

Talking about *Black Beauty*

by Anna Sewell · the free ebook lives at youngreaderguide.org/books/black-beauty/

Warming up

Easy openers. Anyone at the table can answer these, including the youngest.

1. If Beauty could have spoken one sentence of human words at any moment of his life, what should he have said, and to whom?
2. Beauty passes through a lot of homes: Birtwick, Earlshall, the London cab stand, the meadow at the end. Which would you most want to live in, and which would you most want to escape?

The real conversation

Pick two or three, not all of them. Parents answer too, honestly.

1. Ginger bites and kicks; Beauty stays gentle. But the book shows exactly where Ginger's temper came from. Once you know why someone acts the way they do, does it change how you treat them?
2. The check-rein forced horses to hold their heads painfully high, because it looked fashionable. Nobody using it thought of themselves as cruel. What do people do today because it looks right, without asking whether it's kind?
3. A few of Beauty's owners are cruel on purpose, but far more are just careless, or ignorant, or in a hurry. Which kind does more damage in this book?
4. Beauty's whole life changes every time he's sold, and none of it is ever his doing or his fault. How does he manage to stay himself through all of it?
5. As a boy, Joe Green nearly kills Beauty by accident, and then spends years becoming someone who never would. Can a bad mistake make a person better than they'd have been without it?

The big one

Save it for last.

Anna Sewell wrote this book to make people kinder to horses, and it worked. Real laws changed, real habits changed, because enough people read one story. Has a story ever changed how you treat someone? Could one?

Do it *together*

Write your Duchess speech. Beauty's mother sends him into the world with one speech: do your best wherever you find yourself, and keep up your good name. Each of you writes the single sentence of advice you'd send a young horse, or a young person, out into the world with. Read them aloud, then trade: carry someone else's sentence in your pocket for a week and report back on whether it earned its keep.