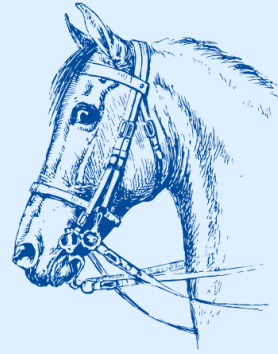


GROUP LESSON RIDING WITH STICKS



Hills and Hollows Horse Riding School Series

SEARCH FOR QUIZ ANSWERS IN THE LESSON BOOKS WHERE YOU FIND HOOF PRINTS AMONG THE TEXT


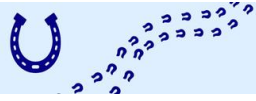


BOOK 6. GROUP LESSON- RIDING WITH STICKS

The autumn morning greeted the riders as they gathered in the tacking-up area at Hills and Hollows Riding School. The Golden Rain Tree with its pod's brown, cast familiar shade over the group of helpers. The horses and ponies shifted lazily in their places under the old Coolabah Trees. Today's lesson, whispered the group, promised something new and exciting: Riding-with-Sticks.

Holly prepared Yogi unsure of what the session ahead would hold, "why would anyone ride with sticks?" she wondered as she gave Yogi a fond pat and reached for the manure rake beside him. He was a gentle giant of horse; a big bay clydesdale-cross stock horse with a quirky Harry Potter-shaped scar on his neck. At 15 hands high, his sturdy build and patient temperament made him a favorite for beginner and advanced riders.

Holly walked, slept and breathed horses. She loved her new friends at Hills and Hollows but the true lure was the horses and ponies: their smell; furry frame; deep eyes; and soft muzzle. She couldn't describe it exactly. Even their manure was okay. Holly placed her hand calmly on Yogi's rump, "move over boy" She prodded him, intent to rake up the manure pile under his back legs. Yogi refused outright to move a muscle and reluctantly turned his nose to Holly. "Seriously Yogi," she exclaimed as she moved to his middle and with one hand, gently pulled the near rein while the other hand nudged him behind the girth area. "That's better," she said as he stepped over with his hind end and permitted her to continue the routine of care.




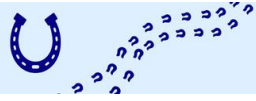
Holly's family had an enduring quality. Her little brother had had a tricky birth. It took almost all that her mum could muster to survive childbirth and care for this precious gift of life. Her Dad didn't quite see things the same way. Now-a-days, she visits him every second weekend.

Holly's mother, Kate, was the kind of person who seemed to carry the world's weight with grace. Whether her warmth came from her struggles and faith or was simply a part of who she was, no one could say for sure. What everyone knew, though, was that Kate had a large heart and an uncanny way of offering exactly what was needed, often before anyone thought to ask.

When Leanne had been injured the previous year, Kate had been the first to step forward. "Let me bring Holly out to make feeds for you," she had offered, with no hesitation. Despite now being a single mother, with more than her share of challenges, she had found a way to make it happen. Between doctor's appointments, sleepless nights, and endless worries, she had still managed to bring Holly to Hills and Hollows a few times each week. "It's good for her," Kate had said, watching Holly scoop feed into buckets.

Leanne had been deeply moved by Kate's generosity. It wasn't just that Kate had stepped in during a difficult time—it was how she did it. There was no fuss, no expectation of thanks. Just quiet, consistent kindness. And though Holly was young, her mother's compassion had left its mark. She worked with a quiet diligence, always looking for ways to ease the load, much like her mum.

"Horses accept you as you are," thought Holly. She lifted the manure into the wheelbarrow. Then she placed the rake back and guided Yogi's hind end back to its original position with the faintest touch, impressed that this time, Yogi recognised the aid more clearly, moving with just a slight touch to his ribcage. "Good boy! Yogi! You really are clever," she said.



Liz pulled the release knot on Quickstep's lead rein. He stood next to Yogi in the shade of the large Coolabah Tree in the tie up area. "Can you stay to watch Luke doing groundwork with Rhyme this afternoon?" she asked.

"Yeah, it's the next steps after join up!" Holly replied. She was learning all she could for one day she hoped to break and train her own horse.

"I know right!" Liz replied. "That horse moves like a wild stallion one minute then comes in like a puppy to nibble your collar". Holly smiled as she led Yogi to the mounting bay. With reins in one hand, she stood at Yogi's shoulder and placed her left toe in the stirrup. After a small spring, she was up and landing softly in the deepest part of the saddle, then leaning forward to stroke his neck. Most kids used the mounting block at Hills and Hollows but Holly was nimble and Leanne encouraged her to mount from the ground.

The troop assembled in the sand arena. "Horses don't care if you've had a bad day or a good day," Leanne said to the group. "What's important is how you treat them in the moment. If you're clear, consistent, and kind, they'll give you their trust. It's the most honest relationship you'll ever have."

Leanne let the words sink in as the kids stroked their ponies' manes, a quiet moment passing between rider and horse.

"Perri, would you please lead the warm up ride," Leanne instructed. Perri was super keen for today's lesson. She, Liz and Zain had discussed the lesson and how it could help them with the skill needed to put up night cameras on the far fence. Zain had suggested the gathering evidence on the trouble with neighbouring properties would help to convince Luke so that real action could be taken. They already knew that Leanne used the cameras to monitor wombats and other native and nocturnal animals. It



would just be a matter of hijacking that system for a while to get the evidence to convince Luke of foul play.

Perri, lost in her thoughts, jolted Lynlea forward with a stronger aid than needed. Leanne looked confused, it wasn't her normal style. "Sorry girl," Perri said as Lynlea took the lead and the other riders followed. Perri held the lead through warm-up as the group walked, then trotted the outside track of the arena.

During the trot work Holly kept glancing down, her eyes on the saddle and her hands as she adjusted her reins. Leanne watched each rider closely, knowing today's lesson, although it sounded like fun, was every bit as technical as any dressage lesson.

After warm-up, the group fell into troop line. Noses pointed toward Leanne, every pony a half pony space apart. The troop line was more elegant in the sand arena than the grass arena where ponies strayed off to graze.

Leanne commenced with group feedback "I noticed a few of you looking down a lot," she said. "What are you checking on?"

Holly looked up, a little sheepish. "For me, I'm making sure everything's alright with Yogi and I guess I'm checking I'm holding the reins correctly."

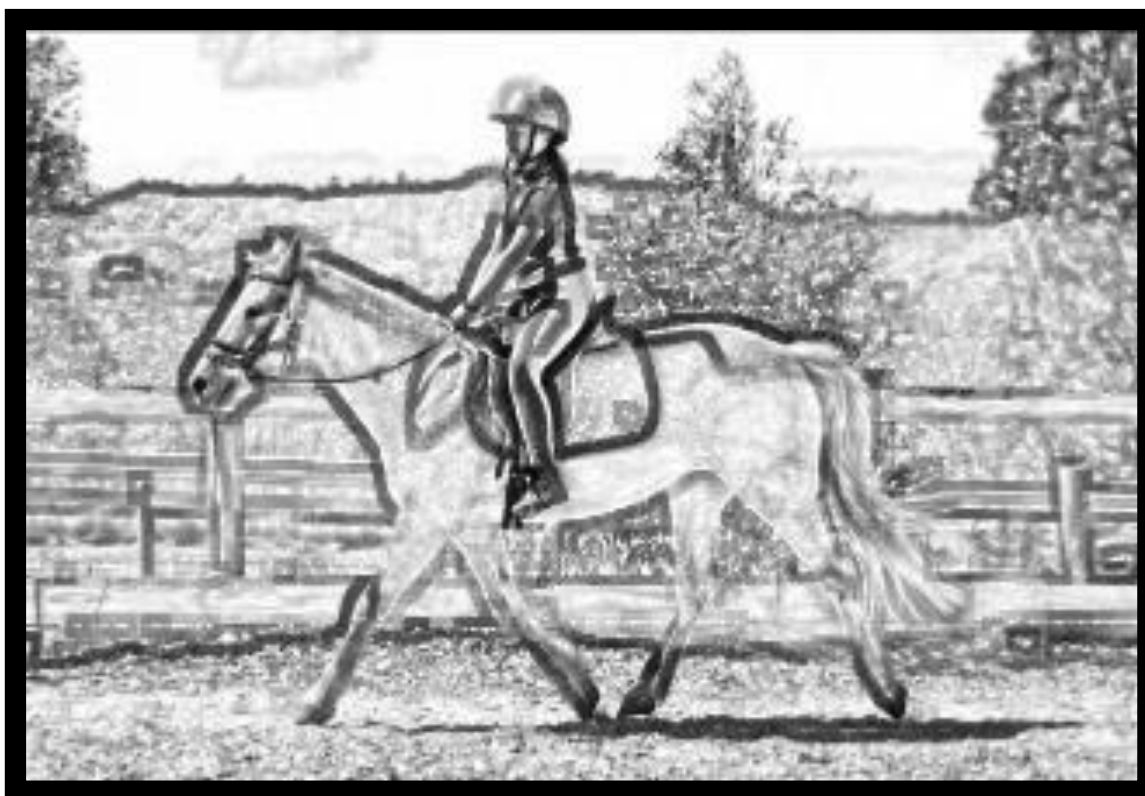
Leanne gave her a reassuring smile. "I understand, but you know, part of developing your skills is learning to 'ride by feel.' When you keep looking down, it shifts your weight in subtle ways that Yogi can feel—sometimes even more than you realize. Your balance shifts



forward, and he'll respond to that." She paused, letting that sink in.

"Think of it like driving a car. You don't stare at the steering wheel. Instead, you look ahead, in the direction you want to go. When your eyes are focused in the right direction, your aids and your balance work together more naturally."

Holly nodded, determined to give it a try. From that moment, she kept her gaze ahead, relying on her peripheral vision and the feel of her seat to maintain her connection with Yogi. She began to notice that by focusing forward, her balance improved and her aids felt more stable.





Leanne shifted the lesson to the day’s goal. “Today, we are focused on Riding with Sticks. Can anyone think about what that might mean for our horses?”

Zain’s hand shot up immediately, and he waved it excitedly. “Oh! Oh! I know!” he exclaimed, grinning. He demonstrated with one hand on the reins and the other holding an imaginary stick.

“Very good, Zain. Anything else?” Leanne encouraged. The group chuckled.

Without hesitation, Zain added, “We need to desensitise them to the stick.”

“Excellent observation, Zain. I can see Luke’s groundwork lessons are paying off,” Leanne said with a smile. “Can you explain to the others what desensitising means?”



“It’s getting the horse used to something so it’s no longer scared of it—or, um, doesn’t care about it,” Zain explained confidently.

“Yes, so they’re no longer reactive,” Leanne agreed. “But can anyone think of when desensitisation might become a problem?”

Zain paused, politely scanning the group to see if anyone else wanted to answer. When no one did, he continued. “Like if you kick without purpose or use the stick too much for no reason. Luke called it pressure and release when he worked with the stallion. If you don’t give the horse a release when it does something right, you can make them dull and unreactive.”



“Exactly, Zain,” Leanne said, her tone encouraging. “If the horse doesn’t connect the pressure—like a leg or rein aid—to a reaction that gets a reward, then it stops valuing that aid. Desensitisation without purpose can lead to confusion or resistance.

Leanne picked up the long stick in her hand. So ancient warriors, like the Amazons and Native American riders needed to firstly” she held up her fingers as she spoke, stick now in the rein hand,

“Desensitise; then to? Train to one rein, or to no reins at all, and finally, what's next anyone?”

“Would it be the legs against the horse to turn?” Hayley offered with hesitation in her voice.



“Yes, brilliant Hayley, you guys are the perfect class” Leanne smiled.

She introduced the concept of neck reining, a technique where the horse responded to the pressure of the rein against its neck rather than direct rein pressure, making it easier to ride with one hand.

Leanne also talked about modern-day sports like polo and tent pegging, where riders needed to guide their horses while holding a mallet or lance.

The first exercise involved teaching the kids how to bridge the reins to maintain control with one hand. Leanne demonstrated, explaining how the bridge kept the reins balanced and ensured steady contact with the pony’s mouth.

The riders took turns practicing on their ponies, starting with simple exercises like turning in large circles and weaving through cones.

Once the kids felt confident riding one-handed, Leanne handed each of them a lightweight stick, rubbing it on the ponies neck as she passed it over. She explained how cavalry riders or polo players guided their horses while holding an object.

Desensitising began with basic maneuvers, having them hold the stick upright, tap it gently on their legs or their pony's neck to simulate actions, and then to balance it as they trotted.

“Let's talk now about where your leg should be positioned when you're giving specific cues,” she explained.

“Holly if you come out we can demo” “Your leg has three primary ‘buttons’ along Yogi's left and right side—the area just at the girth, just behind it, and just in front. These points give different messages. When you apply pressure just behind the girth, you're generally asking him to move forward” she said “Does that sound, right ?” She asked. Holly closed her eyes and thought for a second. “Yeah, that's right”.



“That's good. This is where your leg can provide the most driving power and influence,” Leanne encouraged.

She added, “This spot, right at the back edge of the girth, is powerful for Yogi's movement. It's where your inside leg should stay most of the time. It keeps him moving forward and helps him bend around you. Many riders



don't realize how much this position affects their control and balance—too far forward or too far back, and you lose a lot of the strength and influence that comes from this spot. If the leg aid is given too far behind The girth you are controlling the horses hindquarters rather than the whole horse. If given in front of the girth, you are controlling the horses forehand or shoulders”.

“I understand now”. Holly responded. She tried positioning her leg just as Leanne explained. With her head up and her leg steady just at the back of the girth, she felt Yogi respond more sensitively, his big frame moving forward with ease and precision. She grinned, recognizing how this seemingly small adjustment changed their connection.

“Every time when we ride, we are training our horses, sometimes for the better, sometimes the worse. Using your leg correctly, and rewarding Yogi when he responds, will make him more responsive to your soft aid and make for a better partnership.” Leanne concluded.

As they continued, Holly became more aware of the impact each small shift in her position had on Yogi's responses. She began to understand that effective riding came from these subtleties, the alignment of her focus, balance, and aid positions. Leanne's words rang in her head, “The eyes give direction, the legs give power. With these working together, you and Yogi are a team.”

By the end of the lesson, the group felt a new kind of confidence—one that came from knowing that her focus and her subtle aids could shape Yogi's movement. She gave Yogi a grateful pat, and he nuzzled her in return, seeming to acknowledge the trust they'd built that day. For Holly, it was a lesson she knew would stay with her for her future rides. Zain looked at Perri and said, “let's try to get Holly to come along. We could do with the extra



help!” Perri nodded and smiled, “She has really mastered a lot in a little time,” she said.

To make the lesson fun and engaging, Leanne introduced a mock “warrior challenge.” This included weaving through cones while holding the stick, then picking up and dropping a small stick onto a marker.

Attempting a "tent pegging" simulation was after the break. The kids guided their ponies while touching a target on the ground with their sticks. Leanne reminded the riders throughout that leg aids were key to controlling the pony while their hands were occupied.

As the lesson wrapped up, Leanne gathered the group for a final debrief, reviewing the importance of purposeful aids, the value of desensitisation, and how their new skills in riding with sticks could enhance their overall horsemanship. The kids listened intently, nodding along as they cooled down their ponies and led them back to the tie-up area.

While untacking his pony, Zain turned to Liz and Perry, his face alight with determination. “I think after that session, we’ll be able to master moving the cameras from the trees to the fences up past the valley without any trouble,” he said confidently, holding up the stick he’d used during the lesson. “That skill’s going to help us get the evidence we need to help Luke secure Hills and Hollows for sure.”

Perry grinned, giving Zain an approving nod. Liz, brushed her pony’s mane before setting her free in the paddock. She adding, “It’s true. If we can manage that, nothing will get past us. We’ll be ready for whatever comes next.”

The three exchanged a look of quiet resolve, their bond strengthened by the lesson and their shared sense of purpose. As the sun dipped lower in the sky, their ponies nickered softly for some hay before parting, and the kids felt a renewed determination to protect their ponies' homeland.

