

THE STORY OF SEABISCUIT

by Nora Bracey



1 Every so often someone or something captures peoples' hearts. It's hard to explain why this happens. They feel connected to a person or animal in a special way. Sometimes that person or animal did something spectacular. During the late 1930s in the middle of the Great Depression, the American people connected with a horse named Seabiscuit.

2 During his career Seabiscuit made racing history. Other horses had done that, but Seabiscuit did it the hard way. He was nothing much to look at. He was small and boxy looking. His legs were too short. He was a plain brown color. He didn't look like a winner. He didn't act like one either.

3 You might say that Seabiscuit had "attitude." During his first

- three years, he ran in a lot of races. Too many, some said. His record was not great. He was hard to handle. He had injuries. He had a bad knee. That made him cranky.
- 4 It was then that trainer Tom Smith bought the horse. Smith saw something in the horse that no one else had seen. He saw the horse's potential. His training marked a change in Seabiscuit.
- 5 Smith began by providing the horse with some company. First, he put a goat in the horse's stall. One day the goat got between Seabiscuit and his dinner. The horse picked the goat up by the back of its neck and put it out of the stall.
- 6 Next, Smith tried Pumpkin, a stable pony. From then on, the animals either roomed together or had stalls next to each other. Smith would cut a hole in the wall between the stalls. That way the animals could visit.
- 7 Smith put Seabiscuit on a special diet. It was a type of hay. Smith had it brought from northern California. It was high in quality and rich in calcium.
- 8 He also worked on Seabiscuit's leg. He created a special knee and ankle brace. The horse wore it in the stall. Smith also bandaged the leg to give it support. The leg was treated daily with a homemade liniment. The pain began to go away. The horse's crankiness went with it. Smith knew what he was doing.
- 9 The other important person in Seabiscuit's life was Red Pollard. He was a jockey, but not a very good one. From the moment the man and horse met, there was a connection. It was as if they understood each other. Pollard became Seabiscuit's regular rider. Together they began making racing history.
- 10 Their first season was a good one. Seabiscuit was gaining a reputation. However, the little horse didn't get any respect from the East Coast stables. They had horses that were big and beautiful. The most elegant of these was War Admiral. It was only a matter of time until the two horses raced one another. That, however, would be some time in the future. The owners of War Admiral thought it would never happen.
- 11 In the meantime, Seabiscuit was winning. As he did, something amazing happened. With the Depression gripping the country, times were hard. People were looking for a hero. They found one in the little brown horse that never gave up. He wasn't sleek or fancy. He looked ordinary—and ordinary Americans took him to their hearts. He came out of nowhere and kept winning.
- 12 Seabiscuit became very popular. All of his races were broadcast on radio. It was said that one in three Americans listened to the races on the radio. People cheered him on. When he won, they felt somehow that they had won something too.
- 13 Finally in the spring of 1938, a race was set between Seabiscuit and War Admiral. The experts thought War Admiral would win. The people ignored them. They were pulling for Seabiscuit.
- 14 Seabiscuit won that race by four lengths. It wasn't even close. More than that, he had set a new track record. It was a great moment, but Seabiscuit didn't seem too impressed. In the winner's circle he calmly munched on the blanket of flowers around his neck. The little "working-man's horse" had won it all.

COMPREHENSION

- A** Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.
- Another title for this story might be
 - The Big Race.
 - An Unlikely Champion.
 - Seabiscuit and Pumpkin.
 - The setting for this story is
 - before the Great Depression.
 - during the Great Depression.
 - after the Great Depression.
 - Life was different for Seabiscuit after Tom Smith began training him because
 - he raced more than he did before.
 - he became even more difficult to handle.
 - he got a companion and better food and treatment.
 - Seabiscuit was different from War Admiral because
 - Seabiscuit was bigger than War Admiral.
 - Seabiscuit was smaller than War Admiral.
 - Seabiscuit was better looking than War Admiral.
 - Most of Seabiscuit's "attitude" was probably caused by
 - hard work and injuries.
 - Tom's Smith's training.
 - Red Pollard, his jockey.

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

- B** Often you can find out the meaning of a word by seeing how it is used in a story. The other words give you clues.

Find the word in the story that best fits each meaning. (A paragraph number tells you where to look.) Write the word.

- control; take care of (3)
- grouchy (3)
- a liquid rubbed on the skin to relieve pain (8)
- graceful; high in quality (10)
- holding firmly and tightly (11)
- paid no attention to (13)
- chewed noisily (14)

- C** A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning will depend on how it is used.

The *fly* buzzed around the room.
The bird will *fly* to its nest.

Look at each word in **bold type**. Note the paragraph number. Look back at the paragraph. Which meaning does the word have there? Write *a* or *b*.

8 plain (2)

- an area of flat land
- not beautiful

9 stall (5)

- to abruptly stop running
- a place where a horse sleeps and eats

10 stable (6)

- not easily moved or changed
- a building where horses live

THINK ABOUT IT

D Read each set of sentences. Which word in **bold type** is the best ending? Write the word.

- 1 Tom Smith saw Seabiscuit's potential. He felt _____.
confused confident curious
- 2 Seabiscuit liked having Pumpkin around. He felt more _____.
relaxed lazy tired
- 3 The East coast stable owners weren't worried about Seabiscuit. They felt _____.
superior respectful sorry
- 4 Red Pollard and Seabiscuit understood each other. They felt _____.
distrustful connected nervous
- 5 The American people wanted Seabiscuit to beat War Admiral. They felt _____.
angry energetic hopeful

E One word in this row doesn't belong with the others.

chicken ducks ~~foxes~~

Foxes are not birds. *Foxes* is the word that doesn't belong.

Which word doesn't belong in each row? Write the word.

- | | | |
|-----------|--------|---------|
| 6 trainer | jockey | horse |
| 7 stable | stall | pasture |

- | | | |
|----------|---------|------|
| 8 pony | horse | goat |
| 9 knee | ankle | neck |
| 10 brace | bandage | hay |

F The words *a*, *an*, and *the* are called articles. You use *a* if the next word tells about one thing and begins with a consonant.

Seabiscuit was *a* horse.

You use *an* if the next word tells about one thing and begins with a vowel.

Seabiscuit looked like *an* ordinary horse.

You use *the* if the next word names a particular person, place, or thing. You also use *the* if the next word tells about more than one.

Millions of people listened to Seabiscuit's races on *the* radio.

Read each sentence. Which article in parentheses () fits each sentence? Write the word.

- 11 Red Pollard and Seabiscuit had (a, an) understanding between them.
- 12 War Admiral was from (a, an) East Coast stable.
- 13 Seabiscuit did not want (a, an) goat in his stall.
- 14 (A, The) American people loved Seabiscuit.
- 15 The Depression made life hard in (a, the) United States.