

TITLE: *Ride of Passage*

GENRE: Coming-of-age

AUTHOR: Cindy J. Weigand

LOGLINE: A thirteen-year-old girl goes on a forbidden horseback riding adventure with two friends. If caught, there would be hell to pay, but sometimes you just have to break the rules.

To Kill a Mockingbird meets *The Secret Life of Bees*

AUTHOR NOTES:

Having watched a lot of films, I noticed an absence of stories about adventurous girls. Most coming-of-age movies focus on crushes on boys, their first kiss and losing their virginity. Neither is extreme dysfunctional families. To me, coming of age involves so much more. I wanted to write something different. The story harkens back to the time when I grew up.

Ride of Passage addresses themes of racial bias, malicious gossip and despicable intent. All of this Axelle must navigate without guidance from her parents because the family unit has been wounded by tragedy. Through grit and the strength of friendship, Axelle traverses all of this and takes her first steps into womanhood.

The story harkens back to the author's childhood memories growing up. Reflections of people and events, real and imagined, transformed in memory and imagination with the passage of time.

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Synopsis for *Ride of Passage*

It's 1969, and thirteen-year-old AXELLE ERICKSON, with friends KELLY THOMAS and BENITA CRANSTON, ride out on their horses for on forbidden adventure. Axelle has known nothing but homework and chores since her brother's crippling accident. Her parents and the community blame her. Prohibited from participating in outside activities, she has longed to go riding to have fun. When her parents leave town for the weekend, she gets her chance.

Eavesdropping at home and through gossip at school, Axelle has learned that a hermit on Erickson land was eaten by his dogs. She also hears of neighbors' chickens being killed. The kids and gossip adults blame the Widow Johnson whom they claim is a witch. The community treats her as an outcast but has becomes more reclusive since her son was drafted and her husband died. Axelle is eager to figure out what really happened. Plus, they are good excuses for taking a horseback ride. However, their fun is hampered.

They stop at the local country store for treats. There, the storekeeper harasses Axelle. He cheats her out of some items and pockets her change. To follow the creek all the way to the hermit's house, they must cross the witch's land. Waiting to ask permission, they they hear a banjo being played. The music stops abruptly when they call to her. Initially, Mrs. Johnson tries to scare them but lets them pass.

Once off the road, the fun begins. They run their horses then play in the creek. Kelly goes noodlin'. Kelly and Axelle arm wrestle. They tour of the hermit's house and where his bones were found. But it's not all fun. Benita is chased by wild dogs; Kelly catches a catfish that she can't handle, and they nearly step on a rattlesnake at the loner's shack. The entire way, they are pestered by two boys, SONUV and TOMMY, on motorcycles.

Caught in a thunderstorm on the way home, they take refuge in Mrs. Johnson's barn. Instead of running them out, she covers them with blankets and cares for their horses. The next morning, she serves them breakfast. It is then that Benita learns that Mrs. Johnson, ALIYAH, is African American. Aliyah apologizes for scaring the girls, but Sonuv and Tommy have threatened her.

At home later that morning, Axelle discovers that her parents have returned early. An argument ensues. When Axelle is threatened with punishment, Kenny confesses that the accident was his fault. The family begins to heal.

Axelle, Kelly and Benita continue to take rides for a few years and stop by Aliyah's but gradually lose interest. Axelle visits Aliyah on Sundays. One day, her son, D'SHAWN, suddenly appears. He has been in Canada. When he is unable to find work, the two decide to sell the land to the Ericksons and move back to North Carolina where Aliyah was born. Axelle and Aliyah stay close friends until Aliyah's death twenty-five years later.

