

*Gabriel's Horses*

Alison Hart

Peachtree Publishers, 2007

**About the Author:**

<http://www.childrensbookguild.org/hart.html>

Alison Hart (pseudonym for Alice Leonhardt, but has also written under the name Linda Craig), author of *Gabriel's Horses*, has written over sixty children and young adult books, mostly in the mystery and historical suspense genres. *Gabriel's Horses* is the first book in the *Racing to Freedom Trilogy*. Her first book, *The Wild Dog*, was written, illustrated, and self-published at the tender age of seven. It is said that she still uses that book today when speaking to children, to show that you are never too young to write a book. Hart is an adjunct college instructor.

Three of Hart's favorite things are history, horses, and research. While writing *Gabriel's Horses*, Hart read and researched over 200 books. She was brought to the Bluegrass area of Kentucky while writing this book, and found its vast thoroughbred and Civil War history were wonderful resources for this trilogy and other future books.

*Gabriel's Horses* has been awarded the following:

- 2009-2010 nominee Young Hoosier Book Award (Indiana)
- 2009-2010 nominee Mark Twain Readers Award (Missouri)
- 2009-2010 nominee Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award
- 2009-2010 nominee West Virginia Children's Book Award
- 2008-09 Texas Bluebonnet Master List
- 2008-09 Keystone State Young Adult nominee
- 2008 Kansas State Reading Circle nominee
- 2008-09 Flicker Tale nominee
- Junior Library Guild selection

The following are some of the other children and young adult books written by Hart:

*Bell's Star, Gabriel's Journey, Gabriel's Triumph, Samuel's Horses, Anna's Blizzard, A Spy on the Home Front: A Molly Mystery, Fires of Jubilee, Rescue: A Police Story, Chase: A Police Story, Danger at the Wild West Show, Shadow Horse, Haunted Horseback Holiday, Lauren Rides to the Rescue, Foxhunt, Trouble at Fox Hill, Andie's Risky Business, The Craziest Horse Show Ever, Jina's Pain-in-the-Neck Pony, Andie Shows Off, Marybeth's Haunted Ride, Lessons for Lauren, Jina Rides to Win, Andie Out Of Control, A Horse of Marybeth, Return of the Gypsy Witch, Million Dollar Mare*

**Annotation:**

In book one of the *Racing to Freedom Trilogy*, author Alison Hart introduces us to Gabriel, an almost-thirteen-year-old slave boy, during the Civil War. Gabriel, his mother, and father all work for a thoroughbred owner at Woodville Farm in Kentucky. Gabriel and the other slaves on the farm are all treated very well by their owner and some are even free slaves, but continue to work for Master Winston Giles. Gabriel and his father work in the horse stables, training and minding the horses. His mother takes care of the master's wife, as she is ill. The book, *Gabriel's Horses*, is written in first person account, from Gabriel's point of view.

Gabriel tells of his adventures while riding Master Giles's racehorse, Tenpenny, to Lexington for a race. They are always on the lookout for Confederate Soldiers during this journey, especially one named One Arm Dan Parmer. He is known for entering towns, robbing them, beating colored folks, and stealing thoroughbreds for their own use. This does not set well with Gabriel, as he loves horses and cares for them very well, and One Arm wants to "run them to death".

During the first heat in Lexington, Tenpenny's jockey is hurt and cannot ride the second round. Being that Gabriel is the lightest of the men from Woodville Farm, he has the job of racing him. Gabriel's nerves almost get the better of him, but he finds his love of horseracing and jockeying when he wins the race.

The story continues on with the trials of living in a mostly Union state during the Civil War, the attack of One Arm and his Confederate raiders at Woodville Farm, and Gabriel's own father leaving the farm to join the Union cause.

Hart has written a historical fiction novel that will involve and arouse young readers' interests in not only the history of the Civil War, but also horses and horseracing. From the eyes of a child, the war brings other stresses that adults do not harbor. Hart does an excellent job of bringing to life Gabriel's love of horses and his fears of life in wartime. This first book of the trilogy makes reader's ready for more in books two and three.

**Genre:** Historical Fiction

**Point of View:** First person

**Theme:** The theme of this book is working for your dreams. Gabriel takes great pride in the work he does with the horses and yearns to be the one acknowledged for the hard work. Even though they are not his, Gabriel would lay down his own life to protect these wondrous creatures. Hence, the title, *Gabriel's Horses*, is perfect for this book.

**Conflict:** Gabriel, a slave boy vs. the world during the Civil War – Gabriel wants to prove to the world that he can do just a good a job, if not better, than any at jockeying a horse, especially the new trainer hired for the farm when his father leaves for the war.

**Conflict Resolution:** Gabriel proves he can do so when he wins the first race in Lexington. However, when the new trainer is hired, Gabriel has to endure the hatred and treatment colored people dealt with during those times, which was something he had not really had contact with until this point. Gabriel musters up enough courage to protect his horses from a trainer he does not agree with, and even tells Master Giles that he does not like the way the horses are being treated and wishes for the new trainer to be fired, promising his Master that he can do a better job, without beating the horses.

### **Characters:**

**Gabriel Alexander:** The main character, he is almost 13 and is a slave boy, in Kentucky, during the Civil War. Light weight, he grooms and helps train horses on his Master's Farm. He is smart, but not schooled, and adores the horses he cares for. Gabriel has "horse whisperer" characteristics, as he talks to and listens to the horses' needs. His dreams are of being free and a famous jockey.

**Pa (Isaac Alexander):** Gabriel's father and the main horseman for Woodville Farm, he is a free slave, but continues to work for Master Giles, only calls him Mister Giles. Pa knows a lot about horses and passes this on to his son.

**Ma (Lucy Alexander):** Gabriel's mother and Mistress Jane's main caretaker, her freedom is bought during this book, but continues to work for the Master and Mistress. She is a quiet woman who loves her only son and husband.

**Master Winston Giles:** Gabriel's Master. He is a caring Union man, and treats his slaves well, even giving some their freedom. He owns Woodville Farms, where thoroughbreds are raised and trained.

**Jackson:** Woodville Farm's jockey and a good friend of the Alexander Family. As described by Gabriel, "He's short and bandy-legged with a chest like a rain barrel."

**Mistress Jane:** Master Giles's fragile, sickly wife, who stays in bed because she has caught "the fever"

**Jase and Tandy:** two other slave boys, slightly younger than Gabriel, who work as grooms for the horses (no other descriptions)

**Annabelle:** a slave girl, about Gabriel’s age, who has lived in the Main House all her life. She is spoiled by the Master and Mistress as if she was their own child, because they have none, and has been taught, by Mistress Jane, to read and write.

**One Arm Dan Parmer:** A confederate raider, he and his men steal thoroughbreds for their ability to run quickly and for long distances. His lower right arm is missing and he holds his rifle in the crook of his elbow

**Corporal Benjamin Blue, Private Campbell, and Company H on the 100<sup>th</sup> U.S. Colored Infantry:** a company of colored soldiers whom Gabriel meets while in Lexington. They have recently mustered in and work the dirty jobs for white soldiers. The troop comes to his rescue when men, who bid on other horses, accuse Gabriel of cheating to win the race and begin to harm him.

**Mister Newcastle:** Woodville Farm’s new trainer, in Master Giles’s absence. A white man who believes in beating horses to get them to do what you want. He treats Gabriel and the other slaves with disrespect and even beats them too.

**Danny Flanagan:** Mister Newcastle’s Irish Jockey, he has a scar over one of his red-haired brow. He is rough with the horses and also treats them and the slaves poorly.

**Old Uncle:** an elderly slave. In the words of Gabriel, “His hair is as white as Mistress’s linens, and his skin’s as parched a cured tobacco. He’s so old that he’s forgotten his age... His steps are labored, but his voice is defiant.” He offers advice and a grandfatherly figure for Gabriel, especially is his father’s absence.

**Setting:** During the Civil War, in Kentucky, at Woodville Farm, where thoroughbreds are raised and trained for racing

**Interest Level:** Grades 6-8

**Reading Level:** 4.5, Lexile: 730

## **Booktalk:**

The story of a young boy, racing for freedom and the chance at becoming a world famous jockey, Gabriel Alexander faces a white horse trainer that beats him like he beats horses, One Arm, a Confederate raider, and his men, and the internal struggle of deciding how to voice his opinions in Civil War Kentucky. Gabriel has to decide what is right and then take action. If he doesn't his beloved horses will all be beat and spirits broken. Can Gabriel muster his voice to speak out against the new trainer? Even more important, does Gabriel get any closer to his dreams of freedom and jockeying? *Gabriel's Horses* will throw you into the Civil War era and having you racing to read second and third books in the *Racing to Freedom Trilogy*.

## **Discussion Questions:**

### **Chapter 1:**

**Before:** Have you ever been on a big trip? Where did you go? What did you do to get ready? Was there anything that scared you about the trip?

**After:** Did you have fears like Gabriel's? Would you be brave enough to make this trip?

### **Chapter 2:**

**Before:** Have you ever known someone and thought you knew how they felt about things, but then something happened to make you think otherwise? Did their "actions speak louder than their words"? How did this make you feel?

**After:** Do you think Master Giles is really a Confederate like Gabriel thinks he is?

### **Chapter 3:**

**Before:** What would you do if you were Gabriel and got caught by soldiers who thought you were a spy?

**After:** Have you ever been caught spying? What happened?

### **Chapter 4:**

**Before:** Have you ever wanted to do something really badly? How did you act? Did you try to convince your mom/dad to do it?

**After:** Once you got to do it, were you scared/nervous like Gabriel? Did you go through with it anyway?

### **Chapter 5:**

**Before:** Have you ever done something well and you felt really proud of yourself?

**After:** Has this ever happened to you... people are mad because you won and they didn't think you would?

### **Chapter 6:**

**Before:** Have you ever been lied to? How did it make you feel?

**After:** Did you find out that the lie was to cover up something else for a short time? Did you feel bad for getting angry, when it wasn't really right of you to be that angry?

### **Chapter 7:**

**Before:** What's the hardest part about change?

**After:** Does change always end up like this, for the worse? Or can it be good?

### **Chapter 8:**

**Before:** Have you ever felt like everything was going wrong and nothing could get any worse, but then it did?

**After:** What do you think Gabriel should do to turn things around and make things better?

### **Chapter 9:**

**Before:** Tell me about a time you were really excited about going somewhere or doing something.

**After:** Now tell me about a time where you were really let down when you got there or did the activity. How did you feel?

### **Chapter 10:**

**Before:** Is there only one way to do thing? Are there ways you think are better than others?

**After:** Why is it a good think to learn different ways of doing things?

### **Chapter 11:**

**Before:** What do you feel strongly about?

**After:** Would you take a whipping for it, like Gabriel was going to?

### **Chapter 12:**

**Before:** Have you ever wanted to tell someone how you really felt about something, but were too afraid for fear of getting into trouble?

**After:** Do you think it was a good or bad thing for Gabriel to tell Master Giles his feelings about Newcastle?

### **Chapter 13:**

**Before:** Does having the best help you to win?

**After:** How does Gabriel prove that having/looking the best does not matter? What does Gabriel say it takes to win?

### **Chapter 14 and 15:**

**Before:** What do you think makes a person do crazy things?

**After:** So are all the things we do really crazy or is it just because we care a lot?

### **Chapter 16:**

**Before:** What does freedom mean?

**After:** What do we find out freedom means to Gabriel?

## **Vocabulary**

wadding (1) soft layer of cotton or wool used for padding

furrowed (1) a deep wrinkle in the skin

muzzle (1) the projecting part of the head (the nose area)

grooming (2) to take care of the appearance of something

flanks (2) the section of flesh on the body between the last rib and the hip

colt (4) a young male horse

mare (4) a female horse

filly (4) a young female horse

foal (4) a horse less than one year of age

flaxen (5) having the pale grayish-yellow color of flax fiber

bloomers (5) loose pants gathered at the bottom, worn by women and girls, under skirts

sashay (6) to strut in a showy manner

bridle (7) a harness

bit (7) metal piece, a part of the bridle, which goes in the horse's mouth

headstall (7) the section of a bridle that fits over a horse's head

gelding (8) a castrated male horse

prance (11) to spring forward on the hind legs

trot (11) like a jog, where the front left leg is moving forward when the rear right leg is moving forward and vice versa for the other legs

gallop (11) a fast running motion, where all four feet are off the ground at the same time

canter (12) slower than a gallop but faster than a trot

shanty (12) a roughly built shack

scant (12) barley sufficient

allegiance (14) loyalty to something

aristocracy (14) a ruling class, where the throne is inherited

goggle (15) to stare with wide and bulging eyes

balks (15) to stop short and refuse to go on

ransack (16) to search thoroughly, often being destructive

procure (17) to get by special effort

bravado (19) defiant behavior

'cipher (21) slang for decipher (to figure out what something means)

coachmen (22) a man who drives a coach or carriage

valise (23) a small piece of luggage

jawing (23) talking

spavin (24) A condition in horses caused by the deposition of new bone in the hock joint and sometimes producing lameness (not being able to walk)

nag (24) an old worn out horse

guffaws (28) a hearty burst of laughter

latrine (30) a toilet used by all, mostly in camps

wield (30) to handle with skill and ease

hoecake (31) cornmeal bread usually shaped into a flat cake and baked or fried on a griddle

shroud (32) something that conceals, protects, or screens

pine (32) to feel a desire for

careens (32) to swerve while in motion

colic (33) severe abdominal pain

hock (34) the joint in the rear legs of a horse, like the ankle on a human

roan (35) having a chestnut, bay, or sorrel coat thickly sprinkled with white or gray

sorrel (36) a brownish orange to light brown

field-glasses (38) like binoculars

withers (39) the high part of the back of a horse

silks (42) the attire a jockey wears

gait (44) a particular way of moving

brandishing (45) a wave a weapon as if you are going to use it for harm

untack (50) the removal of the bridle and saddle

privy (54) a restroom

portico (68) a porch

paddock (106) a fenced area, usually near a stable, used for grazing horses

hind pastern (106) the part of a horse's foot between the fetlock (a projection on the lower part of the leg of a horse, above and behind the hoof) and hoof

## **Indiana Academic Standards:**

### Grade 3

Language Arts: 3.1.2, 3.1.4, 3.1.5, 3.1.6, 3.1.8, 3.1.9, 3.3.2, 3.3.3, 3.3.4, 3.3.6, 3.3.8

Social Studies: 3.1.6

### Grade 4

Language Arts: 4.1.2, 4.1.3, 4.1.6, 4.1.7, 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.6, 4.3.7

Social Studies: 4.1.7

### Grade 5

Language Arts: 5.1.2, 5.1.4, 5.1.6, 5.3.1, 5.3.2, 5.3.3, 5.3.4, 5.3.8

Social Studies: 5.7.1, 5.1.19, 5.1.20

**Anticipation Statements:**

<b>Before You Read</b> (agree or disagree)	<b><i>Gabriel's Horses</i></b> <b>By Alison Hart</b>	<b>After You Read</b> (agree or disagree)
	It is alright to hit animals.	
	Horses cannot communicate with you.	
	Colored men and women did not participate in the Civil War.	
	Speaking out against someone in charge of you is a bad idea.	

**Read-Alouds:**

Chapter 7, page 65, from “He whacks the handle...” to “I holler, flinging the rope at Newcastle.” Here the new trainer is asking Gabriel to put a horse in a stall so that he may whip the horse. Gabriel does not believe in this practice and defends the horse and offers his own body for whipping. This is a good passage to talk to children about the horrors of slavery and what slaves endured. It is a point at which the comparison of beating animals and humans can be made.

Chapter 16, page 147, the paragraph that begins, “My mind whirls.” This is after Master Giles has granted Gabriel his freedom and he is weighing his options... to stay or to leave the farm and either jockey somewhere else or join his father in the war. This could bring about a good discussion of making good choices and the responsibilities that come with them. As well as the great responsibilities young boys had during that time.

**Read-Alikes:**

*Gabriel's Triumph* by Alison Hart (Book 2 in the *Racing to Freedom Trilogy*)

*Gabriel's Journey* by Alison Hart (Book 3 in the *Racing to Freedom Trilogy*)

*Anna's Blizzard* by Alison Hart

*Fire's of Jubilee* by Alison Hart

*Danger at the Wild West Show* By Alison Hart (A book in the American Girl Series)

*Al Capone Does My Shirts* by Gennifer Choldenko

*Fever* by Laurie Halse Anderson

*Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz Ryan

*The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* by Avi

*Number the Stars* by Lois Lowery

## Across the Curriculum Connections:

Social Studies and Language Arts: A web exploration of Colored Troops in the Civil War. Students look at several websites and bring back one question and one interesting fact they learned. Websites to use for this activity:

<http://www.campnelson.org/>

[http://americancivilwar.com/colored/colored\\_troops.html](http://americancivilwar.com/colored/colored_troops.html)

<http://www.civilwararchive.com/unioncol.htm>

### Standards

Language Arts: 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 4.2.2, 4.4.6, 4.4.7, 4.4.8, 5.2.1

Social Studies: 3.1.6, 4.1.7, 5.7.1, 5.1.19, 5.1.20

Social Studies and Language Arts: African Americans in Horse Racing; students research selected jockeys and learn of their importance to the sport. Websites to use for this activity:

<http://horseracing.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://hall.racingmuseum.org/jockey.asp%3FID=205>

[http://www.kentuckyderby.com/2004/derby\\_history/african\\_americans\\_in\\_the\\_derby/](http://www.kentuckyderby.com/2004/derby_history/african_americans_in_the_derby/)

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/The-Kentucky-Derbys-Forgotten-Jockeys.html>

### Books:

*Black Maestro: The Epic Life of an American Legend* by Joe Drape

*The Great Black Jockeys* by Edward Hotaling

*Wink: The Incredible Life and Epic Journey of Jimmy Winkfield* by Edward Hotaling

*Perfect Timing: How Isaac Murphy Became of the World's Greatest Jockeys* by Patsi B. Trollinger

*Black Winning Jockeys in the Kentucky Derby* by James Robert Saunders

### Standards

Language Arts: 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 4.2.2, 4.4.6, 4.4.7, 4.4.8, 5.2.1

Social Studies: 3.1.6, 4.1.7, 5.7.1, 5.1.19, 5.1.20

**Book Activities:****To Whip or Not To Whip**

Have students take a side: is it ok to whip animals (specifically horses) or is it not. Once students have chosen a side, make small groups for each side. Each group is then responsible for convincing others their side. They should make posters or have some other kind of visual (Power Point) to help argue their case. Students should write a speech on their feelings of why or why not it is ok to whip animals. Each student should have a speaking part in the group's presentation.

**A First-hand Account**

Students envision they are the thoroughbred. Each student writes about what it would be like to be a racehorse; what they would be thinking and doing as they were running a race.

## **Bibliography**

Indiana Academic Standards,

<http://dc.doe.in.gov/Standards/AcademicStandards/StandardSearch.aspx>

Perry Township's Library Search, Destiny,

<http://destiny.msdp.k12.in.us/cataloging/servlet/presentadvancedsearchredirectorform.do?l2m=Library%20Search&tm=Catalog>

The Children's Book Guild, <http://www.childrensbookguild.org>

Yahoo Kid's Dictionary, <http://kids.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/english>