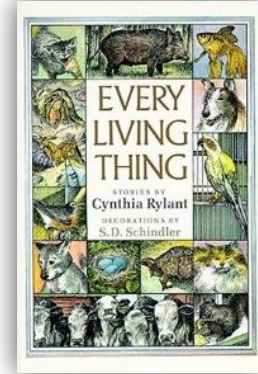


Title: Every Living Thing
Author: Cynthia Rylant
Grade Level: 4th Grade



SUMMARY

Have you ever had a special friendship with an animal? Anyone who has had a pet knows that animals can be great comforters, helpers, and friends. Cynthia Rylant's book, *Every Living Thing*, is a collection of stories about humans and animals. Your family will enjoy meeting many different animal friends, like cats, dogs, bird, turtles, cows and more! You and your child will be touched as the animals lift the hearts of characters and pull them through hard times. Many children will relate to the characters in these stories who feel misunderstood or lonely, and will celebrate as each one finds a furry, feathered, or scaly friend to trust. Animal lovers will be hooked on these stories of love and companionship between people and their pets.

QUESTIONS TO TALK ABOUT WHILE READING

VOCABULARY

It's important to make sure that your child has an understanding of key words in the book. Talking about words while reading is a great way for your child to learn new words.

In this book, you might talk about these words:

- sympathetic (pg. 1)
- bearing (pg. 14)
- serenely (pg. 28)
- timidly (pg. 43)
- disdain (pg.58)
- solemnly (pg. 70)
- prejudiced (pg. 75)

You might use a question like:

In the book, what does the word timidly mean? Be sure to use the rest of the words in the sentence to help you figure it out. Together, act out how the puppy was standing and acting in this paragraph.

KEY IDEAS and THEMES

In addition to words, it's important to talk about key ideas and themes and how they develop over the course of the book. Here are some examples to get you started:

1. Why do you think the author named the first story, *Slower than the Rest*? Talk about how Leo feels about his status in school. What are some reasons Leo is so attached to his turtle Charlie? Ask your child to describe similarities between Leo and Charlie. Finally, after finishing this story, ask, "What did the author mean when she said, 'For the first time in a long time, Leo felt fast?'"

2. After reading *Boar Out There*, ask your child how the story made him or her feel. What words or details make you feel this way? After talking about this, ask: "What do you think the mood of the story is then?" As you ask your child this question, remind him or her that the mood is the feeling the author creates in the reader.
3. Ask your child to tell you what Mr. Willis is like in *Planting Things*. Encourage him or her to point out some words in the story that describe his personality. Why does the author repeat the line – "Mr. Willis was a man who enjoyed planting things" – at the beginning and end of the story?
4. The setting in *A Bad Road for Cats* is a great thing to talk about in this story. Ask your child to describe the story's setting. What kinds of places are there? What words and phrases does the author use to help you picture this setting? After reading all of the stories, describe the settings in each one. How does the setting play a role in each story? How is it connected to the characters and plot?
5. After reading each story, ask your child, "What is the relationship like between the main person and animal in this story?" As a family, talk about the major problem in each story. What is the conflict here? Make sure your child uses the book to help him or her think about this. How does the relationship between the human and animal solve this problem?
6. What is the author's attitude towards animals? Reread the epigraph at the beginning of the book together. How do the words in this Biblical verse connect to the stories in the book? Ask your child to describe how the stories in the book connect to each other. What does the author want you to think after reading these stories?

EXTRA ACTIVITY

Every Living Thing is a great book about animal/human relationships. There are also a lot of movies that show the same thing. Do you know of some? As a family, watch a movie that shows how humans and animals help each other out and develop close relationships. How does the movie's story compare to the stories in *Every Living Thing*? Here are a few movies about humans and animals you could watch:

- Free Willy
- Seabiscuit
- Air Bud
- Marley and Me
- Ring of Bright Water
- Babe
- Dolphin Tale