

The 1st Running Up of English Section
Senior Division

Name of Winner : **Lo Wing Fung, Abbie**
Name of School : **Belilios Public School**
Book Title : **How Animals Grieve**
Author : **Barbara J. King**
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Do animals grieve? Do they have emotions? In *How Animals Grieve*, King the author details her own expedition in uncovering grief and other complex emotions in the animal kingdom. King supports her own observation concerning the hotly debated topic with sound and in-depth evidence. However, she leaves open room for readers to arrive at their own conclusion about the possibility of animals demonstrating bereavement after viewing her justified arguments on both sides. Additionally, through exploring animal keening, King leads us to reflect on ongoing moral issues and teaches us important life lessons.

While most of us have never once pondered on the possibility of an animal showing complex emotions,

increasing cases of animal bereavement have been documented across the animal kingdom. Many of us, however, would remain skeptical towards the stupefying claim on animal grief. After all, humans have for a long time viewed animals as inferior creatures which solely exist to serve mankind. The possibility of an animal feeling anything more complex than physical stimuli was completely off the table. Nevertheless, as technology advances and more diversified methods are developed to increase our understanding in animals, a growing sector of scientists can now grudgingly admit that animals do grieve. Consequently, an increasing amount of research is being conducted--either to support or to deny the highly controversial claim. In the face of rigorous investigations, human perception on animal sentience has escalated to a whole new level. A shocking and inevitable breakthrough was then made. Animals are capable of grief, and when animals grieve, it is only because they have loved.

Being an anthropologist herself, the excited yet reserved author initially views the trailblazing discovery with a critical eye. However, as she starts her own odyssey in uncovering grief in the animal kingdom, she encounters and witnesses unerring accounts of animal bereavement. From a Siamese cat madly wailing for her lifelong companion's death, to an African elephant caressing a kin's skull, to a bottlenose dolphin ceaselessly endeavoring to revive her dead calf, the author poignantly notes down

animals' capability to grieve and love. While some scientists remain resolute that signs of grief might be a mere bewildered response towards the sudden death of a close companion, many more are adamant that animals are sentient beings that are highly capable of intricate emotions like grief. Take Willa the cat as an example. She and her sister Carson always did everything in tandem. When sleeping, they would even entwine their bodies together. One day, Carson died of chronic illness. When Willa could not see Carson in the following days, she began to keel and howled heartbreakingly for her sister. Even years afterwards, Willa would still make a half-moon when she slept, just as when Carson was alive. The example evinces that grief is intrinsically tied to love, no matter human or not. In life we love, and in death we mourn. The message is simple, yet it rings true for all species.

With extraordinary evidence of animal grief popping up in various corners of the world, perhaps it is time for us to put down our pride and admit the fact that animals are sentient beings deserving moral consideration. Hence, I believe we should pay more attention to animal welfare, because animals are “someone, not something”. It is high time for us to reflect on whether it is still morally acceptable to turn a blind eye to the unnecessary suffering induced to sentient animals in the supposedly civilized twenty-first century. In the book, the author painstakingly mentions disparate experiments conducted on animals to

prove the presence of keening. To show that voles are capable of bereavement, their mates were decapitated in a twisted experiment. While we may have proved non-human grief and hence satiated our curiosity, is it worth the needless suffering caused to animals? Is it ethically sound to invasively probe into their emotions? The distorted experiment conducted, unfortunately, is only the tip of an iceberg.

Animal experimentation is highly prevalent these days. Unimaginably barbaric, the majority of animal testing yields questionable scientific significance. For instance, the cancer cure for mice was long discovered after a series of sadistic experiments were conducted. Injected with carcinogenic material, millions of lab mice were forced to languish in cancer. The atrocious experiments caused inconceivable anguish to the rodents. Yet, when the cancer cure was finally discovered for mice, it was found out that it cannot be applied to humans. The barbaric nature of animal testing is amplified by the fact that it is virtually inconsequential. Therefore, I sincerely believe that in our modern society nowadays, we can endeavor to stop causing unnecessary and avoidable suffering to animals on moral grounds.

Grief is a complicated emotion. When the level of anguish tips the scale, tragedies ensue. In *How Animals Grieve*, we would be astonished to find out how grief can

have such an immense impact on animals. In fact, the same is just as true, if not more so, for humans. No matter the species, the author shows that psychological health plays a vital role in our well-being. Ultimately, mental health can even dictate the vast difference between life and death. Kathy was a performance dolphin for a television show *Flipper*. Separated from her family and forced to perform unnatural tricks, Kathy's stress levels skyrocketed and her mental health deteriorated day by day. In the end, when she found life too unbearable, she chose to take the extreme step and committed suicide by refusing to take the next breath.

From the aforementioned lamentable tragedy, we can observe the gravity of psychological well-being. If mental health has such influence on animals, then it matters even more so to us. Nowadays, amongst the hustle and bustle of metropolitan life, it is inevitable that we sometimes have to neglect our emotional well-being. For instance, when we neglect to find healthy ways to cope with pressure for prolonged periods of time, we may develop mental illnesses such as depression and chronic stress, which can lead to dire consequences if they remain unaddressed until it is too late. Afflicted by the debilitating mental issues, some may regrettably choose to take their own lives. The severe consequences of impaired psychological health are highlighted by statistics, which show that suicide is the tenth leading cause of death. Ninety percent of people who

committed suicide, additionally, had mental disorders. This is why it is imperative that we take good care of our emotional well-being, lest we suffer an elevated chance of prematurely falling victim to the Grim Reaper.

Everyone grieves differently and “grieve has no singular face”. In *How Animals Grieve*, the author recounts how animal bereavement can vary greatly across or even in-between species. Just like humans, animals are unique and may mourn differently. Some may bereave longer than others, while others may appear to move on after wistfully nosing a valedictory. Therefore, it is not up to us to judge how profound a loss is to a particular animal, or to a human for that matter. For example, both Myrtle the goat and Harper the duck have lost an inseparable companion. While Myrtle lingered for a while beside her dead friend before moving on, Harper got depressed at viewing his friend’s body and died two months later. However, does that mean unlike Harper, Myrtle did not mourn for her friend? No, Myrtle just bereaved in her own way. For us, we may bereave by sobbing dolefully, or we may keen with a longing look in our eyes. Nevertheless, we mourn in both cases, and the same is true for Myrtle and Harper. The reason is that we are all unique. We think, behave, and grieve in disparate ways. Bereavement, moreover, is a highly personal and private experience. Thus, we should not judge the presence and degree of bereavement in others based on prejudice. Instead, we should try to be

understanding and considerate towards keening individuals to help them cope with the profound loss.

Another message of this book is that friendship may transcend even drastic disparities. In the book, Tarra the towering elephant befriended Bella the loving mutt, and had remained steadfast in the unlikely friendship without any encouragement from her caretakers. For eight years, Tarra and Bella roamed the open fields side by side, treasuring each other's company. Bella would even roll over to let her colossal mate rub her belly with a gargantuan foot. From their extraordinary friendship, we can see that genuine friendship has no bounds. As long as we are willing to try and give, friendship can blossom no matter how improbable it is. Very often, we miss valuable chances to forge a friendship because we doubt whether it is practicable in the given circumstances. For instance, we may hesitate to approach people of different age groups for a banter as we believe friends need to be contemporaneous. However, this is not necessarily true. Instead, by doubting and faltering, we lose opportunities to strike up a conversation that may lead to potential friends.

The most poignant message in this book is that loved ones are irreplaceable, because humans and animals matter to each other as individuals. Hence, we should cherish love in life, lest we should regret it in death. Oxen Castor and Pollux were lifelong partners working on a farm. One day,

while Castor was munching grass and waiting for Pollux, another ox appeared in place of his friend. Comprehending the absence of Pollux, Castor ceased to chew and showed signs of missing Pollux. Castor was not satisfied with just any other ox. Pollux was an irreplaceable friend. Pollux had mattered to him and it was Pollux he had missed. This evinces that it is poignant when a person or an animal you adore is gone, because loved ones are unique. To outsiders, each person or animal may not pose much of a difference. Yet to those who intimately know each other, the individual is irreplaceable and he or she matters deeply to the other.

Besides conveying worthwhile messages, the book is also beautifully and expertly written. For starters, the prologue is unusually intriguing and thought-provocative. Through exploring animals' capability to grieve, the author provokes us to redefine our standards in perceiving grief and love. Another thing is when you hear that this book addresses the topic of emotions in animals, you may worry it is yet another radical publication of anthropomorphism and extreme animal rights. However, *How Animals Grieve* is as unbiased as it can be. It offers rare insight into the topic of animal grief with scientifically sound evidence and an exquisite touch of poignancy. Even for devoted pet owners and animal enthusiasts, this book would broaden your horizons on the topic of animal sentience. Through analyzing the subject with multiple perspectives and supporting each account with solid evidence, *How Animals*

Grieve provides a reliable treatise on animal bereavement. Moreover, the intricate topic is tactically tackled by the author with the passion of an animal lover and the heed of a scientist.

The down side to this otherwise wonderful book is that it does require some patience to read. The huge amount of scientific reasoning can sometimes be frustrating. Therefore, if you are looking for a natural page-turner, then this book is not for you. However, if you want to read something thought-provocative and are willing to spend time to reflect on the underlying messages and scientific hypotheses, then *How Animals Grieve* may come as a delightful surprise.

When I first picked up *How Animals Grieve* from the bookstore, I have to admit I was dubious that around two-hundred pages could be dedicated to the topic of animal bereavement. Nevertheless, my doubts were unnecessary. Not only did the author successfully convince me times and times again that animals grieve, but she also lead me to contemplate on my attitude towards life and the ongoing animal welfare issues in the community. All in all, *How Animals Grieve* enables us to better link and fathom the sentient and emotional lives of ourselves and our fellow animals.