

Teenage Wasteland—Not!

I stand on both sides of the issue when I see kids taking days off from school to ride in dressage shows. As Groucho Marx said, "It's against the principles I stand on; and if you don't like my principles. I'll get some other ones."

Oh, I know all the arguments: if the kid is ahead in her work and making good grades, why not take time out? What with the nature of public education these days, what are they missing anyway? And on it goes. But when I teach or judge, I can't help giving the Juniors and Young Riders who are skipping class a little extra attention—whether they want it or not.

I was judging a three day show in Texas than began on a Friday. A young girl rode her test in front of me, and I noticed on the day sheet that her horse's name was Rosebud. When she saluted at the end, I asked, "Did you name her yourself?"

"No," she answered.

"Do you know what Rosebud was?"

"No," again.

"Well, are you showing again tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"What I want you to do overnight is find out about Rosebud, and come back and tell me tomorrow before I judge you. You can cheat and Google it," I offered smiling.

The next day when she circled the arena before I rang the bell, the girl stopped at my booth and announced, "Rosebud was the sled in *Citizen Kane!*" and went on to recite more details about Orson Wells and the production of that famous 1941 film classic.

I applauded approvingly, and she went ahead and rode her test.

This time when she halted at G, I asked "And do you ride again tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"This last week marked the 70th anniversary of a famous disaster," I told her. "Tomorrow I want you to report back on it."

She cheerfully accepted her assignment and off she went.

That night I discovered she wasn't going to show in my arena on Sunday, but at dinner I was recounting this tale to my fellow judges. The (late) great Tripp Harting was to be her Sunday judge, and he agreed to quiz her before her ride on my behalf.

That interchange took place, but the girl wasn't satisfied to leave it there. She found me during a break and proudly recited everything she'd found out about Lakehurst, New Jersey, and the 1937 *Hindenburg* disaster.

I was suitably impressed, and we parted with my telling her that this information would assure that she'd not only get into the college of her choice but that she'd be courted by a selection of rich and handsome young doctors who would buy her very fancy dressage horses to further her riding career.

Putting me in my place, she grinned, "No, I think I'll be the rich doctor!"