

from **Seabiscuit: An American Legend**
Biography by Laura Hillenbrand

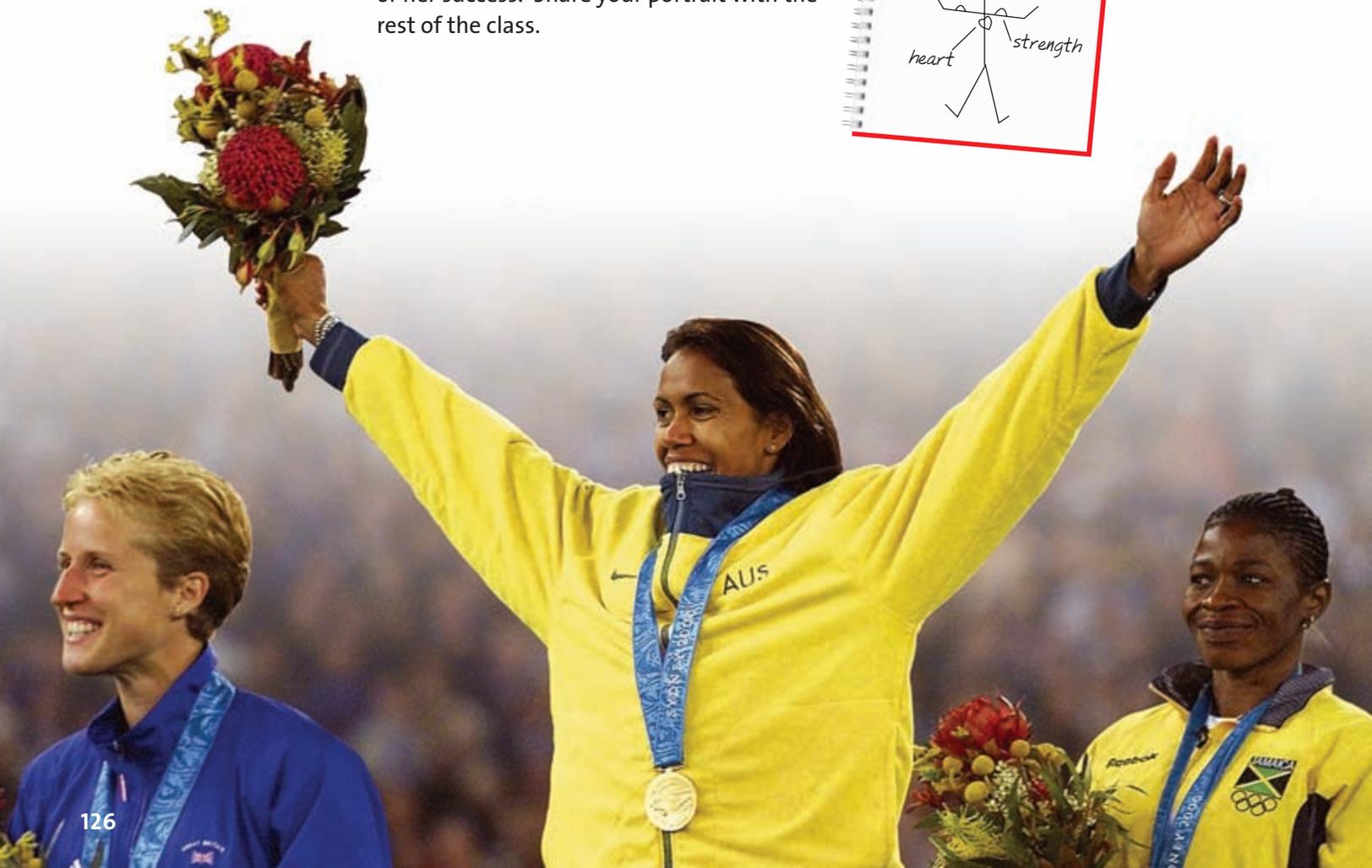
What makes a **WINNER?**

COMMON CORE

RI 3 Analyze how the author unfolds a series of events, including the order in which points are made and how they are introduced and developed.
RI 6 Determine an author's purpose in a text.

In the heat of competition, what separates a winner from a loser? That's the question explored in *Seabiscuit*, the story of the legendary racehorse that won the hearts of millions of Americans.

PRESENT With a partner, choose someone you consider to be a winner. Create a "portrait" of the person in words and images, labeling the qualities that you feel led to his or her success. Share your portrait with the rest of the class.



● TEXT ANALYSIS: SUSPENSE IN BIOGRAPHY

A **biography** is a true account of someone’s life. The following biography is unusual in that the author has chosen to make the life of a famous horse the focus of her work.

Though biographers must research and report facts accurately, a good biographer is also a storyteller who engages readers. Through the use of **foreshadowing**, for example, the biographer can build **suspense** in the same way that a fiction writer does. Notice how the first sentence sets up a feeling of tension and concern about future events:

Quiet trepidation settled over the Howard barn in the week before the Santa Anita Handicap.

As you read this selection from *Seabiscuit*, pay attention to the way Laura Hillenbrand unfolds a series of events.

● READING SKILL: IDENTIFY AUTHOR’S PURPOSE

An **author’s purpose** is the reasons the author has for writing a particular work. An author typically has one or more of these basic purposes in mind:

- to inform or explain
- to persuade
- to express thoughts or feelings
- to entertain

Understanding an author’s purpose for writing can provide insight into the central idea, or most important idea, conveyed by a nonfiction text. It can also help you decide *how* to read. For example, if you realize that an author is trying to inform or explain by including detailed information, you might decide to take notes as you read in order to revisit the most important details later on.

As you read this selection, try to decide Hillenbrand’s purpose, and look for details that support it. Record your findings in your *Reader/Writer Notebook*.

Review: Predict

▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Try to figure out the meaning of each boldfaced word.

1. felt **trepidation** waiting
2. mumbled **inaudibly**
3. looking for the **optimal** solution
4. tiny **increment of speed**
5. a slow, steady **cadence**
6. clumsy and **inept**
7. **inexplicably** slowed down
8. finally reached an **unequivocal** decision

Laura Hillenbrand

born 1967

The Will to Overcome

At the age of 19, Laura Hillenbrand’s life changed forever. Up until then, she had been physically active, swimming competitively, riding horses, and playing tennis. Suddenly, she was stricken with chronic fatigue syndrome, an illness that sometimes made her too weak even to feed herself. To find purpose in her life and “a way to endure the suffering,” Hillenbrand started writing. As she wrote *Seabiscuit*, she found a link between herself and her subject—a horse who had the will to overcome obstacles.

A Thorough Researcher

Although her illness sometimes left her bedridden, Hillenbrand meticulously researched the life of *Seabiscuit*. She placed ads in horseracing magazines, interviewed aging jockeys by phone, and sought information from the Library of Congress. Her research paid off in a best-selling biography filled with suspenseful events and memorable details.

BACKGROUND TO THE BIOGRAPHY

Horseracing

Known as the sport of kings, horseracing is one of the oldest of all spectator sports. A popular type of horserace is the handicap, a race in which the horses carry different amounts of weight based on factors such as age and past performances. Faster horses carry more weight; slower horses carry less. The goal is to give all the horses an equal chance of winning. To ride a racehorse, a jockey needs balance, coordination, strength, and quick reflexes. According to Hillenbrand, “The extraordinary athleticism of the jockey is unparalleled.”



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Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Seabiscuit:

AN AMERICAN LEGEND

Laura Hillenbrand

Quiet **trepidation** settled over the Howard barn in the week before the Santa Anita Handicap.¹ Late in the week, a long, soaking shower doused the racing oval. When the rain stopped, asphalt-baking machines droned over the course, licking flames over the surface to dry the soil. Rosemont emerged from the barn three days before the race and scorched the track in his final workout. Reporters waited for Smith² to give his horse a similar workout, but they never saw Seabiscuit doing anything more than stretching his legs. Rumors swirled around the track that Seabiscuit was lame. Rosemont's stock rose; Seabiscuit's dropped.

10 Smith had fooled them. At three o'clock one morning shortly before the race, he led Seabiscuit out to the track and gave him one last workout in peace and isolation. The horse ran beautifully.

On February 27, 1937, Charles and Marcela Howard³ arrived at Santa Anita to watch their pride and joy go for the hundred-grander. They were giddy with anticipation. "If Seabiscuit loses," mused a friend, "Mrs. Howard is going to be so heartbroken that I'll have to carry her out. If he wins, Charley'll be so excited that I'll have to carry him." Howard couldn't keep still. He trotted up to the press box and made the wildly popular announcement that if his horse won, he'd send up a barrel of champagne for the reporters. He went down
20 to the betting area, and seeing that the line was too long to wait, he grabbed a bettor and jammed five \$1,000 bills into his hand. "Put it all on Seabiscuit's nose,⁴ please," he told the bewildered wagerer before trotting off again. **A**

trepidation
(trĕp'ĭ-dā'shən)
n. nervous fear

Analyze Visuals ▶

Examine the photograph of Seabiscuit. What details convey his strength and will to win?

A AUTHOR'S PURPOSE

From what you have read so far, what do you think is the author's main purpose for writing?

1. **Santa Anita Handicap:** a race at the Santa Anita track in California, with a prize of \$100,000.

2. **Smith:** Tom Smith, Seabiscuit's trainer.

3. **Charles and Marcela Howard:** Seabiscuit's owners.

4. **"put it . . . nose":** bet all the money on Seabiscuit's coming in first.



At a little past 4:00 P.M. Pollard⁵ and Seabiscuit parted from Smith at the paddock gate and walked out onto the track for the Santa Anita Handicap. A record crowd of sixty thousand fans had come to see eighteen horses try for the richest purse in the world. Millions more listened on radio.

As Pollard felt Seabiscuit's hooves sink into the russet soil, he had reason to worry. The baking machines had not completely dried the surface. Rain and dirt had blended into a heavy goo along the rail; breaking from the three post,⁶ Seabiscuit would be right down in it. Far behind him in the post parade, jockey Harry Richards was contemplating a different set of obstacles for Rosemont. He had drawn the seventeenth post



Seabiscuit owner C. S. Howard, jockey Red Pollard, and trainer Tom Smith.

position. He was going to have the luxury of a hard, fast track, but his problem would be traffic. As a late runner, Rosemont would have to pick his way through the cluttered field.

The two jockeys virtually bookended the field as they moved to the post. Pollard feared nothing but Richards and Rosemont. Richards feared nothing but Pollard and Seabiscuit. The two horses stood motionless while the field was loaded around them. **B**

At the sound of the bell, Seabiscuit bounded forward. To his outside, a crowd of horses rushed inward to gain **optimal** position. The field doubled over on itself, and the hinge was Seabiscuit, who was pinched back to ninth. In a cloud of horses, Pollard spotted daylight five feet or so off the rail. He banked Seabiscuit out into it, holding him out of the deep part of the track. He slipped up to fourth position, just off of front-running Special Agent. On the first turn Seabiscuit was crowded back down to the rail. As the field straightened into the backstretch, Pollard found another avenue and eased him outward again, to firmer ground. Ahead, Special Agent was setting a suicidal pace, but Pollard sensed how fast it was and was not going to be lured into it. He sat back and waited. Behind him, Rosemont was tugging along toward the back of the field, waiting for the speed horses to crumble. **C**

B SUSPENSE IN BIOGRAPHY

Reread lines 32–51. What technique does the writer use to build suspense?

optimal (ɒp'tə-məl) *adj.*
most favorable; best

C PREDICT

Which horse do you predict will win the race? Why do you think so?

5. **Pollard:** Red Pollard, Seabiscuit's jockey.

6. **the three post:** in the starting gate, the third position out from the railing.

With a half mile to go, Pollard positioned Seabiscuit in the clear and readied for his move. Behind him, Richards sensed that the moment had come to shoot for Seabiscuit. He began threading Rosemont through the field, cutting in and out, picking off horses one by one, talking in his horse's ear as clumps of dirt cracked into his face. His luck was holding; every hole toward which he guided his horse held open just long enough for him to gallop through. On the far turn he reached Seabiscuit's heels and began looking for a way around him. Ahead of him, Pollard crouched and watched Special Agent's churning hindquarters, waiting for him to fold.

At the top of the stretch Special Agent faltered. Pollard pulled Seabiscuit's nose to the outside and slapped him on the rump. Seabiscuit pounced. Richards saw him go and gunned Rosemont through the hole after him, but Seabiscuit had stolen a three-length advantage. Special Agent gave way grudgingly along the inside as Indian Broom rallied up the outside, not quite quick enough to keep up.

Lengthening stride for the long run to the wire, Seabiscuit was alone on the lead in the dry, hard center of the track. Pollard had delivered a masterpiece of reinsmanship, avoiding the traps and saving ground while minimizing his run along the boggy rail. He had won the tactical battle with Richards. He was coming into the homestretch of the richest race in the world with a strong horse beneath him. Behind them were seventeen of the best horses in the nation. To the left and right, sixty thousand voices roared. Ahead was nothing but a long strip of red soil.

The rest of the field peeled away, scattered across thirty-two lengths of track behind them. It was down to Rosemont and Seabiscuit.

Seabiscuit was moving fastest. He charged down the stretch in front with Pollard up over his neck, moving with him, driving him on. Rosemont was obscured behind him. He was gaining only by **increments**. Seabiscuit sailed through midstretch a full length ahead of Rosemont. Up in the stands, the Howards and Smith were thinking the same thing: Rosemont is too far behind. Seabiscuit is going to win.

Without warning, horse and rider lost focus. Abruptly, **inexplicably**, Pollard wavered. He lay his whip down on Seabiscuit's shoulder and left it there.

Seabiscuit paused. Perhaps he slowed in hopes of finding an opponent to toy with. Or maybe he sensed Pollard's hesitation. His composure, which Smith had patiently schooled into him over six months, began to unravel. Seabiscuit suddenly took a sharp left turn, veering ten feet across the track and back down into the deep going, straightening himself out just before hitting the rail. He had given away several feet of his lead. The **cadence** of his stride dropped. What had been a seamless union was now only a man and a horse, jangling against each other.

Language Coach

Oral Fluency The suffix *-tion* is pronounced "shuhn." Work with a partner to pronounce "shuhn." Work with a partner to pronounce *positioned* (line 64). Then practice saying these other words from the selection: *nation*, *hesitation*, *celebration*, *anticipation*, *exhaustion*.

increment (ĩn'krə-mənt) *n.* a small, slight growth or increase

inexplicably (ĩn-ĕk'splĩ-kə-blē) *adv.* in a way that is difficult or impossible to explain

cadence (kād'ns) *n.* a balanced, rhythmic flow



From between Rosemont's ears, Richards saw Seabiscuit's form disintegrate. He looked toward the wire. It seemed close enough to touch, but Rosemont still wasn't past Seabiscuit's saddlecloth. He had been riding on instinct, reflex, but now his heart caught in his throat: *I am too late*. Desperate, he flung himself over Rosemont's neck, booting and whipping and screaming, 110 "Faster, baby, faster!" Striding high in the center of the track, Rosemont was suddenly animated by Richards's raging desire. He dropped his head and dug in. Seabiscuit's lead, stride by stride, slipped away.

For a few seconds at the most critical moment of their careers, Pollard and Seabiscuit faltered. For fifteen strides, more than the length of a football field, Pollard remained virtually motionless. Rosemont was some ten feet to his outside, leaving plenty of room for Pollard to swing Seabiscuit out of the rail-path's slow going, but Pollard didn't take the opportunity. From behind his half-moon blinker cups,⁷ Seabiscuit could see nothing but an empty track ahead of him, nor is it likely that he could hear Rosemont over the roar from 120 the grandstand. Or perhaps he was waiting for him. His left ear swung around lazily, as if he were paying attention to something in the infield. His stride slowed. His mind seemed scattered. The lead was vanishing. A length. Six feet. A neck. The wire was rushing at them. The crowd was shrieking. **D**

D AUTHOR'S PURPOSE

Reread lines 113–123. What details make this passage not only informative but entertaining?

7. **blinker cups:** flaps put over a horse's eyes to keep it from seeing sideways.



Rosemont edges out Seabiscuit to win the Santa Anita Handicap by a nose.

With just a few yards to go, Pollard broke out of his limbo. He burst into frenzied motion. Seabiscuit's ears snapped back and he dived forward. But Rosemont had momentum. The lead shrank to nothing. Rosemont caught Seabiscuit, then took a lead of inches. Seabiscuit was accelerating, his rhythm building, his mind narrowed down to his task at the urgent call of his rider. But Richards was driving harder, scratching and yelling and pleading for
 130 Rosemont to run. Seabiscuit cut the advantage away. They drew even again.

Rosemont and Seabiscuit flew under the wire together. **E**

Up in their box, the Howards leapt up. Charles ran to the Turf Club bar, calling for champagne for everyone. Voices sang out and corks popped and a wild celebration began.

Gradually, the revelers went silent. The crowd had stopped cheering. The stewards posted no winner. They were waiting for the photo. The exhausted horses returned to be unsaddled, and the fans sat in agonized anticipation. Two minutes passed. In the hush, a sibilant sound attended the finish photo as it slid down to the stewards. There was a terrible pause. The numbers blinked up
 140 on the board.

Rosemont had won.

◀ Analyze Visuals

What elements of the dramatic finish are captured by this photograph? What does the photo add to your understanding of the story? Be specific.

E SUSPENSE IN BIOGRAPHY

Reread lines 124–131. What words does the writer use to build excitement in this passage?

A howl went up from the grandstand. Thousands of spectators were certain that the stewards had it wrong, that Seabiscuit had been robbed. But the photo was **unequivocal**: Rosemont’s long bay muzzle hung there in the picture, just a wink ahead of Seabiscuit’s. “Dame Fortune,” wrote announcer Joe Hernandez, “made a mistake and kissed the wrong horse—Rosemont—in the glorious end of the Santa Anita Handicap.”

Charles and Marcela collected themselves. The length of Rosemont’s nose had cost them \$70,700. They continued passing out the champagne, brave
150 smiles on their faces.

Pollard didn’t need to look at the tote board. He knew he had lost from the instant the noses hit the line. Wrung to exhaustion and deathly pale, he slid from Seabiscuit’s back. He walked over to Richards, who was being smothered in kisses by his tearful wife. Pollard’s face was blank, his voice barely above a whisper. All around him, people regarded him with expressions of cool accusation.

unequivocal

(ŭn-’ī-kwĭv’ə-kəl)

adj. allowing no doubt or misunderstanding



◀ **Analyze Visuals**

What does this photo of Seabiscuit and Red Pollard show you about their relationship? Be specific.

“Congratulations, Harry, you rode a swell race,” Pollard said.

“Thanks,” said Richards, his face covered in lipstick and his voice breaking; he had shouted it away urging Rosemont on. “But it was very close.”

160 “Close, yes,” said Pollard almost **inaudibly**, “but you won.”

Pollard saw Howard hovering nearby, waiting for him. The jockey went to him.

“What happened?” Howard asked gently. Ashen and spent, Pollard said that the rail had been slow, and that he had been unable to get outside without fouling Rosemont. If he and Rosemont had switched positions, he was sure Seabiscuit would have won.

It was a thin excuse. Pollard must have known that to save his professional standing, he would have to offer more than that, say something that would explain how he had allowed Rosemont to come to him without fighting back until the last moment. Already, harsh words were being hung on him:

*arrogant, **inept**, overconfident.* He could not have mistaken the reproach on the faces of those around him. His reputation was tumbling. But Pollard gave the public nothing to make them reconsider.

Perhaps he couldn't. He had a secret to keep, a gamble he had made years earlier and remade with each race. But he could no longer think that its risks affected only himself.

Perhaps Pollard didn't see Rosemont coming because of the blindness of his right eye. **F**

180 It is unlikely that he could have heard Rosemont over the din from the crowd. Rosemont's surge, unexpected and sudden, may have eluded Pollard until very late in the race. Pollard did not begin urging Seabiscuit in earnest until Rosemont was alongside him, just forward enough for Pollard to see him with his left eye, upon turning his head. One good eye offers little depth perception, so he may not have been able to judge whether Rosemont was far enough to his right to allow Seabiscuit to move outward.

190 If this explanation is correct, then Pollard was trapped. He was publicly accused of inexcusable failure in the most important race of his career, but he could not defend himself. Had he let on that he was blind in one eye, his career would have been over. Like most jockeys in the 1930s, he had nowhere else to go, nothing else to live on, nothing else he loved. For Red Pollard, there was no road back to Edmonton. If his blindness was the cause of the loss, his frustration and guilt must have been consuming.

Howard accepted Pollard's explanation without criticism. Neither he nor Smith blamed him.

Almost everyone else did. 

inaudibly (ĩn-ŏ'də-blē)
adv. in a way that is impossible to hear

inept (ĩn-ĕpt') *adj.*
generally incompetent

F **SUSPENSE IN BIOGRAPHY**

Notice that the writer withholds this important piece of information from the reader until after the race is over. If the writer had revealed this information before describing the race, would the suspense have been greater or less? Explain.

Comprehension

- Recall** Which horse was Seabiscuit’s main challenger in the race?
- Recall** How did the stewards determine which horse had won the race?
- Clarify** Why did Pollard keep the blindness in his right eye a secret?



RI 3 Analyze how the author unfolds a series of events, including the order in which points are made and how they are introduced and developed. **RI 6** Determine an author’s purpose in a text.

Text Analysis

- Identify Author’s Purpose** Review your notes. What do you think Hillenbrand’s main **purpose** was in writing this biography? What other purposes might she have had? Include important details from the text to support your answer.
- Analyze Suspense in Biography** How does the author unfold events and create suspense in this biography? In a chart like the one shown, give examples of each of her narrative techniques.

<i>Narrative Technique</i>	<i>Example</i>
<i>Raising questions in reader’s mind</i>	• <i>Rosemont’s stock rose</i>
<i>Foreshadowing</i>	
<i>Withholding certain information</i>	

- Compare and Contrast** Compare Seabiscuit and Pollard with Rosemont and Richards. What qualities made the difference between the winner and the loser of the Santa Anita Handicap?
- Make Judgments** Reread lines 186–195. Was it fair to blame Pollard for losing the race? Support your answer with reasons and evidence.
- Evaluate** How does the revelation about Pollard’s blindness in his right eye affect your evaluation of Seabiscuit as a racing horse?

Text Criticism

- Historical Context** Commenting on *Seabiscuit*, Hillenbrand said, “The subjects that I’ve written about—the men and the horse—were radically different individuals, but the one thread that pulls through all of their lives . . . is this struggle between overwhelming hardship and the will to overcome it.” When Seabiscuit raced, the United States was reeling from the Great Depression, a catastrophic economic collapse that began in 1929 and continued through the 1930s. What might Seabiscuit have represented to the country at that time?

What makes a WINNER?

How does Seabiscuit live up to your idea of a winner?

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

1. A person who speaks **inaudibly** can easily be heard.
2. The **optimal** time to spot Mars is on a cloudy night.
3. To honor your ancestors, you might build an **increment**.
4. An **inept** person is not a good choice to manage a project.
5. If you have **trepidation** about heights, you may not like skydiving.
6. Troops might march to the **cadence** of a band.
7. If an event occurs **inexplicably**, it is hard to understand why it happens.
8. An **unequivocal** “no” answer indicates that you have not made up your mind.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN SPEAKING

- analyze
- element
- infer
- sequence
- structure

Working with a partner, **analyze** the **sequence** of events in the race (lines 52–141) and then create a timeline to represent these events graphically. Note where the horses are in each segment of your timeline (for example, all the horses are in the same place at the race’s start). Discuss with your partner the details in the text that help you create your timeline. Use at least two Academic Vocabulary words in your discussion.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE *aud* WORD FAMILY

The word *inaudibly* can be traced back to the Latin root *aud*, which means “to hear.” Many other words belong to the same word family as *inaudibly*. If you can recognize the root in these words, you can understand how they are related in meaning.

PRACTICE Use each word below in a sentence that shows its connection in meaning to *inaudibly*. If necessary, consult a dictionary.

1. audit
2. audiology
3. audience
4. audio-visual
5. auditorium
6. audition

WORD LIST

cadence
inaudibly
increment
inept
inexplicably
optimal
trepidation
unequivocal

COMMON CORE

L 4c Consult reference materials to determine or clarify a word’s meaning or etymology.

Interactive Vocabulary **THINK** central

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