

The Year of Billy Miller



By

Kevin Henkes

A Novel Study
by Joel Michel Reed

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Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each section of the novel study focuses on one, two, or three chapters of *The Year of Billy Miller* and is comprised of five of the following different activities:

- Before You Read
- Vocabulary Building
- Comprehension Questions
- Language Activities
- Extension Activities

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities in this unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

A principal expectation of the unit is that students will develop their skills in reading, writing, listening and oral communication, as well as in reasoning and critical thinking. Students will also be expected to provide clear answers to questions and well-constructed explanations. It is critical as well that students be able to relate events and the feelings of characters to their own lives and experiences and describe their own interpretation of a particular passage.

A strength of the unit is that students can work on the activities at their own pace. Every activity need not be completed by all students. A **portfolio cover** is included (p.7) so that students may organize their work and keep it all in one place. A **Student Checklist** is also included (p.6) so that a record of completed work may be recorded.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homonyms
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Identify *exaggeration*
5. Identify/create *similes*
6. Use of singular / plural nouns
7. Listing compound words
8. Identifying parts of speech
9. Identifying syllables
10. Identify *personification*

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Identify *cliffhangers*
5. Identify the climax of the novel.
6. Story summary pyramid.

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Character comparison
3. Relating personal experiences

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research assignments
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Write an author biography
6. Write about personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete an Observation Sheet
9. Complete a KWS Chart
10. Design a diorama.

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Lights, Camera, Action!
4. Design a cover for the novel
5. Create a comic strip
6. Create a mural

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Synopsis

It was a blustery day. The flag on the nearby pole snapped in the wind. Billy raced ahead of his family – up the steps to the lookout platform. As he stood between the Giant's enormous feet, a sudden gust lifted his cap from his head. His cap sailed away. Without thinking, Billy stepped onto the middle rung of the guardrail, leaned over, and reached as far as he could ... (Courtesy of the publisher – Harper Collins Childrens)

A complete synopsis and other helpful reviews can be found on the following website: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Year_of_Billy_Miller

Author Biography

Kevin Henkes

Kevin Henkes (born November 27, 1960) is an American writer and illustrator of children's books. As an illustrator he won the Caldecott Medal for *Kitten's First Full Moon* (2004). Two of his books were *Newbery Medal Honor Books*, *Olive's Ocean* in 2004 and *The Year of Billy Miller* in 2014. His picture book *Waiting* was named both a 2016 *Caldecott Honor Book* and a *Geisel Honor Book*. It was only the second time any author has won that combination of awards. Henkes won the inaugural *Phoenix Picture Book Award* in 2013 for *Owen*. The Phoenix Awards from the *Children's Literature Association* recognize the best books that did not win major awards when they were first published twenty years earlier.



More information can be found here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kevin_Henkes

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Name: _____

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Part 1 - Chapters 1-3



Before you read the chapter:

In the opening chapters we learn that Billy is nervous about starting Grade Two. Briefly describe a time in your own life when you were afraid to start a new challenge. What was the end result?



Vocabulary:

Draw a straight line to connect the vocabulary word to its definition. Remember to use a straight edge (like a ruler).

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| 1. Embroidery | A. A sudden, dramatic, and important discovery. |
| 2. Miraculous | B. Fix firmly and deeply into an object or mass. |
| 3. Shuffle | C. Remarkable; bringing a welcome outcome. |
| 4. Breakthrough | D. To grow or develop rapidly and successfully. |
| 5. Habitat | E. The act of mimicking another person's behavior. |
| 6. Flourish | F. Walk by dragging one's feet along the ground. |
| 7. Megaphone | G. Free from outside control or authority. |
| 8. Embedded | H. A person, plant or animal's home/surroundings. |
| 9. Independent | I. A device used to amplify and direct a voice. |
| 10. Imitation | J. The art or handicraft of decorating fabric or other materials with a needle and thread or yarn. |

Questions



1. Describe the setting of the story as Chapter One begins.

2. Why was Billy worried about entering the second grade?

3. What famous statue did Billy and his family see in Minnesota?

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4. Briefly describe how Billy bumped his head in Chapter One.

5. Why did Ned call Billy's father 'Papa'?

6. What objects did Ms. Silver wear in her hair?

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7. What did Ms. Silver do to attract the attention of her students?

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Language Activities



A. Foreshadowing is a literary device used by authors to provide clues for the reader so they are able to predict what might occur *later* in the story. How might the following statement taken from Chapter One be considered an example of this literary device? *"I'm worried about him," said Mama. "He's fine," said Papa. "Everyone said he's fine. And he seems fine. He is fine." "You're probably right," said Mama. "But I worry that down the line something will show up. He'll start forgetting things."*



B. A simile is a comparison using the words "like" or "as". The following is an example taken from Chapter Three: *"Grace Cotter slipped into her chair. Billy had known Grace since kindergarten. She was so shy she seemed almost invisible. Like vacuums, her wide eyes were sucking in everything."*

What two things are being compared in this example?

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Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your own imagination:

a) Children playing in a park or playground.

b) An artist painting (or drawing) a picture.

C. Copy out any three sentences from these chapters and then underline the **nouns** and circle the **pronouns**.

D. Write a Lipogram

Your task is to write a paragraph summarizing the events from these Chapters. But wait, there's a catch! Your paragraph cannot contain the letter P, and it must remain grammatically correct!



E. Observation Chart

The Year of Billy Miller is a novel filled with strange sights and sounds. Look back over the novel and get as many examples of the five senses, listing them in the chart below with a description about where each is found. You may wish to choose your examples from one particular scene, or include a number of different scenes.



Sight	Sound	Touch	Taste	Smell