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**LESSON PLAN: Black Elk Speaks, by John G. Neihardt**  
**Chapter 6: “High Horse’s Courting”**  
**Includes: Summary, Study Questions, Writing Prompts**

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**Summary:**

In this humorous interlude we read of High Horse’s attempts to marry a girl from his village. Love is seldom easy and seldom without frustrations, and, as High Horse discovers, it requires careful planning and perseverance.

The “sickness” that besets High Horse begins the moment he is attracted to a beautiful, shy girl, the only child of parents who feel obligated to protect her from male suitors. At night they secure their daughter with rawhide strips to prevent High Horse from stealing her. (They also suspect that their daughter may wish to be stolen.)

The stages of High Horse’s courtship are several, and only the final one succeeds. First, he offers two horses, then four, but the girl’s father dismisses both offers with a wave of his hand. High Horse, whose love sickness grows worse with each rejection, tries to elicit the girl’s sympathy by telling her he will “fall over and die” if she refuses him. When this ploy

also fails, High Horse appears to waste away, going without food and hanging his head in despair.

Finally, a friend, the young Red Deer, decides to help High Horse drag the girl away at night as she sleeps, but High Horse is so nervous that he inadvertently cuts the girl with his knife as he tries to undo the thongs. When she screams in pain, Red Deer and High Horse run away.

The persistent Red Deer now proposes his second plan. He paints High Horse white and black, giving him the look of an evil spirit so that no one will give chase when High Horse steals the girl. Once in the girl's tent, High Horse awakens her mother, who calls out to her husband in fear of an intruder. However, the girl's father goes back to sleep, as does her mother. Unfortunately, High Horse also falls asleep until morning. When the girl awakens, she believes a terrible animal is present in the tent, and her screams compel High Horse to escape to a hollow tree near a river.

The villagers now break camp, though Red Deer and High Horse remain behind to discuss their problems and to develop yet another strategy. Together, they will attack a Crow camp, steal some horses, and offer them to the girl's father.

The attack exceeds expectations: High Horse and Red Deer return with many Crow horses. High Horse presents them to the girl's father, who accepts this generous gift in return for his permission for High Horse to marry his daughter.

Significantly, we learn the girl's father was not as concerned about receiving horses as he was about finding a "real man" for his daughter.

### **Study questions:**

1. How do the parents of the girl attempt to guard her from any male suitors? (There may be more than one answer.)
2. When High Horse speaks to the girl on the first occasion, what does he discover about her opinion of him? Does this discovery make him feel better or worse?
3. What is High Horse's first offer to the girl's father? His second?
4. How does the father respond to these two offers?
5. What does High Horse say will happen to him if his courtship is unsuccessful?
6. Why does High Horse need a knife when he goes into the girl's tent?
7. On one occasion the girl yells loudly. Explain.
8. Why does Red Deer paint High Horse white and black?

9. Someone says “Old Man, wake up!” Identify someone.
10. When the girl awakens, she believes she sees something and screams. Identify something.
11. A hollow tree performs a specific function for High Horse. Explain.
12. Red Deer and High Horse kill someone. Identify someone.
13. How long does it take for Red Deer and High Horse to drive the horses from the Crow village to the Lakota village?
14. Explain what High Horse learns about the girl’s father at the end of the story.

**Prompts for student writing:**

1. Black Elk refers to High Horse’s feelings for the girl as a “sickness.” Does this term accurately describe High Horse? Provide specific evidence to support your position.
2. The stages of courtship are difficult and complicated in this story. Based on your own observations or personal experience, do you agree with this view of love? Is love really difficult and complicated? Support your response with examples and illustrations—with details. This prompt may require a full essay.
3. Discuss the humor in “High Horse’s Courtship.” Take evidence from the story itself.