

Cow by Malachy Doyle & Angelo Rinaldi

The title page shows a cow walking away from the reader, as if an invitation into the pages of book is being offered. Follow her and you enter the world of the cow for one hot summer's day. The book imparts a vast amount of information that young children will find fascinating, and the information is immediately accessible.

The text that accompanies the beautifully drawn illustrations is deceptively simple. Each word has been carefully chosen and not one is wasted. The rich vocabulary used in the book offers a valuable opportunity for the discussion of words that might be new to the children – discussing their possible meanings and talking about the way that the author has used the words to such good effect. This is a book that deserves to be savoured – reading through once with the children, pausing so that they can make comments and respond to the images that have been offered to them in both words and pictures.

Children for whom these sights are familiar need time to be allowed to say so and to make the links with their lives in the educational setting. Children for whom such images are new or unusual need to be given time to ask questions and to make sense of what they are seeing. Rereading will be important as it allows the children to come to know the book very well.

Asking children to devise questions based on the book is an excellent activity for getting them to look beyond the written word and increase their capacity to have a deep understanding of what they are reading. You might begin any such discussion by asking some questions of the children that ask them to reflect upon the book that they have shared with you.

- What do the children think it is like being a cow?
- Do the children think that the cows genuinely enjoy their routine?
- How do the cows feel about their day?
- Do cows ever get bored?
- Is it really hard work being a cow? Do the children know of any other animal that might work harder? What do the children think hard work is?

A multiplicity of other activities spring to mind when looking through this book. An obvious place to start would be some activities based around the journey of our milk, from cow to our homes the beginning of which is described in the book.

The following list highlights a few more possibilities

- Data handling, who likes milk? Who does not?
- Which kind of milk do the children enjoy?
- Are there any children who have tried sheep's milk or goat's milk?
- Cooking with milk, making milkshakes, pancakes and so on.
- Looking at and tasting milk products, yoghurt, cheese and butter (being aware of any allergies of course)
- Small world play. Try making a wonderful environment for the toy cows by growing them a field to graze in. This is easily done. Take a builders tray or similar container and spread a layer of multi purpose compost across the base. Sprinkle a couple of handfuls of grass seeds across the compost and water it. After a few days depending on the time of year and whether you are doing it indoors or outdoors the grass will begin to grow. Providing small world environments such as this will greatly increase the learning potential of such play. There is likely to be far greater opportunities for the development of descriptive and emotional vocabulary and the activity itself is likely to appeal to a wider range of children.