



≈ ESSAY PROJECT ≈

IMAGINING MORGAN HISTORY

Illustrations by Polly Holabird

In January 2023, *The Morgan Horse* magazine proposed an essay project, inviting submissions from young horse enthusiasts between the grades of four and nine.

The topic was inspired by a post made on Facebook by the prolific author of things equestrian, Denny Emerson. He had found a rusty, cast horseshoe while riding one of his Morgans near the long-abandoned Frye Barn in Tunbridge, Vermont, the geographic epicenter of early Morgan history. The proposed essay topic was the intriguing question, “Who was the almost certainly Morgan horse who once wore this shoe?”

The purpose was to encourage young people both to write and to explore the significance of Morgan history. Denny asks, “Why does Morgan history matter? If the Morgan you have today is sound and sane, and generous and friendly, thank the history of Morgan genetics. Early Morgans evolved to be partners of pioneers who owned them. While needs and uses have changed, we are still the beneficiaries of those partnership traits today.”

Fifty-three young writers responded. Scientist and longtime Morgan breeder Nina Quinn was one of two experts asked to judge the essays. “I was very impressed that we got a total of 53 entries

ABOVE: Denny Emerson & Catch A Cloud at the Frye Barn in Tunbridge, Vermont.

INSETS: Essay winners (left to right) Molly Palmer, Emily Kolodziej, Lily Moser, and Nathanael Buschhaus.

ESSAY PROJECT IMAGINING MORGAN HISTORY

from what seems like a wide background among the students. I was also very impressed with the quality of writing, pretty much top to bottom. They all did a good job. Lastly, the thing that really spoke to me was the research, especially into Morgan history, that they added into their stories. It was quite impressive.”

Also on our judging team was Dorothy Ours, author of *Man Of War, A Legend Like Lightning*, who says, “I sat down with a big pile of stories I printed out and each one took me somewhere. It makes sense that a handful are being recognized for outstanding achievement, but each one took me on a journey, some made me laugh out loud, they were so creative and fun. Others got me straight in the heart. In every one, you could really feel this connection with horses, particularly with the distinctive Morgan character. You could tell from each one who took the trouble to write down a story, that they could feel that connection. I loved the personal feeling and thought that went into each of them.”

Deadline for entries was March 1, 2023. The unenviable challenge of judging was completed by April 15. Results of first and second place winners were revealed on Facebook and in AMHA’s weekly global email the week of May 1st.

Among the incentives for young writers was a promise to publish the winning essays in the official breed journal. Read them,

and additional materials, from the Imagining Morgan History Essay Project in the pages that follow.

GRADES 4–5

Winner: Molly Ruth Palmer (Grade 5);
Title: Ruthy Fryer Had a Horse

Second: Meghan Mathias (Grade 5);
Title: Lucky, In More Ways Than One

GRADES 6–7

Winner: Emily Kolodziej (Grade 6);
Title: A Shoe and the Legend it Created

Second: Naomi Buschhaus (Grade 6);
Title: Naomi’s Morgan Story

GRADES 8–9

Winner (tie): Lily Moser (Grade 9);
Title: Captain’s Story

Winner (tie): Nathanael Buschhaus (Grade 8);
Title: Jenni and Jessi

QUOTABLE QUOTATIONS

The young writers were inspired—a sampling of some of their best lines.

GRADE 4

“Her coat was a majestic brown and her black mane sparkled like a thousand diamonds.”

—Carabella Amodeo

“Figure decided to keep the horseshoe there as a reminder to never doubt himself again...”

—Molly Cheatwood

“But then a piece of hay made the horse sneeze so hard that its horseshoe came off and it was buried in the ground.”

—Blake Densmore

“‘Having a horse also includes chores,’ her dad said. ‘I know, I know,’ said Courtney. She let out a sigh and got straight to work.”

—Alexis Johnson

“However, the only thing he cared about was grooming my coat, so that it shines the color of fresh soil, and brushing my jet-black mane so it was soft and silky.”

—Lydia Klein

“As the horses approached the barn, the door creaked and there were two sets of eyes staring at them.”

—Kit Kupriaczyk

“The rat took the horseshoe because it was shiny.”

—Blaine Ruben

“Pete was tree brown, and Josie was chestnut.”

—Julia Scarangella

“Staring out my bedroom window at the darkening sky over the fields, and in the distance the mountains, I heard the birds finishing their daily music, completing the scene.”

—Miriam Talcott

GRADE 5

“She hugged the horseshoe close one last time, then threw it, leaving her past behind.”

—Kaylee Barnum

“It felt like my life had just begun.”

—Kendall Barry

“He despised this man that would pull on him and smack him.”

—Cameron Carter

“The neighbor ended up staying for a delightful evening of dinner and farm talk.”

—Nora Kate Joyce

QUOTABLE QUOTATIONS

The young writers were inspired—a sampling of some of their best lines.

“Just beyond the woods, a little brown horse with a dark mane came and listened to their songs as they were carried in the wind.”

—Meghan Mathias

GRADE 5

“She decided to bury all four of his shoes, one in each of his favorite places.”

—Ivy Morgan

“But for now you get to frolic and play. You need to get a little older, buddy.”

—Arden Wall

“What Justin didn’t know was that goblins tricked him and knew that he could break free from the rope, only to trap him again so that they could get more laughs.”

—Eva Whitaker

GRADE 6

“I pretend I’m a bird with wings, reins draped over the saddle horn, arms flapping, lungs twittering.”

—Naomi Buschhaus

“Thankfully, I was able to pull it off, but it sure did feel awkward, like walking without a fourth foot!”

—Nicole D’Amelio

“The mud was thick and grabbing the wagon wheels, caking the wagon in mud.”

—Chelsey Johnson

“Cinnamon and Figure’s baby arrived one windy spring afternoon.”

—Malia Marek

“The horse was busy wondering about how much metal someone could see in a day, with the young stallion distracted, the man carefully pressed on the horseshoe and quickly nailed it on.”

—Mabel Williams

GRADE 7

“The blinding blizzard was worsening. I trusted Archer to find the way.”

—Ashlynn Barry

“Her laugh was beautiful, like a waterfall of happiness.”

—Tessa Buskey

“Townspople would stop and lean on the fence and their attention would be drawn to him immediately, trotting up to them in a way that made him look like he was floating towards them.”

—Grace Johnson

“She had a smooth, but strong body, a face that one could understand what she was thinking, and a spirit as full as a crisp, fall day.”

—Liza Joyce

“Figuring out who this horseshoe belonged to meant more to me than I ever thought.”

—Annabelle Levine

“Sherman loved the farrier because he always had some goodies in his pockets and, even with someone holding onto him, Sherman always found a way to sneak a treat or two.”

—Gabriella Seeberger

GRADE 8

“‘That’s all right. Now it’s your lucky shoe,’ Morgan said, as they all laughed.”

—Charlotte Boulier

“She made it clear horses were not for her, but she would sneak Beatus apples and tell him secrets.”

—Isabella Mantella

“The horses loved exploring the area and chasing each other, weaving in between the trees.”

—Isabella Moorhouse

“Athena’s ears pivoted towards the cascading stream.”

—Emmy Kraegel Varner

GRADE 9

“Once we got to the market, noises started to collide, between the early winter wind and the chattering people.”

—Isabel Archer

“Henry pawed the water several times, then laid down slowly as the children giggled and screamed with delight.”

—Lilian Flemming

“He had a Morgan to return, and a Morgan to reclaim.”

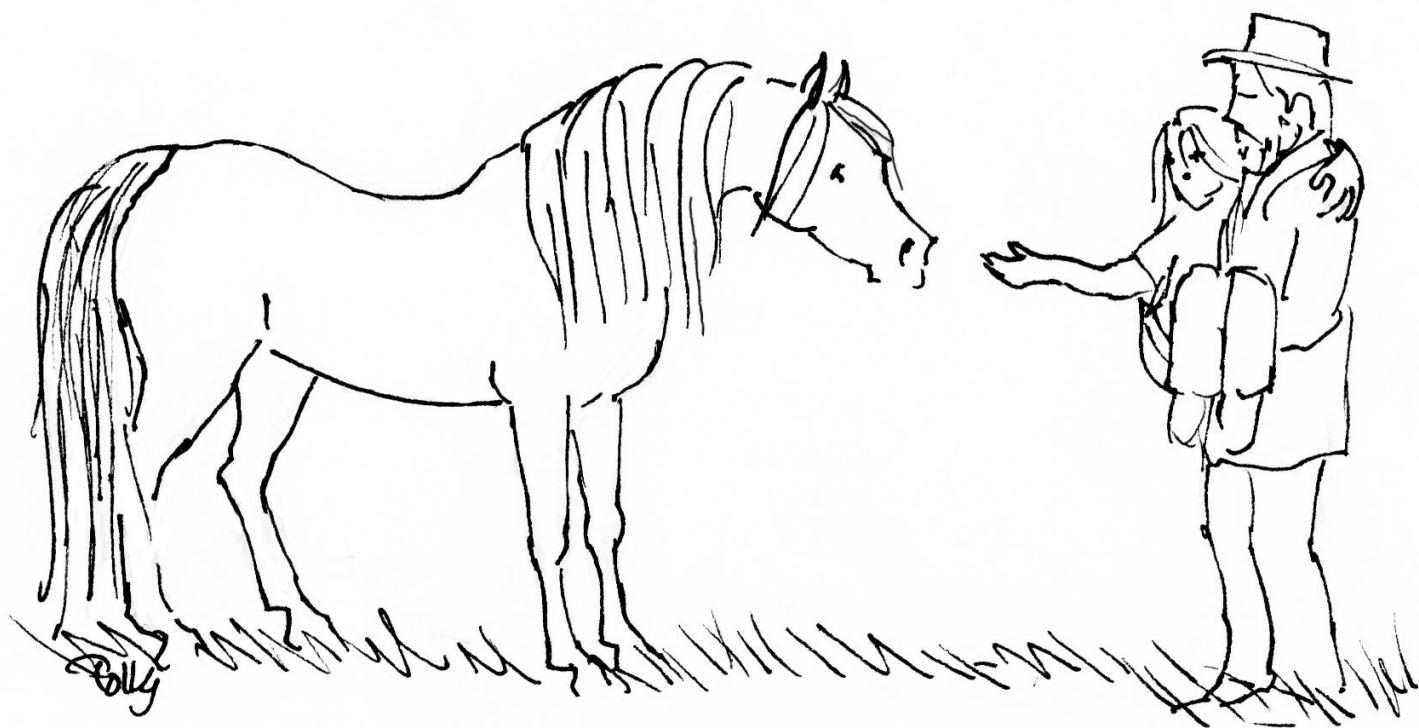
—Abby Mast

“It was like there was an unspoken promise between them that she would never sell him.”

—Sierra McCabe

“She still loved me as she did in the beginning, but I was getting too old to do the things we used to.”

—Hannah Pickett



WINNING ESSAY

Ruthy Fryer Had a Horse

By Molly Ruth Palmer, Grade 5

This is the story of a small chestnut Lippitt mare named Sherman's Star. Star was the daughter of Sherman. Her grandsire was the famous Figure horse owned by Justin Morgan. Everyone knew that Figure and Sherman's colts were the fastest in New England. No one expected much from this little mare, except her owner John Carpenter. He knew that the 14-hand mare, with the double whirl in her forehead, was special.

John was a poor hill farm kid who lived in Tunbridge, Vermont. He may not of had a lot of book sense, but he sure did have a lot of horse sense. You would always see him out working the field, wearing a button-up plaid shirt and straw hat. He was one of those hard-working hill farmers who helped settle Vermont, and who loved his animals and the land.

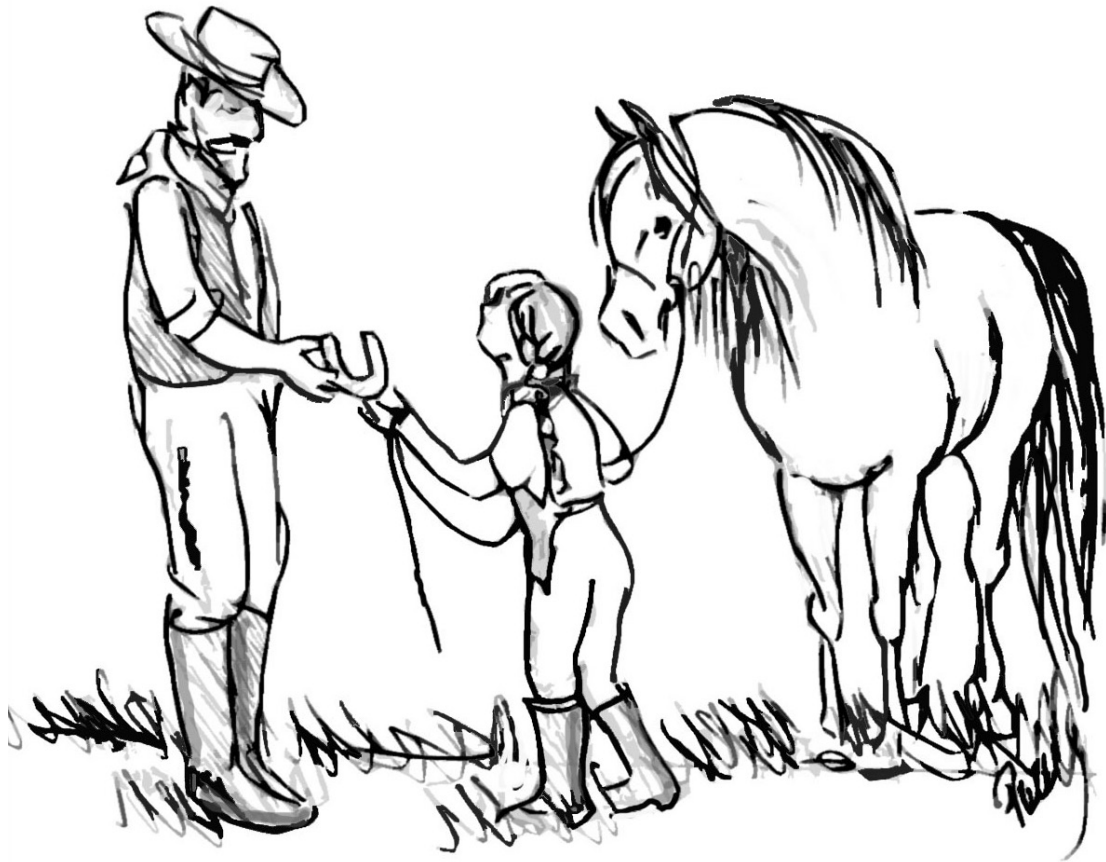
When John was 16 years old, he saved up all his summer wages so he could pay to have his favorite mare bred to the famous stallion Sherman. That next year Star was born. The moment he laid eyes on that filly he knew there was something special about that horse. Two years had passed, and she was the hardest-working horse on the farm. She would work all day in the tugs and still have enough strength for John to ride her 10 miles to church and back for the Saturday evening sermon. She was a stocky, high-headed horse, with a soft eye, who would always give you all she had.

In 1813, when the mare was three years old, John sent Sherman's Star to the Morgan Mile in Brookfield, Vermont. It was the middle of the race and Star was in the lead. As she hit some soft

dirt, she threw her right hind shoe. John jumped off of Star to make sure her hoof was all right. As the other horses approached, Star reared up and ran forward, leaving John standing on the raceway. Star crossed the finish line first but did not receive the prize money because she did not have a rider on her. John got to the finish line and realized that Star was hurt. She was most likely kicked in the flank by one of the other horses that was racing that day.

By the time John got Star home she could hardly walk. John called for the vet. The vet said she would never be able to carry a foal, pull a plow, or carry a rider, and the best thing to do would be to put her down. That is what would have happened if it wasn't for my great, great, great grandmother, Ruthy Fryer.

Ruthy was an ill seven-year-old girl who had a heart infection and lived on the farm next to John's. She always loved to visit Star at the neighbor's farm. It happened to be that the same time the vet showed up to put Star down Ruthy's father carried her over to visit that day. When Ruthy saw what had happened and that Star was going to be put down, she asked her dad if they could buy the mare. Her dad could not bear to see his little girl sad, knowing that Ruthy may not have long to live herself. He granted her wish and bought Star. They brought Star home that day. Ruthy tended Star's flank, day and night. Over time Star's flank healed. The doctor said that Star healed Ruthy, too. It got her out of bed every day and into the fresh air. The time in the barn with that special little chestnut Lippitt mare healed Ruthy's heart. Once Ruthy's heart healed she still could not walk. Star brought her to school and back every day until she could walk on her own. John gave Ruthy the horseshoe from that fateful race. That shoe has always hung in the barn at the Fryer homestead. ■



WINNING ESSAY

A Shoe and the Legend It Created

By Emily Kolodziej, Grade 6

In 1816, long before he was the world-renowned horse we know today, a series of events shaped this legend. These events began when a man with a long, heavy apron led him from the field into the barn and attached these dreadful, heavy, metal plates to the bottoms of his feet. The man attached the left hind shoe first and, as he was kicking and bucking, the farrier patted him on the back and said, “you’ll get used to them.” Little did this young, four-year-old Morgan horse know these shoes would carry him to glory.

One night, woken from his sleep, his owner hastily put a saddle on his back, climbed on and said “Run, run like Sophie’s life depends on it.” As he was galloping (he could gallop like the wind) he felt one of those metal plates fly off his hoof. He now understood how these plates protected his delicate hooves from the rough terrain between his house and the doctor’s. He could feel every stone and pebble underneath his one bare hoof.

The next day, at first light, a stable hand noticed a limp and swelling in his left hind hoof. He made the journey to save Sophie’s life, putting his own life in jeopardy. The legend says he was to never have another lame day in his life.

For the next few days, his hoof was wrapped in a fragrant wrap known as a poultice. Within days, he started to feel better and Sophie, who was also feeling better, came out to see him. Since he

saved her life, the owner thought it was meant to be and gifted the horse to her, along with the shoe her strong Morgan horse had thrown. Since the mortality rate of leg injuries back then was high, it was a miracle he survived. This shoe would be known as a good luck charm, because even though he threw that one he still made it to and from the doctor’s and down many other paths.

Many years later, when Sophie moved out of Ziba Gifford’s house to start her own family at the new Frye farm in Tunbridge, Vermont, she had the builders bury this special shoe as a reminder of the sacrifice this horse had made for her and how it had changed all their lives. “This horseshoe carried my favorite horse, the horse that saved my life, and now it will support my barn and my family,” Sophie said.

Little did she know those trips to the doctor would create one of the fastest horses of its time and an important name in the Morgan world. This special Morgan horse, sired by Figure, was the legendary Bulrush. With all the desirable traits of his muscular, full body and powerful hind quarter, he is the foundation of all of our favorite Morgan traits. Having 28 registered sons, most pedigrees can be traced back to this special stud. So, from a little four-year-old afraid of shoes to a legend and a hero, Bulrush is, and was, a very special horse. To those who wanted to hear her story, Sophie said, “do not shy from things that scare you! Bulrush was scared of his shoes, yet they turned him into the strong Morgan that saved my life.” ■



WINNING ESSAY

Captain's Story

By Lily Moser, Grade 9

The quiet meadow was gray in the early dawn. A white-washed fence ran all around the large pasture. In the middle of the field lay a sorrel stallion, stirring gently from sleep. He stood up, shaking the dew from his coat. The sun was just starting to peek between the green mountains of Tunbridge, Vermont. A white farmhouse sat adjacent to the meadow, and the attached peg-and-beam barn was already filled with the sounds of cows and chickens. The year was 1862.

The silence was broken as the door shut behind a young girl. "Captain," she called. Holding an apple in her hand, she swung her leg over the fence. The stallion pricked his ears upon her call and cantered across the pasture. He slid to a halt a small distance in front of her and crunched on the apple. He blew softly on her face and her black hair drifted back. "Today, you must go," she said softly. Abigail Thomason was a poor farmer's daughter, and this horse was everything to her. But today her father must ride him under the cavalry of Vermont, into the Civil War. She could hardly bear the thought of her beautiful horse, strong and brave, leaving her. The danger they would face was unimaginable.

With a sigh, she slipped the halter over his nose. Leading him through the grass, she swung open the gate and walked through. The cows were mooing now as Abigail slid open the doors to the barn. Captain whinnied as she put him into his stall, then dove into his oats. The stallion's blood was pure, and his breeding could be traced back to Figure himself. A true Morgan. He had perfect conformation with three white socks and a little snip on his nose. His sweeping chestnut mane was silky, and his tail gently swished in the breeze. Abigail walked quietly into the small barn closet that kept Captain's things. She paused for a moment and gazed around

at the freshly oiled saddle and bridle, and the blankets that smelled of sweet hay. She slung the tack over her shoulder and took a brush in her hand. She combed Captain's mane until it shone, then tacked him up, lingering over every buckle. She hugged the stallion and let her tears fall into his mane.

Afterwards, they stood together in front of the house as her father came out. Her mother stood on the porch, tears welling in her eyes. "Thank you, Abigail," her father said as he filled Captain's saddlebags. "I will be home very soon, just you wait. I love you. Take care of your mother now."

"I know, Father," she said, her voice barely a whisper. "I love you, too." She hugged her father tightly, "Look after Captain," she said. Her father gave her a sad smile, "You know I will." He swung into the saddle as Abigail moved to say goodbye to Captain. "Goodbye, my friend. See you soon," she said, stroking him. He nuzzled her as she kissed his nose, tears streaming down her face. Her father gently nudged him on. Captain broke into a trot, and Abigail watched them until they disappeared down the road.

Time passed and Abigail and her mother had heard nothing from her father apart from a few letters. Until one summer day in 1865, he came riding down the road. Abigail smiled when she saw him in the distance. But as he neared, her smile faded, for she could now see the horse upon which he rode was black instead of the deep chestnut she knew so well. Her father dismounted and shook his head slowly, tears forming in his eyes upon seeing the realization in his daughter's face.

Years later, Abigail walked through to the same barn. Suddenly, she tripped as her boot caught on something in the grass. She reached down and grasped a horseshoe. She stared at it for a while and a tear rolled down her cheek. She buried it next to the barn, and laid flowers across the soil. For she knew in her heart, it had once belonged to her brave Morgan stallion. ■



WINNING ESSAY

Jenni and Jessi

By Nathanael Buschhaus, Grade 8

The sun warms a peaceful May afternoon as white-haired grandpa and grandson tramp down Frye Road. Gnarled trees lining the country lane spread their overarching branches, newly-budded leaves drawing rippling shadows. A green carpet spreads across the open meadows, while birds sing in the branches. Through shallow ditches streams trickle on either side of the sloping road. Halfway up a steeper bench 80-year-old grandpa pauses to catch his breath, while his young grandson scampers off in search of the first trilliums. Returning moments later he bursts out excitedly. “Grampie, Grampie! Look what I’ve got. It’s an old horseshoe.” After close inspection, grandpa straightens up. “Well, I do believe you’ve got there the shoe from the best team of horses we ever had. Why don’t we come up to the old log up here and I’ll tell you about them.

“They were full sisters, but you’d never have known looking at them. Jessi was older by a year, and a handsome dark bay with spunk. Jenni was a bright bay and small by comparison. I always thought that what Jenni lacked in looks, she made up for in gentleness.

“Dusk was falling on a cold evening following a warm day in early March. Getting cold and hungry I hunched on the bobsled dreaming of dinner. The harness bells jingled softly in the evening quiet, with snow still coating the bleak ground. Sitting backwards, behind the full barrel of sap, I watched the snow slipping out from under the runners like a magical conveyer belt lost to time. Just ahead, the road dipped down a short hill, before passing Frye farm, and then around a bend to ours. Suddenly coming upon this short yet steep hill my father realized too late the presence of slick ice. During the day, snow beginning to melt, ran across the road, it was now freezing as the temperature dropped with the sun. The first part of the hill went smoothly, as the caulks in the horseshoes

designed for such a purpose were preventing the mares from slipping. Halfway down the hill, Jessi must have lost a shoe. Her hind hoof began to slip, getting out of step with her little sister and unable to get a sure step.

“The wise old team was getting pushed down the hill and they sensed it. So did Father. He ordered us all out. We jumped. Even he stepped down beside the sled to walk, still holding the reins. Suddenly sniffing noses, the noses quivering, those girls came to an agreement. Father saw and jumped fast before they trotted down the remainder of the hill ahead of the bobsled, leaving all of us to follow along. As the ground leveled, our team resumed its original, easy pace despite a missing horseshoe.

“Luckily, just a single stone’s throw away lived a farrier and the horses soon turned into the almost frozen, slushy, muddy barnyard. Dogs rushed out barking, letting the world know we’d arrived. The friendly farrier appeared, shooing the dogs away and glad to see it was Father’s old team that needed his services. They were unruffled despite all the clammer. I helped Father unhitch the team, attempting to wrestle stiff traces from whiffletree eveners with cold, unwilling fingers.

“In a hurry to get home, we unhitched only Jessi, taking her to the shop and leaving me with Jenni. Father held her as the farrier shaped a new shoe. As the slushy barnyard began soaking into my cold feet, I eventually climbed up the pole and slid onto the warmth of Jenni’s back, careful to hold the reins and bury my cold hands under her mane. Her dainty ears swiveled this way and that while she munched hay. From that high seat I had a nice view of the new shoeing.

“Later that night, after we had fed and watered the horses and eaten dinner ourselves, it began to snow. It snowed all night and most of the next day. By the time the snow melted, I forgot all about the shoe. Those girls could pull a load or prance fancy. I learned to drive with them and that’s how I met your Grandmother.” ■

IMAGINING MORGAN HISTORY—IN VERSE

Donna King, of Lawrenceville, New Jersey, was inspired by the essay project’s topic and was one of a number who expressed their wish that the contest was open to all ages. She confesses, “I’m a grown-up, age 64, so ninth grade is well behind me. I wrote this for the challenge and fun of it.”

FOUNDATIONS

Today up at the old Frye homestead I found an iron horseshoe, the kind made long ago in these Vermont hills where a family’s survival could depend on the pluck and thriftiness and versatility of a good horse. A Morgan horse, I should imagine...

Horses have no oral link twixt then and now,
No stories passed from mare to foal or cross a pasture wall.
Their legacy speaks through stamp of sire on get:
Great Morgan shoulders, stamina, and width of thoughtful brow,
Entwined through hopes and dreams and needs of farmer families, all,
Who worked this land through seasons and behind their steady horse,
Giving thanks to God each day and scraping by somehow.

The worthy horse that wore this shoe
Was small and thrifty, strong for size.
A willing partner, quick to learn—and sometimes improvise!
(I know because I own one now, or maybe he owns me.
My Morgan thinks one step ahead in everything we do.)

This one, a stallion, could trot all day with buggy or astride,
Accepting any challenge should life’s circumstance allow,
Kind and steady, able, trusted, even one that kids could ride.
One spring this Morgan lost his shoe high on a gnarly hill;
He turned it under just that quick, while followed by a plow.
Not even missed at dark day’s end and honest work complete,
When rubbed and watered, turned to graze, three shoes upon his feet.

The farmer’s wife, she found the missing shoe as autumn fell;
A bountiful crop, a blessed season,

Enough laid up for all and more to sell.
The neighbor’s mare was large with foal, plus several more;
Their stallion brought security through years like this and lean as well.
She cleaned the iron shoe and nailed it high above the door,
For Morgan luck to this small farm and all it proudly stood for.

When I found that shoe today beneath the rubble
Around what’s left of peg and beam and barn foundation floor,
The long-term consequence was left for me to ponder,
Of hearty breeds of horses and of folks—
Foundations multiplied and grown beyond mere stone and mortar.
Can you hear the laugh, the cry, the bugle challenge answered,
Of those who toiled and loved and lived beneath their real and mental yolks?

The Morgan breed outlasted the old Frye Farm,
The value of a base bred true, expanded,
Willing, ever-ready as commanded,
Rising to new days, exceeding human need and whim,
while family farm and field now long abandoned.

This horseshoe has a story and I’ve shared it:
Of foundation made of stone and wood and faith,
And foundation made of blood and bone and grit.
What knew they back then of time and distant future?
Of outcomes, where and when and why and how?
The circle of this story makes me think,
Of history passed within a blink,
While I hold this crafted iron link twixt then and now. ■

A sincere thank you to all the students who participated in our essay contest!

GRADE 4	Rachel Su	Abigail Stever	Mabel Williams	Carol Lupien
Carabella Amodeo	Miriam Talcott	Arden Wall	GRADE 7	Isabella Mantella
Molly Cheatwood	GRADE 5	Emma Wheeler	Ashlynn Barry	Isabella Moorhouse
Blake Densmore	Kendall Barry	Eva Rose Whitaker	Tessa Buskey	Emmy Kraegel Varner
Dejah Ferguson	Kaylee Barnum	GRADE 6	Grace Johnson	GRADE 9
Alexis Johnson	Cameron Carter	Avery Bench	Liza Joyce	Isabel Archer
Lydia Klein	Ella Gignoux	Naomi Buchhaus	Annabelle Levine	Lilian Flemming
Kit Kuprianczyk	Nora Kate Joyce	Nicole D’Amelio	Gabriella Seeberger	Abby Mast
Olivia Pulcher	Meghan Mathias	Chelsey Johnson	GRADE 8	Sierra McCabe
Blaine Ruben	Ivy Morgan	Emily Kolodziej	Charlotte Boulier	Lily Moser
Julia Scarangella	Molly Ruth Palmer	Leah Luedtke	Autumn Brown	Hannah Pickett
Bailey Stever	Lilyanna Purdy	Malia Marek	Nathanael Buschhaus	Emma Kate Priban