



Crusher will charm readers in this entertaining, clever novel about a snake in captivity and how she turns the tables on her human captor.



I am a snake.

No, not a rattlesnake. I just look like one. I'm a gopher snake.

One day an oily, filthy, fleshy human child crossed my path. As luck would have it, he knew the difference between a gopher snake and a rattlesnake. He has imprisoned me in a terrarium. His name is Gunnar. He calls me Crusher. He thinks I'm male. I'm not.

He dropped in a dead mouse and hoped I'd eat it. I buried it. He then dropped in a live one, which he called "Breakfast." I didn't lay a coil on it.

Gunnar thinks I'll be his adoring pet. He's wrong.

In fact, I am planning my escape. I may take Breakfast with me.



Patrick Jennings grew up in a small town in Indiana, where there were no wild, lethally venomous snakes. He then lived in rural Arizona, where they were many, including seventeen varieties of rattlesnake. As an adult, he decided to confront his fears and learn more about the creatures. The more he learned, the more he came to hold snakes in high regard, and he even held some of them in his own hands. He introduced live snakes to groups of children, allowing them to touch them, hoping to prevent new generations from misunderstanding—and therefore, fearing—snakes as he did. Even after all this, however, Patrick is still seriously creeped out by the reptiles. He now lives in Washington State, where there are no wild, lethally venomous snakes.



WE CAN'T ALL BE RATTLESNAKES BY PATRICK JENNINGS
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS DEVELOPED BY FRIENDS OVER BOOKS VOLUNTEERS

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1. Have you ever felt like Crusher when he arrived in the puzzling new world of Gunnar's room and has to figure out how to survive (ie. the first day of school or camp)? How did you feel in that situation? Did someone help you feel more comfortable? How did they do that? Have you ever helped someone feel more comfortable in a new situation? Who? When? How?
 2. Discuss the title. Do you think Crusher liked being perceived as a rattlesnake? In what ways did it prove to be helpful to her?
 3. How do humans come across in this book? How do you control nature? (refrigerators, sun lamps, windows). Did some of Crusher's observations about people surprise you? Make you laugh?
 4. Have you ever befriended someone who is weaker than you (like Breakfast) who needed your protection?
 5. Do you know someone like Gunnar who is sad, lonely and emotionally neglected by his parents? Someone who takes his pain out on his pets or children who are weaker than he is? What could the parents have done to make Gunnar a better human being (refused to let him be cruel to animals, forbidden him to play violent video games, spent time with him, communicated with him in a more constructive, nurturing way).
 6. Why does Crusher refuse to eat Breakfast, the mouse? (pride, compassion?)
 7. What did you learn about the gopher snakes in this book? (ie. that they are afraid of falling because they lack limbs; that they have limited maternal instincts – "I can't imagine living with one's off spring. I've never ever met mine"; that they are cold blooded and need warmth; that they asphyxiate - and kill – their prey (frequently rodents) by tightening around them before actually swallowing them); that they can go for long periods of time without eating.

What else can you learn about gopher snakes? (ie. that they also eat lizards and birds; that they are between 36 and 96 inches long; that they can be cream or green-gray or tan with large black, brown or red blotches on their back; they are non-venomous; when sensing danger they coil up, vibrate their tails and hiss. They may be prey to coyotes, hawks and foxes. They prefer grasslands and open brush areas and are frequently found in the American Southwest.
 8. How did Crusher communicate with Gunnar's other victims-the tortoise and the lizard? Have you ever communicated with people telepathically? How did you do that? (raising an eyebrows, smiling, frowning shaking your head, nodding, etc.)
 9. What tactics does Crusher use to disarm her master so that she can escape (she pretends to be his non-threatening, tame friend).
 10. What did you learn about wild animals in this book? Did this book remind you of other animal books that you have read? Which ones? How? Did you think you will treat animals differently now that you have read this book? Did your sensitivity towards them grow?
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