

**ANIMALS AS MORAL AND NATURAL SYMBOLS IN MICHAEL MORPURGO'S FICTION****Yuldosheva Zulfizar Sobir kizi**

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[zulfizaryuldasheva56@gmail.com](mailto:zulfizaryuldasheva56@gmail.com)**Abstract**

Michael Morpurgo's fiction holds an important place in contemporary children's literature because of its strong humanistic message and frequent use of animal imagery. In his works, animals are not only part of the storyline but also meaningful symbols that express moral values and ecological ideas. They often represent qualities such as kindness, loyalty, responsibility, and respect for life. This article examines how animal characters in Morpurgo's fiction function as moral and ecological symbols and how they help readers understand ethical behavior and the relationship between humans and nature. By analyzing selected novels, the study shows that animal imagery plays a key role in developing empathy and environmental awareness among young readers. As a result, Morpurgo's use of animals can be seen as an effective artistic and educational tool in modern children's literature.

**Keywords:** Michael Morpurgo, animal imagery, moral values, ecological symbolism, children's literature

**Introduction**

Animal imagery has always played an important role in world literature, especially in texts written for children. From traditional fables to modern narratives, animals are often used to represent human qualities, moral values, and social ideas in a form that is easily understood by young readers. In contemporary children's literature, animal characters no longer serve only as entertaining figures; instead, they function as symbolic images that express deeper moral and ecological meanings. Through animals, writers are able to discuss serious topics such as responsibility, kindness, violence, and respect for nature in a gentle and accessible way. One of the most prominent representatives of this literary tradition is the British children's writer Michael Morpurgo. His fiction is widely known for its strong humanistic orientation and emotional depth. Morpurgo frequently places animals at the center of his narratives and presents the world from their perspective. By doing so, he encourages readers to develop empathy and to question human behavior, particularly in situations involving war, cruelty, and environmental destruction. Animals in his works often symbolize innocence and vulnerability, which highlights the moral responsibility of humans toward all living beings. In addition to their moral function, animal images in Morpurgo's fiction also carry important ecological meanings. The author pays special attention to the relationship between humans and the natural world, showing how human actions directly affect animals and their environments. His works promote ideas of harmony with nature and emphasize the need to protect the environment. This ecological awareness is especially significant in modern society, where environmental problems have become a global concern.

The purpose of this article is to examine animals as moral and ecological symbols in Michael Morpurgo's fiction. By analyzing selected works, the study aims to show how animal imagery contributes to the artistic quality and ideological richness of his narratives. The article also seeks to demonstrate that Morpurgo's use of animal characters is not only an artistic choice



but also an effective educational tool that helps young readers develop moral sensitivity and ecological consciousness.

### **Animals as moral symbols in Michael Morpurgo's fiction**

In Michael Morpurgo's fiction, animals often function as powerful moral symbols that help convey ethical values to young readers. Rather than presenting animals simply as companions or background characters, the author gives them emotional depth and moral significance. Through animal characters, Morpurgo explores themes such as loyalty, compassion, courage, sacrifice, and innocence. These qualities are usually contrasted with human cruelty, violence, or moral weakness, which allows readers to reflect on human behavior from a critical perspective. One of the most striking examples of animals as moral symbols can be found in the novel *War Horse*. The horse Joey represents loyalty and endurance in the face of extreme suffering caused by war. By telling the story from the horse's point of view, Morpurgo removes political justification and focuses instead on the emotional and moral consequences of human actions. Joey does not understand national borders or military conflict; he only experiences pain, fear, and attachment. This narrative strategy encourages readers to question the morality of war and to empathize with innocent victims, both human and non-human.

Animals in Morpurgo's works often symbolize moral purity and honesty. Unlike human characters, animals do not act out of greed or hatred. Their reactions are natural and sincere, which highlights the artificial and destructive nature of many human decisions. This contrast helps young readers distinguish between right and wrong without direct moral instruction. Instead of preaching, Morpurgo allows moral lessons to emerge naturally through the experiences of animal characters. Furthermore, animals frequently act as moral guides for human characters. Relationships between children and animals in Morpurgo's fiction are usually based on trust and mutual understanding. These relationships teach responsibility, empathy, and emotional maturity. Through caring for animals, young protagonists learn important life lessons and develop a stronger sense of moral awareness.

### **Animals as Ecological Symbols**

In addition to their moral role, animals in Michael Morpurgo's fiction also function as strong ecological symbols. The author presents animals as living beings whose lives are closely connected to nature and the environment. They are shown as part of natural systems that must remain in balance in order to survive. Through animal characters, Morpurgo helps readers understand that humans, animals, and nature depend on each other. When this balance is broken, animals are often the first to suffer, which shows the negative results of careless human actions. A clear example of ecological symbolism can be found in *Kensuke's Kingdom*. In this novel, animals live freely on the island and exist in harmony with nature. They are not afraid of the environment and follow the natural order of life. The island itself is presented as a safe and balanced ecosystem. However, when humans interfere, this balance is disturbed. Morpurgo uses animal imagery to show that nature should not be controlled or damaged by humans. Instead, humans should learn to respect natural rules. Animals in the novel symbolize peace, balance, and harmony with the natural world. Another important aspect of ecological symbolism in Morpurgo's fiction is the idea of animal vulnerability. Animals are often shown as weak and unprotected against human power. In many of his works, animals suffer because of war, environmental destruction, and human exploitation. For example, in *War Horse*, horses suffer greatly during war, even though they have no understanding of human conflict. This shows how human violence damages not only people but also innocent animals and the natural environment.



Morpurgo presents this suffering in a realistic but sensitive way, which helps readers feel empathy rather than fear. By giving animals a central place in his stories, Morpurgo allows them to express the voice of nature. Animals become silent witnesses to environmental damage and human mistakes. Their suffering acts as a warning and encourages readers to think more carefully about how human actions affect the natural world. This ecological message is especially important for young readers, who are still developing their understanding of responsibility and care. Overall, the ecological symbolism in Morpurgo's fiction carries a clear environmental message. Animals represent nature itself and remind readers that protecting animals also means protecting the planet. Through simple but powerful animal images, Morpurgo helps children develop environmental awareness and respect for all living beings. His works suggest that a healthy future is only possible when humans live in harmony with nature rather than trying to dominate it.

### **The relationship between Humans and Animals**

The relationship between humans and animals is one of the most important themes in Michael Morpurgo's fiction. In his stories, animals are not shown as objects or property. Instead, they are presented as living beings with feelings, emotions, and needs. Morpurgo often describes animals as close companions who share strong emotional bonds with human characters. These relationships help shape the moral growth of children and teach them important life lessons. In many of Morpurgo's novels, children develop deep connections with animals, especially during difficult moments in their lives. Animals help young characters deal with loneliness, fear, and emotional pain. For example, a child may feel safer and calmer when spending time with an animal. Through these relationships, children learn how to care for others and understand emotions. Animals provide comfort and trust, and they accept humans without judgment. This shows that empathy and kindness are key moral values in human life. Morpurgo also uses human-animal relationships to show how people can change for the better. When characters take responsibility for animals, they become more patient, caring, and mature. Animals help children learn about loyalty, responsibility, and respect. These lessons are not taught through direct instruction but through everyday experiences shared with animals. However, Morpurgo does not show these relationships as perfect. He also includes examples where humans harm animals through cruelty, neglect, or lack of understanding. In such cases, animals suffer because of human mistakes. These moments are important because they teach readers about responsibility and ethical behavior. Animals become silent victims who show the consequences of careless actions. Through the relationship between humans and animals, Morpurgo sends a clear moral message. Humans have a duty to protect and respect animals. Care and kindness are not choices but responsibilities. This message is especially powerful in children's literature, where emotional connection helps shape attitudes and beliefs. By showing strong and realistic human-animal relationships, Morpurgo encourages young readers to become more compassionate and responsible toward animals and the natural world. The emotional power of these relationships is strongly influenced by Morpurgo's narrative techniques, which often focus on the animal's experience. One of the most distinctive and important features of Michael Morpurgo's fiction is his use of animal perspective in storytelling. In many of his novels, animals are not only part of the story but also play a central role in shaping the narrative. Sometimes animals tell the story themselves, and in other cases, the story is closely connected to their feelings and experiences. This narrative technique creates a strong emotional connection between the reader and the animal characters and helps deliver both moral and ecological messages in a powerful and natural way. When a story is told from an animal's point of view, readers are invited to see the world through different eyes. Animals do not understand human rules, politics, or conflicts. They react only to pain, fear, kindness, and care.



Because of this, human actions that may seem normal or necessary are often shown as confusing, cruel, or harmful from the animal's perspective. This change in point of view encourages readers, especially young ones, to question human behavior and think more deeply about responsibility and empathy. A clear example of this narrative technique can be seen in *War Horse*. The novel is told from the perspective of a horse named Joey. Joey does not understand why people fight wars or why he is taken away from his home. He only feels fear, pain, and sadness when he is forced to work on the battlefield. Through Joey's eyes, war is shown not as a heroic event but as a source of suffering and destruction. The animal perspective removes political and national reasons and focuses only on the emotional and physical impact of war. This makes the story very emotional and helps readers feel sympathy for both animals and people who suffer because of war. The emotional impact of animal narration is very strong because animals are innocent characters. They do not choose violence and do not understand human cruelty. When animals suffer, readers often feel deeper sadness and compassion than they would for human characters. In *War Horse*, readers feel Joey's fear during battles and his pain when he is treated badly. This emotional response helps readers understand the moral message of the story: war harms innocent beings and should be questioned. Another important example can be found in *The Butterfly Lion*. In this novel, the lion cub represents innocence and freedom. Although the story is not told directly by the animal, the narrative closely follows the lion's life and suffering. The lion is taken away from its natural environment and forced to live under human control. Through this story, Morpurgo shows how human actions can destroy the natural life of animals. Readers feel sadness and anger when the lion suffers, even though it cannot speak. The emotional power of the story comes from the animal's silence and helplessness. Morpurgo also uses animal perspective to strengthen ecological messages. Animals are often shown as part of nature and the environment. They live according to natural rules and do not harm the world around them. Humans, however, often disturb this balance through war, hunting, and environmental destruction. When animals are placed at the center of the story, readers become more aware of environmental problems and their effects.

In *Kensuke's Kingdom*, animals are not narrators, but they strongly influence the story. The island is full of animals that live peacefully in nature. When the boy Michael arrives on the island, he slowly learns to respect animals and the environment. Through his interaction with animals, Michael changes his attitude and becomes more responsible. Animals in this novel help show the beauty of nature and the importance of living in harmony with it. The emotional impact comes from the peaceful relationship between humans and animals, which contrasts with the destructive behavior seen in the modern world. Another important aspect of Morpurgo's narrative technique is the use of emotional simplicity. The language used by animal characters is often simple and direct. Animals describe what they feel rather than explaining ideas in a complex way. This makes the story easy to understand for young readers and allows emotions to play a central role. Fear, happiness, pain, and love are shown clearly, without complicated explanations. This emotional clarity helps readers connect deeply with the story. The use of animal perspective also helps Morpurgo avoid direct moral teaching. Instead of telling readers what is right or wrong, he allows them to feel emotions and draw their own conclusions. When readers feel sad for an animal or angry about its suffering, they naturally understand the moral message. This indirect way of teaching is very effective in children's literature. In stories that deal with war and environmental destruction, the emotional effect of animal narration becomes even stronger. Animals do not understand why their world is being destroyed. They only experience loss and fear. This makes their suffering more tragic. In *War Horse*, Joey loses friends and faces constant danger. He does not know why this happens, which makes the reader question the reasons behind human violence. Overall, narrative perspective plays a key role in the emotional power of Morpurgo's fiction. By giving animals a voice or placing them at the



center of the narrative, Morpurgo creates stories that are emotionally rich and morally meaningful. Readers are encouraged to feel empathy, question human behavior, and develop a deeper understanding of ethical and ecological issues.

Through animal perspective, Morpurgo successfully combines storytelling with moral and environmental education. His works show that animals are not only characters in stories but also important voices that help readers understand the world more clearly. This narrative technique is one of the main reasons why Morpurgo's fiction has such a strong emotional impact on young readers and remains relevant in modern children's literature.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, animals in Michael Morpurgo's fiction function as powerful moral and ecological symbols that reflect the author's strong commitment to ethical values and environmental responsibility. Through carefully developed animal characters, Morpurgo explores important themes such as compassion, loyalty, suffering, and harmony with nature. Animals are not presented as passive elements of the narrative; instead, they act as moral guides, ecological voices, and emotional companions who influence both human characters and readers. This symbolic use of animals helps readers develop empathy, sensitivity, and a deeper understanding of the moral consequences of human actions. The analysis of selected works demonstrates that animal imagery is a central artistic device in Morpurgo's fiction and plays a significant role in shaping the ideological and educational meaning of his narratives. By presenting events from the perspective of animals or closely aligning the narrative with their experiences, Morpurgo encourages young readers to view the world from a non-human point of view. This shift in perspective invites readers to question violence, exploitation, and environmental destruction, while promoting values such as responsibility, respect, and care for all living beings.

Furthermore, the moral and ecological symbolism of animals in Morpurgo's works shows that children's literature can successfully address complex ethical and environmental issues without losing its emotional appeal or artistic quality. Morpurgo's fiction demonstrates the ability of animal imagery to connect literary aesthetics with moral education. Therefore, the study of animal symbolism in Michael Morpurgo's works remains an important and relevant area of research in contemporary literary studies, particularly in discussions of children's literature, humanism, and ecological awareness.

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