

1. Mark the parts that confuse you. Make a marginal note to explain how it confuses you. (Underlined words in bold must be annotated.)
2. Use what context clues you can to make a guess about what confuses you.
3. Comment on the text by connecting to personal experience or previous knowledge.
4. Write a summary on a sheet of paper and attach it.

Portrait of a 6-year-old artist with autism and her therapy cat

CNN

Comprehension

Comments

Wherever 6-year-old Iris Grace Halmshaw goes, 2-year-old Thula is sure to follow.

When Iris is painting outside, Thula is always nearby, exploring in the garden. They play with the same toys in their fairy-tale-like playroom, take baths together, learn new things together, go on adventures and fall asleep together after long, exciting days.

They sound like sisters. And while the two best friends are like family, there is one striking difference: Thula is a Maine Coon cat and Iris is a child with autism, diagnosed at age 2. Together they prove what Iris' mom, Arabella Carter-Johnson, has always believed: "different is brilliant."

Before Thula came into their lives, Carter-Johnson and her husband, Peter-Jon Halmshaw, went through a "dark time" trying to figure out the best ways to draw Iris out after her diagnosis four years ago.

Iris' severe form of autism was marked by irregular sleep patterns, obsessive behavior, refusing to make eye contact, avoiding playing with her parents or other children, and feeling distressed around people she didn't know. She also had a **tendency** to disappear into books without wanting to engage with anything around her and didn't speak or communicate. [...]

When they brought Thula (pronounced Toola) home from a local breeder, the fluffy kitten slept cradled in Iris' arms the first night. Iris seemed to relax around Thula, stroking her ears and whiskers, and the cat didn't even mind when Iris held her tail. "Thula loved all of the things that Iris found difficult," Carter-Johnson said. "It was like heaven."

Because Iris hated the sensation of things touching her skin, like clothing or water, getting dressed or taking a bath could be incredibly difficult. But as a water-loving breed, Thula hopped right in the bathtub. Soon, Iris began to take all of her baths accompanied by the kitten. And three months after Thula's arrival, Iris was fine with wearing tops and layers.

Around Iris' parents, Thula was a playful, and at times mischievous, kitten. But she seemed to know what Iris needed, **adapting** her behavior and becoming the perfect companion. If Iris became impatient in the car,

Thula would walk over and sit on her lap to calm her down. If she had difficulty during the day or woke up at night, Thula would distract her until she had settled again.

Not long after Thula's arrival, Iris began to speak to her. She would say "sit, cat" and Thula would obey. Iris would follow Thula around the house, saying "more cat." There was no pressure or judgment from Thula, unlike how Iris might feel if she was talking to another child or adult, so Iris would talk to Thula and give her instructions. In addition to helping with Iris' speech therapy, Thula also studied Iris' movements as she played or painted, **mimicking** them, and in turn, encouraging Iris to continue.

"It's beautiful watching this," Carter-Johnson said. "We're her parents and educators. It's calming to know that she has her little buddy, and someone other than just us."

Thula would also accompany them outside, where Iris seemed to learn the best because she was away from indoor sensory distractions such as artificial noise and light. With her cat and her outdoor painting, Iris began to blossom right before Carter-Johnson's eyes. [...]

While Thula and Iris are still best friends, the two have grown more independent from each other over the past year because Thula seems to realize that she's needed less now. But she's always around, whether propped up in a basket on the front of a bicycle or getting her own passport when the family travels to Amsterdam later this year.

While Carter-Johnson knows that they still have a ways to go with improving Iris' speech and communication, she is thrilled with her daughter's progress. Iris is better at making eye contact and socializing more with others. Speech therapy is helping her to remember to say "hello" and "goodbye" when she meets people, as well as describing her day to her parents. She also still receives occupational therapy, music therapy and has had luck with doing yoga as well.

"I'm hopeful for more improvements," Carter-Johnson said. "One day, I want her to be able to get a job and live independently, and we will try our absolute best to make that happen. Autism doesn't have to be this grim diagnosis -- it's seeing the brilliance in differences and embracing those."

Part 2: Summary

On a separate sheet of paper, please write a short (most likely one-paragraph) summary of this article.