



Straight From the Horse's Mouth:

An Echo Beyond the Mirror

By Sandra Wallin

The idea that horses can detect and reflect the human condition has been the source of much discussion in the field of equine facilitated learning/therapy. As a therapist and teacher, I follow my horses' lead while observing how they illuminate the inner story of the people we work with.

Mirroring Principle

Last summer, as I prepared for a group of middle school students to arrive, I thought about the mirroring principle and wondered if it might be modified and applied in a more multi-sensory approach. Just then, my young horse, Chiron, called out to a passing friend, his whinny echoing around the shelter. There it was – an echo beyond the mirror. If horses can talk to our eyes with their body language, could they not also talk

to our ears through our thoughts? What follows is an exercise created out of these musings. Please know that it continues to change and adapt with each group it encounters – just like me.

Echoes of Wisdom

When the students arrived, instead of having them meet the herd in the way they normally do, observing and making note of what they noticed and felt while in the company of each horse, I asked them to pay close attention to what they heard and to the thoughts that went on in their heads. The responses were wonderful. One girl said she heard Chiron tell her that she felt like a big smile. She thought this was delightful because she felt the most happy when she was with the horses. A young man said

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A student notes of what Chiron has to say – straight from the horse's mouth.

Mirror

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A patient listener, Chiron helps people hear.

he heard Cayenne tell him that if he wanted her to trust him, he'd have to prove that he was trustworthy. Another young lady heard Grace tell her that she was strong and courageous.

Each message the students heard was like an echo of their own wisdom bouncing back from the heart of each horse, sharing with them that which they most needed to hear, most needed to know, and most needed to feel.

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I have offered this exercise, or versions of it for almost a year now. Some adults I have worked with felt quite vulnerable at the prospect of hearing what the horses thought of them, even though the filter was their own. Without exception, however, each message carried deep meaning for the receivers. It's amazing to hear what is shared straight from the horse's mouth.



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