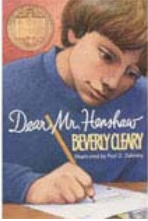


ABOUT THIS BOOK

Dear Mr. Henshaw



Dear Mr. Henshaw

Author: **Beverly Cleary**

Grade Level Equivalent: **4-6**

Reading Level: **4.7**

Age: **9-11**

Genre: **General Fiction**

Subject: **Literature, Journal Writing, Cleverness, Creativity and Imagination, Divorce and Remarriage, School Life, Understanding Self and Others**

Summary

Dear Mr. Henshaw begins with Leigh Botts writing a letter to his favorite author, Mr. Henshaw, as a class assignment. The author writes back and asks Leigh some questions that his mother insists he answer. As Leigh answers Mr. Henshaw, we learn about his struggles with his parents' divorce, his relationship with his father, his loneliness because of being the new kid in town, and his feelings of being just medium. Mr. Henshaw encourages Leigh to keep a diary, and the book is written in that format.

Map of California

I give students outline maps of California and ask them to locate and label the following places: Bakersfield, Pacific Grove, Great Central Valley, and Highway 152—Pacheco Pass. I have them use their maps as we read the novel.

VOCABULARY

gondola	halyard
hibernated	imitate
insulated	nuisance
partition	snitch
wrath	

Questions

Mr. Henshaw asks Leigh a series of probing questions on pages 14-30. I have students answer these questions about themselves. I also have them pretend that they are sending the answers to their favorite authors, so they take their time answering the questions.

Pictures of the Setting

The author gives a good description of the setting of this book (Leigh's neighborhood). Have students draw pictures of Leigh's neighborhood, including all the details the author gives (see pages 21–22).

Diary

Leigh learns to keep a diary in this novel. It helps him sort out his feelings and reflect on his life. Urge students to begin their own diaries and see what unfolds.

Lunch Box Alarm

Students are usually pretty excited about trying to make lunch box alarms of their own. Some students are more adept at this kind of activity than other students are, so I give them the option of doing the assignment alone or with a friend or two. Then I have my young inventors bring their finished products to class so they can explain how they put the alarm together and demonstrate it. I find that a lot of parents get involved in this project.

Beyond Ideas

Meet the Authors

This is a perfect place to ask students to do a project on their favorite authors. I give talks on several different authors who have written a number of books, which helps spark students' interest. Some of the authors my students have enjoyed in the past include Avi, Lois Duncan, Lois Lowry, Joan Lowry Nixon, Scott O'Dell, Katherine Paterson, Gary Paulsen, Zilpha Keatly Snyder, Mildred Taylor, Theodore Taylor, Laurence Yep, and Jane Yolen.

Based on my talks, each student then makes an informed choice of an author. I group three or four students who have chosen the same author. Then I distribute

to each group several books written by the author they selected, place students who have the same authors in mind in groups of three to four. The requirements are that each member of the group read at least one book by the author and that each group member pick a different book. I give students several weeks to read their books; they usually read more books than I assign because they get involved in the books. I require students to make displays about their authors that will eventually hang in our local public library. The displays must be colorful, artistic, and accurate. They must prominently display the author's name and include the following elements:

- biography of the author
- list of other books written by the author
- summary and visual for each book read by the group (Summaries must be varied for each book. Students may choose to do their summaries in any of the following formats: letter, newspaper front page, diary entry, filmstrip or comic strip, interior monologue, or poem.)

Students arrange all the required elements on three pieces of poster paper that have been taped together. We share the displays in class and then send them to the library for presentation. You can also ask your students to write letters to their authors, but be sure to do this ahead of time as it may take some time to receive answers. Students can include their letters and responses on their displays. I don't make this a requirement because some authors don't write back. Suggest that, to increase their chances of receiving an answer, students include self-addressed, stamped envelopes for the authors to use.

Writing Idea

Pose the following question to your students: *How did Leigh's parents divorce affect him?* Have them answer it using a five-paragraph essay format. Students should begin with an introduction that includes a thesis statement and three main points that will be explored in the essay. Paragraph two should be about the first main point in the introduction, along with details to support the point. Paragraph three should be about the second main point. Paragraph four about the third main point. Paragraph five is the conclusion.

READING RESPONSE JOURNAL PROMPTS

Pages 1–12: Why does Leigh's attitude toward Mr. Henshaw change?

Pages 14–30: Why does Leigh feel so medium?

Pages 31–37: Why does Mr. Henshaw keep answering Leigh's letters even though he is very busy?

Pages 38–44: Why does Leigh's mom refer to them as “lonely hearts”?

Pages 45–53: How does Mom feel about Leigh's Dad? How does Leigh feel about his dad?

Pages 55–59: Why is Leigh worried about his mom?

Pages 61–72: Why is Leigh mad at his father?

Pages 73–78: Why does Mom cry?

Pages 79–87: Why is Leigh angry at Dad?

Pages 89–104: How does Leigh's lunch box alarm change things for him?

Pages 105–111: Why does Leigh decide to start scrubbing the mildew off the bathroom?

Pages 112–121: Why does meeting Mrs. Badger make Leigh feel so good?

Pages 123–134: a) How can you explain Leigh's mixed feelings at the end of the book? b) Why doesn't Beverly Cleary have Bonnie say she would like to get back together with Bill to make it a “happily ever after” ending?