

NICKERS, SNORTS & WHINNIES

Horses use body language to show people and other horses how they feel. In this activity, you will practice your observation skills and learn how to "read" horse body language.



Horses have many of the same emotions as humans. For each of the ten emotions in the boxes, mark the letter of the matching behavior listed below.

Behaviors

- A. Nose stretched out, soft look in the eye
- B. Head dropped, ears drooped, sluggish movement
- C. Head lowered, quiet expression
- D. Tight muscles, worried expression
- E. Ears pinned back, rapidly swishing the tail
- F. Ears pricked forward and looking intently
- G. Teeth bared, ears pinned back, charging a horse or person
- H. Looking away
- I. Head up, ears forward, ready to run, or jumping sideways
- J. Constant fidgety movement, sweating

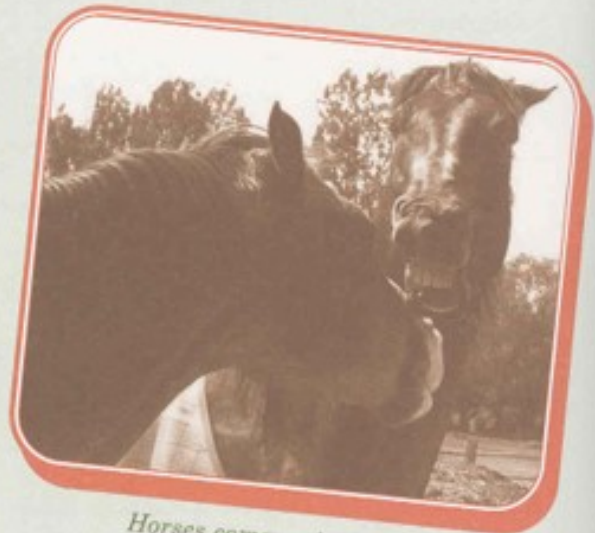
Behavior	Emotion

Horse Project Skill: Identifying horse behaviors

Life Skill: Problem solving

Educational Standard: NS.5-8.3 Life science - structure and function in living systems

Success Indicator: Describe common horse behaviors



Horses communicate and play with each other.



Visit a horse show or riding stable. Observe horses in several different settings (in their stalls, in the ring, being groomed, in a pasture). In the chart to the left, write down the behaviors you observe and then guess the emotions being expressed by the horse.

STABLE TALK

HORSIN' AROUND

How many different types of behavior did you see? What behavior surprised you the most?

BITS & PIECES

Why is it important to understand how horses show their feelings? What happens if you don't understand a horse's body language?

HORSEPOWER

What cues about your feelings do you send through body language? Describe how a person can show the same emotions listed for horses in this activity.

GALLOPING AHEAD

How can you improve your understanding of other people's body language?

SPUR YOU ON

1. Play charades with your family or friends using horse behaviors. See if they can guess what feelings you are demonstrating.
2. Write a story about a horse. Include several examples of the horse using body language and sounds to communicate. Share your story with your family or project helper.

Horse Talk
Withers



Horse Body Language

Horses use their bodies to show other horses or people how they feel. Rapidly swishing or ringing of the tail can signal anger. When a horse lowers its head, licks and makes chewing motions, it is showing readiness to cooperate. If a horse raises its head up high and pricks its ears forward, it is checking out something that it thinks may be dangerous. Horses show affection to each other by standing side-by-side facing opposite directions and scratching the other horse's withers with their teeth. A horse can tell another horse to stay away or leave. It does this by laying back its ears, opening its mouth and showing its teeth or biting, turning its rear toward the other horse and lifting a hind leg, or by kicking and charging the other horse.



Understanding horse body language requires careful observation.

Written by Carmelita Lamb and Tony Lepley. Adapted by Leslie Prillaman and Ami Neiberger-Miller. Photos courtesy of Geri Parsons and the United States Department of Agriculture.