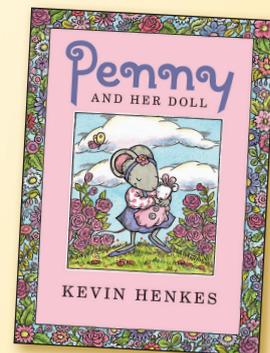
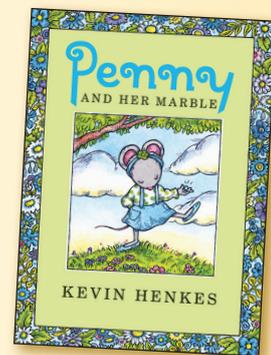
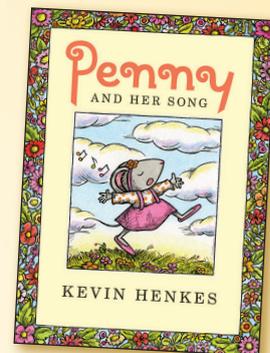
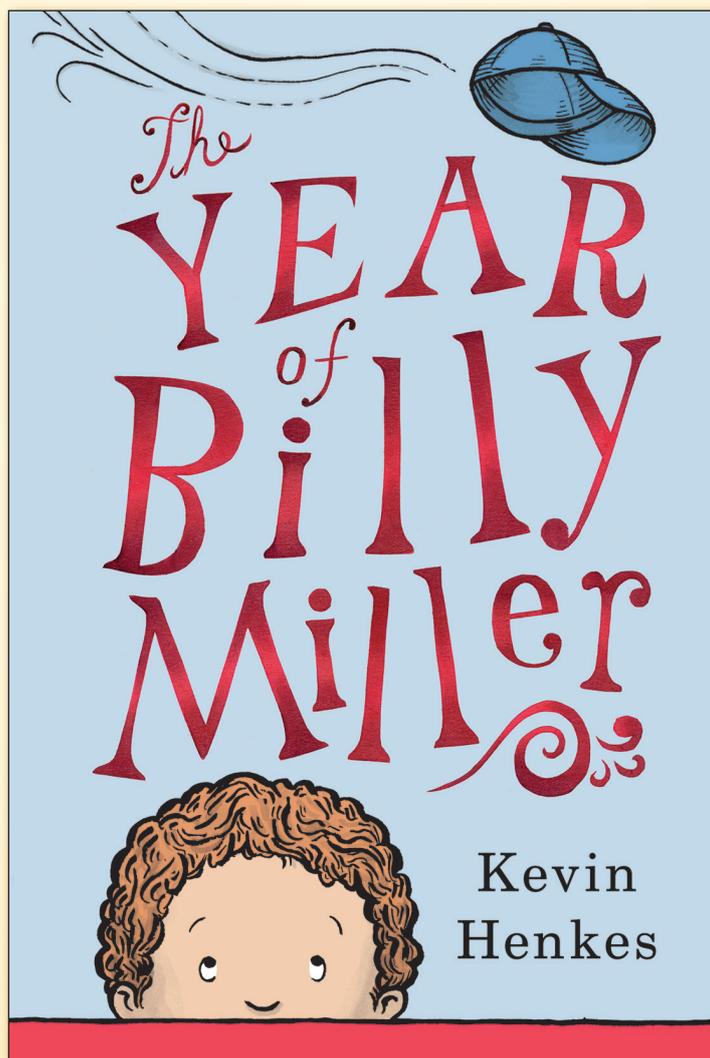
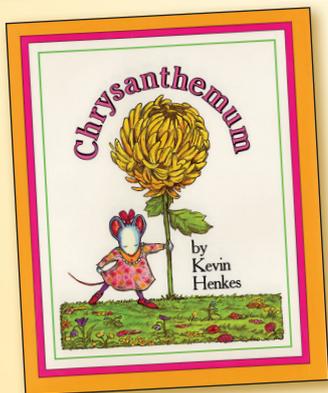
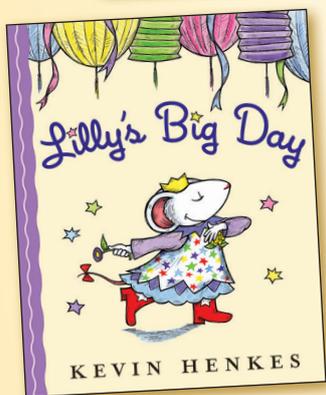
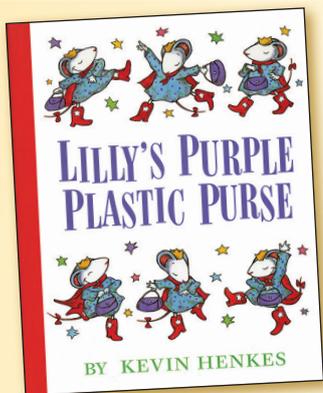


# KEVIN HENKES: An Author Study

Using Art and Writing to Teach Kevin Henkes's Books

Featuring:



Aligns with Common Core Standards for Grades 1–4

# ABOUT KEVIN HENKES



Photo by Michelle Corpora

**Kevin Henkes** was born in 1960 in Racine, Wisconsin, and during his childhood, he often visited the local art museum—the Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts. He also visited the library on a weekly basis with his family. He pored over books and was intrigued by the authors and illustrators, but he says, “I never imagined that one day I would be one myself.”

He grew up loving books and loving to draw and paint. During his junior year of high school, writing became essential to him, and when he was a senior, a public librarian introduced him to Barbara Bader’s *American Picture Books from Noah’s Ark to the Beast Within*. It was only natural that he would decide to write and illustrate children’s books for a career.

Kevin Henkes began college at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, choosing to go there in large part because of the School of Education’s Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC). The July after his freshman year, he set off for New York with a selection of work and a ranked list of publishers. His first choice was Greenwillow Books, headed at the time by its founder, Susan Hirschman. Mrs. Hirschman signed him up on the spot, and he took the fall semester off to work on what became his first published book, *All Alone* (1981).

In 1986, Kevin Henkes’s picture book portfolio blossomed thanks to the birth of some little mice in *A Weekend with Wendell*. Sixteen books featuring a parade of dynamic and unforgettable mouse characters have followed, including the 1994 Caldecott Honor book,

*Owen*; and the most famous of them all, *Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse*. With the release of *Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse* in 1996, Kevin Henkes presented the world of children’s literature with a memorable new addition to its roster of cherished characters. His newest mouse character, Penny, stars in a series for beginning readers that includes *Penny and Her Song*, *Penny and Her Doll*, and *Penny and Her Marble*.

In addition to his picture books, Kevin Henkes has published twelve novels. *Words of Stone* is especially meaningful to him, because this book was his first to elicit letters from older children and adults. His novel *Olive’s Ocean* won a Newbery Honor in 2004, and his most recent novel for young middle-grade readers is *The Year of Billy Miller*, published in 2013. Kevin Henkes says, “Writing a good children’s book comes from someplace within. I think that’s why I love writing about kids who are interested in being a writer or an artist because then I can look at the world through the eyes of a young artist. That’s what I was, so I think I understand them.”

Kevin Henkes writes, paints, and draws in his studio on the third floor of his home in Wisconsin, where he lives with his wife and two children. His desk is surrounded by books, including some of his favorite books from childhood, and a cabinet is filled with his drawings. His tools are simple; he writes his drafts using paper and ink and then types them up using a typewriter that belonged to his wife when she was in college. He still uses the light box he had as a child.

In 2005, Kevin Henkes was awarded the Caldecott Medal for *Kitten’s First Full Moon*. The impact that he has made in his impressive career was further acknowledged when the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, selected him to deliver the prestigious May Hill Arbutnot Lecture in 2007. This is an honor bestowed upon “an individual who has made significant contributions to the field of children’s literature.”

Henkes states: “My main goal is to create books that please me. Of course I’m happy when teachers, parents, or librarians thank me because for them one of my books says something important about tolerance, loyalty, or individuality. But I’m most pleased when children tell me that they loved one of my books, that it made them laugh, that they sleep with it under their pillow.”



# A Q&A WITH KEVIN HENKES

**Q:** When you begin a picture book such as *Wemberly Worried*, do you always know where the story is going, or do your characters ever take you by surprise and pull the story in another direction?\*

**A:** Books begin with character; character is the seed from which a book grows. When I set out to write *Wemberly Worried*, I didn't know the book would end with the start of school, although in hindsight, it seems a logical path for the book to have taken. That's the magic and mystery of creation.

**Q:** It must be a very different process, working on a novel. Do you still have vivid pictorial images of the characters and their environment in your head?\*

**A:** Writing a novel is very different. I can delve much deeper into a character's psyche, for example. I can describe a scene at length. And I can deal with subject matter that is more complex than the subject matter of my picture books. But, because I'm a visual person, I do have very strong images in my head as I work. I love describing my characters and their environments. Setting a scene—providing proper lighting, the colors and textures of things, sounds—is one of my favorite things about writing a novel.

**Q:** How does writing a novel differ from writing a picture book?\*

**A:** The thing that's most different for me is that when I'm writing a picture book, I will sometimes see the complete book in my head. With a novel, I don't at all. I know perhaps a character and an opening situation. I think I know where I want to end, but I have no idea how I will get there or who will populate the book in terms of people, other than my main character. I write very, very, very slowly when I'm writing a novel. I usually think about it for about a year, and then I'll take notes for a year, which is happening while I'm working on something else. Then when I write the novel, I write paragraph by paragraph, very slowly. I know other people who write many, many drafts, but that's not the way that I work. I go very slowly and have just one draft, even though I may write one paragraph 15 times before I get it absolutely the way I want it to be. Because I do write in such small chunks, I read it aloud many times as I'm going.

**Q:** When you began *The Year of Billy Miller*, how did your writing process compare to the 5-step process that young writers learn in school? Do you do any of the following: research, prewriting, drafting, revising, proofreading, and publishing?\*

**A:** When I began *The Year of Billy Miller*, I wasn't consciously thinking about things like research, prewriting, drafting, revising, and proofreading. But, of course, I do all of those things in my own way. My books usually begin with character. Character is the seed from which my books grow. I took notes about Billy long before I began working on the actual story. My notes included things such as: what he looked like, what he liked to do, who his friends were, what his family was like. This is the kind of prewriting I do. My research involved, among other things, going to lunch (with my notebook) at the restaurant that was the inspiration for Ruby's Cupboard in Part 3. The restaurant was a favorite of my kids when they were small. I hadn't been back to it in many years. I probably could have written the scene from memory and by using my imagination, but it was fun to revisit it.

I think for a long time before I begin to write. When I do write, I write slowly. And I revise as I go. It might take me a week to write one paragraph. I've never used an outline. I tend to figure things out as I plod forward.

**Q:** What role do plot sequence, character development, setting, theme, and conflict resolution play in your writing process?\*

**A:** All these things—plot sequence, character development, setting, theme, and conflict resolution—are important to the writing process. They are tools writers use. I don't think of them by name, per se, but rather use them instinctively. As a writer this is what I want: I want my characters to be believable, I want the story to be convincing. And I want to write good sentences. It's as simple and difficult as that.

**Q:** What is an example of a theme or major idea that you convey in your body of work?\*

**A:** So many of the children (or mice or other animals) who populate my work use imagination—as play, as an escape, as a tool. Imagination is a theme I've returned to again and again. It is a theme that has been with me from the very beginning of my career.\*

**Q:** How long does it take you to complete a new picture book, from getting the idea to final page proofs? How much time do you spend on each illustration, and what kinds of changes do you make to your words and pictures?\*

**A:** Each book is different. Some come easily, and some are very difficult to bring to completion. I'll often think about an idea for months, even years, before I'm ready to write. It's difficult to say how much time I spend on each illustration. I don't do each illustration from start to finish; I do them in stages. I do sketches for the entire book first. Then I'll refine all the sketches. Next, I'll do a finished pencil drawing for each illustration in the book. Inking comes next. At this point, I make several copies of each ink drawing so that I can test different colors before I finally paint each piece. If I change words at this point, it's usually a matter of taking something out that isn't necessary any longer. Perhaps I've "said" what I want to say in the illustration and don't need the words any longer.

**Q:** When you write a picture book, do you write the whole text first before creating the art? How do you determine where to break the story into pages?\*

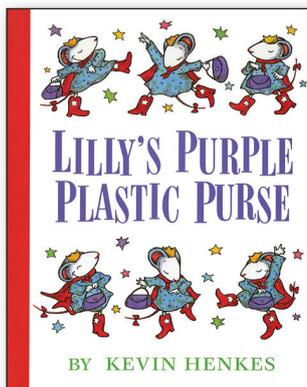
**A:** When I'm working on a picture book, the words always come first. I try to perfect the words before I draw anything. However, I do think about the pictures while I write. Because I'm both the author and the illustrator, I often edit as I write, knowing that the pictures will provide important information. For example, in *Chester's Way* I didn't mention Lilly's boots, crown, or cape when I wrote the story, although I knew long before the manuscript was finished that Lilly would be wearing them. Determining where to break the story into pages is important—and instinctual in many cases. Some breaks seem natural and obvious. Others take longer to figure out. I cut up the text into sections and move the sections around in a blank dummy until the flow and pacing seem right. Reading the text aloud again and again helps, too.

**Q:** Do you have any recommendations for ways classroom teachers or parents can help children grow as readers, writers, and artists?\*

**A:** Exposure is everything. Read aloud as often as possible. If your child likes to write or draw, make sure that he or she always has paper available. Encourage children to experiment when it comes to art, and remind them to have fun and not be concerned with creating a masterpiece. If, as adults, we value art and books, our children will, too.

\*Questions and answers from TeachingBooks.net

# PICTURE BOOKS: Perfect for reading aloud!



Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: M  
Themes: Friendship, Family, School

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Lilly loves everything about school, especially her teacher, Mr. Slinger. Lilly just can't wait until Sharing Time to show off her movie star sunglasses, her shiny quarters, and her purple plastic purse; she continually interrupts Mr. Slinger to show her classmates her new possessions. Finally, when Mr. Slinger takes Lilly's things away from her, Lilly draws a mean picture of him. It isn't until Mr. Slinger gives her belongings back to her with a kind note and snacks that Lilly realizes she owes Mr. Slinger an apology.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

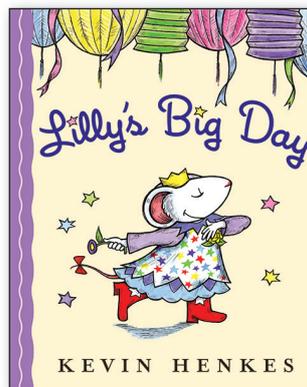
- Why does Lilly like Mr. Slinger? How does Mr. Slinger make Lilly feel?
- How does Lilly's apology affect her, Mr. Slinger, and the class?

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details 2.1, 2.3; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 2.7; Language: Knowledge of Language 2.3.

## ACTIVITY

Explain the format of a riddle and write an example with the class. Ask students to make a list of objects (nouns) that are their favorite or special possessions. Then ask each student to select one of the objects and to write a riddle that's a clue to the object's identity. The students can present their riddles to the class, and their classmates can guess what the objects are.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Craft and Structure RL.2.4.



Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: M  
Themes: Friendship, Family, School

## ABOUT THE BOOK

When Mr. Slinger announces that he's getting married, Lilly decides she is going to be the flower girl at the wedding. She practices and plans for her big day, until Mr. Slinger gently tells Lilly that his niece, Ginger, is going to be the flower girl. She can be Ginger's assistant, he suggests. Lilly isn't too happy about that, but she decides to make the best of it. On Mr. Slinger's wedding day, Lilly shines—proving that she is the best *assistant* flower girl Mr. Slinger could have chosen.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

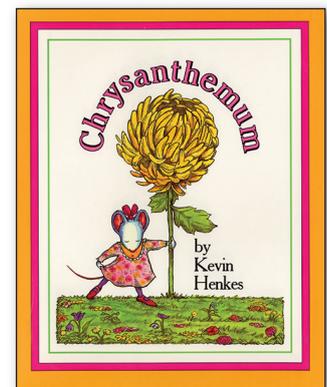
- How does the reader know what Lilly is feeling? What clues do you get from the author's word choices? From the illustrations?
- Why does Lilly misunderstand her parents' explanations of why she can't be Mr. Slinger's flower girl?

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details 2.1, 2.3; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 2.7; Language: Knowledge of Language 2.3.

## ACTIVITY

Using Lilly's self-portrait as an example, ask students to look in the mirror and draw self-portraits depicting themselves doing something to help others. Ask students to write an explanation of the helping activity, what tools (if any) they use in the course of the activity, and why they have chosen this particular activity to draw. Make a bulletin board of their finished (but unsigned) portraits, and ask the students to guess the identity of their classmates in each of the drawings.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Writing: Text Types and Purposes W.2.2; Production and Distribution of Writing W.2.5; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.2.1.



Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: L  
Themes: Friendship, Family, Bullying

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Chrysanthemum loves everything about her perfect name until her first day of school. When a trio of mean girls teases and taunts her about the unsuitability of her name, Chrysanthemum doubts that her name is "absolutely perfect;" she thinks it is absolutely dreadful. It is only when the students go to music class and Mrs. Twinkle reveals to the class her own long, flower-based name—Delphinium—that Chrysanthemum feels better and becomes the envy of the three mean girls.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do the mean girls make fun of Chrysanthemum's name?
- Could her classmates have done anything to stop the girls from teasing Chrysanthemum? What could Chrysanthemum have done to overcome the bullying?

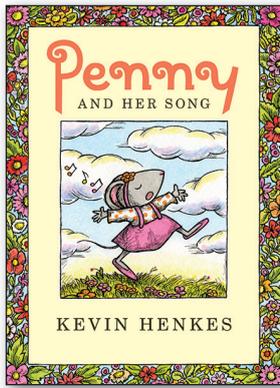
Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details RL.2.1, RL.2.3; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RL.2.7; Language: Knowledge of Language L.2.3.

## ACTIVITY

Ask students to look up the meaning of their names in a baby book, or online at [www.babynames.com](http://www.babynames.com), and to discuss with their parents the reason they chose those names. Then ask students to write their names on card stock or paper using a variety of materials. Have students add text detailing the meaning of their name, why their parents gave them their name, and why they like their name. Display the name cards on a bulletin board.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Writing: Text Types and Purposes W.2.2; Production and Distribution of Writing W.2.5; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.2.1.

# BEGINNING READER BOOKS: Perfect for emerging readers!



Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: J  
Themes: Family, Performing Arts

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Penny arrives home from school bursting with excitement. She has made up a song, and she can't wait to share it with her family! Unfortunately, it never seems to be the right time for her to sing it. When the time finally comes, the entire family enjoys a festive celebration of music, love, and family fun.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

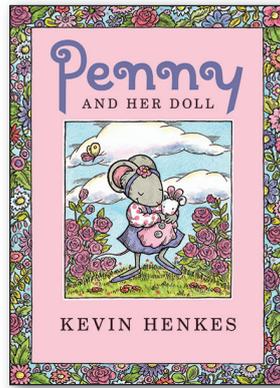
- Why isn't Penny content to just sing her song to her glass animals?
- How does Penny's family react to her song?

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details 2.1, 2.3; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 2.7; Language: Knowledge of Language 2.3.

## ACTIVITY

Ask students to bring a collection of family photographs in which family members are sharing—food, good times, toys, ideas, etc. (Remember to inform parents that the photos will be altered and not returned.) Have students create a collage of family photos. Photos can be trimmed, overlapped, angled, and embellished. Have students write a brief explanation of the sharing taking place in the photos and why it is important to be able to share with your family.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Writing: Text Types and Purposes W.2.2; Production and Distribution of Writing W.2.5; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.2.1.



Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: J  
Themes: Family, Toys

## ABOUT THE BOOK

While working in the garden with her mother, Penny receives a package from Gram. When Penny opens the package, she finds a beautiful doll dressed in pink, and she immediately falls in love with her. Penny shows the doll to everyone, but Papa asks Penny what her doll's name is. Penny struggles with finding the perfect name for her perfect doll, but ultimately she finds it in the garden.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

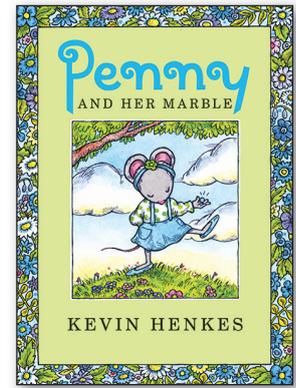
- How does Penny's family try to help her find a name for her doll?
- Why is Rose the perfect name for Penny's doll?

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details 2.1, 2.3; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 2.7; Language: Knowledge of Language 2.3.

## ACTIVITY

Ask students to write a short story about a time they were given a special gift. Explain to students the importance of including details to describe actions, feelings, and thoughts. Have students form a reading circle and allow each student to read his or her story to the class.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Writing: Text Types and Purposes W.2.3; Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas SL.2.4; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.2.1.



Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: K  
Themes: Honesty, Family

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Penny finds a beautiful blue marble in Mrs. Goodwin's yard; she picks it up and takes it home to play with it. But because she took the marble without Mrs. Goodwin's permission, Penny isn't able to take pleasure in it. She feels so guilty that she hides the marble, and then she does the only thing she can—she decides to return the marble to Mrs. Goodwin. When Penny arrives at Mrs. Goodwin's home, she is in for a surprise!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

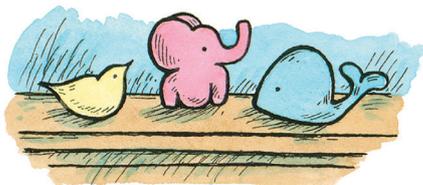
- How do Penny's actions show that she feels guilty for taking the marble?
- How does Mrs. Goodwin's response allow Penny to feel better and enjoy her marble?

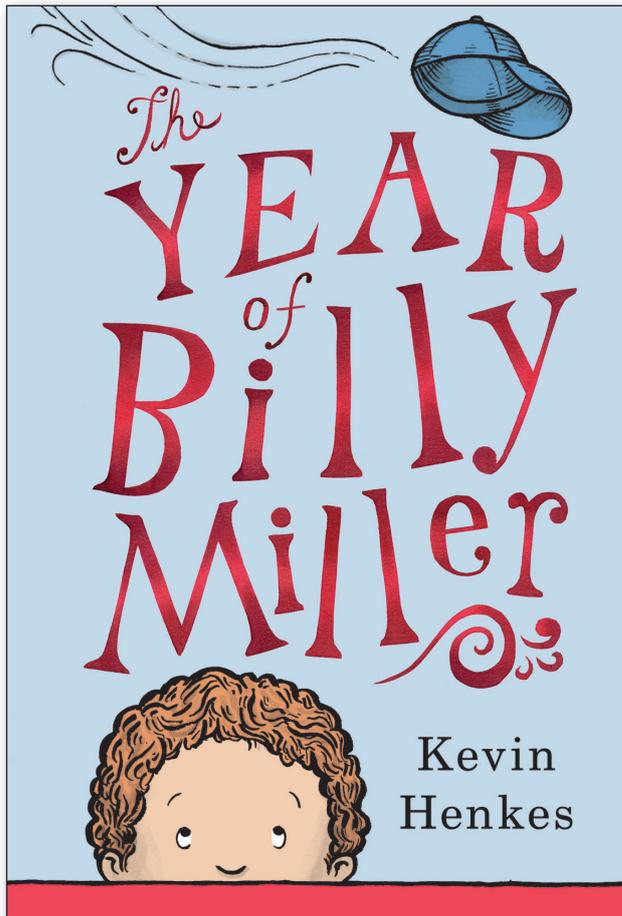
Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details 2.1, 2.3; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 2.7; Language: Knowledge of Language 2.3.

## ACTIVITY

Ask students to think about an experience (or the experience of a family member) in which they did something without thinking and then felt bad or guilty afterward. Have students each give a phrase or sentence that briefly describes the situation. List all phrases/sentences on the board. Then have each student create a collaborative poem by selecting 5 or 6 of the situations to include in their own individual poems. Students may reorder the phrases, omit or add words, and add additional ideas to create their own poems about acting impulsively and/or feeling guilty. Have students share their poems in small groups and post around the room.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Craft and Structure RL.2.4; Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas SL.2.5.

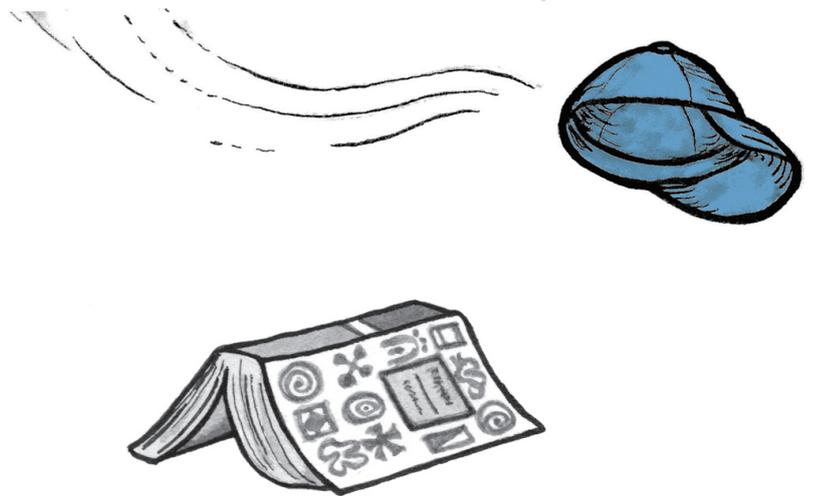




Interest Level: 3-6  
Guided Reading Level: P  
Themes: Friendship, Family, Social Issues

## ABOUT THE BOOK

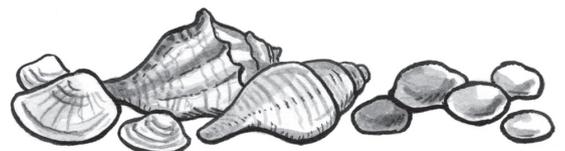
Billy's mom is a teacher and his dad works at home as an artist, spending his days finding objects he can use for his found-art sculptures. When Billy begins second grade, he is scared and unsure of how he will perform in school. To make matters worse, there is a new girl who sits at his table, and she constantly criticizes him. As the school year progresses, Billy Miller does well and overcomes his insecurities. He helps his dad with a unique found-art idea, he makes a true-to-life bat cave diorama, and he writes his mom the perfect poem. *The Year of Billy Miller* proves to be the best year Billy could have hoped for.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Billy's father support and encourage him when he is fearful or troubled?
2. What are some of the situations Billy worries about? How does Billy's worrying affect his actions?
3. How does Billy feel when Ms. Silver tells him he is smart? Why is it such a relief for him to hear praise from his teacher?
4. How does Billy treat Sal? Why does she irritate him so much? Do Billy's feelings toward his sister change?
5. Why does Billy want to call his father Dad instead of "Papa"? How do his parents react to their new names?
6. What does Billy's dad mean when he talks about something "shredding his heart"? How does Billy react to his father when he hears this phrase?
7. How does Billy feel when his attempt to stay awake all night fails? Why was it so important to him to achieve his goal of staying up all night?
8. Throughout the book, Emma says unpleasant things to Billy and her comments motivate him to action. What does Billy accomplish because of Emma's remarks?
9. How does Billy decide whom to write his poem about? Why does he choose his mother?
10. On page 10, Billy's papa encourages him with the thought that his second-grade year will be "the Year of Billy Miller." Then on page 229, Billy tells his mother, "This is the Year of Billy Miller." What lessons does Billy learn throughout the book that help him grow from a scared second grader to a confident boy?

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details 2.1, 2.3; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 2.7; Language: Knowledge of Language 2.3; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration SL.2.1.



# YOUNG MIDDLE-GRADE: Perfect for early readers!

## ACTIVITIES

- 1. Chinese New Year.** Ms. Silver teaches her students about Chinese New Year. Ask each of your students to select one of the animals in the traditional twelve-year lunar year cycle. Have students draw a picture of the animal and write a short explanation of its meaning.

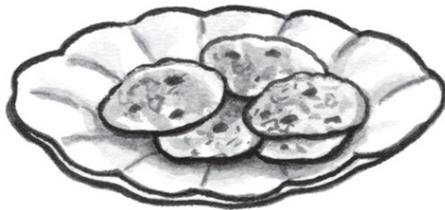
Correlates to Common Core Standard Writing: Text Types and Purposes W.2.3, Production and Distribution of Writing W.2.5; Research to Build and Present Knowledge W.2.7; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.2.1.

- 2. Found-Art Sculpture.** Ask students to bring small items from home that they find interesting and unique. They can ask their parents to help them look in the garage, attic, or drawers. Once the objects are collected, supply the students with glue, cardboard, string, and other art supplies so they can make a found-art sculpture. Students can present their sculptures to the class and discuss the meaning behind their sculptures. Display the sculptures in the school library.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas SL.2.4.

- 3. Diorama-Rama.** Ask students to create a diorama of one of their favorite rooms. It could be a room in their home or a room in a place they enjoy visiting: the zoo, museum, or Grandma's house. Students can share their dioramas by telling the class where the room is located and what it means to them.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas SL.2.4.

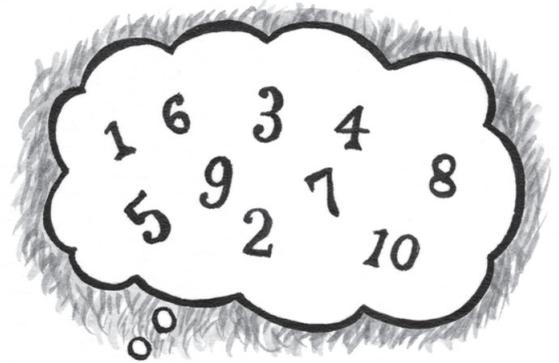


- 4. Found Family Poetry.** Ms. Silver asked her students to write a poem about a family member. In turn, ask your students to write a “found” poem. Each student can select one family member and write a poem about that person by “finding” at least 10 phrases or parts of sentences from anywhere in *The Year of Billy Miller* and using those phrases as a starting point for their found poem. Students can revise and add to their phrases so that they’re relevant to their family member. Then plan a poetry slam for your class to read their poems for their classmates and families.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge W.2.6; Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas SL.2.5.

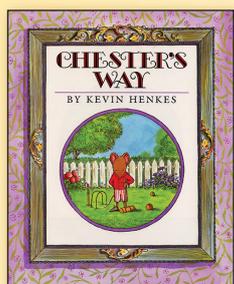
- 5. Dialogue with a Difference.** Have students read the conversation between Ms. Silver and Billy on pages 45–50 and discuss the fact that the scene is written from Billy’s point of view. Then, as a class, rewrite the scene from Ms. Silver’s point of view, to demonstrate how meaning can change depending on point of view. Then ask students, with a partner, to select a scene in the book where Billy has a conversation with one of the other characters. Ask students to rewrite the dialogue from the other character’s point of view. Have students perform the “new” scene for their classmates.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Craft and Structure RL.2.6.

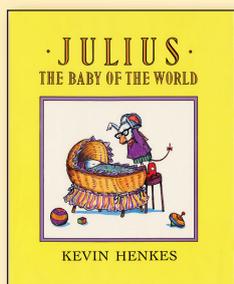


# MORE BOOKS BY KEVIN HENKES: A Selected Bibliography

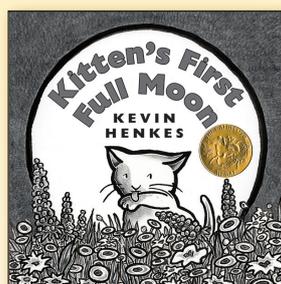
## PICTURE BOOKS



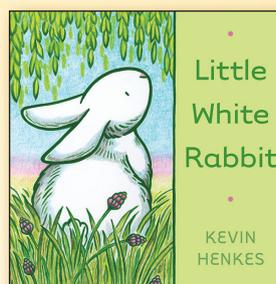
*Chester's Way*  
Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: K  
Themes: Friendship, Emotions



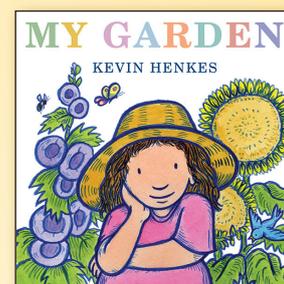
*Julius, the Baby of the World*  
Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: K  
Themes: Family, Emotions



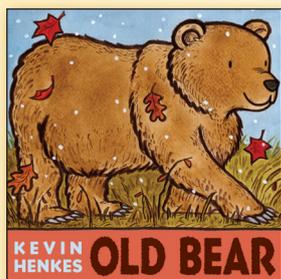
*Kitten's First Full Moon*  
Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: G  
Themes: Nature, Imagination



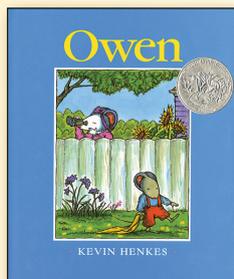
*Little White Rabbit*  
Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: E  
Themes: Nature, Imagination



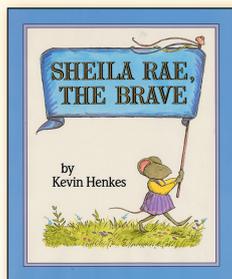
*My Garden*  
Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: I  
Themes: Nature, Imagination



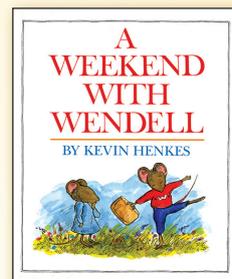
*Old Bear*  
Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: H  
Themes: Bedtime, Seasons, Nature



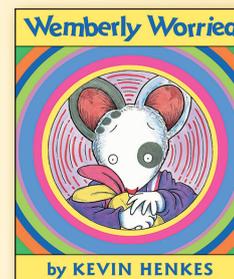
*Owen*  
Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: K  
Themes: Family, School, Emotions



*Sheila Rae, the Brave*  
Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: K  
Themes: Family, Emotions

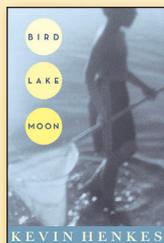


*A Weekend with Wendell*  
Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: K  
Themes: Imagination, Friendship

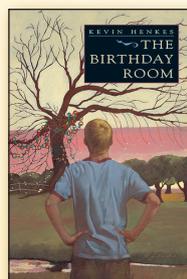


*Wemberly Worried*  
Interest Level: K-3  
Guided Reading Level: H  
Themes: School, Emotions, Family

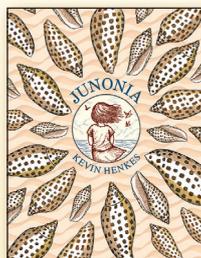
## MIDDLE-GRADE



*Bird Lake Moon*  
Interest Level: 5-8  
Guided Reading Level: W  
Themes: Friendship, Family, Death



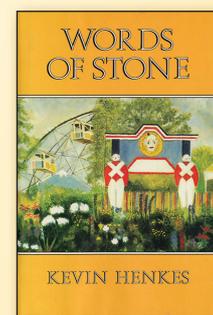
*The Birthday Room*  
Interest Level: 5-8  
Guided Reading Level: V  
Themes: Family, Self-Acceptance



*Junonia*  
Interest Level: 3-6  
Guided Reading Level: S  
Themes: Friendship, Family, Independence, Nature



*Olive's Ocean*  
Interest Level: 5-8  
Guided Reading Level: V  
Themes: Family, Friendship, Emotions, Death



*Words of Stone*  
Interest Level: 3-6  
Guided Reading Level: V  
Themes: Family, Friendship, Emotions