

**WIND DANCER**

## by Chris Platt

## Louisiana Young Readers’ Choice Nominee 2017

**Grade 3-5**

Submitted by Jessica Barrilleaux, Student Worker

State Library of Louisiana

**Title**: *Wind Dancer*

**Author**: Chris Platt

**Publisher**: Peachtree Publishers

**Pages**: 176

**SUMMARY**

Ali’s passion was horses – until the accident. Her life changed in a flash, leaving her hesitant around the animals she once loved. Since then, Ali’s brother Danny has joined the Army and come home from Afghanistan feeling damaged, an amputee with PTSD. Ali is adrift without horse-riding and wishes she could reconnect with her brother; she can’t focus in school, and things don’t seem like they can ever go back to normal, as they were before.

Still, despite her problems, Ali can’t ignore animals in need, especially when she passes them every day on the bus. When Ali and her friend Cara investigate the barn of a neighbor and discover neglected horses that haven’t been fed or exercised, Animal Control and the local veterinarian get involved, and Ali’s family ends up with the task of nursing the horses back to health. Can caring for an Appaloosa horse help both Ali and Danny start to rebuild their lives?

**AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Chris Platt is a life-long horse lover and owner, and she has a degree in journalism from the University of Nevada, Reno. She lives in Nevada with her husband and many animals and has written more than a dozen books about horses for an audience of young readers.

Biographical information taken from the author’s website at

<http://chrisplattbooks.com/wordpress/about-chris/>,

Accessed 18 February 2016.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Author website <http://chrisplattbooks.com/wordpress/>

**OTHER TITLES BY AUTHOR**

Ashleigh series (1998-2003)

*Storm Chaser* (2009)

*Moon Shadow* (2010)

**RELATED TITLES**

*Wild Girl* by Patricia Reilly Giff

*Come What May* by Lauren Brooke

*Pony on the Porch* by Ben M. Baglio

*Colt* by Nancy Springer

**CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**

**Art:**

*Wind Dancer* is a book about horses, but it’s also a book about family and overcoming trauma among other themes. Ask students to design a new cover for the book, one that can include horses but also incorporates another element of the story. As a class, discuss what you can learn about a book from its cover and whether these judgements can be misleading. Use the sayings, “A picture is worth a thousand words” and, “Never judge a book by its cover” to prompt discussion.

**Math**

At the feed store, Ali uses the money that Danny gives her to buy two chicks, but she also makes sure that there is room in her twenty-dollar budget to buy food and the other supplies she will need to care for them. Ask students to share an experience they have had with saving money for something they wanted; did they have to make considerations for other costs (the monthly or yearly subscription fee to a gaming website or magazine, for example)? Then ask each student to create a budget for purchasing and caring for a new pet, including the cost of the pet, food, equipment (a leash, tack, carrier, etc.), veterinary fees, and any other costs relevant to the animal the student chooses. It may be necessary for students to first research the needs of specific animals. What amount can the student save weekly for his or her pet fund? Brainstorm ways to make money. How long would he or she have to save? In class, apply this exercise to the concept of weekly, monthly, and yearly spending and savings plans. Supplemental activities include <http://www.petweek.org/assets/pdf/GradeLevel4_Add.pdf>

**Health**

* After her family takes in the neglected horses, Ali is responsible for their care, and they are dependent on her. Divide the class into pairs to complete the trust walk activity in the following link before discussing its ties to pet ownership. Also use this opportunity to discuss the ways that sense of balance and direction are affected by sight and the importance of eye health.

<http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/parents_educators/responsible_pet_ownership.pdf>

* First ask students to put themselves in the place of a soldier like Danny and compare the thoughts they might have had before and after going to war. Using these reactions, their knowledge of Danny and Ali as characters, and the resources on Post-traumatic Stress Disorder at the back of the book, ask them to create a Venn diagram comparing the ways that a doctor like a neuroscientist or therapist might help someone with PTSD and ways that a family member like a sibling or parent might help.

**Science**

Tame and Wild: Take a virtual field trip to the zoo by visiting <http://www.waza.org/en/zoo> or by exploring the resources available through the websites of your local zoo or aquarium. Discuss the concept of domestication as a class, and ask students to determine which (if any) of the zoo animals would make a good pet and why or why not. Are there any animals that can be both wild and tame, like horses and chicks? As the units given in the animal profiles from WAZA are in metric, this may also be an opportunity to teach students about units of measure and to demonstrate some simple conversions. Use the “Extend this Lesson” section of the following teaching guide for related activities: <http://www.petweek.org/assets/pdf/GradeLevel3_WD.pdf>.

**Civics**

On page 24, Ali says that “A part of her felt sorry for Mrs. Marshall” because “Surely she hadn’t meant to starve her horses.” There are many reasons that good pet owners choose to give up their pets or, sometimes like Mrs. Marshall, have them taken away for their own good. Use the following lessons plans to explore this topic and to discuss what actions students can take.

<http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/parents_educators/good_answers_for_pet_problems.pdf>

<http://www.petweek.org/assets/pdf/GradeLevel4_2many.pdf>

**Vocabulary:**

Befuddled

Gelding

Incorrigible

Prosthetic

Ransom

Senile

Sparse

Stricken

Understatement

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why do Cara and Ali sneak out to check on Mrs. Marshall’s horses even though they know they might get into trouble? Why are their actions dangerous? Is the risk worth the results? What might they have done instead to achieve the same result?
2. Reference the last page of chapter six. When the neglected horses are first brought to her house, why doesn’t Ali want to be the one to care for them? Who is Max? From what part(s) of the book did you gather this information?
3. Does Ali do the right thing by not telling her parents about the car accident on the way home from the feed store with Danny? Why or why not? What events in the book lead you to your answer?
4. Danny is upset with himself when he finds out that he could have hurt the horses by feeding them too much. Is the mistake really his fault? Does it make a difference that he was trying to help Ali? How could the situation have been prevented?
5. What problems does connection to the horses help both Ali and Danny overcome? How is this possible? Name specific examples from the book.

**RELATED WEB SITES**

**Healing Hooves**

<http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/adventure_pass/amazing-animals/healing-hooves/>

An example of a providing therapy, like Wind Dancer and Misty.

**Horse Vocabulary**

<http://www.sunnysidefarms.net/horses/facts/vocab.html>

A guide to the specialized terms used around horses, some of which appear in the book.

**Veterinarian**

<https://kids.usa.gov/watch-videos/jobs/veterinarian/index.shtml>

Information from kids.gov about being a veterinarian.