

Koko's Kitten



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In *The Education of Koko*, an adult title, Patterson described her successful career as a teacher and caretaker of a female gorilla, Koko. Since 1972, the author and Koko have been communicating in sign language, mostly on subjects important to the big, surprisingly gentle animal. Before Koko's 12th birthday, she signed that she wanted "Cereal there. Good there drink. Cat." Later she repeated, "Cat. Cat. Cat." So Patterson brought a kitten to visit; Koko named him All Ball (he had no tail) and mothered the mite with the love visible in Cohn's wonderful color photos. They show vividly the humanlike relationship developing between the huge gorilla and her tiny baby. When All Ball is killed by a car and Koko signs "Cry, sad, frown," and weeps, we know why the

author cries too. It's gratifying to report that, in time, Koko expressed "Good. Nice." Her new kitten had come to stay.

Grade 1-4 The cover photo alone is all that is needed to "sell" this book the smallest, most delicate of kitten profiles in the massively careful embrace of a glistening gorilla, whose bare-knuckled fist is four times the size of the diminutive feline's head, and whose face radiates tenderness. Koko is one of a number of great apes in various experimental communication programs and is remarkably conversant in American Sign Language, used by hundreds of thousands of hearing-impaired people. With her linguistic skill, she asked for, and finally received, the small, tailless tabby kitten she promptly named All Ball. This brief, moving book records Koko's relationship with her pet. All Ball was groomed, played with, cuddled and loved, and never once showed fear of her large foster-mother, outlandish though she might seem to feline eyes. The growing relationship was cut horribly short by All Ball's death beneath the wheels of a car, and Koko's grief is dramatically recorded on film. Fortunately, Koko was given the opportunity to have another kitten, and chose a second tailless Manx. In a happy new beginning, she is shown cuddling "Lipstick." In beautiful color photos, and a brief accompanying text, Patterson and Cohn let readers see beneath the glossy fur, the heavy brows and the animal shape to the gentle mind that wanted something to love and be loved by. An empathy-building book of high degree.

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