

*Children's Literature Reviews*

Item 15 of 130

**Boris***Cynthia Rylant.*[Contributor biographical information](#)[Publisher description](#)[Sample text](#)

Orlando : Harcourt, 2005.

74 p. ; 19 cm.

**Horn Book Guide:**

Fall 2005 Nonfiction-Literature Rating 1, Outstanding, noteworthy in style, content, and/or illustration.

**Reading Measurement Programs:**

Accelerated Reader  
Interest Level Middle Grade  
Book Level 4.9  
Accelerated Reader Points 1

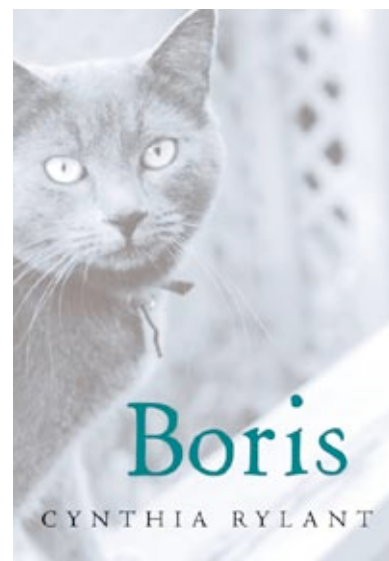
Lexile, MetaMetrics, Inc.  
Non-Prose

Reading Counts-Scholastic  
Interest Level 3-5  
Reading Level 4.1  
Title Point Value 3  
Lexile Measure AD 740

Reading Counts-Scholastic  
Interest Level 3-5  
Reading Level 5.2  
Title Point Value 9  
Lexile Measure 850

**Reviews:****Ilene Cooper (Booklist, Feb. 15, 2005 (Vol. 101, No. 12))**

This small book, written in terse free verse, introduces Boris, a gray cat who gets himself adopted, even though his unnamed narrator-owner (apparently Rylant) had no intention of getting a new pet. Like almost every cat owner, Rylant feels that her pet is remarkable. His name in his previous home was Hunter, and the moniker was well deserved--so much so that when a new cat moves next door, Rylant fears for its safety (ultimately, the two cats become best friends). Although Rylant, master of the perfectly chosen adjective, beautifully shares the affection she feels for Boris, this is, ultimately, a self-indulgent work. The book's subtext is the inevitability of change, and the larger lessons here are for middle-age women going through their own transformation: the narrator worries about no longer being cute enough to avoid traffic tickets, mourns children growing up, and tentatively welcomes relocation. This can be appreciated for the sway of the writing or for its celebration of cats, but probably those most affected won't be young people. Category: Books for Older Readers--Fiction. 2005, Harcourt, \$16. *Gr. 7-10.*



### **Karen Leggett (Children's Literature)**

This is the free verse story of Boris the cat, his sister, and the narrator who falls for them both when they appear in the window of a humane shelter. It is also the story of the compromise and thoughtfulness necessary for true friendship with cats or people and how our essential natures can be very simple--and very catlike: "We are outside cats/and proud of it/until the first big drop/of rain hits our noses/and we run for the door,/leaving our free spirits/behind us, crawling into someone's lap." Cynthia Rylant's poetry about Boris is as comfortable and comforting as the "same old furniture/you'd been clawing up for three years," but it is also an elegant study in the pacing and precision of each word. Everyday events become opportunities to ponder life--you never see baby kittens screaming for hours: why aren't humans born in litters so they can sleep in a pile of brothers and sisters with all that warm breathing? You never manage to move away from a place without tears and yet, "Isn't it so,/that every new place/is worth trying?" A few verses toward the end have language or situations that may raise an eyebrow and prompt an official listing of "14 up," but selected verses are excellent for a much wider age range. *Boris* is a fresh breath of characteristic warmth and gentle observation from a favorite author. 2005, Harcourt, \$16.00. Ages 12 up.

### **Gwynne Spencer (Children's Literature)**

This title is not much of a book at all, weighing about the same as a little cat, but unlike most cat books--which are mere paeans to a dead feline--this one is Cynthia Rylant's extended monologue--a lecture of sorts--to her cat Boris. It will inspire you (yes, you) to write one of your own. Not necessarily to your cat, but perhaps to your dog, or your baby or your father. Once you read it, your memory is guaranteed to be like one of those road maps that just will not allow itself to be folded back into its original shape. It is a lovely late-night reading book, but it would be a terrific read aloud that you could take on a road trip or to a nursing home if you had to go to a nursing home to spend time with someone. Or it would be a good book, like a good cat, to give someone comfort. Or if you are lucky enough to be a teacher, you could read it to your students and then have them, all full of its rich knotty language, write one of their own--much shorter, not as well crafted, but their own, nonetheless. Cynthia Rylant, extraordinary writer of many books, knows how to get into your heart and leave a piece of herself there. *Boris* is not one of those horrible books where the cat dies at the end and you cry and get all stupid. It deserves your full attention, and ought to come standard with a cat from a shelter. Cynthia, I thank you. 2005, Harcourt, \$16.00. Ages 14 up.

### **Kirkus (Kirkus Reviews, March 15, 2005 (Vol. 73, No. 6))**

With characteristic sensitivity, Rylant addresses one of her cats in a set of conversational free-verse poems--recalling the day she brought him and his sister home from the humane shelter, warning him about predatory eagles, congratulating him on bonding rather than battling with a new neighbor's cat and on surviving a solitary jaunt into the surrounding woods. She uses these and other incidents to reflect on parallels in her own life: "we are like you, Boris. / We are outside cats / and proud of it / until the first big drop / of rain hits out noses. . . ." Though subtler and more understated than Dave Crawley's *Cat Poems*, (see above) neither the language nor the insights here should present challenges for readers, even younger or less practiced ones. 2005, Harcourt, 80p, \$16.00. Category: Poetry. Ages 8 to 10. © 2005 Kirkus Reviews/VNU eMedia, Inc. All rights reserved.

### **Susan Black (Library Media Connection, October 2005)**

Cat lovers will love the poetic story of Boris, a big gray cat that integrates his cat habits and personality into the life of his new owner. This story of love and companionship between a cat and his owner is written as poetry and begins with the day his new owner finds him in a humane shelter. Throughout the story Boris sleeps, hunts, explores, and befriends new neighbors as his owner develops an understanding and appreciation of her relationship with her cat and her cat's relationship with her. This is a short book that not only develops the character of Boris, but also of his owner (who is not named). *Boris* is a story that will leave the reader wondering what happened to Boris and his owner's lives after their story ends. This book would be a nice addition to the library's collection of novels written in poetry form. Recommended. 2005, Harcourt, 80pp., \$16 hc. Ages 12 up.

### **Hope Morrison (The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, April 2005 (Vol. 58, No. 8))**

At first glance, this is a collection of poetry told from the point of view of a thoughtful, somewhat lonely woman and addressed to a recently adopted stray cat called Boris. In fact, this is a meaningful exploration of how one woman, in speculating on how her cat might see the world, comes to understand it, and the feline, on a new level. The poems each focus on a small event or observation--wanting to be home during inclement weather, contemplating a move from house-with-yard to condominium, spinning Boris around on the hardwood floor--and

they are consistently successful in introducing and completing each focal concept. Rylant has effectively told the reader everything and nothing about the narrator: very little background information or personal description is given, and yet, in reading the nineteen poems in this finely tuned collection, the reader comes away with a sense of understanding of the woman's personal struggles with isolation and her personal joys in her chosen companions (three dogs and two cats) and in the greater world around her. There is a sense of growth implicit in the narrator's journal-like expositions ("And do you think, Boris,/ how terribly beautiful/ it all is,/ this world that/ lives in a frenzy all day/ then drops/ limp/ like a new baby/ into the deep sleep of night?"), as well as a parental affection demonstrated toward the kitty's antics ("Boris, you weren't supposed to/ beat up an old cat"). This isn't about being a pet owner so much as it is about one individual exploring life, relationships, and the passing of years, and adults are likely to get as much, if not more, out of the reflections than teenaged readers. (Reviewed from galleys) Review Code: R -- Recommended. (c) Copyright 2005, The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. 2005, Harcourt, 80p, \$16.00. Grades 10 up.

### **Horn Book (The Horn Book Guide, Fall 2005)**

The narrator of these nineteen poems speaks directly to her cat, Boris, about his life--and her own--since his arrival at her door. A great introduction for readers not comfortable with poetry, the poems tell an accessible, compelling story--like a good free-verse novel, but briefer--while exposing readers to some skillful writing. Though the narrator is an adult, the tone is never nostalgic. Category: Nonfiction-Literature. 2005, Harcourt, 74pp, 16.00. *Ages 14 to 18*. Rating: 1: Outstanding, noteworthy in style, content, and/or illustration.

### **Dawn Stewart (The Lorgnette - Heart of Texas Reviews (Vol. 18, No. 1))**

Boris, a big gray cat, is the main character of this poetry collection. Abandoned and found at an animal shelter, Boris finds a new life and gives new life to his new owner. The author goes into the new shelter in town wanting only one cat and comes out with two, Boris and his sister. The two cats share their new home with three dogs. At first Boris is reluctant to come out from his safe place upstairs, but after a while he begins to feel comfortable with his new surroundings. He even tolerates the dogs. Boris' owner finds comfort and pleasure in everything that he does. She rejoices in his triumphs and grieves when she believes that he is gone forever. The author allows us to feel the strong bond that is shared between her and Boris. The book shows the parallels of the cat's and the owners lives as well as the differences. High school students would enjoy this book. The poetry is easy to read and understand. Nonfiction (811). Grades 9-12. 2005, Harcourt, 74p., \$16.00. Ages 14 to 18.

### **Jan Chapman (VOYA, April 2005 (Vol. 28, No. 1))**

This book is an engaging story told in the poetic narrative of Boris, a large grey cat who was adopted from a pet shelter. Boris is a cat with personality; he loves to hunt, boss around other cats, and amuse his adult friends by playing spinnies on the hardwood floor. He manages a visit to the vet with regal dignity, making the other shivering pets waiting their turn seem like utter wimps. At the end of the story, Boris must move with his owner to a new home, and the narrator vividly imagines his uncertain thoughts on the long ride--does he wonder if he is being taken to another shelter and abandoned by his beloved owner? But his is not just a story about a cat. It is equally the story of an owner of cats, someone who is willing to tell a persnickety neighbor off because of ridiculous complaints about Boris and to reconsider a move to a city because her cat would hate that unwelcoming environment. Rylant skillfully conveys powerful emotion through this everyday gentle story about a beloved pet. This slim volume might have the look of a children's book, but its mood and language are for older readers, middle school age and up. Older teens with an interest in pets might also enjoy this whimsical and touching story that is reminiscent of Cleveland Amory's *The Cat Who Came for Christmas* (Little, Brown, 2001). VOYA CODES: 4Q 3P M J (Better than most, marred only by occasional lapses; Will appeal with pushing; Middle School, defined as grades 6 to 8; Junior High, defined as grades 7 to 9). 2005, Harcourt, 80p., \$16. Ages 11 to 15.

### **Subjects:**

[Cats Poetry.](#)

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