stallion*, there are several points worthy of note. Firstly, the author, through the narrator, employs language suitable for his intended audience. The diction is not academic, nor raised, but simple and straightforward. The words he employs do not have multiple meanings within the context of the novel and they hint at nothing beyond the immediate plot. In this way, Walter Farley writes directly to his intended young reader in a fashion that does not try to elude the reader or add sophisticated layers to the novel.



Secondly, accents play into the way the author writes and represents each character in the novel. To Farley's credit, every person who speaks in the novel has a specific vocabulary and style of speech. For instance, Alec speaks without truncating words, but he uses contraptions constantly as is common with someone his age. Other characters, like Pat the sailor, use certain expressions that reveal their background. Pat repeats the phrase, "by St. Patrick", which displays his Irish heritage without the narrator having to reveal the fact explicitly.

Each character has their own lexicon, or personal dictionary. Alec's friends, Bill and Wiff, cut off the endings of some words saying "I'm runnin' late" for instance rather than speaking as Alec does and saying "I'm running late". This subtle difference reveals something about each character. The difference in these characters' words tell the reader something about each person. The reader can infer that perhaps Bill and Wiff are not as learned or as mature as Alec himself.

In turn, Alec, who uses informal contraptions, may not be as mature as his father who does not shorten his sentences with contraptions. While a character's grammar is not the definitive signal of that character's intelligence, Farley's system seems to lend itself to this conclusion. Furthermore, the author explores accents in his writing not just of Pat but of Tony, the Italian huckster. Tony's first words are "Dio mio", Italian for my God. After these words, he speaks in a heavily accented English reflective of his status as a second-language speaker. Through the use of slang and accents, Farley uses language as an indicator of a character's traits.

## Structure

Farley divided his roughly 200 page novel into 18 chapters. Throughout these chapters, the use of suspense pulls the action forward. At the end of almost every chapter, Farley includes a sort of predicting sentence that keeps the reader looking forward to the next section. He also employs heavy foreshadowing and predicting. Many characters along the Black and Alec's journey point out that the stallion is the fastest horse they had ever seen and that even the most well-known horses would have to watch out for the beast.

Besides the 18 chapter divisions, the novel's structure boils down to roughly three arcs. In the first arc, Alec is returning from India, first sees the Black, and then the two are stranded on the deserted island off the coast of Portugal. During this first section or act, the author highlights his interest in the exotic and the different. Farley presents very few characters to the reader because he narrows his focus in on the boy and the horse. In charting their burgeoning friendship, Farley's focus and tone remain engaging and the plot progresses quickly through the dangers that the two must face.

At Chapter 7, the story's second arc begins. In this section, the horse and the boy settle in Alec's home in Flushing, New York. After the wild adventures the two experienced, the action does not lessen when the two arrive home. The theme of the exotic no longer figures heavily into the narration. Instead, Farley introduces the bulk of the book's characters in this section. The boy and horse begin to train under Henry's instruction.

Also, the rising action builds throughout this second arc to keep the reader looking forward to the climactic race scene.

The third and final arc begins in Chapter 15 when finally, Jim Neville is able to gain the Black entry in the Chicago race. Alec and the horse's training is finished and Farley's tone becomes more anxious as the narration reflects Alec's mood. It is during this third part that the novel traces the climax and conclusion of Alec and the Black's tale. In dealing with these highly anticipated moments, the chapter length shortens and the action occurs more quickly.



## Quotes

The tramp steamer Drake plowed away from the coast of India and pushed its blunt prow into the Arabian Sea, homeward bound.

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** These first words of the novel introduce the novel's exotic setting, but also hint that the novel will progress elsewhere because there is traveling to be done before the Drake is home.

Alec forgot his problems in the beauty of the stallion as he swept along, graceful in his swift stride, his black mane and tail flying.

-- Narrator (chapter 3 paragraph 14)

**Importance:** Alec can stop to appreciate the Black's beauty in a manner that removes his thoughts from his own problems. The transcendent quality of the animal becomes more and more apparent as the novel progresses.

Painted on the gray board was the name DRAKE- it had been part of one of the lifeboats! Alec stood still a moment, then grimly he fixed the plank securely in place.

-- Narrator (chapter 3 paragraph 16)

**Importance:** This is the defining moment of Alec's trials. Here, he decides to repurpose the wreckage and tragedy of the Drake in order to survive.

Suddenly Alec felt the stillness of the island-no birds, no animals, no sounds. It was as if he and the Black were the only living creatures in the world.

-- Narrator (chapter 3 paragraph 25)

**Importance:** In these words, the reality of Alec's situation becomes clear. He is stranded on an island with nothing but a horse for company. Despite the eerie stillness, Alec's determination to live does not falter and he is able to appreciate having at least one companion on the island.

He had conquered this wild, unbroken stallion with kindness.

-- Narrator (chapter 4 paragraph 21)

**Importance:** The moment that Alec finally rides the Black is the final affirmation that the boy and the horse have a bond that no other pair can match. This scene defines their relationship for the entire story.

You've certainly had a tough enough trip as it is without our making it any tougher.

-- Quarantine officer (chapter 7 paragraph 34)

**Importance:** In recognition of the trials that Alec had to face, the officer shows the boy kindness that he did not need to. In this instance, the reader can fully appreciate the



depth of Alec's troubles, because, despite the fact that the Black had just attacked a Quarantine worker, the officer lets Alec through.

The head was that of the wildest of all wild creatures—a stallion born wild—and it was beautiful, savage, splendid. A stallion with a wonderful physical perfection that matched his savage, ruthless spirit

-- Narrator (chapter 4 paragraph 21)

**Importance:** This description gives the reader a perfect look into the Black's personality and physical appearance.

He's acting more like a gentleman everyday.

-- Alec Ramsay (chapter 11 paragraph 38)

**Importance:** Alec speaks about the Black and the way that the animal behaves around Henry, himself, and Napoleon. The unbreakable spirit described earlier, now seems to bend to the wishes of the horse's master, Alec.

You're like me, Henry...as long as there's a breath left in your body, you'll want to be around horses and nothing in this world will keep you from 'em.

-- Jake (chapter 13 paragraph 47)

**Importance:** Jake, a minor character who sneaks the team onto the Belmont racetrack, reveals Henry's true nature in these words.

The man and the boy looked at each other, and then turned and walked toward the stallion, who had stuck his black head out the stall door and was looking at them curiously.

-- Narrator (chapter 15 paragraph 52)

**Importance:** Alec and Henry celebrate the Black's acceptance into the Chicago race and then turn to face the curious horse. The scene reveals the Black's humorous lack of understanding, but, at the same time, it personifies the horse by describing the Black as looking at the pair "curiously".

I still think the Black can beat them.

-- Alec Ramsay (chapter 17 paragraph 29)

**Importance:** After seeing the monstrous horses that the Black must compete against, Alec shows his utter and complete faith in his horse here.

Alec smiled at Henry and his mother and father. He rubbed the Black's nose, and then led the huge stallion through the crowd-back to his victory oats.

-- Narrator (chapter 18 paragraph 42)

**Importance:** In the book's final words, Alec acknowledges the people in his life who have allowed him to achieve first place at the Chicago race. After smiling to them

though, Alec brings his attention back to the Black. Together the two leave the celebrations and the victory behind them until the focus is only the boy and the horse.