The horse has been a revolutionary animal in unexpected ways. Horses have shaped the way we speak, what we wear, and they have helped determine the hidden limit for the size of our most massive empires. Their story spans the cosmos from the elements that made it possible for them to thrive through their many functions in our world today. This episode explores important thresholds in the history of the horse, from their near extinction to their dominance on the steppes of Eurasia to their key roles in agricultural societies over time.

**Curriculum Links**

H2’s *Big History* series is a great fit with a range of courses and units on history, science and technology, social studies and global studies. It is most appropriate for high school students but is suitable for middle school students as well. The series can be used as a companion to the Big History Project online course and curriculum. (Visit [www.bighistoryproject.com](http://www.bighistoryproject.com) to learn more.)

**Identification Terms**

The terms below are used in this episode; defining them will help students understand some of the concepts explored in this series. Using a dictionary or another resource, students can find definitions for these terms before or after watching the episode. As they are watching, students can also keep a list of terms from each episode in the *Big History* series to define.

- apex
- carnivore
- cavalry
- domesticate
- imperial
- Industrial Revolution
- nomad
- propel
- tunic
- unprecedented
- wattage

**Discussion Questions**

1. What role did horses play in the spread of language among humans?
2. What are some of the ways horses have shaped your life today including your language, wardrobe and structure of government?
3. Why were horses among the most likely animals to be domesticated?
4. What role did horses play in empire-building? What were some of the issues empires faced as they continued to expand?
5. Why did horses disappear in the Americas, and how did they survive without becoming extinct?
6. How did native people in the Americas respond to the horses brought by the Spanish?
Activities

1. **Expanding Empires.** This episode discusses the role of horses in the expansion of empires. Choose one of these empires and after doing your own research, write a short essay about the role of horses in the growth of this empire.

2. **Energy Pyramid.** In this episode we learn about the role horses played in the energy pyramid and about the way energy is distributed throughout the ecosystem. Create a graphic or chart depicting the energy pyramid and discuss in a larger group.

3. **Horsepower.** The term horsepower was coined by James Watt, an 18th-century inventor who designed a steam engine. What does this term mean? Explore the definition of horsepower and then describe it in a short paper, using your own words. How is the term horsepower used today? What is the average horsepower of a car? What about a racecar?

Reflections After Watching

What were the three most interesting things you learned from watching this episode of *Big History*?

Web Links

Short video on History.com about the taming of the horse:

Interesting article about the DNA of horses:

Background information about the Aztecs and encounters with the Spanish:
[www.history.com/topics/aztecs](www.history.com/topics/aztecs)

Big History Project:
[www.bighistoryproject.com](www.bighistoryproject.com)

Related Books

**NOTE:** These books are recommended for educators and advanced student readers who may want to read selections from these books to further their understanding of the topics explored in this episode.

