

[Author shares message of responsible pet ownership](#)

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[Jimmy Tomlin](#)

HIGH POINT — If you think [CritterKin](#) sounds like some sort of combination of animals and family, you're barking up the right tree. Jena Ball, of Cary, has combined three of her greatest passions — writing, illustrating and animal rights — to create CritterKin, a series of books and children's products aimed at teaching children and families the importance of being responsible caregivers for their pets.

Ball will be in High Point Friday evening for a presentation she calls "Be Kind: A CritterKin Reading." The program will be at [Barnes & Noble Booksellers](#), where she will read from her CritterKin book "Meet the Mutts."

"There are eight dogs in the CritterKin pack, and I gave each one of them a lesson to teach," Ball said during a telephone interview. "For this program, I'll be reading the chapter about [Ricky Bobby](#), which focuses on kindness."

In addition to Ball's presentation, Jeremy Williamson and Vanessa Kearney Williamson of the [Merit Pit Bull Foundation](#) will be on hand with their community ambassador dog, Lizzie. They will share information about volunteering, fostering and adoption opportunities with their organization, which is based in Greensboro.

Ball's tale of Ricky Bobby is based on the true story of a dachshund named Ricky Bobby that was rescued from a North Carolina puppy mill. By the time the Humane Society rescued him, his back legs didn't work because of a degenerative disc resulting from neglect. The dog was adopted by Ball's veterinary technician, Megan Bliss.

"She adopted him and built him a little cart that helps him get around, and now he's happy," Ball explained. "Ricky Bobby's life was transformed by kindness, and that's the lesson of that chapter in the book. Megan didn't have to adopt him but she did, and one person being kind and caring and determined has changed not only this dog's life, but the life of everyone who comes in contact with him."

According to Ball, during her presentation she will read her story about Ricky Bobby and then discuss the concept of kindness, particularly as it relates to animals. "I'll ask the children, 'What can we do to help the lives of animals in the community?'" Ball said. "So we take the stories and use them as a door to thinking and feeling in real and honest ways, and then we take that learning and apply it in real life."

It's a concept Ball refers to as humane education, and the idea is to teach children about the important responsibilities that come with being a caregiver for a pet.

The idea for CritterKin stemmed from a conversation Ball had with a 7-year-old girl who was talking about how much she'd like to have a pet dog. The girl told Ball a dog would be fun to play with and could even sleep in her bed with her. "Then I asked her who was going to feed the dog and take care of the dog, and she said, 'Oh, Mom will do that,'" Ball said. "Of course,

the mom just rolled her eyes, but later I told her mother that there could be a really great lesson there for her daughter — a lesson about responsibility.”

That simple conversation ultimately led to the creation of CritterKin, a project Ball said is just getting started. “I want it to become a teaching tool, a way to bring project-based learning into the classroom,” she said. “I want it to be a catalyst for educational change or even a tool for the classroom to make learning real for kids.”

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Want to go?

“Be Kind: A CritterKin Reading,” featuring author/illustrator Jena Ball, will be presented at 7 p.m. Friday at Barnes & Noble Booksellers, 901 Mall Loop Road.

In addition, Jeremy Williamson and Vanessa Kearney Williamson of the Merit Pit Bull Foundation will be on hand with their community ambassador, Lizzie. They will share information about volunteering, fostering and adoption opportunities with their organization. For more information about the event, call Barnes & Noble at 886-1331.

For more information about CritterKin, visit www.critterkin.com.