



Churchill Downs is a Perfect Place for a Field Trip

May 7, 2022 by Educator Barnes

It is May! These three words for Hoosiers are synonymous with the Indy 500. However, to our border neighbors down south, May means it is time for the Kentucky Derby which is another great race.

I was born in Kentuckiana ... Jeffersonville, Indiana to be exact. Jeff, as it is commonly known by locals, is one mile from Louisville or as many southern Indiana residents say “right across the bridge from Louisville.”

Louisville, Kentucky is the home of the Kentucky Derby. The Kentucky Derby is the longest continuous race in America. Just like Hoosier students can go down to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway (IMS) to visit the IMS Museum and learn about racing cars and the Indy 500, teachers can also plan a similar trip for their students to the Churchill Downs in Louisville.

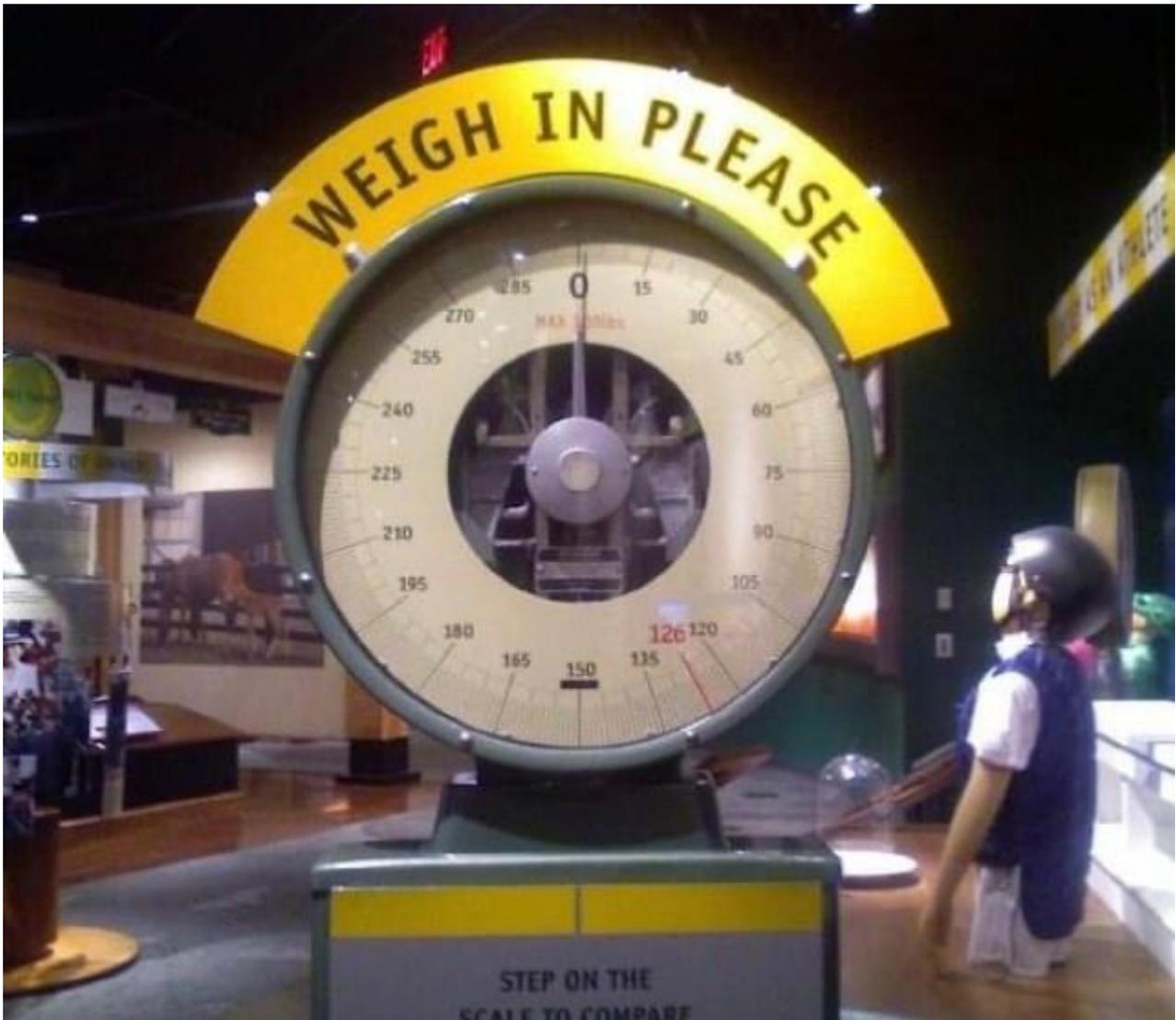
Early in my career as an English teacher, I went to Churchill Downs on a Saturday with my 6th grade students to learn about horse racing and the Kentucky Derby. The distance between Indy and Louisville is short enough for a day trip.



Kentucky Derby Museum Fall 2008

Inside the Kentucky Derby Museum, my students learned what a thoroughbred horse was and that only three-year-old thoroughbreds can race in the Derby which means the same horse

can never win more than one year in a row. Additionally, students learned what it takes to be a jockey including the stringent weight requirements jockeys must maintain.



Kentucky Derby Museum – Compare Your Weight to Jockey Scale



Students watch Educator Barnes compare her weight to the weight of a jockey.

My students also learned why the Derby is called the most exciting two minutes in sports. Unlike the Indy 500, the Derby race is only two minutes long. None of my students knew this and were shocked. They were able to see horses race from the stands which gave them a feel of what it is like during the Derby.



Indiana students watching a race at Churchill Downs



As a Black teacher, I also try to show the Black history on any topic I share with students. I love saying to students, “I wonder what Black people were doing.” Sometimes I will ask, “Do you think Black people were part of this?” Honestly, you can do this with any group of people.

A book I recommend is “The Last Black King of the Kentucky Derby: The Story of Jimmy Winkfield” by Crystal Hubbard. The book focuses on Jimmy “Wink” Winkfield. He won the Kentucky Derby twice in 1901 and 1902. 1902 is the last time a Black jockey has raced to victory in the Derby. Winkfield had over 2,600 horse racing wins during the course of his career. This book is a story of perseverance and lets students know the Black history of the Kentucky Derby. Lee & Low Books has a guide that teachers can use with the book.

If teachers want additional resources about the Kentucky Derby, the Kentucky Derby Museum provides resources online for teachers to use with their students.

The Kentucky Derby is more than Derby pie, bourbon balls, mint juleps, and fancy hats. There is a rich history students can learn which can easily be tied to social studies, science, math, and

English standards. One part that resonated with my students was all of the careers they learned about while attending the field trip at the Churchill Downs.

Bookmark this page and consider planning a field trip to Louisville, Kentucky with your students.