



Why the Wild Things Are: Animals in the Lives of Children

By Gail F. Melson

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Why the Wild Things Are: Animals in the Lives of Children By Gail F. Melson

Whether they see themselves as King of the Wild Things or protector of Toto, children live in a world filled with animals--both real and imaginary. From Black Beauty to Barney, animal characters romp through children's books, cartoons, videos, and computer games. As Gail Melson tells us, more than three-quarters of all children in America live with pets and are now more likely to grow up with a pet than with both parents. She explores not only the therapeutic power of pet-owning for children with emotional or physical handicaps but also the ways in which zoo and farm animals, and even certain purple television characters, become confidants or teachers for children--and sometimes, tragically, their victims.

Yet perhaps because animals are ubiquitous, what they really mean to children, for better and for worse, has been unexplored territory. *Why the Wild Things Are* is the first book to examine children's many connections to animals and to explore their developmental significance. What does it mean that children's earliest dreams are of animals? What is the unique gift that a puppy can give to a boy? Drawing on psychological research, history, and children's media, *Why the Wild Things Are* explores the growth of the human-animal connection. In chapters on children's emotional ties to their pets, the cognitive challenges of animal contacts, animal symbols as building blocks of the self, and pointless cruelty to animals, Melson shows how children's innate interest in animals is shaped by their families and their social worlds, and may in turn shape the kind of people they will become.

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

The study of children, suggests Purdue professor Melson, has tended to be *humanocentric*, with the role of animals in childrens' lives ignored. Yet, as she amply demonstrates, young people often seem to have a closer relationship with their pets than they do with their parents. It is from animals, the author argues, that children first learn about love, loss, and loyalty; it is with animals that children learn how to nurture. Children, she suggests, may even understand animals better than they understand adult humans, since animals' behavior is simple and straightforward. It seems rather obvious that kids have a special bond with their pets, one that may never be re-created with a human, so it may come as a surprise to some readers just how unexplored this area of child development is. Those looking for a pop treatment of the topic may find Melson's rigorous study a bit tough going, but for anyone willing to work at it, this perceptive, groundbreaking account sheds valuable new light on a fascinating subject. *David Pitt*

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Review

As [Melson] amply demonstrates, young people often seem to have a closer relationship with their pets than they do with their parents...Children, she suggests, may even understand animals better than they understand adult humans, since animals' behavior is simple and straightforward. It...may come as a surprise to some readers just how unexplored this area of child development is...This perceptive, ground breaking account sheds valuable new light on a fascinating subject. (David Pitt *Booklist* 2001-02-15)

[This book is] a reminder that each generation of humans needs an environment of living things to thrive as surely as it needs oxygen and water. It is an alert, warning us to ensure that children not lose their sense of connection to other species as they grow into adulthood. Obviously, this is an important book, not only because it provides a corrective lens for those in Melson's own field of study, but because it effectively argues for the importance of correcting the myopic vision of the culture at large. (Marion W. Copeland *H-Net Reviews* 2001-07-01)

A particular animal book recently printed is worth sharing with you. Gail Melson's *Why the Wild Things Are* won't teach you why elephants weep or why cats paint. But Melson, a professor of child development at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind., will give you fascinating insights into how kids interact with pets, wildlife and livestock. (Phil Arkow *Courier-Post* 2001-06-17)

Melson has prepared a fascinating and thought-provoking book whose time has come. What varying roles do animals in the home, yard, classroom, park, and zoo play in the psychological, social, physical, and moral development of children? As Melson so thoroughly points out, scholars and researchers alike have long ignored the developmental consequences of relationships between children and animals...Melson explores the various impacts of keeping pets and effectively presents children's use of animals as symbols in exploring, clarifying, and reflecting different facets of children's sense of self...In this balanced look, Melson does not fail to point out the troubled side of some child-animal relationships, featuring a candid look at possible links between animal abuse and family violence and animal neglect and abandonment. (M. M. Slusser *Choice* 2001-11-01)

[*Why the Wild Things Are*] draws on psychological research, history and children's media over a 10-year period to examine youngsters' connections to animals and how their experiences may shape them as adults.

The book also explains how caring for pets helps children develop nurturing skills...Caring for a pet is a gender-neutral responsibility and can be especially valuable for boys who may feel, rightly or wrongly, that other forms of nurturing compromise their masculinity. (*Pet Age* 2001-10-01)

[A] fascinating new book...Melson says the child-animal connection is underresearched, underestimated, and underutilized. It's not that every child needs a pet, but every child benefits from exposure to animals, she says, whether it's fish in a bowl, pigeons in a park, or zebras at the zoo. (Barbara F. Meltz *Boston Globe* 2002-01-17)

About the Author

Gail F. Melson is Professor of Child Development and Family Studies at Purdue University.

Users Review

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Jenny Dill:

Do you have favorite book? When you have, what is your favorite's book? E-book is very important thing for us to find out everything in the world. Each book has different aim or perhaps goal; it means that reserve has different type. Some people sense enjoy to spend their the perfect time to read a book. They may be reading whatever they take because their hobby will be reading a book. Consider the person who don't like reading a book? Sometime, particular person feel need book once they found difficult problem or perhaps exercise. Well, probably you will require this Why the Wild Things Are: Animals in the Lives of Children.

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George Seal:

Reading can called thoughts hangout, why? Because when you are reading a book mainly book entitled Why the Wild Things Are: Animals in the Lives of Children your head will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in every aspect that maybe unfamiliar for but surely can become your mind friends. Imaging just about every word written in a book then become one contact form conclusion and explanation that will maybe you never get ahead of. The Why the Wild Things Are: Animals in the Lives of Children giving you a different experience more than blown away your brain but also giving you useful information for your better life in this particular era. So now let us show you the relaxing pattern this is your body and mind is going to be pleased when you are finished examining it, like winning a sport. Do you want to try this extraordinary investing spare time activity?

Rebecca Lopez:

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