



## **Venom**

Nikki Tate

Reading level: 3.4  
978-1-55469-071-8 PB  
AR Quiz # 129680

### **Book Summary**

Sixteen-year-old Spencer loves his job at the local racing stable, but when he becomes convinced that someone is drugging the racehorse Lord of the Fires, no one believes him. By refusing to turn a blind eye, Spencer risks losing those he cares most about, including Em, the stable owner's niece.

### **Prereading Ideas**

- Find out about famous racehorses—where and when they raced, who owned them and who trained them. Watch the movie *Seabiscuit* for some great racing scenes.
- Jockeys are very small. Research what it takes to be a jockey—how long do they work? Do they have eating disorders? How often are they injured? Are there any female jockeys?

## Connecting to the Text

### *Theme*

- One of the themes of *Venom* is the importance of trust in relationships. Have students pick one of Spencer's main relationships (Em, Grandma, Mom, Scampy) and find examples from the book of how trust (or the lack of it) shapes those relationships.
- Family is another important theme in *Venom*. The only person in Em's family that is ever mentioned is her Uncle Scampy. Have students write a couple of character sketches that imagine what the rest of her family is like.
- Spencer's family has been fractured by his father's death and his mother's problems. Ask students to write a short scene between Spencer and the ghost of his dead father. What would Spencer say to him?
- Spencer asks, "Is it so bad to die doing something you love?". His father had a passion for horses, but then he was killed by a horse. What would Spencer's life be like if he had turned his back on his passion for horses after his father died?

### *Setting*

Most of the action in *Venom* takes place at the track. Many readers will never have been to a racetrack, so it's very important for the author to provide enough detail so that readers are not confused. Ask students if the author has done a good job describing the setting.

### *Language*

Thoroughbred racing uses a particular system for naming racehorses. Ask students to research the rules behind the names and suggest a name for a horse.

## Connecting to the Curriculum

### *Math*

- Do you have to be good at math to gamble? Betting on racehorses is big business and a lot is at stake. How do people decide which horses to bet on? What are "odds" and how do they work?
- What is handicapping and how does it work?

*Science*

- Spencer refers to horses as “prey animals.” What does this mean? What other animals are prey animals and how does it affect their behavior?
- Horses are thought to be very intelligent. Ask students to research how intelligence is measured in animals. Which animals are the most intelligent? Which the least?
- What drugs are horses tested for after a race? Are they similar to performance-enhancing drugs for humans? Do they have negative side effects?
- Spencer says, “There’s nothing like a jolt of adrenaline to wake a guy up.” How and why is adrenaline released in your body and what effect does it have?
- What kind of snake venom produces the effect of the one in the story? How would someone get their hands on snake venom?

**Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions**

1. Spencer’s grandma loves to bet on the horses. She doesn’t have a lot of money, but she gambles all the time. When does gambling become an addiction? Is she addicted?
2. Is Spencer’s grandma behaving responsibly when she allows Spencer to be so involved at the track? Would he be better off with his alcoholic mother?
3. What happens to horses after their racing days are over? Are there animal rights groups that protect them?

**Resources***Horses*

<http://horseracing.about.com/od/breeding/a/aanameingtb.htm>

[www.horse-races.net/library/links-famous.htm](http://www.horse-races.net/library/links-famous.htm)

[http://horseracing.about.com/od/famoushorses/Famous\\_Race\\_Horses.htm](http://horseracing.about.com/od/famoushorses/Famous_Race_Horses.htm)

[www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=horse.htm](http://www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=horse.htm)

[www.ehow.com/how\\_2189006\\_train-become-flat-racing-jockey.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_2189006_train-become-flat-racing-jockey.html)

[www.jockeysroom.com/msg4.htm](http://www.jockeysroom.com/msg4.htm)

[www.guidehorse.org/intellig.htm](http://www.guidehorse.org/intellig.htm)

<http://hubpages.com/hub/The-Intelligence-of-the-Horse>

[www.helium.com/items/320183-what-happens-when-race-horses-get-injured](http://www.helium.com/items/320183-what-happens-when-race-horses-get-injured)

[www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=13622778252&topic=9556](https://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=13622778252&topic=9556)

*Science*

[www.causeof.org/adrenal.htm](http://www.causeof.org/adrenal.htm)

*Math*

[www.ildado.com/horse\\_racing\\_rules.html](http://www.ildado.com/horse_racing_rules.html)

<http://horseracing.about.com/cs/ht.htm>

**Author Biography**

**Nikki Tate** has written many books for children and young adults in a variety of genres. She shares her home on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, with a collection of goats, ponies, dogs, cats and assorted feathered friends.

**Author Website**

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