

May 2022

## How we assess for humane content

There is a wide range of children and young adult books that deal with animals. Animals take different roles in books. Books that show the human-animal bond and the intrinsic value of animals are the types of books we would like to recommend.

In order to promote animal welfare we ask ourselves these questions when assessing books to recommend:

1. Are the animals anthropomorphized (given human characteristics) or are they realistic?
2. Does the book promote positive or negative attitudes towards animals? (pets as family members)
3. Are the animals well cared for? (kept indoors, positive training methods, etc.)
4. Are animals stereotyped? (i.e. are rottweilers portrayed as mean and vicious)
5. Are the facts about the animals correct?
6. What lessons can be learned from the book to improve animal welfare?

Classroom Activity: Have students answer the above questions about books they read or books you ask them to review.

## CHAPTER BOOKS

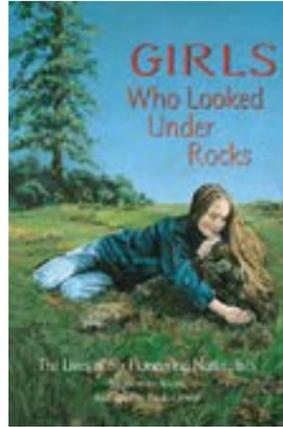


### **The Summer We Saved the Bees** by *Robin Stevenson*

Reading level: Grades 3-6

When twelve-year-old Wolf is inspired by a project at school, he and his family embark on a journey to bring awareness to the collapse of honeybee colonies. Donning bee costumes and painting their van to resemble a bee, the family sets off from Vancouver Island to travel across British Columbia, educating people on the importance of pollinators and what they can do locally to prevent bee extinction.

This fascinating story captures how a family unites their passion to save bee colonies in North America, and how education plays a vital role in spreading this message. The family's journey unfolds with laughter, adventure and compassion, concluding that making a difference can take many forms, but as long as the world has hope, the future for bees can be bright.



**Girls Who Looked Under Rocks** by Jeannine Atkins, illustrated by Paula Conner

Reading Level: Grade 7+

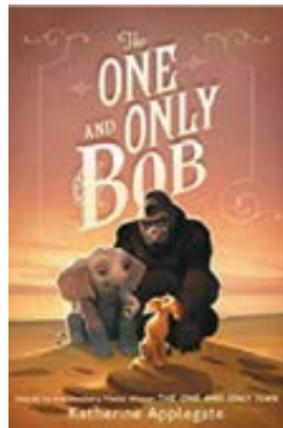
From the lesser-known Maria Merian to Anna Comstock to the well-known Jane Goodall, this book explores the lives of six women who would overcome sexism and gender biases to become world-renowned scientists, artists and writers.

From a young age, these women were drawn to a world filled with bugs, animals, plants and fossils. As their girlhood interest in nature turned to fierce determination to protect wildlife and their habitats, they went on to fight limitations placed on women to follow their dreams of protecting, researching and teaching about the natural world.

Detailed illustrations accompany each story, helping to create a colourful look into the

women and their experiences.

Inspiring and empowering, this chapter book encourages readers to connect with their surroundings while also starting an important dialogue and teaching others about the issues of gender, the environment and the importance of being unique. While a short read, the author provides a list of other resources to continue learning more about these remarkable women and the natural world.



**The One and Only Bob** by Katherine Applegate

Reading Level: Grades 3-5 (content is suitable for young adults as well)

For students (and adults!) who loved *The One and Only Ivan*, author Katherine Applegate has come through with a beautiful sequel featuring Ivan and Ruby's canine friend, Bob. *The One and Only Bob* tells the tale of a self-described "mutt" of uncertain breed, "Definitely some Chihuahua, with a smidgen of papillon on my father's side."

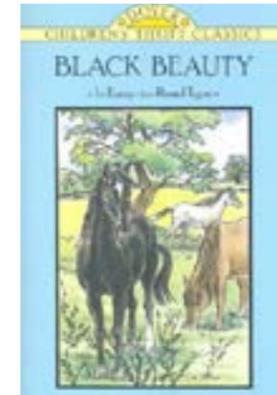
Fans of the first book (now a movie) will love spending more time with Bob, as well as revisiting the themes of friendship, loyalty and animal welfare that made it more than just an adventure story. Applegate never makes animals "human" but rather helps humans see life through the eyes of animals, for better or worse. She starts off the book with a practical visual guide to canine body language, as well as a glossary of "dog

language" that Bob uses, like drool flag and bed boogie.

Bob's story is a good read for many reasons, but the author's effort to help readers get into someone else's shoes, or in this case, paws, and feel from their perspective is one of the most effective ways to build empathy. In this excerpt she describes how Bob came to be a puppy alone in the cruel world:

"Being man's best friend can mean a lot of things. Companionship. Belly rubs. Tennis balls. But it can also mean a dark, endless highway, and an open truck window. It can mean the smell of the wet wind as hands grab the box you are in with your brothers and sisters and you go sailing into the unkind night and still, crazy as it sounds, you're thinking, But I'm yours, I'm yours, I'm yours."

*The One and Only Bob* by Katherine Applegate is available in book, ebook and audiobook.



**Black Beauty** by Anna Sewell

Reading Level: Grade 5+

First published in 1877, Anna Sewell's classic tale of a horse named Black Beauty was a positive force for change in the treatment and welfare of horses at the time, and still offers lessons in kindness and empathy for us to draw from today. From his days as a young colt, through his many hardships as a London cab horse, to his final days in retirement, we follow the journey of Black Beauty, seeing the world through his eyes as he discovers how humans can be capable of showing cruelty and indifference, or compassion and kindness.

Black Beauty is a thinking, feeling and reasoning character and exploring the story from his perspective allows the reader to develop empathy for all animals. This is a wonderful novel for any animal lover and shorter chapters make it an ideal story for parents and kids to enjoy together.



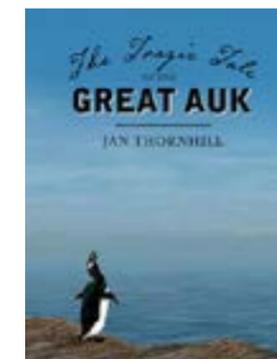
**Manatee Blues** by Laurie Halse Anderson

Reading Level: Grade 4+

Brenna, a volunteer at the Wild at Heart Animal Clinic, is thrilled when she is invited to Florida by Dr. Mac, where she will get to visit a manatee rescue center. But the visit to the Gold Coast Rescue Center is not all fun and games—Brenna soon learns that manatees are in grave danger, as boat strikes in manatee habitats have been injuring and endangering these curious creatures. On top of this, the Gold Coast Rescue Center is quickly running out of money... if the center is forced to close, who will care for the poor gentle giants, the manatees?

This exciting and fascinating story is part of the Vet Volunteers series by Laurie Halse Anderson. It features a compassionate protagonist who wants to make a difference in animals' lives. Her bravery and passion for animals also lead her to educate others about humans' capability to either harm or help wildlife. This book, one in a larger series of novels, will help kids become aware of their impact on the environment and how humans must be mindful of animals in the wild.

Educators should note that Brenna has a pet crow. Keeping wild animals as pets is illegal in Canada.



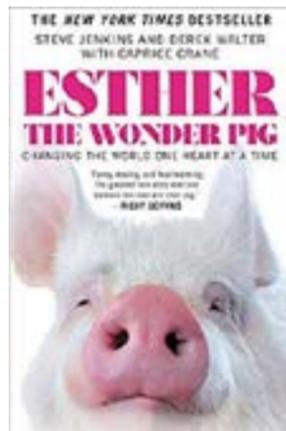
**The Tragic Tale of the Great Auk** by Jan Thornhill

Reading Level: Grades 5-7

When the Great Auk went extinct in 1844, did anyone make a sound? The answer might surprise you. Canadian author Jan Thornhill explores the fascinating history of this flightless Arctic bird, from its physiology, natural behaviors and habits to its eventual extinction. A non-fiction read, this book touches on Inuit perspectives of sustainable land management, and delves into the ethics of using and collecting wild animals for human purposes.

Young readers are asked to question the biological, geographical and human forces that cause an animal's extinction, and what they can do to help. Ultimately, the reader is left with an unexpected benefit to the Great Auk's tragic tale – the creation of a protected ecological preserve.

The book also includes a map, glossary and index of other extinct species for further inquiry.

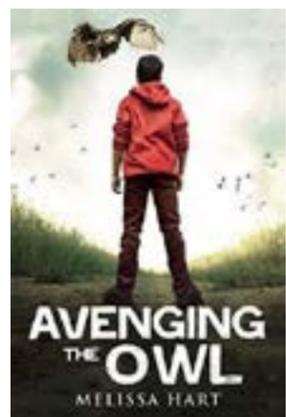


**Esther the Wonder Pig: Changing the world one heart at a time** by Steve Jenkins and Derek Water with Caprice Crane

Reading level: Grade 8+

In *Esther the Wonder Pig*, Steve Jenkins and Derek Water recount the trials and tribulations of bringing a farm animal into their home as a pet, discovering their “micro pig” would reach a staggering 600 pounds, and transitioning from their urban Toronto home to a farm where they can legally have Esther. As their story unfolds, readers experience the challenges Jenkins and Water faced when Esther entered their lives. With accompanying photos of Esther growing up, this heartwarming book gives readers get a sense of just how much a piglet can change.

Esther is also a social media sensation, with active Instagram and Facebook pages where readers can keep up to date on Esther and her whole family. Esther challenges readers to consider the social divisions we have placed between pets and farm animals. Her personality changed the lives of those she lives with, and the minds of many others who follow her antics online.



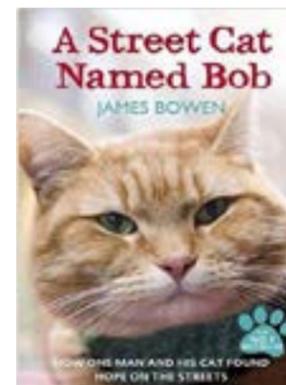
**Avenging the Owl** by Melissa Hart

Reading Level: Grade 7+

Knowing right from wrong isn't always easy, and 13 year-old Solo is about to find that out when he is sentenced to community service at a raptor sanctuary after he tries to shoot the owl that killed his kitten. Solo works closely with a Great Horned Owl, named Artemis, and is forced to confront his dislike and prejudice, as well as his own grief. The bond they form is one of understanding, forgiveness, and ultimate redemption.

This young-adult, fiction novel, by Melisa Hart, explores mature themes surrounding growing-up, mental illness, friendship, loss, grief and compassion. It challenges students to think critically on a variety of topics, including personal identity and the value of all animals' lives. This story is partially based on the author's own experience as a wildlife volunteer, and Hart's knowledge of raptors' natural behaviours. It paints a realist

picture of these often misunderstood predators. This book is an honest exploration of tolerance, animal stereotypes, and prejudice.



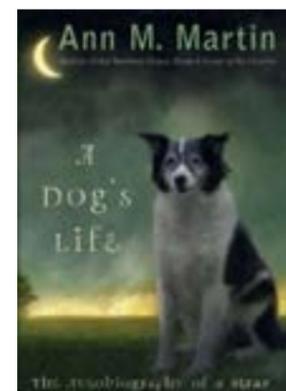
**A Street Cat Named Bob** By James Bowden

Reading Level: Grade 6+

James Bowden is a young man suffering from drug addiction on the streets of London. He is lonely and hopeless, barely surviving on the small amount he makes from busking. When a stray cat comes into his life the last thing he needs is another mouth to feed, but he feels connected to the cat whose run-down condition and life of hardship seems to mirror his own. A strong bond quickly develops between James and the stray, whom he names Bob, as they struggle through life's obstacles with humour and determination.

Almost any pet guardian will relate to James and Bob's connection; however this story goes much further to illuminate the reciprocal nature of a pet and guardian relationship. As a homeless man and an addict, James describes feeling invisible to strangers. Unexpectedly, it is his cat who humanizes him to other people and allows him to reengage with the world and share his story. The unconditional trust that Bob puts in James makes James determined not to let him down. Through Bob's eyes he learns to see himself as someone who can be relied upon, deserving of love and companionship. James repays Bob by providing him with the best care he can give and illustrates many ways in which low-income pet owners can still provide optimal animal welfare.

*A Street Cat Named Bob* offers many opportunities for critical thinking and addresses social issues that many of us experience or observe every day, such as homelessness, addiction and oppression. Students can consider how all animals and humans have the same basic needs and rights, and why those needs are met for some but not for others. The empathy James feels for Bob reminds us of the empathy we should strive to feel for all the animals and humans that we encounter throughout our lives.



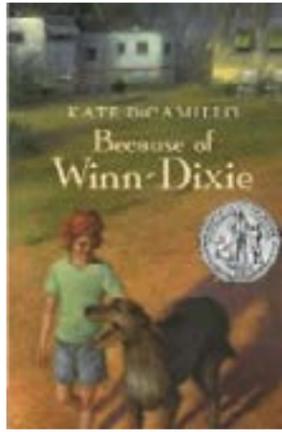
**A Dog's Life: The Autobiography of a Stray** by Ann M. Martin

Reading Level: Grades 4-7

*A Dog's Life* tells the story of two young, orphaned pups, Squirrel and Bone, who must find a way to survive in the world. They have learned from their mother's experience how to avoid humans and find food, but when she doesn't return to the shed, they set out on their own to explore the world around them. After narrowly escaping being hit by cars, they are taken home by strangers. Since Squirrel and Bone have never lived indoors their stray dog habits of eating trash and howling to go outside soon land them back on the streets in a mall parking lot. Squirrel is left behind when someone takes Bone home with them.

Left on her own, Squirrel must now defend herself and find food and a warm place to sleep. She faces many challenges but also finds kindness along the way. Will she ever find a person to care for her and give her a warm place to sleep?

Through this heart-touching story, told from the dog's perspective, readers understand how early experiences can influence a dog's behaviour forever, but how kindness and patience can help them learn to trust humans.

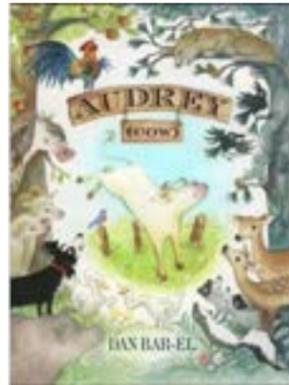


**Because of Winn-Dixie** by Kate DiCamillo

Reading Level: Grades 3-4

*Because of Winn-Dixie*, the Newberry Honor book, deals with friendship, human-animal bond and coping with loss.

When India Opal Buloni sees an ugly, skinny dog getting in trouble she comes to his aid by claiming ownership. She just moved to Naomi, Florida with her father who has taught her about helping those in need. Since Winn-Dixie was in need of a home, food and love he quickly becomes part of the family. This new companion is just what India needs to help her meet new friends in town. Her new friends aren't typical friends for a 10 year old but they all share one thing in common, they miss someone. India manages to get her unique groups of friends together for a party but during the party Winn-Dixie is scared by a crack of thunder and runs away.

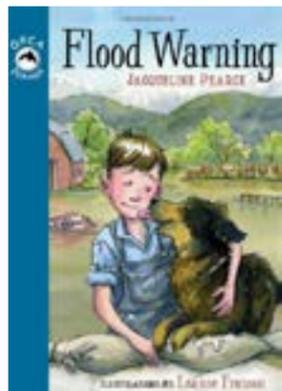


**Audrey (cow)** by Dan Bar-el, illustrated by Tatjana Mai-Wyss

Reading Level: Grade 6+

Audrey the cow has a zest for life, and she doesn't want to end up in the meat aisle of a grocery store. The story of Audrey's escape from the farm is told with humour and charm through short "interviews" with various animals and people, showing different perspectives of the same event. The author doesn't shy from the reality that farms raise food animals, and that some animals will be killed, but he does it with a gentle touch and with humour (for example, the animals mishear the word "abattoir," referring to the dreaded place the truck takes animals who never return as "Abbot's War").

You can use this story to initiate a discussion of where our food comes from and how animals might perceive their reality living on farms. Do farm animals know their fate?

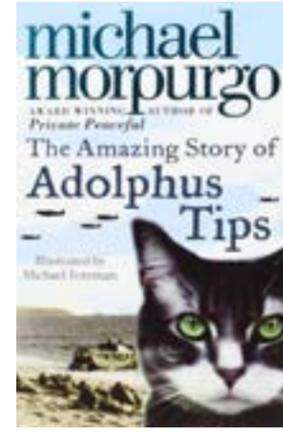


**Flood Warning** by Jacqueline Pearce, illustrated by Leanne Franson

Reading Level: Grade 3+

A young boy saves his family's dairy herd from a flood with the help of his dog, Amos. This is an exciting, easy-to-read chapter book based on a real situation that happened when British Columbia's Fraser River flooded in 1948.

Teacher extension: The novel is told from the perspective of the boy, Tom. Have students write the story from the point of view of the mother cow or her calf, or from the perspective of Amos the dog. How does the little calf feel when water starts to creep over the farm and she is separated from her mother? Does Amos feel like a hero when he is asked to help lead the cows to safety, or is he just having fun as usual?



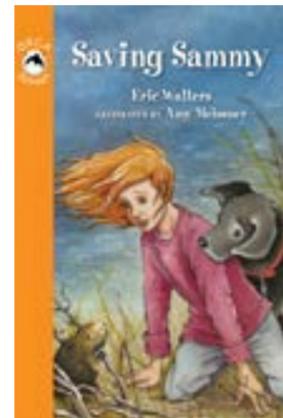
**The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips** by Michael Morpurgo, illustrated by Michael Foreman

Reading Level: Grades 4-7

In the south of England during World War II, Lily's family and 750 others are told they must leave their homes behind so soldiers can use the land to practice for the upcoming D-Day invasion. But when evacuation day comes, Lily's beloved cat, Tips, runs away. With barbed wire surrounding her village, will Lily be able to sneak back in and find Tips?

*The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips* touches on various themes, including the human-animal bond and the importance of friendship and keeping our promises. Readers may imagine themselves in Lily's situation and consider how they would feel and what they would do. This book also touches on some animal welfare issues specific to its time and place. Classroom discussion could certainly arise around why Tips the cat is not spayed and continues to have litters, and why Lily's parents say they must drown the kittens they cannot care for, even though Lily opposes it.

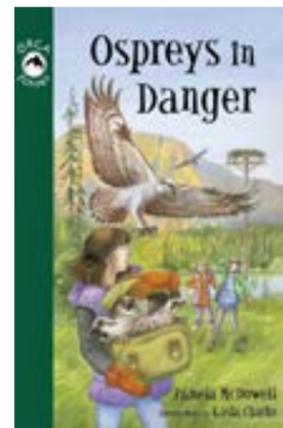
A wonderful piece of historical fiction for young readers, *The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips* is a great read for animal lovers, history buffs and anyone who likes a good story.



**Saving Sammy** by Eric Walters, illustrated by Amy Meissner

Reading Level: Grade 3+

After Morgan's backyard is flooded by a nearby river, her dog finds a baby beaver unable to survive on his own. Morgan and her family care for the beaver kit (with guidance from a wildlife expert) until he can be returned to the wild.

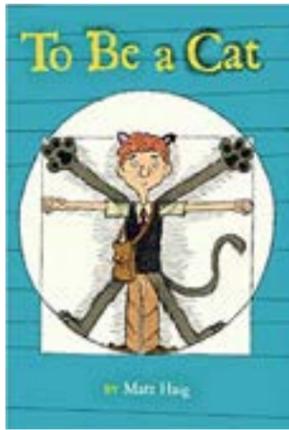


**Ospreys in Danger** by Pamela McDowell, illustrated by Kasia Charko

Reading Level: Grade 3+

When an osprey nest atop an electrical pole catches fire, Shilo and her friend find three osprey chicks on the ground. With the help of Shilo's park warden father, the girls look after the chicks, hoping to reunite the chicks with their parents.

With *Saving Sammy* and *Ospreys in Danger*, discuss with students why looking after orphaned wildlife is never a good idea because of the specialized care they need. It is also against the law to keep or care for any B.C. wildlife without a permit. Before handling any injured or orphaned wildlife, students should contact a wildlife rehabilitation centre (wrnbc.org) for advice.



**To Be a Cat** by Matt Haig, illustrated by Stacy Curtis (Atheneum, 2013)

Reading Level: Grades 4-7

When facing difficult challenges at school and tough times in his family life at home, 12-year-old Barney Willow figures life would be a lot easier if he could live as a cat. When his wish unexpectedly comes true, Barney quickly discovers that life as a cat is anything but simple.

Barney doesn't fit in at school and, while neither does his fiend Rissa, she handles bullying much better than he does. Though the idea that you can disappear into someone else's skin is intriguing for the getting students to empathize, the story may well be used as a launching point to talk about issues of bullying and how it affects people in different ways.



**Kit: The Adventures of a Raccoon** by Shirley Woods

Reading level: Grades 2-5

*Kit* chronicles the first few years in the life of a young raccoon.

Though he starts life with two siblings, Kit soon finds himself the only survivor of his litter when his sisters are subjected to predators and human activity. Later, when he is old enough and on his own, Kit's adventures include encounters with other wildlife, track hounds, traps and humans.

While some anthropomorphizing is apparent, it doesn't take away from the realistic nature of the story. Kit's story will intrigue young readers and provide them with an accurate portrayal of a raccoon's life in both an urban and wild setting.

Though out of print, *Kit* can still be found for sale online.



**Sharing Snowy** by Marilyn Helmer, illustrated by Kasia Charko

Reading level: Grades 2-4

Ali loves cats and dreams of having one of her own, but unfortunately her brother Jay is allergic. Unable to have a feline friend at home, Ali is thrilled when she discovers a white cat hanging out in her backyard clubhouse. She names her Snowy, and quickly becomes all-consumed with being a good guardian. She brings her leftovers to eat, makes her a comfortable bed and even leaves her beloved teddy bear with Snowy at night to keep her company.

Everything seems to be going well until Ali sees a "Lost Cat" sign at the store with a picture of Snowy. Ali doesn't want to give Snowy up but knows that she belongs to someone else who also loves her. Reluctantly, Ali returns Snowy to her guardian,

Ruby. Ruby is ecstatic to have Snowflake (Snowy's real name) back home. She can see that Ali has taken good care of the cat so she invites her to visit anytime – the best gift Ali can imagine.

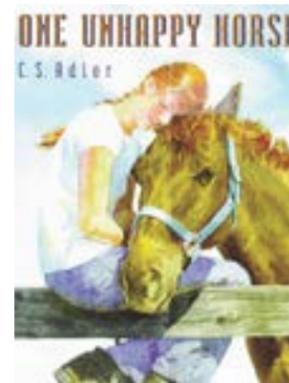


**Ten True Animal Rescues** by Jeanne Betancourt

Reading level: Grades 3-5

A hamster hero and a gentle gorilla are just two of the stars of *Ten True Animal Rescues* that will surprise you. Read about a pup who digs a young girl out of a snow bank, a family dog that saves his human family from a fire, and a cat who alerts a mom to her suffocating baby. These are just some of the amazing stories that will delight and amaze young readers. The content is engaging and will likely be re-told by the reader to anyone who will listen!

Some of the stories from long ago ("Shark Attack!") seem a bit embellished and others ("Lost at Sea") will make you question the welfare of the animal. However, these tales also emphasize the change in attitudes towards animals over the years, and can lead to some interesting class discussions.



**One Unhappy Horse** by C.S. Adler

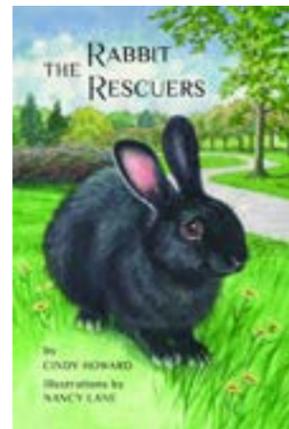
Reading level: Grades 4-6

Jan could talk to her father. But when he dies in a car accident, Jan is left with many changes in her life.

She finds comfort spending time with her horse Dove. When Dove needs expensive surgery and mom is already finding it difficult to pay the bills, Jan finds true friendship in an unlikely source.

Mattie is a forgetful older woman who lives next door in an assisted living home. Mattie loves horses and reminisces about her childhood horse. Jan visits Mattie regularly and becomes like the granddaughter Mattie never had.

When Mattie offers to loan Jan the money for the surgery, it becomes complicated.



**The Rabbit Rescuers** by Cindy Howard

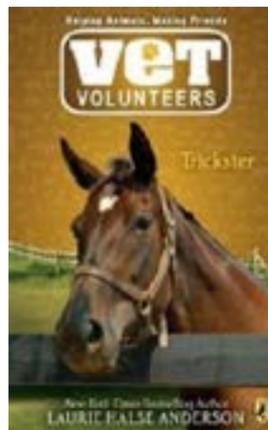
Reading level: Grades 3-5

When twins Kate and Zack reluctantly move to the suburbs, they feel certain the change is for the worse. All seems hopeless until they meet Paityn and Marijane, the quirky cousins who live next door. Happily for the twins, the girls share their love of animals and sense of adventure. Together, they are drawn into the secretive world of abandoned rabbits in the park across the street. Seeing firsthand just how dangerous this world can be convinces the new friends to form a club to help the rabbits.

The story is both gripping and heartwarming, strengthened by the fact that the setting is a real-life park and the rabbit characters are loosely based on real-life rabbits and their harrowing experiences. By giving abandoned rabbits a voice, the author brings into focus the plight of pet rabbits everywhere who have been left outdoors to fend for

themselves.

Just as importantly, *The Rabbit Rescuers* shows young readers the power they have to make a difference. Young readers are sure to follow along with pleasure as Kate and Zack open themselves up to new friendships and experiences.



**Trickster** by Laurie Halse Anderson

Reading level: Grades 3-5

David, who loves horses, is a volunteer at the Wild at Heart veterinary clinic. When he sees Trickster, a horse from Quinn's Stables, he immediately knows that this is the horse he wants to ride. But David's gotten into trouble at the stables before, and he must regain Mr. Quinn's trust through hard work before his dream of riding Trickster can come true.

Readers will relate to David as they cheer for him as he struggles to prove himself, taking a few missteps along the way. *Trickster* uses scenes at the stables and vet clinic to demonstrate the importance of responsible pet care, as well as being accountable for all of our actions.

*Trickster* features plenty of animal care and veterinary details, character development and a few suspenseful twists.



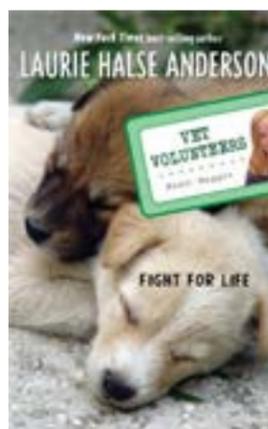
**Kittens in the Kitchen** by Lucy Daniels

Reading level: Grades 3-5

*Kittens in the Kitchen* follows Mandy Hope as she races to find homes for four newborn kittens. Mandy is told she has just a week to adopt out the kittens before Mr. Williams the custodian will "deal with them" himself.

With the help of her friends, family and neighbours, Mandy perseveres to not just find homes for the kittens, but to find responsible, loving guardians. The task isn't easy, but Mandy doesn't give up. In between her search for four great homes and taking care of the mother cat and kittens, Mandy keeps up with her responsibilities as a guardian to her own pets at home.

*Kittens in the Kitchen* is a great book that demonstrates what can be done when one caring, dedicated person makes it their mission to make a difference.



**Fight for Life** by Laurie Halse Anderson

Reading level: Grade 4+

Maggie thinks that living at the Wild at Heart Animal Clinic is pretty cool but her grandma, the vet who owns the clinic, wants Maggie to make school work her first priority, not the animals.

When the clinic takes in several very sick puppies, all of whom came from the same local farmers market, Maggie decides she has to put a stop to this. Even though her grandma has cut Maggie's time in the clinic dramatically until her grades improve Maggie makes finding the puppy mill owner a priority.

This is a great novel for any students who love animals. It is the first in a series of books about young vet volunteers.



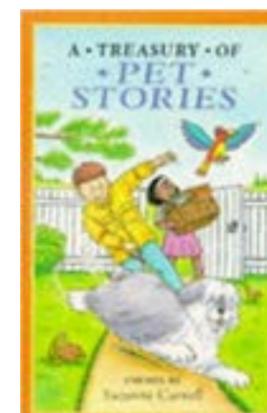
**Little Joe** by Sandra Neil Wallace

Reading level: Grades 3-5

*Little Joe* is a heart-warming story that explores family relationships and the bond between humans and animals. Eli, a young boy, raises his first show calf, Little Joe. With this comes the responsibility of caring for another living thing which brings with it some hard lessons in reality.

*Little Joe* is written in straightforward but appealing language that will work for both urban and rural kids. City kids will be able relate to the lessons Eli learns and will gain better insight into life on a farm for both children and animals.

*Little Joe* is a great classroom or at-home chapter book that gives a glimpse of life on the farm.



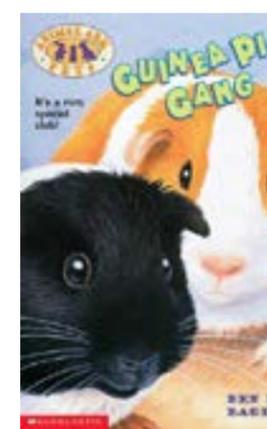
**A Treasury of Pet Stories** by Suzanne Carnell

Reading level: Grades 3-4

Featuring 16 short stories by noted children's authors including Beverly Cleary and Judy Blume, *A Treasury of Pet Stories* touches on many aspects of the human-animal bond.

In "Henry's Canine Teeth," a boy enlists his dog's help to impress his friends. In "Dribble," a child's pet turtle goes missing in the most unexpected way. And in "Posy Bates Goes Green," a young environmentalist holds a pet show to raise money to plant trees – with chaotic results.

The tales in *A Treasury of Pet Stories* can be used to entertain and to ignite classroom discussions of responsible pet guardianship and animal welfare. What do the characters do right, and what could they do better? This collection is excellent for reading aloud or independently.



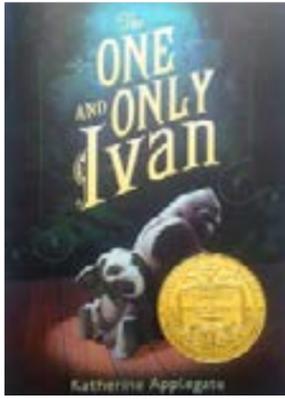
**Guinea-pig Gang** by Lucy Daniels

Reading level: Grades 3-5

In this installment of the Animal Ark Pets series, protagonist Mandy Hope and her friends are gaga for guinea pigs – so much so that they form a "Guinea-pig Gang" to bring their pets together and to talk about proper care.

When one of the girls, Lisa refuses to bring her guinea pig, Carla to the group, Mandy knows that something's up. As Mandy soon discovers, Lisa would love to take part, but her big sister poses a big problem. When Lisa must prove herself as a responsible pet guardian or risk losing Carla forever, Mandy helps her hatch a plan to become the blue ribbon winner at the local pet show.

A chapter book suitable for grades 3 to 5, *Guinea-pig Gang* teaches crucial lessons about the responsibility of pet care, and the importance of knowing what's involved before bringing an animal home.



**The One and Only Ivan** by Katherine Applegate

Reading level: Grades 3-5 (content is suitable for young adults as well)

*The One and Only Ivan* is the Newbery Medal-winning story of Ivan, a wild-born gorilla who now lives, and works, at the Exit 8 Big Top Mall and Video Arcade. Ivan spends his time watching TV, drawing pictures for the gift shop to sell and pondering the ways of humans. Though he has an elephant friend named Stella, a dog friend named Bob and a young human friend named Julia, Ivan lives alone in his cage. He is the only gorilla he knows. One day, a baby elephant named Ruby is brought to the Big Top Mall. Other changes happen, too. Ivan starts to see his world differently, developing a new purpose – and a plan – to fulfill a very important promise.

Told in short, poetic chapters, or vignettes, *The One and Only Ivan* is a beautifully written and moving book. It subtly asks the reader to contemplate how humans treat animals, particularly wild animals in captivity. Why do some humans help while others cause harm? Is there such a thing as a “good zoo”? What can we do, as individuals and as a society, to improve the lives of animals? Through the artfully imagined voices of Ivan and his friends, as well as human characters like the young girl, Julia, and the boss and the Big Top Mall, Mack, the author paints a heartbreaking but hopeful portrait of the lives of animals in captivity.

While recommended for a grade 3-5 reading level, *The One and Only Ivan* should not be limited to a specific age group. Read it aloud to younger students or recommend it to teenagers and adults; this is a story for all ages.



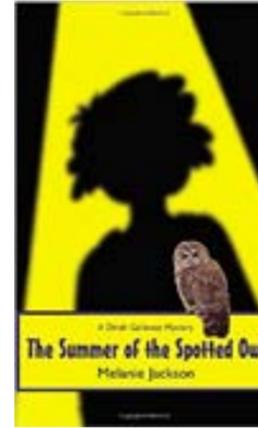
**The Nine Lives of Travis Keating** by Jill MacLean

Reading level: Grades 4-6

Travis feels more alone than ever when he and his father move to a small town after his mother dies of cancer. But his discovery of a colony of abandoned cats gives Travis a chance to put aside his grief and anger to care for them, a decision that results in more satisfaction – and more danger – than he could have ever imagined.

*The Nine Lives of Travis Keating* is a poignant and compelling book. Readers will likely be able to empathize with Travis, perhaps even crying with him and cheering for him as he struggles to find his place in the world. The characters are well developed and the relationships between them are complex; no one – not even the town bully – is one-dimensional. Moreover, there is enough action to keep even the most reluctant reader interested.

Though the story centres on Travis’ efforts to help the cats, MacLean masterfully weaves together diverse themes such as bullying, abuse, grief, loneliness, poverty, alcoholism, stereotypes, friendship, lying, forgiveness and responsibility. As such, *The Nine Lives of Travis Keating* is a versatile book that will work well as a read-aloud and a discussion starter.



**The Summer of the Spotted Owl** by Melanie Jackson

Reading Level: Grades 4-6

Dinah Galloway, a young sleuth, always seems to find intrigue and adventure and this time it involves the endangered spotted owl.

A strange sequence of events peaks Dinah’s inquisitive mind. Her inflatable turtle is stolen by a inept hang glider that crashes into the backyard pool. Rownea is acting very secretive about the contents of an old trunk. A reporter for the local newspaper shows up just minutes after these things happen and the city councilor has a quick change of heart about protecting the spotted owl in North Vancouver. Are these things all connected or just coincidence? Dinah and her friends set out on a hilarious adventure to put the puzzle pieces together during their summer vacation.

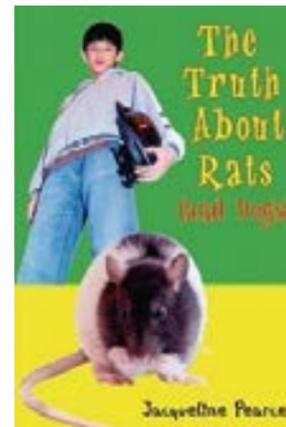


**Dog House Blues** by Jacqueline Pearce

Reading Level: Grades 3-5

*Dog House Blues* is the first in a series of books written especially for the BC SPCA Kids Club. The story is about Erika who finds it difficult living in a house with 3 dogs. Smelling of dog cologne is not a good thing when you’re trying to make a good impression at school and the class bully doesn’t like dogs. Worrying about making new human friends causes Erika to forget what her dog friends mean to her - until a crisis opens her eyes.

The novel, aimed at kids ages 8 to 12, shows some of the less glamorous aspects of being a dog guardian (such as picking up dog doo!), but it also highlights the close bond that develops between a girl and dog who have grown up together.



**The Truth about Rats (and Dogs)** by Jacqueline Pearce

Reading Level: Grades 3-5

Rats are dirty, sneaky and scary, right? Wrong!

Conner knows what it’s like to have people decide something about you without even knowing the facts. He is expected to be good at school and music because he looks Chinese and his big sister Jenna is great at both. Conner is good at doing stunts on his BMX bike, and he loves animals, but his parents have a no-pets rule. The last animal Connor ever wanted for a pet was a rat, that was until he meets Oscar, a rat at his local animal shelter. Conner finds himself offering to foster Oscar - even if it means hiding him from his mom and dad. Connor soon realizes he will have to stand up for Oscar and for himself, even if that means confronting his parents head on.

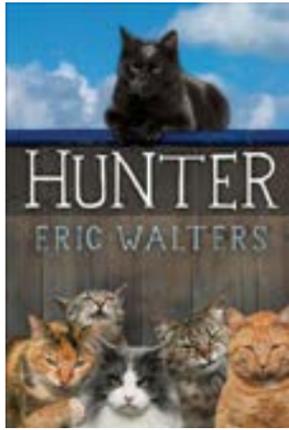


**Who Took Henry and Mr. Z?** by David Glaze

Reading level: Grades 3-4

The story is about how two young sleuths who set out to solve the mystery of the missing guinea pigs. Henry and Mr. Z are classroom pets of Mrs. Whitestar's grade five class. When the two are missing one morning everyone is anxious to find them. The next day it is discovered that not only were the guinea pigs stolen but so was money from the teacher's desk. Are the two crimes connected?

This young mystery novel is very believable and a good introduction to the mystery genre. Kids will be able to relate to the characters and the situations they get into at school. It also imparts the message of commitment and care for these small animals.



**Hunter** by Eric Walters

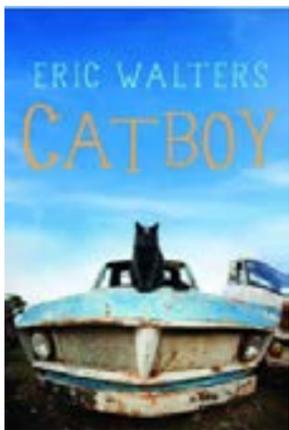
Reading level: Grade 4+

In this follow-up to his young adult novel, *Catboy*, about a boy named Taylor trying to save a feral cat colony at a junkyard, Eric Walters tells the same story, this time from the point of view of one of the feral cats, Hunter.

Based on previous experiences, Hunter distrusts humans. How will he react when Taylor and his friends start showing up at the junkyard? Will he grow to trust them? The novel's perspective gives students the chance to consider how feral cats might view human behaviour and to better understand the differences between feral and domestic cats. Anthropomorphizing is used for the purpose of the point of view as well as some aspects of the plot; while not always realistic, this approach does work to evoke empathy in the reader. Unfortunately, some animal welfare issues are not ad-

ressed; most notably, the opportunity to mention spay/neuter to prevent overpopulation is lost.

*Hunter* is sure to entertain, while also offering educators a springboard to animal welfare-related lessons and discussion.



**Catboy** by Eric Walters

Reading level: Grade 4+

*Catboy* tells the story of Taylor, who has recently moved from a small northern town to the diverse metropolis of Toronto. Everything in the city is new to Taylor, including a feral cat colony that he discovers with his friend, Simon.

Taylor, called Catboy by an older bully, quickly takes an interest in the cat colony. When a new condominium development threatens the cats' survival, he vows to come up with a solution.

*Catboy* touches on some important information regarding feral cat colonies, as well as the issue of anthropomorphizing animals. Unfortunately, it neglects to discuss the sterilization of feral cats or their effect on wild birds, both issues that could be raised

in classroom discussions of the story.

Interspersed are messages about cultural diversity, gentrification and the question of morality vs. legality – all of which offer the possibility of further critical thinking and discussion. *Catboy* offers a page-turning and thought-provoking read.



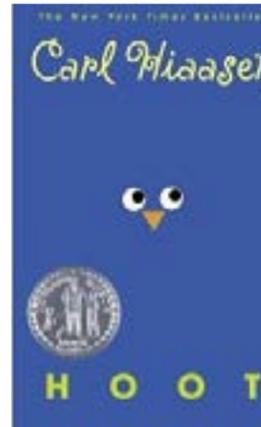
**Scat** by Carl Hiaasen

Reading level: Grade 5+

During a science field trip to Black Vine swamp, the much feared teacher, Mrs. Starch goes missing after a wild fire breaks out.

Even though the students welcome the break from their teacher, something just doesn't feel right so Nick and Marta start to investigate. They suspect "bad boy" Duane as having something to do with their teacher's disappearance but once they find clues they soon discover they have misjudged him and their teacher.

As they start to unravel the mystery they stumble upon a scam by an oil company and an endangered puma. All of this makes for an exciting adventure young readers are sure to enjoy.



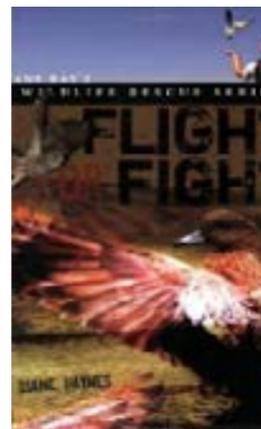
**Hoot** by Carl Hiaasen

Reading level: Grade 5+

Roy just moved from Montana to Florida and he quickly becomes the target of the school bus bully. But when Roy gets his head squished up against the school bus window he is intrigued by a barefooted boy running down the street. Roy sprints off on a mission to find out more about this "wild" boy.

Soon he gets involved in this boy's creative tactics to stop the building of a restaurant in order to save the endangered burrowing owls (also endangered in BC) that live underground on the land about to be bulldozed.

This story may inspire young readers to critically examine land use decisions and take a stand for causes in which they believe.

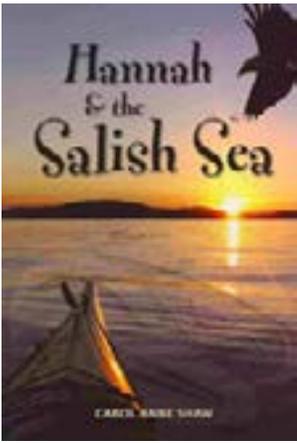


**Flight or Fight** by Diane Haynes

Reading Level: Grade 6+

When Jane rescues a drowning seabird from an oil spill, she doesn't realize this will change her life. After taking the bird to the Urban Wildlife Rescue Centre she gets interviewed by a TV crew and speaks out against the company responsible for the spill. This grabs the attention of both the Sea King Shipping Pacific executives and the star football player at school.

Jane commits herself to working with and for the animals at the Urban Wildlife Rescue Centre. She volunteers her time and makes a plan to get Sea King to do the right thing. Jane finds love, friends, passion and danger.



**Hannah and the Salish Sea** by Carol Anne Shaw

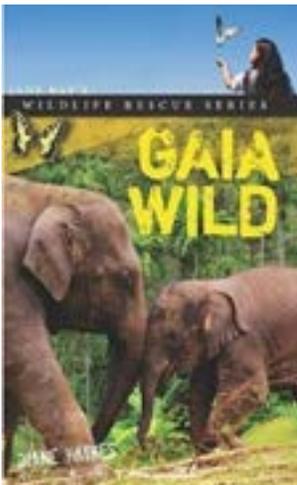
Reading level: Grade 6+

Hannah plans on enjoying her summer vacation hanging out with her friend Max and working part-time at the Salish Sea Studios. Her plans are upturned, however, when her curiosity about unexplained events turns into suspicion of criminal activity.

Along the way, Hannah meets Izzy, a reluctant summer resident who is sent to work with her mother's friend Ramona at the Salish Sea Studios to get in touch with her First Nation's roots. The three teenagers put clues together – and themselves in danger – to explain how an accidental eagle death, the grisly discovery of a dead bear cub and some strange new people in town are all connected. This quest culminates in a midnight kayak paddle to an abandoned tuna boat where they soon have to fight for their lives and the lives of the animals being hunted for their body parts.

*Hannah and the Salish Sea* will appeal to youth ages 12 and up and adults alike. This novel deals with serious matters in a sensitive way that allows the reader to enjoy the plot as it unfolds. The characters are very realistic, and teen readers will relate to the frustrations and pressures they endure as well as the victories and self-discovery they achieve.

Concepts in this novel that can be expanded upon in other subject areas include, peer pressure, bullying, poaching and pride in culture.

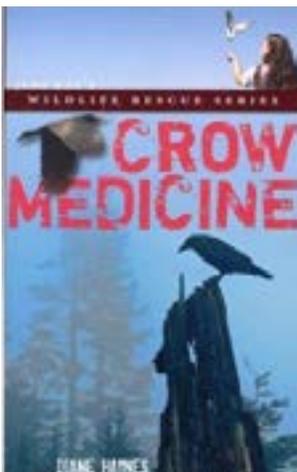


**Gaia Wild** by Diane Haynes

Reading Level: Grade 6+

This time Jane and her friends are working on a movie set. Everyone in town seems to be star struck with the exception of Jane. She can't prove it but senses something isn't right with the animals on set. Gaia, the elephant, is performing on command and has spent her whole life in captivity. Jane finds out the Gaia's life is on the line and intends to do something about it, with the help of her best friends Amy and Flory.

The adventures continue and heads will roll in the latest book in this series that is sure to be gobbled up by students.



**Crow Medicine** by Diane Haynes

Reading Level: Grade 6+

Jane, a young volunteer at the Urban Wildlife Rescue Centre in the Fraser Valley, loves animals and has a particular interest in crows. The threat of West Nile Virus puts the wildlife centre in a difficult position. Since crows are the messengers of the disease and could pass on the virus to humans the controversial decision is made to euthanize all crows that come into the wildlife centre for the safety of staff and volunteers. This sets off protests and threats by animal rights groups and donors who don't agree with the decision. A timely donation allows Jane and her two best friends to embark on a road trip to the Rocky Mountain Wildlife Hospital to get an expensive vaccine to save the crows. This becomes quite an adventure for the young heroine and her pals.