

ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL

The Bestselling Classic
by James Herriot

An American Library Association Best Book
For Young Adults

Reviewed by:

The New York Times, The New York Times Book Review, Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, San Francisco Chronicle, Chicago Tribune, Chicago Tribune Book World, Houston Chronicle, The Atlantic Monthly, Time magazine, Kirkus Reviews, Library Journal, Publishers Weekly

Lexile Measure®: 990

Accelerated Reader: Book Level 6.8; Points 26.0

A ST. MARTIN'S GRIFFIN NONFICTION
TEACHER'S GUIDE

 St. Martin's Griffin / New York

www.stmartins.com



*Teacher's
Guide*



COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

This is an ideal nonfiction book for middle school and high school readers. We've included the Common Core State Standards for grades 9-10 as an example or guide to use as you develop a curriculum for your students.

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RL.9-10.6	SL.9-10.1b	W.9-10.7
RL.9-10.9	SL.9-10.1c	W.9-10.9
RL.9-10.10	SL.9-10.1d	



TO THE TEACHER

A bestselling memoir that has entertained and spoken to generations of readers for more than four decades, *All Creatures Great and Small*, James Herriot's timeless account of becoming a veterinarian in the English countryside, is the sort of book that routinely tops "my favorite" lists everywhere. And it's easy to see why: Herriot's stories of humor, pain, service, kindness, grace, respect, tradition, diligence, medical development, the bonds between mankind and animals, and appreciation for life itself are as irresistible as they are accessible, as moving and charming as they are readable and fun. Thus his collection of vignettes makes an ideal text for today's classrooms; brimming with anecdote and adventure, with observation and wonder, Herriot's heartfelt account has long appealed to lovers of great storytelling (and animals) and reluctant readers alike.

This teacher's guide, keyed to this edition of *All Creatures Great and Small*, offers a number of different approaches to, and questions about, the book. The first part is meant to help students follow the narrative and understand its key points and details; the second focuses on exploring the text as a class (via discussion, collaboration, and so on). The third section lists related secondary sources and ideas for student research topics, and the fourth and final section addresses defining words and phrases across a range of idioms, usages, backgrounds, and contexts.



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COMPREHENDING THE PLOT, DETAILS, AND THEMES OF THIS TEXT

1. In chapter 2 of his classic autobiography, James Herriot frets to himself about what living in Yorkshire and working as an assistant veterinary surgeon will be like: “I cursed my fevered imagination . . . It couldn’t be as bad as that” (p. 9). Were his concerns ultimately realized? Looking back over the arc of Herriot’s narrative, were things “as bad” as he’d feared?
2. “I was beginning to learn about the farmers and what I found I liked,” writes Herriot in chapter 7 (p. 47). “They had toughness and a philosophical attitude which was new to me.” As a reader, how would you paraphrase this “attitude”—this way of thinking and being, this outlook on life? Why is Herriot fond of this outlook? Cite a passage or two from the text in support of your views.
3. Chapter 14 begins with the author mentioning “all those hours [he spent] making up medicines. But our drugs didn’t come to us in proprietary packages [so] we had to [dispense] a wide variety of carefully compounded and largely useless remedies” (p. 89). There are several other passages in this book—in chapter 3, for example, or chapter 58—where Herriot refers to the bygone medicines or outdated remedies of his profession. Locate a few of these other passages, and then cite them in order to reflect on how Herriot regards medical and scientific “progress.”
4. Look again at the last line of chapter 18: “Dinna meddle wi’ things ye ken nuthin’ about!” (p. 108). Translate what is being said here. Who is speaking to whom, and why is this assertion being made?
5. Explain why Herriot so prefers—as we learn in chapter 25—lambing to calving.
6. At the end of chapter 28, the author muses: “If only vetting just consisted of treating sick animals. But it didn’t. There were so many other things” (p. 173). Identify and describe some of these “other things”—particularly those you think

Herriot himself might name. As a reader, how would you interpret the tone of this remark? Is Herriot complaining about his work, or lamenting it in some way?

7. “You did all right for a Kentucky Minstrel!” a farmer says to Herriot in chapter 31 (p. 186). Explain this comment, and the “minstrel” image at its core. Do some outside reading or independent research to determine the significance of this image, if necessary.
8. Revisit the passage in chapter 36 where Herriot looks “back to the time [he] had decided to become a veterinary surgeon” (p. 216). What led him to desire this line of work? Why does he add that his rationale, “seemed a frail basis on which to build a career?” Does Herriot like his job? Why do, or don’t, you think so? And what exactly does he mean by calling himself “a tiny wheel in the great machine of British agriculture?”
9. Why, near the outset of chapter 40, does Herriot walk around the grounds calling out the names of those he’s visiting, rather than simply “[going] to the house and [asking] if the farmer [is] in” (p. 244)? Describe the etiquette, protocol, or logic being used here.
10. “I finished the inspection by examining the wall in front of each cow,” Herriot notes in chapter 42. Why does he do this?
11. A novel called *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is referenced in chapter 50. Explain this literary allusion. What is this novel about—what does it concern; what story does it tell—and why is Herriot reminded of it? What prompts him to refer to it?
12. At the conclusion of his medically successful, yet



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socially awkward encounter with a penny-pinching butcher named Mr. Dumbleby, Herriot writes that the butcher speaks “as though the words [have] been forced from him by a power beyond his control” (p. 360). What does he mean? What is this “power”?

13. In chapter 54, Herriot aids a special cow named Strawberry. He writes: “As I stared at her an organ began to play somewhere in the back of my mind; not just a little organ but a mighty instrument with gleaming pipes climbing high into the shadows of the cathedral roof” (p. 343). Given the context of this encounter—given what has happened to Strawberry, and how Herriot regards what has happened—explain this imagery. In particular, explain its “cathedral” aspect.
14. When referring to a collection of antique medical instruments that his boss, Siegfried Farnon, has never bothered to throw away, Herriot says that the old tools comprise “a silent testament to sixty years of struggle” (p. 382). What does he mean? Why is it that Herriot himself, by his own admission, could likewise never throw these instruments away?
15. What is it that motivates Siegfried to enact a “bloodletting” in chapter 59? Why does he say to Herriot: “I’m going to take you back to the Middle Ages” (p. 383)? What did the medieval practice of bloodletting entail, and why was it once a fairly common practice? Do some research into these questions, if necessary.
16. In chapter 64, one of Siegfried’s old friends says to him: “The funny thing is I don’t think you really try” (p. 416). Siegfried’s reply: “Try? Try what?” Explain this exchange. Based on your understanding of Siegfried as a character, what is being communicated—or perhaps only hinted at—here?
17. Late in this book, the author states that a certain calf—who has just been delivered by a cow named Candy—looks “like something out of Disney” (p. 431). Explain this visual simile. Where else in these pages did you, as a reader, encoun-

ter animals that you associated with Disney? Conversely, where, if at all, did you find animals that contradict that image?

18. Reflecting, near the conclusion of *All Creatures Great and Small*, on the life that he and his wife, Helen, came to share, Herriot describes “a peace, a sleepy insinuating charm” within the Yorkshire countryside. Does this kind of peace-laden locale still exist today—in Yorkshire or anywhere else? Do you think Herriot himself would say that such a locale still exists? Explain your views, and justify them with citations from the text.



QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES FOR CLASS DISCUSSION AND COLLABORATION

1. In chapter 1 of this narrative, a sarcastic and derogatory character known only as Uncle tells the typically hard-at-work Herriot: “You can ‘ave your book learning. Give me experience every time” (p. 4). Discuss this remark as a key theme of *All Creatures Great and Small*. Do all of the small farmers and countrymen in this book feel as Uncle does? What about Herriot himself—how do you think he would finally answer the debate about knowledge vs. experience?
2. Revisit the end of chapter 7, where Herriot compares (as he does at other points in his book) working in the city with working in the country. Shortly thereafter, at the beginning of chapter 8, he likens looking out over the Yorkshire countryside to “taking time out of life” (p. 51). What does he mean by this? In small groups, talk with your



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classmates about Herriot's impressions of living and working in the country. Then, reconvene as a class and talk about what Herriot likes about the country, and why.

3. "I often wondered what drove him on," writes Herriot of Siegfried Farnon (p. 51). Many pages later, Herriot refers to him as "my gifted but mercurial boss" (p. 216). Write a short paper describing the character of Siegfried as you comprehend him. What do you think drives or motivates him? Why do you think he's so "mercurial"?
4. In chapter 19, remembering how he watched a batch of newborn piglets gather around their mother, Herriot writes: "I couldn't say how long I had been standing there looking at the wonder that never grew stale" (p. 116). Make a list of other such moments—moments defined by wonder—that you recall from these pages. Compare your list with those of your classmates. Discuss the relationship between this timeless "wonder" and the book's broader universality (as in, its widely appealing and ever-applicable story).
5. More than once in this book, we as readers encounter a character who loves animals, takes care of animals, cherishes animals, is committed to saving animals, and is also fond of eating those same animals. This even applies to Herriot himself, and to Siegfried. Is this contradictory to you? Why or why not? Debate this issue with your classmates; be prepared to defend your views.
6. "The calf felt no pain now that the broken ends of the bone were immobilised," writes Herriot in chapter 40, "and the fear which always demoralises a hurt animal had magically vanished" (p. 246). Write a short paper, based on your reading of this book, about the all-important "bedside manner" that vets must utilize in addressing both pain and fear in their patients. Is it fair to say, regarding the pain and fear that animals experience, that whenever a vet treats one, he or she is automatically treating the other as well? Is this duality also true among doctors and human patients?

7. Chapter 43 makes a funny, if obscure, reference to a famous brand of steak sauce and its longtime advertising slogan; see the “Mr. Heinz” nickname on page 266. Collaborate as a class and, based on the context at hand, try to discern what this nickname refers to. Then, do some online research in order to find out for certain.
8. Later in chapter 43, Miss Stubbs—who’s on her deathbed, and who owns several beloved pets—asks Herriot if he thinks that animals have souls. How does he answer her? Is he telling her what he really believes, or is he telling a dying woman what he thinks she wants to hear? Talk about your reading on this passage, and defend your views with citations from the text.
9. The wealthy and reclusive John Skipton enlists Herriot’s help in chapter 45. Skipton has a pair of old horses who are both ailing; one is thirty, and the other is a year or two younger. He says of his horses: “They were two slaves when I was a slave” (p. 282). What does he mean here? Why is he taking such devoted care of two very old horses? Write a brief analysis of Skipton as a character. Explain how his present actions are bound up in his past—not just regarding his horses, but also how he runs his vast estate, how he lives his life, etc.
10. “Whenever I thought of the existence of the small farmer it made my own occasional bursts of activity seem small stuff indeed,” admits Herriot (p. 333). This praise from a man who’s routinely called out at one or two in the morning to treat others’ animals; the author of this book clearly admires small farmers. Collaborate with a few classmates in order to find several assertions to



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this effect. Also, talk about where this admiration comes from.

11. Look again at the beginning of chapter 55, where Herriot talks about how money “has always formed a barrier between the farmer and the vet” (p. 346). Why are farmers, in Herriot’s experience, often reluctant to pay their veterinary bills? Why does he state that “the veterinary surgeon [now] stands pitilessly exposed as the only man who has to be paid?” Monetary struggles comprise an ongoing concern in these pages: negotiating compensation, billing, requesting payment, accepting or declining tips or other bonuses, storing enough petty cash at the office, and so on. Write a short paper analyzing the function of money in this story: Does it, in the end, really matter to Herriot? To Siegfried? To any of the book’s other main characters?
12. Tristan Farnon, Siegfried’s younger brother, is one of the more vivid characters in *All Creatures Great and Small*: a boisterous, generous, chatty, chain-smoking, and beer-chugging man about town who always gets stuck doing the most menial tasks. Does Tristan change over the course of this book? Discuss this question, using citations from throughout the text to support your stance.
13. “You don’t find people like the Bramleys now,” writes Herriot of a certain family (p. 375). Describe this family, and explain why the author thinks that such “simple people” are no longer to be found nowadays. Also, discuss the fact that—for a book primarily about farm animals and their treatment—this text is actually filled with memorable human beings. Did this strike you, as a reader, as odd? Ironic? Surprising? Necessary? All of the above, or none?
14. “I’m used to animals, you know, and I like working with them,” Helen Alderson tells Herriot in chapter 60 (p. 390). Discuss how this remark foreshadows not just their eventual marriage but also the final scene in the book. Also, address

how Herriot gradually reveals this relationship to the readers—the way he structures and paces the book’s successive “courting” vignettes to present this aspect of the story.

15. In chapter 61, we encounter two distinct families: the Taveners and the Altons. Write a short yet detailed essay that compares and contrasts these two households.
16. “There is a tide in the affairs of men . . .” So begins a well-known quotation from William Shakespeare; Siegfried recites it on page 426, when he’s urging Herriot to marry. Look up this quote and read it in its entirety. Then, as a class, talk about what the quotation means and why Siegfried is reciting it here. Why, ten pages later, does Siegfried then pester Herriot with this adage: “Marry in haste, repent at leisure?”
17. The phrase “thirty years later” appears often in this text, especially in its final few chapters, to refer to the author’s here-and-now present. So, when is Herriot telling the reader this tale? What omniscient timeframe is he writing / recollecting / narrating in? How, if at all, does this time frame affect the manner in which Herriot conveys his story? Does it cause him, for example, to make certain asides, or note certain developments, or take certain things for granted?
18. “Everything happens for the best,” as Tristan tells Herriot in chapter 39 (p. 240). Siegfried says the same thing to our narrator near the end of chapter 64. This all’s-well-that-ends-well notion is expressed at various other points in this book, too. In a short essay or as a class, debate whether this sentiment is Herriot’s core message or overall theme.



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SECONDARY SOURCES

www.jamesherriot.org

This site includes chapter summaries for *All Creatures Great and Small* and other works by James Herriot, a list of characters who appear in the book and the real people upon whom Mr. Herriot based these characters, a biography and timeline of Mr. Herriot's life and career, an image gallery, details about the many books and films by and about Mr. Herriot, and more.

www.worldofjamesherriot.org

This site features information about the area where James Herriot really lived and worked. Also included are information about and photographs of the iconic Yorkshire landmarks where the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) series *All Creatures Great and Small* was filmed.



EDUCATOR RESOURCES

www.avma.org/KB/Pages/default.aspx

The American Veterinary Medical Association's Knowledge Base includes information and news about dozens of types of animals and different topics related to veterinary medicine. Educators may find classroom resources under "Tools for K-12 Educators."

www.farmsafetyforjustkids.org

Farm Safety for Just Kids is an international nonprofit organization that serves millions of rural and youth and their families every year. Their educational resources cover the health and safety of farm animals and the kids who care for them; safe practices for farm tools, vehicles, and chemicals; and more. Don't miss the games and puzzles! (Some materials are available in Spanish.)



YOUTH-FRIENDLY RESOURCES



www.ars.usda.gov/is/kids/

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service created the Sci4Kids Web site to show students (and their teachers) how science and agriculture are linked together and how integral they are to our daily lives, far beyond laboratories and farms. The site features high-interest articles about animals and plants, new discoveries and innovations in the fields, scientific and agricultural technology, and more.

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www.healthyanimals.org

The goal of the Animal Health Institute's Healthy People. Healthy Animals. Healthy Planet campaign is to educate people about the important connection between animal health and human health. Learn about food safety, pet health, and zoonotic diseases (diseases that can be transferred between people and animals) at their Web site.

www.healthypet.com

The American Animal Hospital Association's youth-friendly portal includes information about caring for domestic companion animals including dogs, cats, birds, exotic pets like snakes and lizards, and small mammals like guinea pigs and rabbits. Information and news about the veterinary medicine field and fun pet-related activities are also featured.

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www.aipl.arsusda.gov/kc/kcindex.html

The Animal Improvement Programs Laboratory's "Kids Corner" is an ideal place for students to learn the basics of dairy farming. The site includes information about cows, milk, and the history of the dairy industry, and related games and quizzes.

www.agclassroom.org/index.cfm

Agriculture in the Classroom provides quality educational tools and resources for students and their teachers. The site features the agricultural data profile for each state; facts and opinions about social issues related to farming; and WebQuests that challenge students to conduct research online, make observations, think critically, and present their knowledge about a variety of agricultural topics.

www.sites.ext.vt.edu/virtualfarm/main.html

When they tour the 4-H Virtual Farms, students will learn about six types of farming: horses, aquaculture, beef, dairy, poultry, and wheat. The Web site includes information about different animals, practices, and industries; glossaries; farmers' perspectives; media, and quizzes.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS TO RESEARCH:

- Raising animals for food (e.g., beef, poultry)
- Raising animals to provide products (e.g., milk, eggs, wool)
- What education, training, and personal characteristics are required to become a veterinarian today?
- Animals raised for food or products which are not mentioned in the book (e.g., fish, honey bees, goats)
- The geography of England's Yorkshire region (e.g., climate, natural environment, economy, culture) today and/or when the book takes place



WORDS AND PHRASES TO DEFINE, EXPLAIN, OR CONTEXTUALIZE



This list of words and expressions—ranging over the entire text—contains colloquial as well as formal language, descriptive or figurative as well as medical or technical terms, slang remarks as well as specific place or animal names, and so on. In each case, the page where the word or words appear is given in parentheses.

expulsive (1)	torsion (33)	probang (135)
embryotomy (2)	Bruce Bairnsfather cartoons (45)	toothful (140)
commissure (2)	the Dales (46)	cross-talk (141)
papillae (7)	tuberculin test (47)	haematoma (142)
dole queue (8)	shirty (55)	pregnancy toxaemias (146)
the Pennines (8)	factotum (61)	prolapses (146)
oesophagus (9)	eversion (64)	swayback (147)
canula (9)	byre (68)	pulpy kidney (147)
Darrowby (10)	ascites (74)	nanberries (150)
servile (11)	dropsical (74)	lobulations (153)
rockery (12)	cock-a-hoop (78)	stirk size (156)
carbolic (18)	flop-bott (84)	magnesium sulphate (157)
sulphonamides (18)	crackerdog (86)	shorthorn (158)
electuary (18)	syrup of coccilana (89)	Fiji Islander (163)
Adrean (19)	mutiny (100)	knacker yard (165)
ophthalmoscope (20)	materia medica (105)	Anthrax (169)
auroscope (20)	transverse presentation (115)	Johne's disease (176)
Hudson's instrument (24)	pituitrin (117)	lumbago (179)
paroxysm (24)	carpal flexion (123)	working party (189)
mallenders and sallenders (28)	Aberdonian (127)	Wellingtons (189)
marshmallow ointment (28)	pessaries (130)	Coryne pyogenes (218)
hackles (31)	beck (132)	ung pini sedativum
	subcutaneous (133)	

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(227)	cine film (321)	piebald (380)
erysipelas (230)	expectorant mixture (324)	aconite (381)
agalactia (231)	ampoules (324)	laminitis (381)
fell [as in, Heskit Fell] (247)	peat hagsgs (326)	fleam (383)
centrifuge (260)	trilby (327)	beck (384)
pyometra (268)	balaclava (332)	femur (389)
nephritis (268)	abscess (336)	Novalgin (393)
lymphosarcoma (268)	Prontosil (337)	curlews (398)
Galvayne's groove (282)	Kaolin poultice (338)	U.C.M. (400)
rum (285)	carotid artery (339)	the Gaumont News (404)
rumenotomy (288)	attestation (344)	the Albert Hall (404)
Nembutal (291)	post-pharyngeal (344)	palpate (413)
oedematous (295)	P.N.S. system (349)	nystagmus (413)
chit (296)	snug (355)	the other Yorkshire (416)
synovia (299)	cissy (356)	impecunious (423)
Chinosol (299)	grunter (358)	Jersey (428)
iodoform (299)	tympani (366)	Friesian (428)
blue vitriol (300)	tableland (370)	Ministry notification cards (437)
football pools (317)	rumen (372)	M.R.C.V.S. (439)
oracle (318)	feline enteritis (377)	callipers (442)
	gipsies (379)	

