

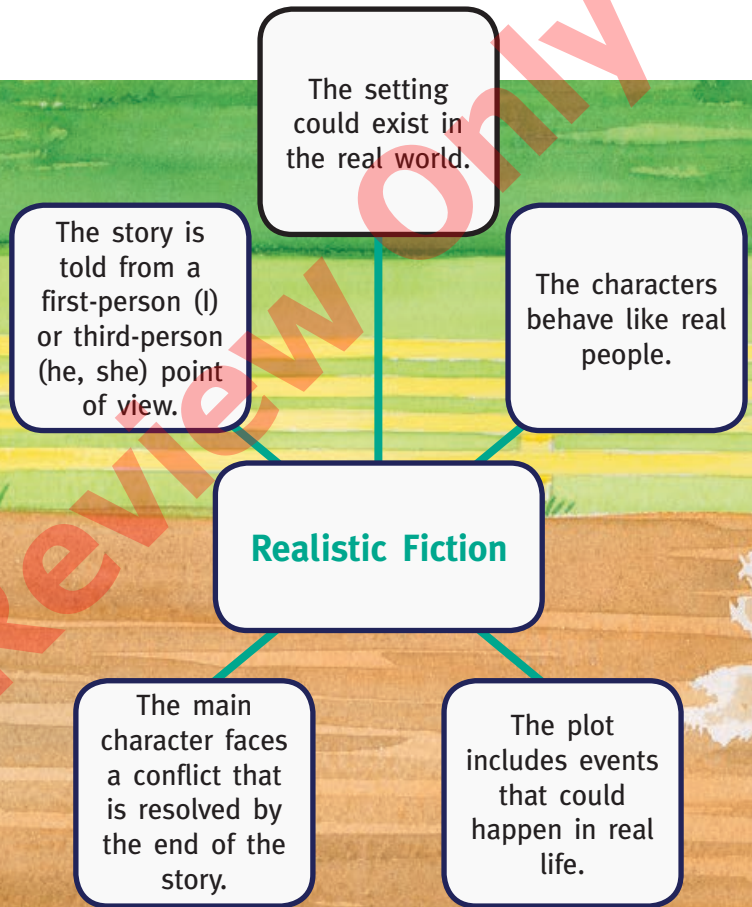
Barreling Toward SUCCESS

by Traci Sorrell • illustrated by Topaz Jones



Realistic Fiction

Look for the genre features noted below as you read this book. Use the features to help you understand the text.



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Arriving at the Rodeo

As soon as Mama slowed down, Autumn unbuckled her seat belt. She jumped out of the truck and called out to her horse. “Usdi, my lightning-fast buddy, are you ready?”

Usdi let out a cry. Autumn opened the heavy door and led him out of the trailer into the rodeo’s dusty parking lot.

It had not been a typical prerace morning so far.

First, she’d had to struggle to get Usdi into the horse trailer. Definitely not normal. He always trotted straight to his trailer when she said it was time to race.

Then, a tire had blown out on their truck as they drove to the rodeo arena. Luckily, another rodeo family had stopped to help change the flat.

Autumn, flustered, wondered how she’d settle both their nerves in time to compete.





Usdi bent his head down toward her, and Autumn gently stroked the small star on his forehead, an act that often seemed to calm her as much as her horse. He rested his head on her shoulder. Her buddy was acting more like the horse she knew—relaxed and ready to race.

“A lot of good horses and riders will be competing today,” she whispered in his ear.

Autumn knew that she was talking more to herself than to him. Although Usdi’s name meant “little” in Cherokee and the other rodeo horses towered over him, Usdi was fast. People were often amazed at how quickly he made the turns around the barrels in the arena.

Like Usdi, Autumn was also tinier than her competitors in the junior barrel-racing circuit.

As a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, Autumn and Usdi raced in the Oklahoma region of the Indian Rodeo Association, which had lots of very fast, highly competitive barrel-racing teams. Now she was competing against other tribal citizens for a spot in the Indian National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, Nevada, in the fall.

Autumn tied Usdi loosely to the side of the trailer.

“This is it,” she told him. “To make it to the finals, we have to win today. There’s only one more race after this.”

Autumn knew Usdi could do it, but she wasn’t so sure about herself. “I can’t even lift the saddle by myself,” she muttered.

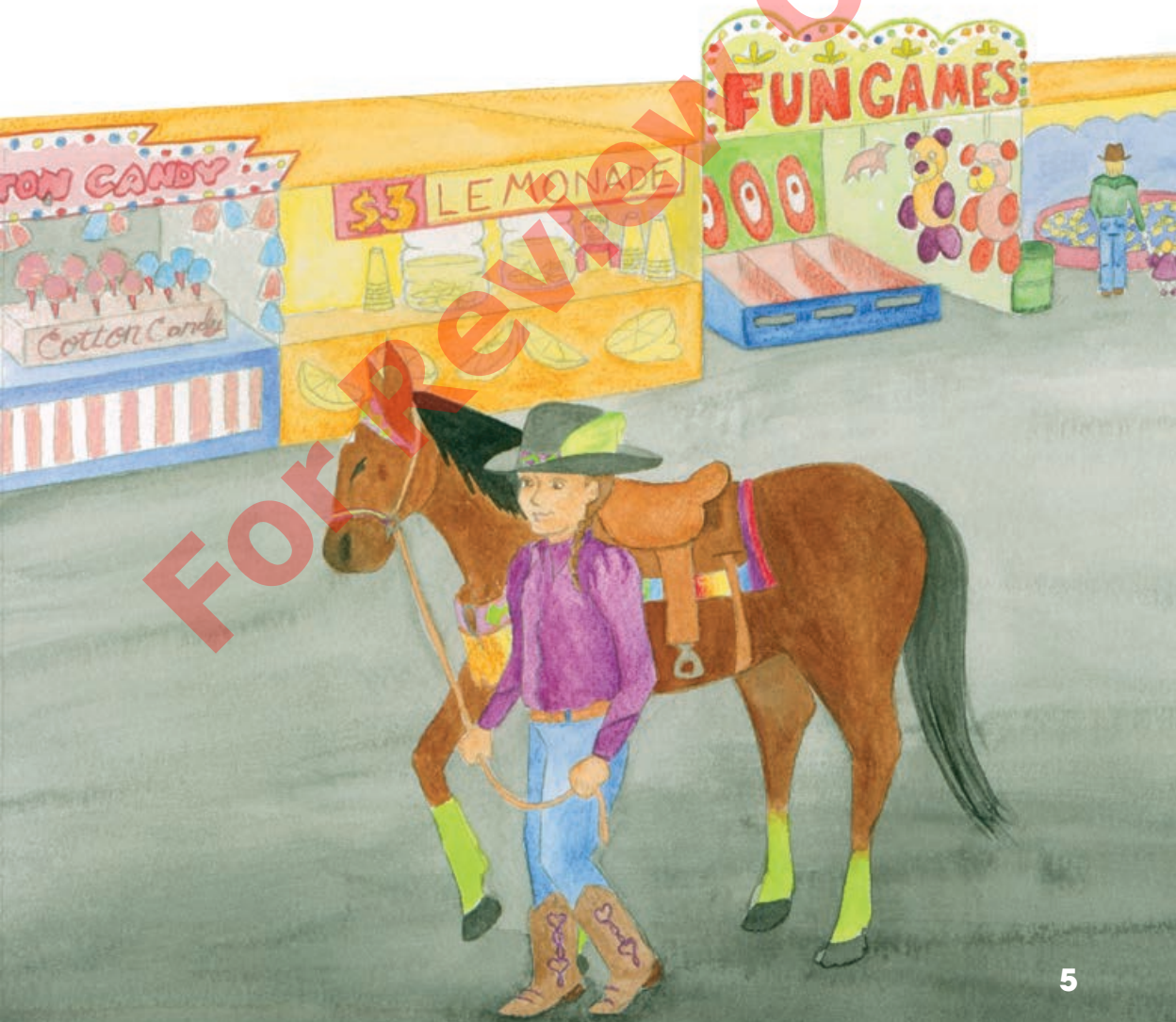
With Mama’s help, she unloaded the equipment. Usdi nuzzled her neck after she spread out his rainbow-colored saddle blanket, and Mama placed the saddle on top. Then Autumn tightened everything in place.

On cue, Usdi lowered his head so Autumn could lift the bright, beaded bridle with a rainbow-colored fringe over his ears. Then she placed the bit in his mouth, just right.

Next she put on his neon-lime leg boots to help protect his legs from injury during the race.

Ignoring the butterflies in her stomach, Autumn smoothed the bright, lime-green feathers clipped to her beaded hatband and stuck the black felt hat on her head.

Finally, she headed off to walk Usdi around the fairgrounds and to warm him up for the afternoon race.



Always Saying Something

“Well, if it isn’t Little Miss Petite and her pint-sized pony.” Autumn knew the voice behind her, yet she still flinched. Kacey Fields, another barrel racer, two years older and a head taller, *always* had something to say. Usually, not so nice.

“How’d you get here so fast?” Kacey said. “Heard you had a flat.”

“Good luck tonight,” Autumn called out, while walking on and not looking back.

“We don’t need it. Ace and I are ready,” said Kacey. “We’re gonna qualify for the nationals! Too bad you won’t!”

Kacey turned her horse and headed back toward the arena. Usdi tensed up and swished his tail.

“There, there, boy,” Autumn whispered into Usdi’s ear as she stroked his mane. He didn’t like the sound of Kacey’s voice, either, but she couldn’t let Kacey rattle them before the race.

Too bad you won’t. Kacey’s words played back in her mind, and part of Autumn wondered if Kacey was right.

“I don’t care what Kacey or what anyone else thinks. We can do this!” said Autumn aloud. She needed to hear some pep talk even if Usdi didn’t.

“Let’s have a good run,” she said, leaning forward and rubbing the side of her horse’s neck.

Usdi whinnied with delight; his renewed excitement boosted her sagging spirit.



When they heard the announcer call for the junior barrel racers, Autumn walked Usdi to the rodeo arena from the parking lot, which was crowded with trucks and trailers. Mama was waiting for them at the end of the alley.

Kacey and Ace were going through their run. Before long, they sprinted back down the alley from the arena.

“How did they do?” Autumn asked her mother.

“15.741,” Mama said, straining to see the time clock.

“What? 15.741 seconds!” Autumn exclaimed. “Is that her best time ever?”

“I don’t know, but I’m sure she qualified for the nationals,” Mama said. “Just like you’ll do. Now get ready.”





Autumn began her prerace routine. She slid down off Usdi and walked him close to the alley entrance. Then she cleaned his feet and gave him some treats.

“Are you ready? Take care of yourself out there,” she said as he nuzzled her neck.

Mama helped Autumn get up in the saddle and secure her feet in the stirrups with rubber bands. Autumn hated having to use the rubber bands but could not afford to lose a stirrup tonight. If she did, she would be thrown off-balance and could lose control of Usdi.

The judge at the end of the alley raised his hand to show that it was time.

Autumn leaned up and gave Usdi’s neck a big smooch. He knew that meant “Go!”