

Written Comprehension

King of the Cowboys
By Ty Murray, 2003

General comprehension

1. Who is the narrator ? The narrator is a cowboy and apparently a very famous one. His nickname is « King of the Cowboys ».. He practises rodeo and is a champion who won a prestigious title. He may be the author, Ty Murray, as the book seems to be an autobiography and is written in the first person narrative.
2. Right or Wrong, justify by quoting the text
 - a. The narrator is being interviewed for the first time. Wrong. l.1 « I've been giving interviews most of my life »
l. 10,11 « After several thousand interviews »
 - b. The scene takes place in a concert arena. Wrong. l.3 « We were outside the locker room at a Professional Bull Rider event »
 - c. The narrator is surprised to be asked why he is a cowboy. Wrong. l.7,8 « after a few minutes he asked that question, the one I'd heard more than any other since I'd begun riding »
 - d. He quickly answers the question though. Wrong. l.11,12 « But I still have a hard time answering it »
 - e. He says it is quite easy to become a champion when you like riding. Wrong l.35 « I'd been working to win that first all-around championship since I was two years old »
3. Find two sentences which show that the journalist doesn't understand what a cowboy is.
 - l.21 « Still, I needed to give it another shot »
 - l.30 « I wasn't sure I was getting through to this reporter, so I tried another tack »

Detailed comprehension

1. Explain in your own words

a. « **the concept** of the cowboy way **is so foreign to some people** that **I have a hard time** boiling it down to a simple sound bite. »

Is so foreign to some people : people usually have a wrong image about cowboys. We are influenced by Westerns we watched. Those stereotypes are far from being reality.

The concept/I have a hard time : For the narrator, being a cowboy is a concept, that means a way of life which goes beyond hats and boots. It is then very difficult for him to give a precise definition as it is more something you feel.

b. « As far as I was concerned, asking a cowboy why he's a cowboy is like asking a Frenchman why he's French »

What the narrator tries to explain is that being a cowboy is in your genes and is part of your identity like a nationality can be. You don't choose it, it comes to you and you must accept it.

2. From the definition the narrator gives of a cowboy, can you imagine what he means ?

"A cowboy is a cowboy no matter how he makes his living," I said. "Not all of us wear chaps and hats. You'll find plenty cowboys wearing Brooks Brothers' suits on Wall Street, or playing in the NFL. Those real estate developers who borrow millions to build big office towers, a lot of them are cowboys. The cowboy way is about how you approach things, whether you're talking about a businessman, an artist, or a housewife. Being a cowboy is in your DNA. You either have it or you don't."

Being a cowboy is not necessarily living in a ranch and riding a horse. He says that a businessman, a housewife or an artist can be cowboys. It actually depends on how you lead your life and your values. Being a cowboy is following a code. A code that has been, if not written, deeply rooted in the centuries and respected by those men.