

The Year of Billy Miller

By Kevin Henkes

Book Summary:

Billy's mum is a teacher and his dad works at home as an artist, spending his day's 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.

The Year of Billy Miller proves to be the best year Billy could have hoped for.

Newbery Honour author and Caldecott Medallist Kevin Henkes delivers a short, satisfying, laugh-out-loud-funny school and family story that features a diorama homework assignment, a school poetry slam, cancelled sleepovers, and epic sibling temper tantrums. This is a perfect short novel for early readers.

The Year of Billy Miller includes black-and-white art by Kevin Henkes

Themes: Friendship, Family, Social Issues

Appropriate Ages: 6+

ISBN: 9780062268143

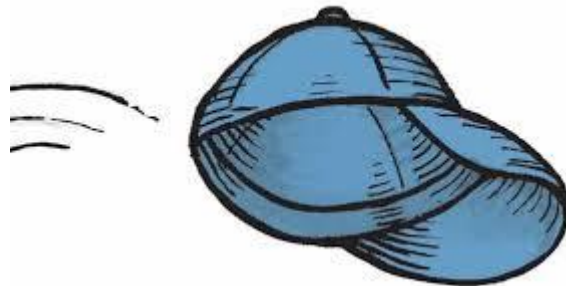
E-ISBN: 9780062268150 (ebook)

Notes by: Kevin Henkes

Updated Jacqui Barton

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?

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.

Curriculum Links

Ask students to bring small items from home that they find interesting and unique. 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.

Curriculum Links

Ask students to create a diorama of one of their favourite 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.

Curriculum Links **ACHHK064** Celebrations and commemorations in other places around the world **ACHHK029** How the present, past and future are signified by terms indicating time such as 'a long time ago', 'then and now', 'now and then', 'old and new', 'tomorrow', as well as by dates and changes that may have personal significance, such as birthdays, celebrations and seasons



Activity 2

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.



Australian Curriculum **ACHHK001, ACHHK002, ACHHS022**

Activity 3

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.

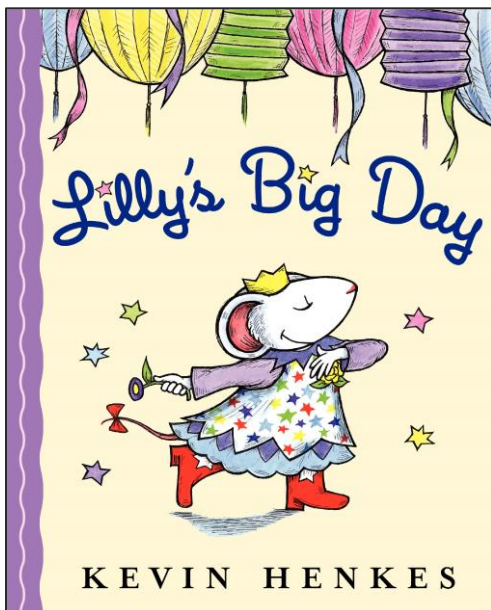
Australian Curriculum **ACELT1785, ACELT1783, ACELY1784**



Kevin Henkes 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 Centre (CCBC).

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 favourite 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 Arbuthnot Lecture in 2007. This is an honour 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



Lilly's Big Day by Kevin Henkes
ISBN 9780062313584 \$14.99

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?

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.