

The Very Hungry Caterpillar

By Eric Carle

Philomel Books

A Reading and Discussion Guide

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SUMMARY:

A small caterpillar hatches from its egg and immediately begins its quest for food. He eats yummy fruits, then junk food that leaves his stomach aching. Munching on a fresh green leaf cures his tummy ache and leaves our now very large caterpillar ready to hole up in his cocoon. A few weeks go by and our voracious caterpillar emerges as a colorful butterfly.

It's the classic children's picture book for generation after generation. Its enduring themes, deceptively simple art, and bright colors ensure that it will be a classic for generations of children to come.

At first, when we're small, all we notice about Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* are the colors, the cute caterpillar and the hole through each page. As we grow up, we notice that this is also a counting book, a science lesson, and a warning that eating too much junk food will make our tummies sore. As adults, and parents, and teachers we find even more lessons to base around this book: the days of the week, art mediums, counting, personal transformation, and nutrition. We see the intricacies of Mr. Carle's art, the colors, the collage, his use of multimedia and paper engineering: short then progressively longer pages with corresponding holes as the caterpillar eats more and more.

I could leave the summary of this book as just the first paragraph, but this book is so much more. Indeed, it is what we build childhood on. Eric Carle teaches us that we can all grow up to be butterflies.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How long does the caterpillar eat before he makes his cocoon? What does he eat on Monday? Tuesday? Sunday?
2. What do you think this book has to say about eating right? Do you think that the caterpillar would have turned into such a beautiful butterfly if he had kept eating junk food?

ACTIVITIES:

1. Eric Carle's art form is called collage. Try making your own art using the same method.
2. Explore some other artists who worked in collage. Eric Carle admires Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and Paul Klee among others. What other children's illustrators use collage?
3. Capture a caterpillar and take care of it until it becomes a butterfly or moth. Does the caterpillar look anything like the creature it becomes later?
4. Grow your own butterfly garden. You can plant a garden to attract butterflies to your home!

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Excerpted from <http://www.eric-carle.com/bio.html>

Eric Carle is acclaimed and beloved as the creator of brilliantly illustrated and innovatively designed picture books for very young children. His best-known work, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, has eaten its way into the hearts of literally millions of children all over the world and has been translated into more than 30 languages and sold over 22 million copies. Since the Caterpillar was published in 1969, Eric Carle has illustrated more than seventy books, many best sellers, most of which he also wrote, and more than 71 million copies of his books have sold around the world.

Born in Syracuse, New York, in 1929, Eric Carle moved with his parents to Germany when he was six years old; he was educated there, and graduated from the prestigious art school, the **Akademie der bildenden Künste**, in Stuttgart. But his dream was always to return to America, the land of his happiest childhood memories. So, in 1952, with a fine portfolio in hand and forty dollars in his pocket, he arrived in New York. Soon he found a job as a graphic designer in the promotion department of *The New York Times*. Later, he was the art director of an advertising agency for many years.

One day, respected educator and author, Bill Martin Jr, called to ask Carle to illustrate a story he had written. Martin's eye had been caught by a striking picture of a red lobster that Carle had created for an advertisement. *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* was the result of their collaboration. It is still a favorite with children everywhere. This was the beginning of Eric Carle's true career. Soon Carle was writing his own stories, too. His first wholly original book was *1,2,3 to the Zoo*, followed soon afterward by the celebrated classic, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.

Eric Carle's art is distinctive and instantly recognizable. His art work is created in collage technique, using hand-painted papers, which he cuts and layers to form bright and cheerful images. Many of his books have an added dimension—die-cut pages, twinkling lights as in *The Very Lonely Firefly*, even the lifelike sound of a cricket's song as in *The Very Quiet Cricket* - giving them a playful quality: a toy that can be read, a book that can be touched.

Children also enjoy working in collage and many send him pictures they have made themselves, inspired by his illustrations. He receives hundreds of letters each week from his young admirers.

HELPFUL LINKS:

Selected Books by Eric Carle:

1,2,3 to the Zoo (1968); *The Mixed-Up Chameleon* (1975); *Papa, Please Get the Moon For Me* (1986); *Draw Me a Star* (1992); *Dream Snow* (2000); *10 Little Rubber Ducks* (2005)

Other Books You Might Enjoy:

The Art of Eric Carle, Eric Carle, 1996, Hamish-Hamilton Children's Books
You Can Make a Collage: A Very Simple How To Book, 1998, Klutz
Peterson First Guide to Caterpillars of North America, Amy Bartlett Wright, 1998, Houghton Mifflin
From Caterpillar to Butterfly, Deborah Heiligman, 1995, Harper Collins
The Creepy Crawly Caterpillar Book, Margery Facklam, 1999, Little, Brown
As pets: *Caterpillars*, Theresa Greenaway, 1999 Raintree Steck-Vaughn

Websites:

The Official Eric Carle Website: <http://www.eric-carle.com/>

Backyard Nature: <http://www.backyardnature.net/caterpil.htm>

Butterfly Farm: http://www.thebutterflyfarm.com/Raising_butterflies.htm

What's This North American Caterpillar?: <http://www.whatsthis caterpillar.co.uk/america>

Worldwide Art Gallery: <http://www.theartgallery.com.au/kidsart.html>

The Art Zone: <http://www.nga.gov/kids/zone/collagemachine.htm>



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