

# Hold Your Horses!

Today, we tell all about horse expressions!

In the past, many people depended on horses for transportation, farming and other kinds of work.

A lot of people still like to ride horses for sport. Horseracing and betting on horse racing are also popular. So, it is not surprising that Americans use a lot of expressions about horses.



Horse-drawn wagons and electric trolley cars share the streets in 1897 Philadelphia during a time of revolutionary change in transportation and industry. (FILE PHOTO)

Long ago, people who were rich or important rode horses that were very tall.

Today, if someone acts better than everyone else, you might tell him to “**get off your high horse.**”

And if someone is pushing you to do something, you can say, “**Hold your horses!**” This is a very informal way to tell someone to calm down and wait. You would not use it with your boss but you could use it with children.

Something else you could say to children if they are playing too rough or hitting each other is to **stop horsing around!** When kids horse around, they could get hurt. However, kids who live in a **one-horse town** might have nothing to do but horse around. A one-horse town is a small town with not too much going on.

So, if you live in a one-horse town, you might like to watch a lot of television. Imagine that you are watching your favorite show when your phone rings. You do not answer it. **Wild horses could not drag you away** from the television. Nothing could stop you from doing what you want to do.

In fact, that’s what the Rolling Stones are singing about in their song, “Wild Horses.”

*"Wild horses couldn't drag me away ..."*

If you love someone, even strong wild horses could not drag you away from that person.

When you get news directly from the best source, you get it **straight from the horse's mouth**. If your teacher, for example, tells you there is going to be a test tomorrow, you got that information **straight from the horse's mouth**. Don't worry. This is not the same as saying your teacher has a "horse face."

Sometimes a person keeps arguing a question that has already been settled. They are **beating a dead horse**. A dead horse is quite different from a **dark horse**. A dark horse is a person who surprises others by doing better than unexpected. In politics, a **dark-horse candidate** is someone who is not likely to win ... but then does.

A **horse of a different color** is a different matter entirely.



Jockey Victor Espinoza celebrates on American Pharoah after winning the Preakness Stakes in Baltimore, May 2015. (AP Photo/Brynn Anderson)

For example, you and your friend might be talking about how to make more money.

Your friend suggests investing in the stock market. You mention betting at the race track.

"Gambling!" your friend says, "That's a horse of a different color." In other words, it's a different way of thinking about the same topic.

Your friend might use another horse expression to give you some advice. If she tells you **do not put the cart before the horse** she is telling you to do things in the proper order.

Here's another piece of advice: **do not change horses in midstream**. You would not want to make major changes to something you've already started.

d. In the past, this expression was used as an argument to re-elect a president, especially during a time when the country was at war.

And one more piece of advice from the world of horses is **if you fall off the horse, get right back on again**. When you fail or suffer a setback it is important to try again. People doing something after a long period of not doing it are getting **back in the saddle again**. The saddle is the leather seat you put on a horse in order to ride it.

And this is Gene Autry, the singing cowboy, singing "Back in the Saddle Again."

*"I'm back in the saddle again ..."*

But people often ignore even good advice. After all, **you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink**.

This means you can give someone advice but you cannot force them to use it.

We end this Words and Their Stories with a riddle.

*(We can't write the riddle because it will give away the answer!)*

Take a guess and write it in the comment section. We will tell you the answer next week on Words and Their Stories.

I'm Anna Matteo.

*This is the opening song from Gene Autry's 1949 film "Rim of the Canyon."*

*This VOA Learning English program was originally written by Shelley Gollust with additional material from Anna Matteo.*