

# Horse and Horseless Activities for 4-H Clubs

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Coming up with horse-club activities can sometimes be a struggle, especially when owned horses are not an option. In this publication, you will find fresh ideas for 4-H Horse Club indoor activities and field trips. These experiences connect youth to relevant horse programs through hands-on learning that fosters positive youth development and links young people to other 4-H opportunities.

## Equine Health and Behavior

Horses, being the longest living species of domestic animals and living up to 30-40 years of age, have a lot of chances of developing illnesses throughout their lives. It is important to learn what is normal regarding their health and behavior so we can intervene as needed (Figure 1).

- Have youth do some background research on animal behavior and then watch a popular horse-related movie. Identify examples of horse behavior displayed in the film.
- Plan a trip to a tack shop or reference a catalog and figure out/learn why different pieces of equipment are used and how they affect a horse's behavior.
- Attend a clinic or a show and discuss the different equine behaviors observed.
- Go to a horse farm and observe how horses behave or interact with each other during different times such as feeding, being brought in or turned out, being tacked or groomed, etc. Note the body language (ears, lips, eyes, tail, feet, etc.) and sounds (nicker, squeal, snort, etc.), and discuss with the club.
- Tour a vet clinic: Organize with your local veterinarian or with one of the horse clinics in Lexington, as most of them are eager to host 4-H horse clubs.
- Ask a vet to teach how to conduct a temperature, pulse, and respiration (TPR) assessment at a local barn. You may need to invest in some thermometers and stethoscopes.
- Ask a horse trainer, vet, or vet tech to teach basic bandaging techniques. Learn about the different materials and their specific applications, quilts, pillows, standing or shipping bandages, polo wraps, and others.
- Take a field trip to a farrier school or have a farrier come to a meeting and demonstrate different types of shoes and their application. Maybe they can give away some old shoes the youth can use for an art project and enter in the state contest.
- Plan a field trip to a feed mill, and learn about different ingredients included in horse feed and the mixing process. This experience can also serve as practice for hippology.
- Have a sales rep or equine nutritionist talk to the group about equine nutrition for different classes of horses or their use/discipline.
- Have kids in the club research common horse diseases or different parasites, and present in the next club meeting. This can serve as a learning tool as well as practice for public speaking or demonstration.
- Ask a veterinarian to demonstrate a dental float.
- Invite a massage therapist or chiropractor to demonstrate and discuss their role in the overall health of the horse.
- Have a saddle fitter come to your club meeting and teach the youth how to properly fit a saddle and how it is constructed. If they can show both western and English saddles, that's even better.
- These could give youth insight to not only the benefits of these services, but also open their eyes to the endless career possibilities within the industry.
- Ask a farrier to explain different types of shoes and their application, including glue-on shoes.



**Figure 1.** 4-H'ers receive a lesson in equine anatomy.

## Hands-on Activities and Equine Management

Hands-on activities are a great way to help young people learn new skills and keep them engaged (Figure 2). Some examples include:

- Take the club for an outing on a trail ride. Check with the Kentucky Horse Park or farms to inquire.
- Some lesson barns will give the first lesson free: If your club does not operate out of a barn, or most of the kids do not own their horses or ride at a barn, you could check around to see if a barn could work out a deal for your club.
- Take a field trip to a retirement or rescue facility or a therapy center. Not only will your club learn about these types of facilities, but often they are looking for volunteers to help clean stalls, move hay, or do other odd jobs.
- Ask a local horse trainer to teach the group some basic grooming, handling, or maybe even showmanship.
- “Adopt” a horse: Talk to a local horse owner about feeding, vet work, training techniques, and costs. Encourage the kids to keep a record book as if it were their own horse.
- Visit different farms (breeding, training, showing, racing) and learn their day-to-day practices: blanketing, turnout, feed, rotation, fans, bedding, breeding, vaccinations, farriers, teeth, etc. Have the club discuss the differences.
- Learn to calculate rations for different types of horses using the NRC requirements.
- Plan a tour of a racetrack: Learn about the track surface, different types of races, history of the track, etc. For example, in Lexington, you could plan a trip to Keeneland and watch the morning workouts and have breakfast at the track kitchen. Or visit the Red Mile and learn about harness racing.
- After these visits, the kids could create and design a fictional farm, with different structures and business plan. They could use real numbers to calculate profit and loss.



**Figure 2.** 4-H'ers visit Hallway Feeds in Lexington.



## Practice Judging

Horse shows and competitions are a great opportunity for young people to get out and learn the different aspects of showing, including the tack, equipment and attire used for different breeds and disciplines (Figure 3). Local arenas frequently put on competitions of all types. Rodeos, shows, and racing can all be seen within a few hours of anywhere in Kentucky.

- At a horse show, practice judging with the kids and compare their skills with how the judge placed the classes. Approach the judge at the end of the show and ask him/her to explain why he/she placed classes a certain way and to give tips for oral reasons.
- When planning a trip and before the event, discuss the origin of the competition, the rules, what judges are looking for, and watch some YouTube videos with the youth so they are better prepared.
- At Keeneland or Fasig-Tipton sales, watch the horses, observe their conformation and how they move, research pedigrees, and compare to sales results.
- Go to different racetracks to learn training techniques, the rules of racing, how to read past performance stats, and what the different types of races are.
- Watch videos: YouTube has a lot of horse-judging videos. Have kids prepare and present oral reasons based on the video placings.
- Judge from still photos: Use magazine pictures to create groups of four horses of the same discipline or breed and have kids place them.
- Invite a local judge to talk to the kids and explain what they are looking for in different classes.

## Practice for Hippology

Hippology is an extensive contest consisting of a 100-question, written, multiple-choice exam with ID slides, stations, and judging. The ID slides component features a PowerPoint with pictures and multiple-choice questions where participants must identify what the picture is portraying. The stations portion is where youth work their way through different poster display boards and must match the correct picture to the description.

Other than having the kids study from the listed resource materials, you can do a quick online search for photos and ask your county agent to print them. You can also have “live” items for identification. Some ideas include:

- Pictures of different equipment from an online catalog
- Pictures of different breeds
- Pictures of different plants
- Different feed ingredients from a feed mill
- Hay samples from several farms
- Grooming tools at tack shop or tractor supply
- Weeds in a pasture
- The bones or muscles of a live horse to draw or paint
- Saddles and equipment at used-tack sale



**Figure 3.** Horse-judging opportunities are plentiful in Kentucky.

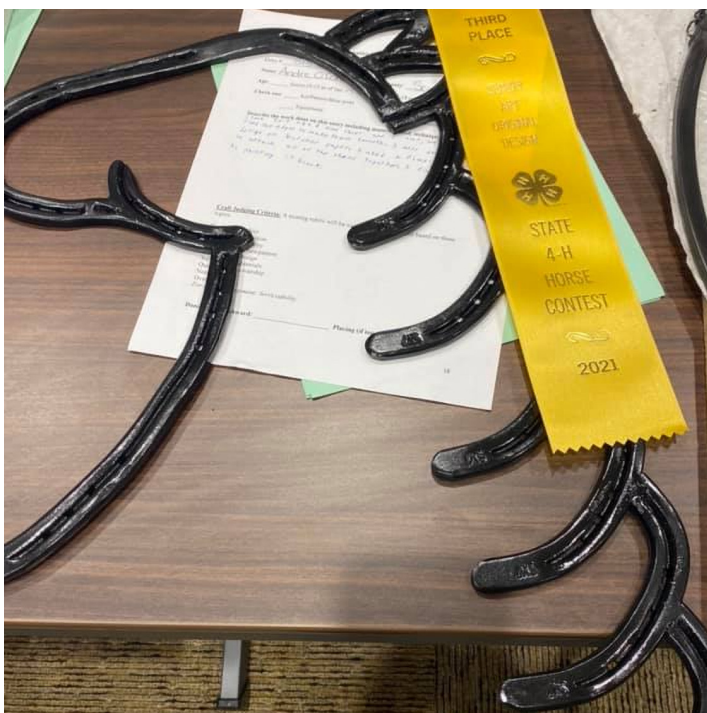


## Arts, Crafts, and Equipment

These are great winter projects, and they can be entered into our state horse contests (Figure 4).

- Shoe rack, towel rack, coat rack, made of horse shoes
- Fly bonnet crochet
- Your own rope halter
- Wood grooming box
- Jump poles or stands
- Saddle rack, using wood or PVC pipe
- Saddle pads

- Polo wraps
- Jewelry made of horse hair
- Christmas ornaments and wreaths
- Wall décor using shoes, bits, spurs, and maybe a bourbon barrel lid
- Grooming apron
- Leather reins or belts
- Mounting block made of wood
- Horse drawing or painting from YouTube videos
- Stick horse using a mop



**Figure 4.** Examples of 4-H arts and crafts.



## Photography

Taking great photos has never been easier (Figure 5). With the advancement of cell phone cameras, everyone can learn to take stunning photos.

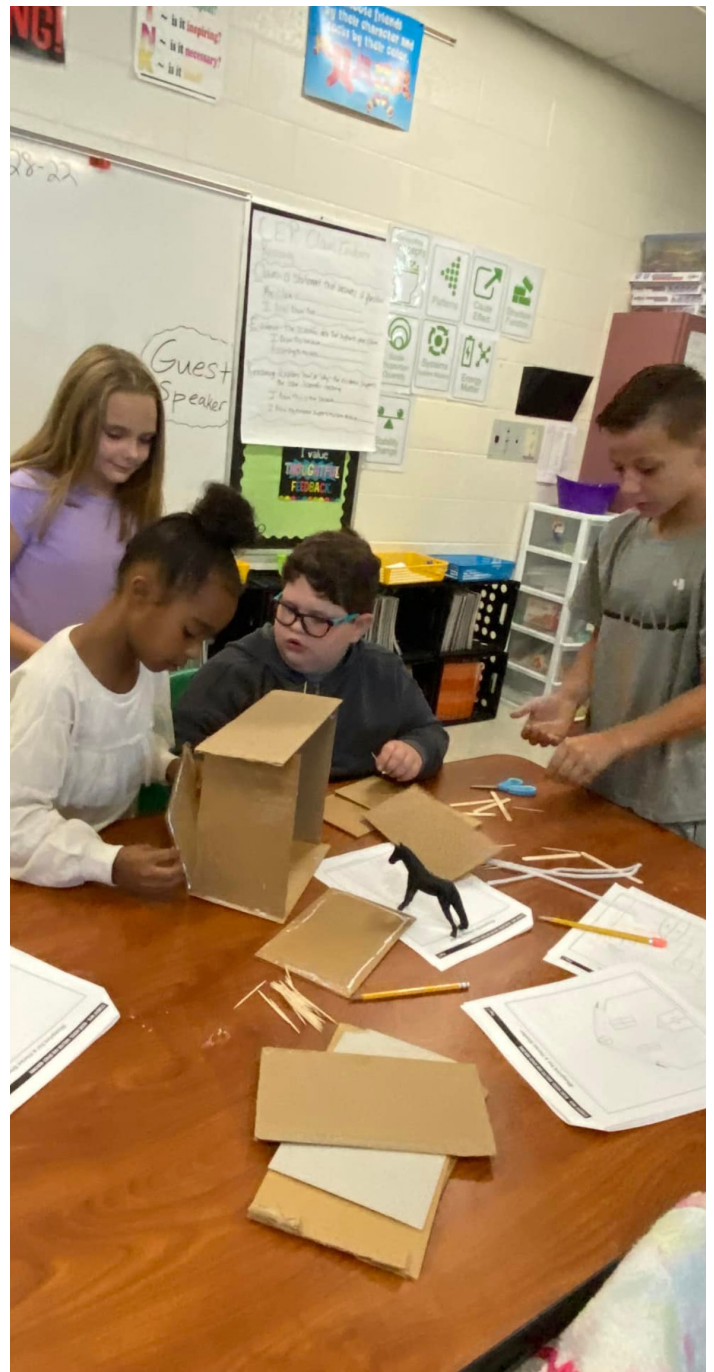
- Invite a photographer to talk to the club about different techniques, angles, and lighting.
- Check to see if your county or a county close to you has a photography club, and ask if your club can join a few club meetings.
- Watch YouTube videos about new and fun ways to take breathtaking photos with your phone, then go out to a farm and practice.
- Kids can present about their photos and practice public speaking.
- Photographs can be entered at the state horse contest.



**Figure 5.** Horse photography entered into a contest.

## Horse Science Lessons from Teach Kentucky Ag

Teach Kentucky Ag in the Classroom has horse-science lessons that are great for junior level 4-Hers (Figure 6). They provide interactive lessons that include building a barn/shelter, horse vision, nutrition, coat color and camouflage, and what's in the water/karst lessons. Here is the link to the printable lesson plans, student worksheets, and material lists: <https://www.teachkyag.org/horsescience>.



**Figure 6.** 4th grade class at Ballard County Elementary, building horse shelters, from lesson module in Teach KY Ag.

## Practice for the State 4-H Horse Contests

Another idea for club meetings could be learning and preparing for the state horse contests (Figure 7). Contests include horse judging, hippology, horse bowl, communications (individual speech, individual presentation, team presentation), and arts and crafts. You can practice, form teams, and create projects/speeches/demonstrations during club time to present at the state contests held in June. Rules, guidelines, ideas, and practice videos are linked below.

*\*refer to our rules found here for updated sources, and more contest-specific information: [https://afs.ca.uky.edu/sites/afs.ca.uky.edu/files/state\\_contest\\_rules\\_4.pdf](https://afs.ca.uky.edu/sites/afs.ca.uky.edu/files/state_contest_rules_4.pdf)*



**Figure 7.** A Kentucky 4-H'er competing in Individual Presentation at Eastern Nationals 4-H Horse Roundup.

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