

A Standards-Aligned Educator Guide for Grades 4 - 8

ALEXANDRA THE GREAT:

THE STORY OF THE RECORD-BREAKING FILLY WHO RULED THE RACETRACK

About the book:

When a little foal with a white upside-down exclamation point on her forehead was born one morning in Kentucky, the heart of America's horse racing region, problems mounted quickly. Rejected by her mother, the filly would need to be accepted and nursed by another mare. As she grew, the tall, knock-kneed girl remained skinny and scruffy, with paltry muscles. Considered an "ugly duckling," she was unsuitable as a champion racehorse, her owner proclaimed, and must be sold. But two days before the sale, an examination revealed a medical condition—now she was impossible to sell! What would become of this problem filly?

Age Range: 9 - 13

Grade Level: Grades 4-8

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About the Author - Deb Aronson:

Deb Aronson (debaronson.com) has been a freelance, non-fiction writer since 1997, when she moved to Urbana, IL, land of corn, soybeans, cows, and the source of the mighty Kaskaskia River. Before that, she worked for a decade in university public relations. When she's not gardening, sailing, or reading, Deb is writing about interesting people doing unusual things. That list includes an astronaut, archaeologist, a male midwife, Pulitzer-prize winning journalist, a rowing team, several novelists, a photographer, an architect, scientists, and a woman who founded a summer camp to reunite siblings who have been separated within the foster system.



Pre-Reading Discussion:

- Study the image of the horse featured on the cover. Notice the brass plates and buckles on its harness and lead. What does this detail suggest about the stature of this horse?
- The horse featured on the cover is a famous racehorse. Tell all that you know about horse racing. Have you ever experienced a horse race? If so, describe the experience.
- Alexander the Great was the King of Macedonia and one of the history's greatest military minds – ever! Knowing this, explore the significance of the featured horse's name. Determine how this horse earned such a powerful name.
- Predict what this non-fiction story is going to be about.

Post-Reading Discussion:

That July they offered to buy Rachel Alexandra for \$1.2 million, and Dolph was ready to sell her. However, when a vet examined Rachel, he found a small chip in her ankle, and IEAH withdrew its offer (pg. 33).

- The word *trial* means a test, one in which endurance, character, and fortitude are challenged. Discuss how, even when Rachel was very young, she was confronted with trials that served to develop her competitive nature.
- Consider how the disappointment of discovering the small bone chip described in this scene ultimately served to be a blessing.

Hal couldn't believe his fairy tale had ended almost as soon as it began. To feel that kind of ecstasy and jubilation and then, before he had time to get used to those top-of-the-world feelings, to learn that the best horse he's ever train was no longer his to train? That was heard (pg. 84).

- A tragedy is a disaster, a misfortune, and a heartbreak. Determine how selling Rachel for \$10 million could be a tragedy for Hal.
- Examine Hal's relationship with Rachel. Why was he so deeply affected by her sale?
- Hal retired shortly after Rachel was gone. Do you think Rachel's absence played a role in his desire to do so? Explain your answer.

Hooves flying the fastest, stride the longest, tail streaming, ears up, relaxed and fast, Rachel Alexander ran in front of 12 three-year-old colts, her beloved jockey perched on her back and urging her on (pg. 100).

- The word *tenacity* means persistence, determination, and drive. Though Rachel stumbled when breaking from the far gate, she ultimately won Preakness. Discuss the depths of tenacity required by a filly to break a record established for 85 years.
- When asked what author Deb Aronson hoped young readers would take away from the biography about Rachel Alexandra, she responded, "What appealed to me about this story is that here was a strong, dominant, athletic female who wasn't afraid to do her best" (CRP). Make a connection between owning a sense of tenacity and athletic dominance. Tell how they both empowered Rachel Alexandra to greatness.

Alex opened the envelope. "The Eclipse Award for the 2009 Horse of the Year" – he paused – "is Rachel Alexandra" (pg. 127).

- As a noun, the word triumph is defined as a victory, an achievement, and an accomplishment. A triumph is also defined as a joyful feeling, one of jubilation and rejoicing. Consider how winning the Eclipse Award serves as an example of both interpretations of the word.
- Which interpretation of the word triumph best describes Calvin's reaction to Rachel Alexandra being recognized as the 2009 Horse of the Year? Explain your answer.
- Author Deb Aronson believes that Rachel Alexandra's story serves as an inspiration for young girls to believe that they "... are as good as boys. They can compete, they have strengths, and they should not be dismissed because they are girls" (CRP). Do you agree? Explain your answer.

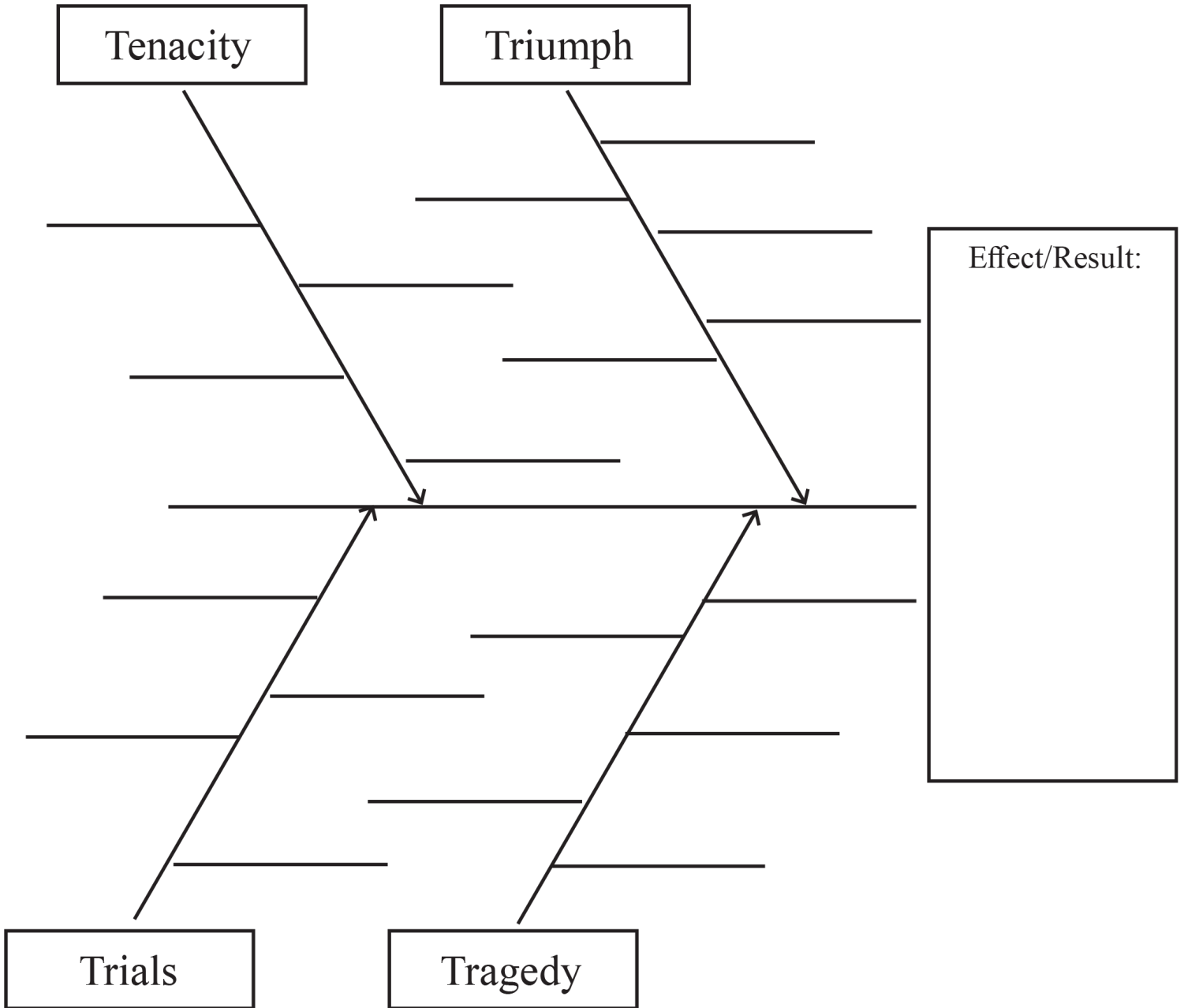
Reference:

"Deb Aronson's Alexandra the Great tells the story of a horse who showed people exactly what it means to "run like a girl." [CRP's Blog. Chicago Review Press, Feb. 17, 2017.](#)

Research Strategy in Action

Using the graphic organizer on the following page as a guide, develop the four topics explored in the discussion section in the guide – trial, tragedy, tenacity, and triumph – as they relate to Alexandra's fascinating life. Make note of a variety of situations Alexandra demonstrated each of these character traits in the short horizontal lines featured on the graphic organizer. Use information to write an essay communicating how the characters traits Alexandra the Great demonstrated helped her to become one of the greatest racing horses of all time. Share your work with the class.

What Made Rachel Alexandra So GREAT!



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COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS ALIGNMENT:

Reading: CCRA-R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.10

Language: CCRA-L.1, L.2, L.4

Writing: CCRA-W.2, W.4, W.5, W.9

Speaking & Listening: CCRA.SL.1, SL.2, SL.4, SL.6

