



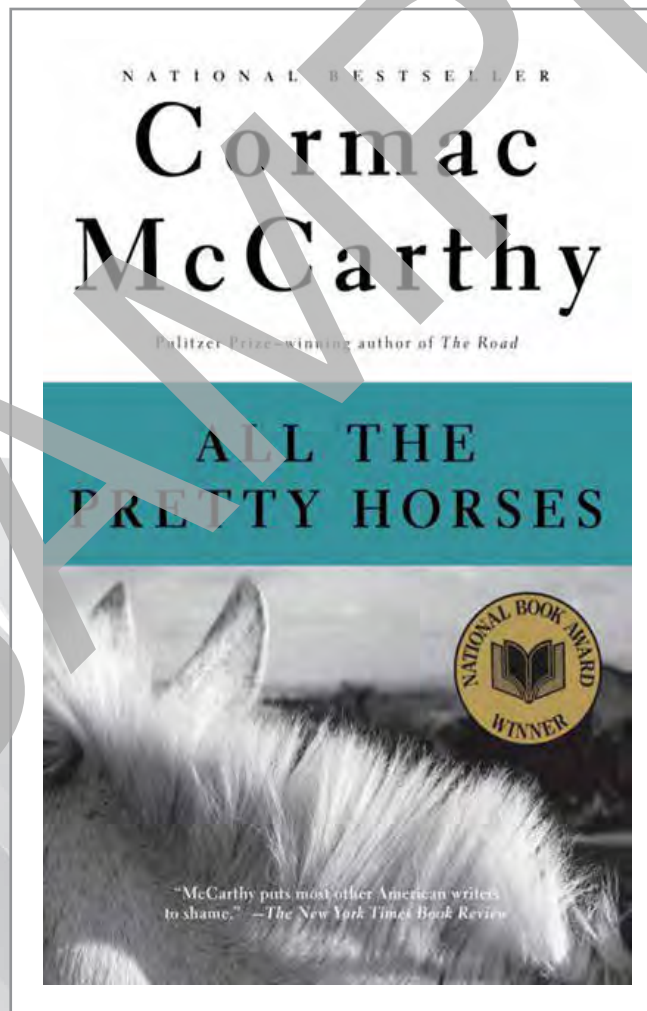
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# All the Pretty Horses

Cormac McCarthy



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# All the Pretty Horses

Cormac McCarthy

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Summary

The first book of the Border Trilogy, *All the Pretty Horses*, is a coming-of-age tale set during the late 1940s. When the story opens, 16-year-old John Grady's grandfather, a Texas rancher, has just died. Grady's mother, separated from Grady's father, plans to sell the ranch over Grady's protestations. Grady and his friend Lacey Rawlins set out on horseback looking for adventure in Mexico and end up with more than they had bargained for. By the time his journey is over, Grady has known love, killed a man, and come near death. When he returns to the place that was once home, he is a changed man.

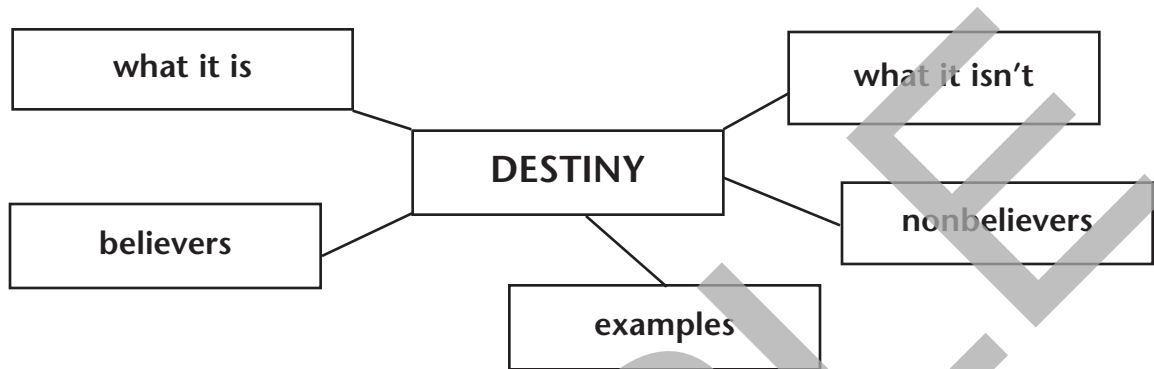
## About the Author

Cormac McCarthy was born in Rhode Island in 1933, the third of six children. He grew up in Knoxville, Tennessee (where his father was a lawyer for the TVA) and attended Catholic high school in Knoxville. He attended the University of Tennessee on and off, leaving for a four-year stint in the Air Force. While stationed in Alaska, he hosted a radio show. Upon his return to the university, he published several stories in the student literary magazine and won the Ingram-Merrill Award for creative writing in 1959 and 1960. He married a fellow student, had a son, and moved with his family to Chicago, where he worked as a car mechanic and wrote his first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*.

He and his wife divorced, and McCarthy accepted a traveling fellowship. On an ocean liner, he met a young English singer and dancer, and they married. He and his new wife toured Europe and settled in an artists' colony on the island of Ibiza. The following year they moved back to Tennessee and rented a house on a pig farm. His second book, *Outer Dark*, was published to good reviews. After McCarthy won a Guggenheim Fellowship, he and his wife moved into a barn which McCarthy renovated himself. *Child of God* was published to mixed reviews in 1973, and the next year he worked on a screenplay for *The Gardener's Son*.

In 1976, he and his second wife divorced and he moved to El Paso, Texas, his current home. In 1979, he published his fourth novel, *Suttree*, considered by some to be his finest. He won a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship in 1981 and used the money to write *Blood Meridian*, an apocalyptic western (for which he researched heavily and learned Spanish). *All the Pretty Horses*, the first in his Border Trilogy, was published in 1992 and became a *New York Times* bestseller. (He bought a pickup truck with his initial profits.) In 1994, his play *The Stonemason* (about three generations of a black family in Kentucky), and the second volume of The Border Trilogy (*The Crossing*) were published. The third volume, called *Cities of the Plain*, again focuses on John Grady Cole (the protagonist of *All the Pretty Horses*).

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5. Brainstorming: Have students generate associations with a theme that is central to the story—such as DESTINY—while a student scribe jots ideas around the central word or statement on a large piece of paper. Help students “cluster” the ideas into categories. A sample framework is shown below.



6. Roleplay: Have small groups of students improvise skits about the following situations (similar to situations in the story):
- You are trying to convince your divorced parent not to sell the family business.
  - A wealthy adult is trying to explain rationally why she thinks you are not good for her daughter or son.
  - A bully walks up to you and tries to start a fight. How do you react?
  - Some armed thugs have just forced an acquaintance of yours into a dark alley. What do you say or do?
7. Geography: On a map, have students locate Texas and Mexico. Suggest that they trace the boys’ route on the map as they read the story.
8. Prediction: Have students make predictions about the story, based on the cover. Where will it take place? What sort of story will it be? What is shown on the front cover? What feeling does that picture give you? What does the title make you think of? What is the embossed medal, and what can you predict about the novel from its inclusion on the cover?
9. Writing: Have students freewrite in their literature journals, using these sentence starters. After they read and discuss the relevant chapter, have them reread their freewrites and add another few sentences in light of the reading.

8. Have students work in cooperative groups to map particular words that fit the following framework:

	What it looks like:
	What it does:
	Where it is:
What it is:	

Some words students might map this way include:

suture 38	pallets 54	gorgon 71	heifer 91
jodhpurs 94	mescal 122	foxfire 141	cummerbund 205
aqueduct 247	pumpstanchions 285		

9. Have students (especially those for whom English is a second language) do “synonymic webbing” of words with multiple meanings. For example:

<b>drawn (p. 3)</b>				
various meanings:	*weary	attracted	depicted	stretched
synonyms: <small>*meaning as used in the novel</small>	exhausted haggard	pulled led	designed represented	strained tightened

Help students write several sentences containing “drawn” with its various meanings.

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## Chapter I, pages 59-96

After meeting a group of Mexicans on horseback, the boys stop and cook a rabbit Blevins has shot. Blevins admits that he ran away to see a show in Ardmore, Oklahoma. While working in a bowling alley there he was bitten by a dog, and he ran off rather than face being sent back to his abusive stepfather. After buying some alcohol from migrant traders along the road, the boys get drunk. Blevins panics at the approach of bad weather, saying that he is going to try to outride the storm since deaths from lightning run in his family. Later, John Grady finds Blevins horseless, huddled beneath some dead tree roots in his underwear, and retrieves him. The three boys ride into a camp where a group of Mexicans let them take something to eat and drink. When one tries to buy Blevins, John Grady signals his companions that it is time to leave. They ride into a town and see Blevins' pistol in a man's pocket. Blevins goes to look for his horse and Rawlins suggests they leave Blevins there, or something bad will happen. Sure enough, Blevins soon steals back his horse, and men with guns chase the boys out of town and across the countryside. Blevins creates a diversion by taking a fork in the road. John Grady and Rawlins eventually stop to kill and dress a deer. They ride on and while they are talking to some vaqueros, a beautiful girl rides by on horseback. The vaqueros introduce the boys to the owner of the ranch, and he hires them.

### Vocabulary

Pleiades 60  
rowels 62  
tandem 65  
foundry 67  
bracken 73  
chaparral 73  
pueblo 78  
hackamore 81  
heifer 91  
gaited 94

infidel 61  
desiccated 65  
decanted 65  
derrick 68  
impaled 73  
esclarajos 75  
pollarded 78  
bedlam 83  
withers 93  
caporal 94

zacateros 61  
effigy 65  
caballeros 66  
soldered 68  
espallered 73  
speculative 75  
rogue 80  
arroyo 87  
vaqueros 93  
gerente 94

tallow 62  
migrant 65  
sotol 66  
gorgon 71  
galvanized 73  
serf 77  
palisades 81  
foray 90  
jodhpurs 94  
expansive 95

### Discussion Questions

1. If you were Rawlins or John Grady, what would you like to ask Blevins?
2. What do Rawlins and Grady learn from Blevins about himself and his family? (*He says that his stepfather tried to beat him and that he left home to see a traveling show.*) Do you believe what he tells them?
3. Why is Blevins so afraid of lightning? (*He says several family members were killed by lightning.*) What does he do as a result? (*When it begins to storm, he removes his clothes because there is some metal on them, and hides under the roots of a dead tree.*) What is your worst fear?
4. How do the Mexicans at the "waxcamp" treat the boys? (*They let them have some food.*) Why do you think they want to buy Blevins? How much of the conversation (in Spanish) can you understand? Why do you think the author didn't just translate these exchanges? (*possibly to create a realistic effect*)