

# Representations of Nonhuman Animals in Bulgarian Literary Education

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Through an educational perspective, the paper traces the attitudes towards nonhuman animals, the human-nonhuman relations, and the ideologies included in the literature curriculum developed by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Sciences. Comparing the official programmes with certain literary textbooks, I examine various representations of nonhuman animals in the latter. I study which authors who wrote about nature and nonhuman animals are included in the curriculum, which of their literary works are studied in school, what interpretational directions are offered, what approaches to human-nonhuman relations are chosen, and what types of thinking are encouraged and cultivated.

▪ **Keywords:** Bulgarian literature, curriculum, textbooks, critical animal approaches

Prispevek s perspektive izobraževanja predstavlja odnos do nečloveških živali, razmerja med človekom in nečlovekom ter ideologije, vključene v učni načrt književnosti, ki ga je razvilo bolgarsko ministrstvo za izobraževanje in znanost. Ob primerjavi uradnih programov z nekaterimi učbeniki književnosti avtorica v slednjih preučuje različne upodobitve nečloveških živali. Razpravlja o tem, kateri avtorji, ki so pisali o naravi in nečloveških živalih, so vključeni v učne načrte, katera njihova literarna dela se obravnavajo v šoli, kakšne interpretacijske smeri so ponujene, kakšni pristopi k razmerjem med človekom in nečlovekom so izbrani in kakšna razmišljanja spodbujajo in razvijajo.

▪ **Ključne besede:** bolgarska književnost, učni načrt, učbeniki, kritično animalistični pristop

## Introduction

There is much to worry about in the contemporary world. This article, along with other texts I have written in the recent years, is an expression of my ever-growing concern over what has been happening to nature on the planet Earth, to human nature, to the unnecessarily cruel human treatment of other creatures.

In the contemporary world, there are numerous practices through which violence towards nonhuman animals is normalised and habituated. They include consuming animal flesh, conducting medical laboratory experiments, raising “farmed” or “working” animals, exterminating “vermin”, using animals in “entertainment” industries, shooting “game”, and the cultural representations of nonhuman animals. All these practices are usually perceived as normal and legitimate. Furthermore, they are based on violence towards nonhuman animals that is often habituated, institutionalised, and/or concealed.

My work in the field of Critical Animal Studies aims to undermine this objectification and normalisation of violence and, in so doing, strip human cruelty of its corporate and

cultural masks, thus presenting living creatures as such and not as objects. Finally, it strives to perceive a number of human practices as relations between humans and other animals – relations bound with certain engagements and responsibilities.

### **Children and nonhuman animals**

Like all basic values, care for other living beings is also an aspect with a profound pedagogical significance. Most would agree that what we teach children is of crucial importance – be it the habitualisation of anthropodomination, or care towards other living beings. In the present Western world, cruelty is systematically normalised through a complex system of components that mask its reality. This occurs at home, at educational institutions from preschool to the university, and through artistic, cultural, media, and market channels.

In my 2020 book, *Why Is the Laughing Cow Laughing? Relations between Humans and Other Animals* I presumed that children have an innate understanding with nonhuman animals, and that anthropodomination is imposed upon them by adults until they grow accustomed to it. In the words of Elizabeth Costello from J. M. Coetzee's remarkable 1999 book *The Lives of Animals*:

And of course children all over the world consort quite naturally with animals. They don't see any dividing line. That is something they have to be taught, just as they have to be taught it is all right to kill and eat them. (Coetzee, 1999: 61)

The same presumption is followed by Matthew Cole and Kate Stewart in their 2014 book *Our Children and Other Animals: The Cultural Construction of Human–Animal Relations in Childhood*:

How could it be that presenting children with a figure of a loved animal character alongside dead pieces of other animals is not only tolerated but enjoyed by children? What happens in the walk across the multiplex car park, from screen to restaurant, which transforms the strong affective feelings towards nonhumans represented and encouraged in themes common in children's films to an acceptance of the utility of nonhumans as toys or food? How do we teach young humans so swiftly and so robustly that these contradictory relationships are 'normal' and unproblematic? (Cole, Stewart, 2014: 4)

While I was presenting my book to various colleagues, some expressed certain reservations with regard to the innate understanding and kindness of children toward nonhuman animals, as well as their later internalization of anthropodomination and violence. Some children do enjoy hurting animals, they pointed out, kids might tear insects' wings, hit birds with slings and other tools, burn the tails of cats and dogs, catch frogs etc. Professor Inna Peleva, for instance, suggested that it could be the other way around – that perhaps the little one is authentically natural, part of which is their ability to react aggressively toward the surrounding environment, and that perhaps it is precisely culture, or segments of culture, that recondition this cruelty and teach children to be compassionate (Peleva, 2021: 3).

This debate will not be the centre of my present paper, but it is a good starting point as it exemplifies the importance of upbringing and education when it comes to care about other living beings. Whether children are born with a natural bond with nonhuman animals and later taught to dominate and hurt them, or they are born naturally cruel and later taught to respect and protect other living beings – in both cases, and in all the cases in between, what we teach children is of utmost importance. It makes a difference whether the literary curriculum contains hunting short stories or environmental ones, whether culture brings problems closer or further, and whether violence is being stigmatised or normalised. The ways we socialise children and the relations they build with other animals are essential to the relations between humans and other animals in general.

### **Scope of this paper's research**

Before I focus on the Bulgarian literary curriculum, let me unequivocally state: all school curriculum is important, and insofar as any text consists of ideologemes (to follow Kristeva's famous intertextual arguments; Allen, 2000: 37), no discipline is purely factological or smoothly objective. Let us take geography for instance. Recently, the National Institute of Geophysics, Geodesy and Geography at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences developed a new educational portal titled Geography of Bulgaria Geo10, in aid of teachers, students, and interested publics. The portal has a section 'Environment' with a subsection 'Use and Protection of Animals in Bulgaria'. From this subsection we learn that "animals are renewable resources": a resource for the development of agriculture and farming, a resource for the development of the leather and shoe industry, a resource for the development of the food industry, development of hunting and bird-watching, aesthetic and cultural values.<sup>1</sup> I find this approach to nature and its creatures unacceptable. If we teach children that anthropodomination

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<sup>1</sup> Translation from the Bulgarian educational sources into English in this paper is mine – K. Z.

is the proper attitude, we can never escape the vicious circle of comprehending our fellow creatures as “resources” that exist only to be used by us, superior humans. In the words of Jhan Hochman, we must “ensure that plants and animals are granted separateness, independence, and liberation (an apartness distinct from excusing and advocating separation because of superiority)” (Hochman, 1998: 16).

A few words about the scope of my research, briefly exposed in this paper. First of all, why literature? The logical explanation would be: because I am a literary scholar. But this is not the only reason – above all, literary education teaches us not only about worthy literary works; literary education teaches us how to read, how to apprehend texts, how to perceive the world, how to write, how to think, how to internalise and express certain values and views. Through an educational perspective, I shall here examine the attitudes towards nonhuman animals, the human-nonhuman relations, and the ideologies included in the literature curriculum developed by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science. Comparing the official programmes with certain literary textbooks, I have identified various representations of nonhuman animals in school materials. I will trace which authors who wrote about nature and nonhuman animals are included in the curriculum, which of their literary works are studied in school, what interpretational directions are offered, what approaches to human-nonhuman relations are chosen, and what types of thinking are encouraged and cultivated.

The scope of my examples will range between 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, leaving the initial grades aside. Not because they are insignificant, but precisely because they are of crucial importance and deserve separate attention. As shown by Catina Feresin and Snježana Močinić in their 2017 article ‘Do We Need to Train Teachers and Students to Care about the Other Living Beings?’, the “educational process should start at the level of primary school to create a significant imprinting in students who are very young” (2017: 33). Indeed, respect and care towards other living beings should be taught from a very young age, and I intend to focus on this subject in my forthcoming research work. Here, I address the curriculum for grades 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, with a focus on literature rather than the Bulgarian language, and with limits to the standard curriculum rather than specialized education.

### **Bulgarian literary curriculum**

A brief overview of the curriculum shows that animal welfare is not an evident priority, neither is respect and care towards nonhuman animals. With individual exceptions, non-human life is included from different anthropocentric angles, and not as a harmonious coexistence of all living creatures. The choice of literary works in the curriculum already contains a deficiency of engaged attitude.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, the curriculum includes mythological and folklore models as well as authors' tales, such as Charles Perrault's *Puss in Boots* and Hans Christian Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling*, in which, according to the instructions of the Ministry of Education and Science, the student should be able to "distinguish the attribution of human characteristics to an animal and to explain their significance for the building of the text's meaning" (Bulgaria, 2016). Notably, such emphasis on anthropomorphism already serves to enforce the anthropocentrism characteristic of contemporary culture in general.

As the few exceptions of note are found in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades, I will presently skip them and return to them shortly.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, matter for instruction does not presuppose a critical animal approach in terms of criticizing human attitudes toward nonhuman animals. The only short story that includes nonhuman animals as characters is Yordan Yovkov's *Along the Wire* – but its main animal character, the white swallow, is a symbol that is supposed to be interpreted from the viewpoint of human destiny (faith in the good, love, hope, the white bird, the holy Spirit, etc.; whereas the snake, respectively, appears as sickness). Yovkov has written significant works that include nonhuman animals as characters as well as various aspects of their relations with humans, but these do not appear in the curriculum. Unfortunately, this applies to other important authors as well.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the literary curriculum gallops through the Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance; and in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade through European Enlightenment, Modernism, and back to the Bulgarian National Revival.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, the curriculum includes a section called 'Nature' which comprises three literary works, all of them (as if on purpose) lacking nonhuman animals as characters (apart from some sporadic ones, as part of the landscape). Ivan Vazov's ode *At the Rila Monastery* praises nature as a home of humans and is charged with patriotic pathos; Peyo Yavorov's poem *Hailstorm* presents nature as dramatic and uncontrollable; and Pencho Slaveykov's lyrical miniature *The Lake Sleeps* presents nature as still life. Shared by the three literary works is the (almost complete) lack of fauna.

The 12<sup>th</sup>-grade matter for instruction consists of literary works arranged in groups around certain themes, such as "love", "faith and hope", "labour and creative work", and "choice and mind division" – none of which gets connected with animal welfare or the improvement of people's relations with other living beings.

To sum it up, the literary curriculum as a whole lacks an engaged attitude towards nonhuman animals. There are two notable exceptions, which I will state below.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, the 'Human and Nature' section of the curriculum offers an interesting combination: a poem by the Bulgarian National Revival revolutionary Lyuben Karavelov *You Are Beautiful, My Forest*; Ivan Vazov's 1884 poem *Kind Fatherland, How Beautiful You Are!*; and... the fourth chapter of Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals*. I must admit I was quite shocked by this unusual combination and at

the same time pleasantly surprised by the presence of Durrell's work in compulsory literary education. The selected chapter – 'A Bushel of Learning' (with abridgment) – is not the most engaged with critical animal thinking in the book, but it does offer an excellent introduction to approaching human-nonhuman relations.

The other exception appears at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup>-grade curriculum: Yordan Radichkov's short story *The Gentle Spiral*, which was previously included in the literary curriculum for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. This is the single Bulgarian literary work in the curriculum to contain explicit criticism of the violent behaviour of humans toward nonhuman animals. On the other hand, Radichkov was not only an excellent writer, but an excellent hunter too, which is a fact that should not be ignored. And also, the short story is not unambiguous and is not interpreted unambiguously.

In the following chapters, I will examine various representations of nonhuman animals in certain Bulgarian literary textbooks.

### **Not-so-good representations of nonhuman animals**

When discussing the various representations of nonhuman animals in Bulgarian literary textbooks, the examples might be good or not so good. By "good" I will here understand instances of cultivating a respectful harmonious human treatment of other creatures. To first give a set of not-so-good examples, concerning paratexts and images: The major subject in the literary curriculum for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade is "The Worlds of the Human" (*Световете на човека*) – anthropodomination per se; where the "worlds" in question are:

- I. Human and Nature (*Човекът и природата*)
- II. Human and Art (*Човекът и изкуството*)
- III. Human and Other Humans (*Човекът и другите хора*)

Within this classification already, nature is framed as a world of the human, a world that belongs to and is dominated by humans. In this case, the unfortunate formulation is not just a question of not-so-good paratexts, it is also a conceptual issue, stating in outspoken terms that the human is supposed to be the master of all the worlds in question.

Further with the not-so-good examples, certain pictures contain hidden messages that are not particularly well considered – for instance, as an illustration for the 'Human and Nature' section in a 6<sup>th</sup>-grade textbook (Protohristova et al., 2019b: 7) appear three happy kids running in a park with a lovely retriever. The park and the domesticated animal, I infer, are supposed to represent "nature". In a picture for the same section from another textbook (Gerdzhikova et al., 2019: 13), the kids are depicted on a mountain instead, there are birds and insects around them.

Another not-so-good example – or perhaps suitable from a literary point of view, but not from a critical animal thinking one, is an exercise with four photos of nonhuman animals and the task: "Choose one of these animals as a character in a story of

yours and describe it” (Inev et al., 2018: 193). The species (Emperor tamarin, Pygmy armadillo, Frill necked lizard, Proboscis monkey) are chosen for their remarkable features that might spur the descriptive abilities of the child, but on the other hand, the exercise clearly promotes speciesism by suggesting some species are funnier or uglier than others – one can imagine if those were photos of people with specific features, the exercise would be considered discriminatory.

Following are two not-so-good textual examples. The 6<sup>th</sup>-grade curriculum contains chapter XXI from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s *The Little Prince* – the chapter in which the Little Prince meets the fox who teaches him what it is like to tame somebody and develop a special bond. During the dialogue, the fox also complains about the “hunting people”, whom he finds disturbing: “People have guns and they hunt. It’s quite troublesome” (Saint-Exupéry, 2000: 56); “My life is monotonous. I hunt chickens; people hunt me” (Saint-Exupéry, 2000: 59). In the examined Bulgarian textbooks, there is not a single trace of the hunting theme or the way it is expressed by the fox – instead, the focus of the interpretation is on relations between humans. Such as: “The wise fox shows the Little Prince how to carefully build interpersonal relations” (Mihaylova, Shishkova, 2023: 68) or “The fox is part of the natural wildlife, which is why it associates friendship with taming” (Gerdzhikova et al., 2019: 165).

In this context, it is important to observe that even though some authors and their nonhuman animal-related works are not in the curriculum, they are sometimes mentioned from a comparative angle. One such author is the most prominent Bulgarian hunting writer – Emiliyan Stanev. In an 11<sup>th</sup>-grade textbook, we find a problematic example of substituting his real life and works with a beautiful fragment about profound human feelings in nature. The text reads:

Calling himself a “cruel realist”, Emiliyan Stanev holds no romantic attitude toward nature. Many of his works treat nature not from the perspective of a “guest”, but rather that of a hunter penetrating the wild as an enemy. Nevertheless, in his long short story *When the White Frost is Melting* one encounters soulful imagery of nature inspiring serenity, greatness, and beauty. (Hranova, Shishkova, 2019: 245)

Shifting the focus from Stanev’s hunting life and similarly themed works to such a text is not a good approach in terms of critical animal thinking. Neither is labelling him as an “animalist”, along with Gerald Durrell and Yordan Yovkov, defining “animalists” as “writers whose works are about animals” (Protohristova et al., 2020: 59). In Bulgarian literary history, namely, there is a tradition (recently more often disputed than confirmed) of differentiating a certain literary branch called “animalist fiction” or “animalist literature”. The basis for distinguishing this section is predominantly thematic – the so-called “animalist fiction” tells stories about nonhuman animals. I suggest we

substitute this simple (and to a great extent useless) definition based on *what* (literary works about animal characters) with a much more effective approach based on *how* (how those literary works contribute to human-nonhuman relations, how are they involved in the construction of culturally modified organisms, to what degree do they support anthropodomination and to what extent do they oppose it). In other words, I suggest the substitution of the predominantly thematic distinction with an ethical perspective.

### **Better approaches to the relations between humans and nonhumans**

As a better approach, I would point out a 12<sup>th</sup>-grade textbook in which Yordan Yovkov is presented through a broader examination (Inev et al., 2020: 148–156). The 12<sup>th</sup>-grade curriculum includes his short story *The Song of the Wheels* in the thematic section ‘Labour and Creative Work’, where the textbook authors have chosen to characterise Yovkov’s creative work more widely and in detail, not omitting his carefully developed theme of human-nonhuman relations.

The observations on human nature’s dark sides give good reason to one of Yovkov’s characters [...] – the wise Uncle Mitush – to conclude that animals excel humans in their goodness: “To tell you the truth, I value the cattle higher than man”. (Inev et al., 2020: 149)

The textbook authors stress Uncle Mitush’s praise of nonhuman animals and the values he finds unchangeable in them but diminishing in humans: nobleness, patience, and stability (ibid.). I find such a flexible approach productive – not only does it broaden the students’ general knowledge of literature and literary history, but it also brings forward thematic aspects that are quite important in the contemporary world, among them of course being our relations with the other living beings.

Another exemplary chapter appears in an 11<sup>th</sup>-grade textbook, where the ‘Nature’ section is introduced through a comprehensive examination of “Nature in Bulgarian literature” (Inev et al., 2019: 242–246). While introducing important authors and literary works connected with nature, the chapter also brings forward environmental and philosophical problems: “the transition from the natural to the cultural human destroyed the connection with nature and as a consequence destroyed humans’ inner world” (ibid.: 243); “humans entered into a rivalry with nature” (ibid.); “humans increasingly kept taking possession of nature and transforming it, and using it instead of enjoying it” (ibid.: 244); “literature presents nature as an oasis for the soul and at the same time as an unprotected zone for unscrupulous profit” (ibid.). Confronting young teenagers with such problems through literature – to me, this means exploring the pedagogical potential of literary education to the highest degree.



Continuing with the better approaches to the relations between humans and nonhumans, let me mention a few fruitful representations of nonhuman animals in Bulgarian literary textbooks.

Some 6<sup>th</sup>-grade textbooks approach Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals* with an accent on Durrell's biography, which is quite beneficial. By emphasising certain aspects of his naturalist experience and his love for animals, the textbook authors encourage children to think about loving animals as a value and as an important cause.

The fundamental topic in Durrell's book is the relations of humans toward animals. The writer is one of the earliest propagandists of ecological awareness. The main theme of his overall creative work is the idea that people should understand, respect, and protect all the other living beings on Earth, and take care of them. Durrell was a champion of a responsible and considerate attitude toward nature and its wealth, among which he attached the highest importance to animals. (Protohristova et al., 2020: 57)

The life and work of Gerald Durrell is inspiring in terms of considerate human-nonhuman relations. Some textbook authors skilfully follow this potential by also encouraging additional work: "Find on the internet and/or in books by Gerald Durrell statements in defence of nature and wildlife. Make your classmates familiar with them by emphasising Durrell's role as environmentalist" (ibid.: 50); "Find in a library or on the internet information about Gerald Durrell's activities as an environmentalist and as a writer. Prepare a presentation" (Gerdzhikova et al., 2019: 40).

In certain textbooks we encounter broader tasks such as "Draw a map of wildlife in Bulgaria" (Protohristova et al., 2020: 58) or discussion topics like "Do you think zoos should exist? Why?" (ibid.). Thus, by extending the attention area beyond the compulsory literary texts in the curriculum, some textbook authors stimulate the students to think, write, and discuss important issues concerning human responsibilities and irresponsible actions. Similar thought-provoking discussion topics are found in textbooks for the other grades as well, and are in my opinion excellent keys to engaging the students with critical animal thinking and environmental commitment. Here are a few highly welcome examples: "Write an essay on the topic *Contemporary human – a child of nature or a guest of nature?*" (11<sup>th</sup> grade; Hranova, Shishkova, 2019: 244); "Discuss the topic *Human – a master or a friend to nature?*" (10<sup>th</sup> grade; Penchev et al., 2019: 271); "Carry out a discussion on the topic *Could we clean nature in Bulgaria in just one day?*" (11<sup>th</sup> grade; Inev et al., 2019: 261); "Discuss the most important contemporary debates regarding nature" (11<sup>th</sup> grade; Hranova, Shishkova, 2019: 253); "Discuss the topic *Contemporary world – concrete or nature?*" (10<sup>th</sup> grade; Penchev et al., 2019: 271); "Plan for a discussion on the topic *Construction of new ski lifts in Bulgarian mountains – for or against?*" (11<sup>th</sup> grade; Inev et al., 2019: 289).

The aforementioned short story *The Gentle Spiral* by Yordan Radichkov (10<sup>th</sup> grade), as noted, is not unambiguous and is not interpreted unambiguously. The text depicts the strange winter experience of a group of hunters, finishing with the dramatic killing of a wood pigeon. *The Gentle Spiral* is often analysed in the direction of the complex and problematic relations between humans and nature. In this, textbooks differ considerably. Some offer expressive accusing statements, such as “unprovoked cruelty”, “lack of interest and even indifference to the environment”, “suddenly unleashed aggression towards nature”, and “killers”; the main topic of the short story is framed as “the broken harmony between human and nature”, since people considered themselves “masters of nature” (Protohristova et al., 2019a: 264). Such examples show that certain literary works have very strong thought-provoking environmental potential, but also the way we approach them is crucial. The same literary work is in another textbook (Biolchev et al., 2019) approached through the incognoscibility of death, with no accent on the hunters or on human aggression; the interpretations are more philosophical and underestimate the significance of the text’s critical animal potential. Since the curriculum includes so few literary works with such explicit potential, in my opinion, it is essential not to overlook it.

## Conclusions

Based on the research of the literature curriculum for grades 5<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> developed by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, the comparison between the official programmes and certain literary textbooks, and the study of the interpretational directions offered, I would formulate the following conclusions:

1. Animal welfare is not an evident priority in Bulgarian literary education; the choice of literary works in the curriculum contains a deficiency of engaged attitude towards nonhuman animals.
2. The authors of textbooks do have certain (limited) freedom to include in the exercises other literary works, and to comparatively or thematically bring forward certain environmental aspects.
3. Teachers are constrained by the limitations of the curriculum, the logic of the textbooks, and the pressure of time. Still, in the end, it is up to them to include certain values in the way students read, write, think, and perceive the world, among these values being also our fundamental attitude toward other living beings.

Conclusion one calls for a more considerate national educational policy – it is high time the curriculum (and not only the literary one) included more attention to the problems of the planet and its inhabitants.

Conclusion two benefits from more flexible textbook approaches, and this would mean that textbook authors should focus not only on the currently popular “functional literacy”, but also on the not-so-popular, and yet much more important, values, principles, and views of life.

Conclusion three is our best course for systemic improvements. Critically conscious educators can model any material into proper food for thought and empathy, and above all – good teachers cultivate not only ways of thinking, they cultivate thinking itself.

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### Reprezentacije nečloveških živali pri pouku književnosti v Bolgariji

Prispevek s perspektive izobraževanja predstavlja človekov odnos do nečloveških živali, razmerja med človekom in nečlovekom ter ideologije, vključene v učni načrt književnosti, ki ga je pripravilo bolgarsko ministrstvo za izobraževanje in znanost. Ob primerjavi uradnih programov z nekaterimi učbeniki književnosti avtorica v slednjih preučuje različne upodobitve nečloveških živali. Razpravlja o tem, kateri avtorji, ki so pisali o naravi in nečloveških živalih, so vključeni v

učne načrte, katera njihova literarna dela se obravnavajo v šoli, kakšne interpretacijske smeri so ponujene, kakšni pristopi k razmerjem med človekom in nečlovekom so izbrani in kakšna razmišljanja spodbujajo in razvijajo.

Kot vse osnovne vrednote je tudi skrb za druga živa bitja pomembna z vidika izobraževanja. Večina bi se strinjala, da je tisto, kar učimo otroke, osrednjega pomena – naj bo to navajanje na antropodominacijo ali skrb za druga živa bitja. V sodobnem zahodnem svetu je krutost sistematično normalizirana s kompleksnim sistemom prvin, ki prikrivajo njeno resničnost. To se dogaja doma, v izobraževalnih ustanovah od vrtca do univerze ter po umetniških, kulturnih, medijskih in tržnih kanalih. Pomembno je, ali učni načrt za književnost vsebuje lovske ali okoljske zgodbe, ali kultura približuje ali oddaljuje probleme in ali se nasilje stigmatizira ali normalizira. Način socializacije otrok in razmerja, ki jih oblikujejo z drugimi živalmi, so bistvenega pomena za razmerja med ljudmi in živalmi nasploh. Na podlagi raziskave učnega načrta za književnost za 5.–12. razred, ki ga je razvilo bolgarsko ministrstvo za izobraževanje in znanost, primerjave med uradnimi programi in nekaterimi književnimi učbeniki ter študije ponujenih interpretacijskih usmeritev, so oblikovani naslednji sklepi:

1. Dobrobit živali ni očitna prednostna naloga bolgarskega književnega izobraževanja; izbira literarnih del v učnem načrtu je z vidika angažiranega odnosa do nečloveških živali pomanjkljiva.
2. Avtorji učbenikov imajo omejeno svobodo, da v vaje vključujejo tudi druga književna dela ter da primerjalno ali tematsko poudarijo določene okoljske vidike.
3. Učitelji se spoprijemajo z omejitvami učnega načrta, logiko učbenikov in pritiskom časa. Kljub temu je naposled njihova naloga, da v način, kako učenci berejo, pišejo, premišljajo in dojemajo svet, vključijo določene vrednote, med katerimi je tudi naš temeljni odnos do drugih živih bitij.

Prvi sklep zahteva bolj premišljeno nacionalno izobraževalno politiko – skrajni čas je, da se v učne načrte (pa ne le v tiste o književnosti) vključi več pozornosti do problemov planeta in njegovih prebivalcev. Drugi sklep se opira na prožne učbeniške pristope, kar pomeni, da se avtorji učbenikov ne bi smeli osrediniti ne le na trenutno popularno »funkcionalno pismenost«, temveč tudi na manj priljubljene, a precej pomembnejše vrednote, načela in poglede na življenje. Tretji sklep je najboljša pot za sistemsko izboljšanje. Kritično ozaveščeni vzgojitelji lahko vsako gradivo spremenijo v primerno hrano za premišljanje in empatijo. Predvsem pa dobri učitelji ne gojijo le načinov mišljenja, temveč negujejo mišljenje samo.