



Spark and Queen Mab

Students will understand the role that fast horse breeds have played in Maryland equine history for recreation, sport, and service.



Welcome students to the farm! Introduce two plush toy horses, *Spark* and *Queen Mab*. Explain that the toys represent two of the four original foundational horses brought from England to Maryland that established the thoroughbred breed in America. Since the 1750s horse racing has been an important part of equine history in our state! *Spark* and *Queen Mab* will help us uncover clues about this fascinating history.

Assemble students in a large circle. Include yourself as part of the circle, holding *Spark* and *Queen Mab*. “Race” the horses around the circle by passing them from student to student, *Spark* going one way and *Queen Mab* the other. Every student must touch the horses as they are passed along - no tossing! Which ever horse (it doesn’t matter) comes back to you as the winner “whispers” the first clue into your ear, which you dramatically announce to the students:

Clue: “Search for and find the right course for this



Tour the farm with students to search for land that would make a suitable race course. Include discussions of steeple chasing courses and jumping events. Take students through barns, stables, across pastures and explain how the farm functions. Point out any special fields or turf features that are used for events, lessons, jumping, hunting, etc. If there are riders with horses, stop and watch.

Celebrate the tour with another race between *Spark* and *Queen Mab*! Whichever horse is the winner will whisper the next clue into your ear to share with students. **Clue: “Wish upon a star and search not too far for an athlete - with four feet!”**

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Thoroughbreds are fast horses that have been bred over hundreds of years to exhibit athletic ability and competitive spirit. Ask students to name their favorite athletes. What makes an athlete a star performer? Accept all answers.

Share the names of several thoroughbred race horses with connections to Maryland racing, who achieved star status (*Native Dancer, Sea Biscuit, War Admiral, Man O'War*, etc.). If you have thoroughbreds on the farm, take the students to meet him or her. If a rider is working with a thoroughbred, invite them to come over and speak to the students. Point out the anatomical characteristics of a thoroughbred that set it apart from other breeds.

Invite students to help prepare for a feeding. How is the competitive racehorse fed and cared for differently than non-racing breeds? What are the nutritional needs of a thoroughbred? What are the special health and wellness concerns a thoroughbred owner must consider? Meet and interview the stable manager and barn workers.

After becoming familiar with the stables and the horses, announce another race between *Spark* and *Queen Mab*. Gather students in an area far enough away from the horses so as not to startle them. The winning horse will whisper into your ear the clue to announce:

Clue: "Horses built for speed satisfy the human's need!"

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The need for speed in American thoroughbreds and other fast breeds transcended recreational and competitive racing and spread into other areas of human endeavor. *Spark* and *Queen Mab* have one more race to run, then it's the students turn. Race the horses around the circle with the winning horse whispering the next clue to share with students.

Clue: "Our race is won! Water us then you're done!"

Hang two water buckets on a fence about two rail lengths apart, one for *Spark* and one for *Queen Mab*. Between the buckets place a large tub, five gallon bucket, or half barrel of water. Divide the students into two teams facing their horse's bucket. Give the first student in each line a small dipper each (a butter tub, drink cup, water bottle, etc.) to dip water for their horse. Explain that that team with the most water in their horse's bucket is the winner!

1.) Read a statement about horse racing or racing breeds that is either true or false. Lead students holding dippers may consult with their teammates for ten seconds. Call "They're off!"

2.) *If the statement is True:* runners may scoop two dippers-full from the five gallon bucket into their team bucket then run back and pass the dipper to the next in line. *If the statement is False* runners may dip one scoop of water from the opposing team's bucket back into the center bucket and two scoops from the center bucket into the team bucket and run back to pass the dipper to the next player in line.

3.) Announce the correct answer. If a team was incorrect and with great flourish, dip a scoop of water from their bucket to pour back into the center bucket. Have fun with this!

4.) Read up to ten statements that reflect what students learned during their visit. At the end of the activity measure the quantity of water in each bucket with a ruler or tape. Hang a medal on the winning horse and celebrate!

Example of True Statement:

"Horse racing has been an important equine event since the mid-1700s."

Example of False Statement:

"Famous Maryland race courses include Pimlico and Belmont."



Share some familiar phrases with students and explain their origin in the history of horse racing. Terms like *running mate*, *a run for the money*, *in the running*, *in the home stretch* (or *that's a stretch*), *hands down*, *front runner*, *dark horse* and *across the board* are phrases that students will recognize. Ask students to help explain the origin of these phrases and describe how they are used today. For fun, have students invent some new catchy phrases based on their visit to your stables!