

Comprehension

Genre

Narrative Nonfiction

is a story or account about actual persons, living things, situations, or events.



Monitor Comprehension

Cause and Effect

As you read, fill in your Cause and Effect Diagram.

Cause → Effect
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→
→
→

Read to Find Out

What is it that makes a wild horse wild?





Wild Horses

by Cris Peterson
photographs by Alvis Upitis



In the deepest, darkest part of night, when the crickets and tree frogs are almost silent, shadowy shapes emerge from the ponderosa pine ridge and tiptoe down to the glassy Cheyenne River below. Their long tangled manes and tails ruffle in the night breeze. Ever alert and watchful for predators, they swiftly drink their fill. Then they turn on their heels and lunge up the rocky hills to safety.

In the misty glow of dawn, one can see these mysterious visitors aren't backyard pasture mares with swishing tails and docile, trusting eyes. These horses are wild—from another century, another era, another world. They are American mustangs, whose freedom, adaptability, and toughness define the western wilderness.



Some of the mares have names. Medicine Hattie is easy to spot. Her dark ears jut out above her ghostly white face and corn-silk mane. Painted Lady's pure white coat is splashed with brown spots; she always seems to know where the sweetest grasses are.

And there are others. Funny Face has a creamy white blaze that slides down the sides of her face like melting ice cream on a hot day. She loves to stand on the highest rock-strewn spot with her face to the wind. Yuskeya, whose name means freedom in the Sioux language, always stands at the edge of the herd, alert for danger and ready to run.





To find these horses, cross Cascade Creek where the South Dakota Black Hills meet the prairie, and turn right onto a pothole-strewn gravel road. This is the land of silver sagebrush and cowboy legends. Scraggly buzzards perch on fence posts near the entry gate to the Black Hills Wild Horse **Sanctuary**, home for more than three hundred wild horses and one determined cowboy-conservationist named Dayton Hyde.

Dayton was a gangly, growing thirteen-year-old boy when he met his first horse. It was a dirt-colored pony he found drinking from a puddle of old soapy dishwater behind his family's summer cabin in northern Michigan. He recalls that for a time he thought all horses blew bubbles out of their noses.

Soon after that encounter, word came from Dayton's cattle rancher uncle in Oregon that his cowboys had just captured a band of wild horses. Dayton hopped a westbound train and arrived on his uncle's doorstep, where he grew up as a cowboy learning to love the western range and its wild horses.

Mustangs are **descendants** of the horses brought to America by Spanish explorers nearly five hundred years ago. By 1900, more than two million smart, fast, surefooted wild horses roamed the West.

When newly invented barbed wire fences began crisscrossing the rangelands, the horses lost access to sources of food and water and became a pesky problem for local residents. Thousands of them were slaughtered for fertilizer or pet food. By 1950, less than seventeen thousand survived.

After a Congressional act prohibited the capture or slaughter of wild horses in 1971, the wild horse population again grew quickly. Many died of thirst and starvation in the harsh western winters. In an attempt to manage the size of the herds, the United States government gathered up the animals and maintained them in fenced feedlots until they could be adopted.

One day in the early 1980s, Dayton Hyde, who by this time owned his uncle's ranch and had a grown family of his own, drove by one of these feedlots. Shocked and dismayed by the sight of dozens of muddy and dejected horses locked in a corral, he felt he had to do something.



Cause and Effect

What caused the mustang population to increase during the 1970s?







After months of searching and many long days spent convincing government officials to accept his plan of creating a special place for wild horses, he acquired eleven thousand acres of rangeland and rimrock near the Black Hills in South Dakota. Here, among yawning canyons and sun-drenched pastures, he hoped wild horses—some too ugly, old, or knobby kneed to be adopted—could run free forever.

Before he could ship his wild horse rejects to their new home, Dayton had to build eight miles of fences to ensure they wouldn't wander into his neighbors' wheat fields. He also fenced in a fifty-acre training field where the horses would spend their first few days on the ranch adjusting to their new surroundings.



On a miserably cold fall day, huge creaking semi-trailers filled with snorting, stomping steeds finally arrived at the ranch. After hours of **coaxing**, Dayton succeeded in getting Magnificent Mary to skitter off the trailer. She was a battle-scarred, mean-eyed mare with a nose about twice as long as it should be. The rest of the herd clattered behind her, eyes bulging with fear.



Dayton's worst fear was that the horses would spook and charge through his carefully constructed six-wire fence, scattering across the prairie like dry leaves in a whirlwind. Aware that wild horses often feel **threatened** by being watched, he sat in the cab of his old pickup truck, peeking at them out of a corner of his eye. Finally, after nearly a week of around-the-clock vigilance, he swung open the gate from the training field to his wild horse sanctuary.

Many years have passed since Dayton held his breath and pushed that corral gate open. Every spring, dozens of his wild horses give birth to tottering colts that learn the ways of the back country from their mothers. They share the vast, quiet land with coyotes, mountain lions, and countless deer. Star lilies, bluebells, and prairie roses nod in the wind along with the prairie short grass that feeds the herd.



Thousands of visitors arrive each summer to get a glimpse of wild horses in their natural **habitat**, a habitat that has been preserved through Dayton's careful planning. Throughout the grazing season, he moves the herd from one area of the ranch to another so the horses don't damage the **fragile** rangeland. In the process, he searches for his marker mares: Painted Lady, Medicine Hattie, Funny Face, Yuskeya, Magnificent Mary, and several others. When he spots them all, he knows the whole herd is accounted for.





Sometimes in the fall while he's checking on the horses, Dayton notices a gaunt, aging mare whose ribs stand out through her ragged coat. He knows this old friend won't survive the winter. As the pale December daylight slips over the rimrock, the old mare lies down and goes to sleep for the last time. After years of running free, the wild mustang returns to the earth and completes the circle of life.

The wild mustangs Dayton Hyde once discovered crowded into a feedlot now gallop across the Cheyenne River free as the prairie wind. They splash through the **glistening** water and bolt up a ravine. Here in this rugged wilderness, one man's vision of a sanctuary for wild horses has become a reality.



Cause and Effect

What were the events that caused the wild horses from the feedlot to be protected in the Sanctuary?

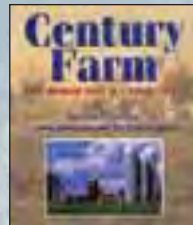
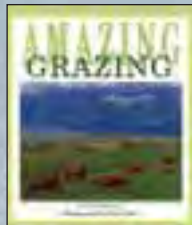
Ride Away with Cris and Alvis



Cris Peterson lives on a big dairy farm in Wisconsin. Tending 500 cows keeps Cris pretty busy, but she still finds time to write. Cris writes a lot about farm life and animals. She often uses her own experiences as inspiration for her books. Cris believes it is very important to give readers a true picture of farms and animals, so she chooses her details carefully.

Alvis Uptis has provided the photographs for many of Cris's books. He is a good partner. When Cris was very busy with farm work and did not think she'd have time to write, Alvis encouraged her to try.

Other books by Cris and Alvis



Find out more about Cris Peterson and Alvis Uptis at www.macmillanmh.com

Author's Purpose

Cris Peterson tried hard to create a true picture of the animals in *Wild Horses*. What does this suggest about her purpose for writing? How well did she succeed at that purpose? Explain.



Comprehension Check



Summarize

Summarize *Wild Horses*. Include only the most important information in your summary. Use your Cause and Effect Diagram to help you.

Cause → Effect
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Think and Compare



1. What caused the **fragile** wild horse population to almost disappear? **Monitor Comprehension: Cause and Effect**
2. Reread page 638 of *Wild Horses*. What does the author mean by saying these horses are from “another era, another world”? **Analyze**
3. What would you do if you found a horse drinking soapy dishwater? **Apply**
4. Why is it important to care for and protect animals? Explain your opinion. **Evaluate**
5. Read “The Wild Ponies of Chincoteague” on pages 634–635. Compare Assateague Island with the Black Hills Wild Horse Sanctuary. How are the two places alike? How are they different? Use details from both selections in your answer.

Reading/Writing Across Texts

