ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL

The Bestselling Classic by James Herriot

An American Library Association Best Book For Young Adults

Reviewed by:

Lexile Measure®: 990

Accelerated Reader: Book Level 6.8; Points 26.0

A MACMILLAN PUBLISHERS NONFICTION TEACHER’S GUIDE
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 the print edition (St. Martin’s Griffin, 9781250057839) and audio production (Macmillan Audio, 9781559277730) of *All Creatures Great and Small*, offers a number of different approaches to, and questions about, the book.

The first part of the guide 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 includes questions and extension activities integrating the audiobook as well as other multimodal instructional tools for use by students, either individually, in groups, or as a class.

The fourth section lists related secondary sources and ideas for student research topics, and the fifth and final section addresses defining words and phrases across a range of idioms, usages, backgrounds, and contexts.

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

We have also included some multi-modal extension activities linked to the Standards as examples of how the audiobook and other tools can be integrated into classroom instruction.

“This warm, joyous and often hilarious first-person chronicle of a young animal doctor . . . shines with love of life.” — *The New York Times Book Review*

“[Herriot] is the most entertaining, most thoroughly likeable, most engaging person to have come along in a long time, and the stories he has to tell are fascinating.” — *The Washington Post*

“With seemingly effortless art, this man tells his stories with perfect timing and optimum scale. Many more famous authors could work for a lifetime and not achieve more flawless literary control.” — *Chicago Tribune Book World*

“Christopher Timothy, who played James Herriot in the BBC version of *All Creatures Great and Small*, recreates a variety of rich Yorkshire accents impeccably and brings these stories of small town and country life before WWII vividly alive. Each character has a distinct voice and personality, and you end the book wanting to hear more about each one. Masterfully narrated, this is a joy to listen to.” — *AudioFile*
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? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.4)

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. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.4)

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?” (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.2)

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. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.6)

10. “I finished the inspection by examining the wall in front of each cow,” Herriot notes in chapter 42. Why does he do this? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.1)
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? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.9)

12. At the conclusion of his medically successful, yet socially awkward encounter with a penny-pinching butcher named Mr. Dumbley, 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”? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.4)

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. (CCSS. ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.4)

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? (CCSS. ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.1)

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. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.6)

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? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.4)

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, encounter animals that you associated with Disney? Conversely, where, if at all, did you find animals that contradict that image? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.4)

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. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.10)

19. The book is filled with passages consisting of the particular brogue of the Yorkshire Dales. In what ways does listening to the audiobook expand understanding of the culture through the language? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.6)

(a) If you are listening without using the text, can you understand what is being said?

(b) If you are listening along with the text, how does hearing the accents alter the experience of the story?

19. The ability to fully comprehend the characters is tied to their manner of speech, from that spoken by Siegfried and Tristan Farnum and James Herriot, to the brogue used by the farmers and many townspeople. In the audiobook, Christopher Timothy delivers what is referred to as a “fully
voiced reading” (one actor creating distinct voices for many different characters).

(a) How does this fully voiced reading impact your understanding and enjoyment of the characters and the story?
(b) What kind of pictures does this fully voiced reading paint in your mind?

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? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.2)

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 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. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.2)

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”? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.3)

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). (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.2)

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. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.10)

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? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.2)

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. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.4)

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. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.1)

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. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.3)

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 this effect. Also, talk about where this admiration comes from. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.1)

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? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.2)

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. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.3)

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? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.10)

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. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.5)

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. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.3)

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?” (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.9)

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? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.5)

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. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.2)

19. The BBC produced a long-running television series based on James Herriot’s books (https://www.amazon.com/All-Creatures-Great-Small-Collection/dp/B003DUBAWQ/), much of it filmed on location in North Yorkshire, with Christopher Timothy, narrator of the audiobook, playing the role of Mr. Herriot.

(a) Have students read the text, listen to the audio, and watch segments from the TV show to gain a broader understanding of what life was like in the Yorkshire Dales during the early days of Mr. Herriot’s veterinary career. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.7)

(b) Discuss how Christopher Timothy’s portrayal of James Herriot is different or similar between the two mediums (the audiobook and the TV series). How do the images in your head while listening to the audiobook compare to what you see on the screen of the TV show? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.9)

(c) Working in small groups, based on their reading, listening, and viewing, and using the Secondary Resources provided below, have students create posters depicting that life, broken down into the following:
- Farm life and animal husbandry
- Family life and the roles of men and women at that time
- Cultural aspects of life in the North Riding, including food, entertainment, and leisure activities
- Geography and the role it played in the lives of those living in the North Yorkshire area

(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 9-10.6)

20. Using the Secondary Resources below, have students investigate the ways in which life in North Yorkshire and veterinary practices have changed since the days of James Herriot, writing a short paper delineating those changes. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.10)

21. After viewing Unity Shrimpton’s video tour of Thirsk (listed below in Secondary Resources) have students create a video of their own town or city, describing its history and current places of interest.
Secondary Sources for Educators and Students

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.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_RtmLB-sUaPM
A video tour of Skeldale House, where James Herriot lived and practiced, now a museum. The tour, narrated by Jim Wight, son of the author James Alfred Wight (who wrote under the pen name James Herriot), takes viewers through the museum to see how veterinarians lived and worked in times now past.

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.)

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.

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.

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.
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.

http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/living-and-working

Part of the site for the Yorkshire Dales National Park, this provides information on contemporary sustainable farming methods, wildlife conservation, and historical sites within the park.

http://www.ywt.org.uk/what-we-do/projects/grazing-animal-project

From the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, this site is filled with information about ancient and contemporary Yorkshire landscapes, flora, and fauna, as well as efforts to maintain the landscape through the use of grazing animals.

http://www.halinaking.co.uk/Location/Yorkshire/Frames/People/Tykes/Yorkshire%20People.htm

As they read or listen to All Creatures Great and Small, students will notice the distinct Yorkshire dialect. This site “translates” traditional sayings from the dialect into common English and also provides insight into other conventions and customs attributed to the Yorkshire people.

http://www.britannica.com/place/Yorkshire-former-county-England

The history of Yorkshire County and the structure of the current administrative unit will help students understand the ways in which the geography shaped the people and culture of the area.

http://www.yorkshire-england.co.uk/index.html

Another historical, geographical, and cultural offering to aid in understanding how the countryside and the customs influenced Mr. Herriot’s impressions of the Yorkshire Dales.

http://www.yorkshire-england.co.uk/index.html

From Wikipedia, more information on the geography, history, customs, and culture of the area where James Herriot went to practice veterinary medicine. These sites include information on the people of Yorkshire, including dialect, food, sports, and music, as well as the history, geography, and economy of the region.

http://www.thirsk.org.uk/index.php

Thirsk is the real town on which Herriot’s fictional Darrowby was based. Thirsk and its companion village of Sowerby are located in the middle of Herriot’s Yorkshire, with national parks to the west and east. Along with tourist information, this site also contains bits of history for the area.


Of particular interest here are the various maps of the North Riding, where All Creatures Great and Small took place. Students will glean additional information about the area from these tools.
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.

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