

*If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.*

Rachel Carson

## Why I Want My Child to Be Compassionate

**By Nicole Green, AAVS Associate Director of Education**

Making the decision to be an animal activist was an easy one for me. From childhood, I had a love for all animals. As I grew older, I learned how animals are abused and exploited for food, animal experimentation, and fur. These findings turned my awe of animals into empathy for all creatures who share our world. This is why working for AAVS was a natural fit for me. On a daily basis, I have the opportunity to educate young students about how they can make a difference for animals. But my work doesn't end there; as a mother, I have the even greater responsibility of teaching my own child how to impact the lives of animals by making kind choices.

In a time when violence is sweeping through high schools and colleges alike, I believe it is crucial for parents to take every opportunity to expose children to humane lessons, especially pre-k and elementary children. In response to tragic events at schools, many administrators are forced to implement emergency safety measures like lockdowns in the case of a senseless shooting or bomb threat. As a parent, this is a scary reality, but it serves as even more of a reason for parents to enter the classroom and teach kids that it is, for example, kinder to watch or learn about insects in their natural environments, than to step on them.

My child is a preschooler, so I have already had the opportunity to bring compassionate ideas and lessons into my son's classroom. Recently, I was invited to talk to his class about how to be kind to animals. I read a book about a friendship between a bunny and a bird and then held a lively discussion with the children about their own animal friends. I then gave the simple message that animals express feelings just like we do, so we



Nicole Green, AAVS Associate Director of Education, and her son.



should always be kind to them no matter how big or small. Reading books about animals is an ideal way to teach young children about the many fascinating creatures who share our world. This is one of the first steps in building respect for animals. The more children learn about animals, the more they will recognize and respect their unique traits and, ultimately, choose not to harm them.

Parents who want to raise kind kids have the important job of being positive

role models for their children through their own behaviors and actions. As a vegan, I knew that I would raise my son to be vegan, too. At age five, my son has grown to love fruits and veggies, tofu, veggie hotdogs, soy milk, and dairy-free ice cream. Will he ever be curious about meat and dairy? He may be, but I will most certainly educate him about the horrific pain and suffering that animals endure in the meat and dairy industries before he makes that choice.

Parents can help their children grow up to be compassionate and responsible adults by showing them that the animals they encounter, whether they be those who share our homes or those in the wild, all deserve to be treated with respect and compassion.

Conflicts will certainly arise when children are exposed to media and books that portray animals as villains like the Big Bad Wolf, for example. Also, industries that exploit animals frequently generate glossy literature geared towards school-aged children. So parents need to be prepared to have animal-friendly materials handy for a teacher who may have given your child a coloring book about the health benefits of eating meat and dairy or how 'beneficial' animal research is to curing human diseases. I have found in my own experience, most teachers are happy to accommodate your child or to make a project humane for all of the students.

On one occasion, my son's teacher contacted me to ask how I would feel if she were to purchase a fish for the classroom to teach the kids the responsibility of caring for a living creature. It was considerate of the teacher to contact me about this, since she knew that my son and I are vegans and care about animals. I suggested that instead of purchasing a fish, who would need care not just during the days when the children

were in school but during weekends and school breaks, etc., why not instead set up a terrarium, which would still give the kids the opportunity to share in the responsibility of living things—plants! The teacher loved this idea, and she set up the terrarium in her classroom.

I know that there will be many situations that arise like this one, but because of my ethical beliefs, I plan on being an outspoken advocate for my child throughout his life. He will understand that the zoo and the circus are no fun for animals. Instead, we will take nature walks and discover those wild creatures who roam in our backyard, or we will watch videos about elephants and tigers living in their natural habitats. He will learn that he doesn't have to dissect animals to learn about anatomy. Instead, I will provide him and his teacher with dissection alternatives. I will teach him to quote a poster I proudly hang in my office, picturing a circle of humans and animals, hand in paw, that reads, "Everyone matters!" **AV**

### Resources for Parents

#### WEBSITES

- [Animalearn.org](http://Animalearn.org) – Parent center
- [ASPCAeducation.org](http://ASPCAeducation.org)
- [Teachkind.org](http://Teachkind.org)

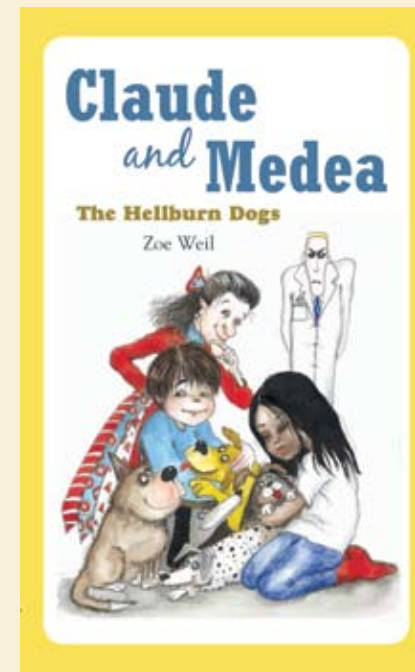
#### BOOKS

- *Above All Be Kind: Raising a Humane Child in Challenging Times*  
By Zoe Weil
- *50 Awesome Ways Kids Can Help Animals: Fun and Easy Ways to be a Kind Kid*  
By Ingrid Newkirk

#### VIDEOS

- *Share the World*
- *Beyond Violence*

# Book Review



### Meet Claude and Medea

In a world where society seems so self-centered, kids today need positive influences that instill good character and show why it is important to care about what happens to others.

They also need books that teach as well as entertain. In *Claude and Medea: The Hellburn Dogs*, author Zoe Weil accomplishes all of the above.

Showing that you can't judge a book by its cover, Weil introduces the reader to Claude and Medea, two classmates, who, on the surface, seem unlikely friends. The son of a Senator and a famous journalist,

Claude Maxwell-Cunningham is agreeable and outgoing, while Medea Ramon is an intelligent young girl from Harlem who attends their exclusive private school on a full scholarship. They are brought together by a quirky substitute teacher named Ms. Rattlebee.

Through Ms. Rattlebee, Weil cleverly discusses many issues of concern to our society, including social justice and animal rights. Although their classmates seem unsympathetic to the plight of those less fortunate, Claude and Medea look at things differently, and form a bond that brings about a great friendship.

Their fortitudes are tested, however, when they learn that Brady and several other dogs in the neighborhood have been stolen. Appalled that someone would even consider doing this, Claude and Medea want to do more than just learn about such a terrible incident, they want to try to stop it. In doing so, they embark on a dangerous adventure that leads them to an animal research laboratory.

A controversial topic to broach, Weil tackles the issue of animal research carefully, and includes admonishment for the children from Claude's father as well as the police for getting involved in such a treacherous situation. In the end, both Claude and Medea learn valuable lessons, and no doubt so will young readers. **AV**