



Buck Discussion Guide

Director: Cindy Meehl

Year: 2011

Time: 88 min

FILM SUMMARY

BUCK examines the life of Buck Brannaman from his abusive childhood to his phenomenally successful approach to horses. A real-life “horse-whisperer”, he shuns the violence of his upbringing and teaches people to communicate with their horses through leadership and sensitivity, rather than punishment and force. Just by watching a horse’s behavior, Buck can understand a lot about the owners. Those who enroll in Buck’s workshops must be prepared to face the reality of why their horse behave the way they do. For some, this can be a therapeutic and transformative process, both for owner and horse, while for others, Buck’s training forces them to take a deep look into their own lives before they consider owning another horse.

What begins as a lesson about horses becomes a lesson for the whole of life. As director Cindy Meehl said, “Buck has a unique ability to help people reconfigure the way they perceive both horses and humans, and the principles he teaches can become life altering. How he treats and works with these animals reverberates beyond the round pen and the arena.” BUCK is the story of an ordinary man who has made an extraordinary life despite tremendous odds.

FILM THEMES

On the surface, BUCK appears to be about horses, but Buck quickly proves that he has a lot more to share with the world than just horse tricks. Use the themes below to help guide your discussion.

ONE MAN'S STRUGGLE

The film highlights Buck's struggle toward forgiveness and peace within himself. He said in an interview: "I knew what kind of human being I hoped to be, and it was going to be so different from [my father... Eventually, at some point, everybody has to decide which way they're gonna allow their life to go."

COMMUNICATION

The secret to Buck's success with horses comes down to communication. In order to communicate with another being, one must be willing to see life through their perspective. This requires time and generosity, for it's much easier to criticize than to try and understand. But to understand and be understood – these are among life's greatest gifts, and every interaction is an opportunity to exchange them.

NATURAL HORSEMANSHIP

People often believe they're having trouble with their horse, when in reality, it's the horse that is having trouble with humans. There are no wild horses with behavioral problems. The problems begin when humans enter the horse's life and require it to act as a human. 'Rehabilitation' must occur in both the owner and horse. Until recently, mankind believed that animals possessed no emotions, no fears, no intelligence, which led to years of animal testing and torture. But recent studies reveal exactly the opposite. Animals are enormously sensitive, and sometimes, shockingly intelligent too. Techniques such as Natural Horsemanship have been incredibly successful and have led to other questions about the relationship between people and animals of all kinds.

CARETAKING

When a violent, dangerous horse arrived at his clinic, Buck became very emotional. "Someone could have helped that horse understand right from wrong, how to fit in, and how to get along in the world. But nobody had been there for the horse to teach him that. It's about taking responsibility and being a responsible parent or a caretaker of an animal, and helping them to learn because you can really have a great effect on them." Perhaps Buck saw himself in that horse. No one took responsibility for him either... until foster mother, Betsey Shirley, came into his life and taught him how to forgive and move forward in life.

“Your horse is a mirror to your soul, and sometimes you may not like what you see. Sometimes, you will.”

Buck Brannaman

“They say nerves heal real slowly. Lots of things about us heal real slowly.”

Buck Brannaman

FILM FACTS:

- BUCK won the U.S Documentary Competition Audience Award at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival.
- In 2012, Buck was named “Horseman of the Year” by Western Horseman.
- The film was recorded over two and a half years with more than 300 hours of footage. After editing it down to an 88-minute documentary, the directors and producers had more than 10 hours of extra footage that they used to create the DVD series, “7 Clinics with Buck Brannaman.”
- Although Buck was uncomfortable with the biographical elements of the documentary, he thought it served a purpose.
- The abuse of the Brannaman boys was well known in their community, but neighbors didn’t get involved. Eventually a female companion of Buck’s father left the house, taking the 12- and 14-year old boys with her. She abandoned them at an Ennis motel.
- Madison County Deputy Sheriff Johnny France had also been abandoned as a child and knew the boys would have a good home with foster parents, Forrest and Betsy Shirley.
- When a court ordered custody of the Brannaman boys to the Shirleys, Buck’s father got very angry. Each year he sent Buck a birthday card threatening to kill him and his brother once they reached age 18. The Madison County sheriff ordered him to leave Montana. Buck later made peace with his father, then living in Oregon.
- A few years ago, Buck suffered a serious injury while playing basketball. It could have confined him to a wheelchair due to excessive nerve damage, but thankfully Buck did recover.
- Buck and Robert Redford became good friends while filming “The Horse Whisperer” in 1998. Buck did not ask Robert to participate in the documentary: “I don’t want to put him in a position that if I ask him to do something he doesn’t really want to do, he would say yes because of our friendship.”
- Buck has held more than 1700 clinics throughout his career.
- 9 months a year, Buck travels the country helping horses with ‘people problems.’ He also works as a motivational speaker.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Gives others an opportunity to be inspired and strengthened by Buck’s life.
2. Learn more about the person and techniques of Buck by watching “7 Clinics with Buck Brannaman,” which includes more than 10 hours of cut film footage.
3. Support victims of child abuse in your community, perhaps by providing a foster home or becoming a mentor to abuse victims.
4. Take the time to learn more about horses and other animals - how they live naturally in the wild and what is really good for them. Then, try to live in a way that respects them.
5. Use your capacity as a human being to treat other people and animals as humanely and respectfully as you would like to be treated.