



Bird Lake Moon

Kevin Henkes

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When two boys come to spend the summer at Bird Lake, each is reeling from his own personal tragedy. Both boys arrive scarred and fragile, but as they become friends, the sharp edges of their lives smooth out and, slowly, they are able to start to heal.

Spencer thought the house might be haunted.

Mitch knew it wasn't. And he knew why.

The whole time Spencer and Mitch hung out together at Bird Lake that summer, there were secrets keeping them apart.

And maybe a secret knowledge keeping them together, too—together like members of the same tribe. Like friends.

Author Note

Dear Reader,

Olive's Ocean, my last novel, was published in 2003. Since then I've written and illustrated three picture books and two board books. All the while I was working on those books, I was thinking about Bird Lake Moon. In fact, my first notes for Bird Lake Moon are dated June 2003.

My new book revolves around two boys: Spencer Stone and Mitch Sinclair. It was Spencer and his family who came to me first. It's interesting to me now that Mitch wasn't part of the story when I began. But once he appeared in my thoughts and on the page, he became increasingly important. In its final form, the book starts with his story.

The creative process is difficult to understand, much less explain. I do know that bits and pieces of my life and of my family's life are embedded in Bird Lake Moon, as they are in all my books. And, like a person, a book grows, lives, moves forward in its own way.

After being a huge part of me for years, Bird Lake Moon is ready to find its readers. It's bittersweet to let a book go, but I'm already thinking of other ones. . . .

Best wishes,

Kevin Henkes

Bird Lake Moon Details

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From Reader Review Bird Lake Moon for online ebook

Sydney says

Neither kid had an average family. They had a little bit of a twist to their lives. I read Bird Lake Moon by Kevin Henkes. This book draws you into the slight mystery and cliffhangers that make you never put the book down.

Spencer and Mitch were just ordinary kids with a little bit of a different family life. They were both spending the summer at Bird Lake. Mitch because his dad left him and his mom. Spencer because his brother drowned in bird lake when his brother was 4 and the family wanted to come back to remember him. At first Mitch wanted Spencer's family to leave so he was trying to scare them off. Spencer thought that the weird hints left for him were from his dead brother and Spencer came to believe that ghosts were real. After a few days, Spencer and Mitch became good friends and the truth came out that Mitch had left the weird items for Spencer. Spencer did not really mind that much and the two kids were doing everything together. Then, one day Mitch came back from looking for apartments with his mom something was different around the lake.

I think that this book was a very good, and interesting book. I liked it because it made you think a little bit. You could not just skim through the pages and expect to understand it. Also, it was not boring. There was always something interesting happening, it never just started telling and not showing. It definitely painted a picture in my head and I could easily imagine what was happening in the book. One thing that I did not like was that I felt like the book ended very quickly. It didn't have much of a conclusion. I felt like the author got bored so he just threw on an ending without really making the ending at its best potential.

I think that it would be important for others to read this book because it shows that all families are not perfect and that not every story is going to have a happy ending. Mitch and Spencer had harder lives than most people, mostly within their families and it is important that people know how everyone has a different story that is either happy or not. But, you need to be nice to everyone because you do not know what untold story they are hiding. Everyone deserves to be treated well and if you are mean to others you will regret it. Just like Mitch regretted leaving something that scared Spencer, and stealing something that belonged to Spencer before he actually knew him or had a reason to be mean.

I would recommend this book to others. There were a couple of elements about it that I did not love, but overall I thought that it was a great book. There were a lot more positive than negative things about it. It was high quality writing and I think that the author is a very creative and an awesome author in general. I would definitely read another one of Kevin Henkes' books. I think that Bird Lake Moon was super eventful and a bit mystical which makes it an amazing book that I would recommend to people any day.

Overall Bird Lake Moon by Kevin Henkes was a very well put together and well written books that I am happy I read. It taught me a little bit and could be applied to real life. It was the perfect pace and never went off to unimportant and uninteresting topics. I would definitely consider reading this brilliant book if you are reading because it will be hard to put down.

Casey says

Bird Lake Moon is a realistic fiction book. There are two main characters: Mitch and Spencer. The chapters switch between the point of view of Mitch and Spencer. They are two little boys who are going through

some troubling times, and as a result, become neighbors for a short time during a summer. They find friendship in each other, and grow from being sad to happy.

Activities:

1) There are many words in this book that some children may not know the meaning of. While reading the book, the students will keep an ongoing list of words they don't know. They will look up the words in the dictionary, and write the definitions. After they have finished reading the book (they will have also completed their vocabulary list) they will write their own short story, incorporating the words on their list. The students would need to find at least seven words.

2) The students will make a Venn Diagram of the similar and different characteristics of Mitch and Spencer. The students will then have two options of writing assignments to choose from. They can choose one of the characters and write about that character's life ten years later (from that character's point of view). Or they can write their own story about two different characters who live intertwined.

Laura says

Kevin Henkes has been a favorite author of mine for a very long time. I read Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse until the pages fell out when I was little, and I was so jealous when the other fifth grade class read Olive's Ocean. Thus I had great expectations for Bird Lake Moon.

I still am debating whether or not I liked the book. The writing is great, and the stories are real. Sometimes the boy's emotions seemed dry, but then they act normally again. The ending is perfect, and not what I expected. I try to find one reason why it didn't impress me like I thought it would and I can't.

Maybe my expectations just left spaces too big to fill. I half wish that I hadn't known the author, so I could say it was a fantastic book. It just doesn't match up to Olive's Ocean.

I just looked at what I said above, and it sounds like a pretty dreary book, huh? Well, it is really good. Henkes spotlights two average boys, and makes their summers connect.

Spencer knows that his house on Bird Lake is haunted. His brother drowned years ago, and Spencer thinks he haunts the lake. First, he finds a pile of sugar with a 12 (the age his brother would be now) and a turtle. He learns that his brother swallowed a turtle when he was little. Everything just builds up, until Spencer is convinced that his brother has lurked on the lake for 8 years.

But Mitch Sinclair knows that Spencer's brother isn't haunting the lake. And he would totally tell Spencer if it weren't for the fact that his parents just split up and might (he doesn't even want to think about it) be divorcing.

Well, I probably won't get this book in hardback when it comes out. I feel so bad for not liking it a great deal, so that's why it took me so long to review it.

Sarah says

My overriding question upon finishing *Bird Lake Moon*:

Is this really a book *for* children, or is it a book *about* them?

Of course, it's well-written. Kevin Henkes knows exactly how kids and their families react and interact in fragile situations, so the emotions and actions of the characters are believable, even insightful. But to me, the whole thing felt a bit like an out-of-body experience. There's just something awfully adult about the writing itself, something too insular and reflective to make me believe this is a story that will appeal to more than a handful of young readers.

Any other early readers care to weigh in?

Andrew says

I'm unclear how to rate this book, because it wasn't written for me, not exactly. It's definitely a children's novel. Though it does speak to themes that adults may want to read about, and it's very gentle with those themes, such as guilt, divorce, death (grief, more than death, actually, as the child in question was already dead when the book starts, dead ten years) (don't worry, that's not a spoiler), sibling rivalry. Really, though, the book is pretty tame with those matters. I wonder if it's heavy enough to have much impact. But again, I'm not a kid. It's been quite awhile since I've been a kid. All I can do is relate it to the books I read back then, books like *The Pigman*, *Where the Red Fern Grows*, *The Outsiders*. That wouldn't be fair, exactly, because a lot has changed for kids since then.

Matthew Winner says

NO for black-eyed susan.
NO for our school library.

Sorry, Kevin Henkes, but this one missed the mark.

Henkes is most recognized for his award-winning picture books (*Lily's Purple Plastic Purse*, *Owen*, *It's a Good Day, Kitten's First Full Moon*). He's written a number of novels, including Newbery honor winner *Olive's Ocean*, but *Bird Lake Moon* doesn't quite accomplish the wonder he sets out to establish.

In short, this story is about a boy who moves with his mom to his grandparent's house on Bird Lake. It appears mom and dad are going through a divorce and mom needed some time away. The house next door is abandoned and Mitch, our main character, wishes he and mom could just move in there... that is until a family pulls up one day and move back into the house. The family, as it turns out, have neglected this house because of its ties with a family tragedy several years back, but now mom and dad are giving it another go. Mitch, however, decides he wants the family to leave, so he spies on them and sets up little ghost-like occurrences around the house in attempts to spook them away. Well, wouldn't you know the boy from the new family and Mitch, who gets found out, become friends and then have a difficult time moving away from one another.

My goodness... even writing a synopsis felt like a bit of a chore.

In Henkes defense, I listened to the audio book of *Bird Lake Moon* and the reader wasn't great (his female voices were, at times, enough to make you jump out of a moving car).

Still, I had the feeling that there were a great deal more pages/words than needed to accurately tell this story. With description after description of hum drum events with little more excitement than sitting on the side of

a lake on a sunny summer's day, this title needed to be condensed to a short story or embellished with a great deal more action or humor if students are ever going to give it a chance.

Josiah says

I would give this book three and a half stars.

"Bird Lake Moon" is wonderful and mysterious, esoteric and pointed and childlike and exceptionally beautiful in the crystalline descriptions that flow from the pen of Kevin Henkes. The same inscrutable qualities that worked to make "Olive's Ocean" such a mystifyingly fine addition to juvenile literature are clearly at work here. Perhaps the genius of Kevin Henkes is in the ways that his stories are allowed to bleed through to the heart of the reader not by spelling out the things that are, but by allowing the natural rhythm and blend of the little pieces that make up human experiences to capture the page when any wordy description could only perform a pale imitation.

This story is simply, sweetly beautiful, even though I cannot fully point out exactly what makes it so. It encompasses the pain in the human heart and the resilience that so inexplicably always seems to accompany that pain. I truly love "Bird Lake Moon," as well as the characters in it who will always remain close in my thoughts.

"He couldn't help but give in to the occasional temptation to replay past events in his mind, altering them, changing them from cruel to comfortable, from sad to happy, from unfair to accommodating. Anything was possible in his imagination. Any ending. If only thinking it could make it so."

—Bird Lake Moon, PP. 170-171

Jamie says

The writing is lovely but ultimately I felt it was much more of a "mood" piece than a real child-focused story. I wondered about audience - it's a boy book but it's also quiet and introspective. If anyone has had any child readers I'd really like to know!

Cheryl says

I searched other reviews for insights that would help me appreciate this more, and found only the same complaints that I have. It is Henkes, who writes beautifully and who knows children. But I don't know any children who would like this. Even I found it too subtle... which is truly saying something! And the cover doesn't really fit, either, which is even more important for kids than it is for most of us adults.

I really really want a kid's opinion of this.

Roxanne Hsu Feldman says

Henkes is such a craftsman. I can appreciate all the skills and thoughts and wonderful passages that he puts into this and many other titles: all of them high quality works! But my realization today is that I don't

particularly love the Impressionistic artworks. I have seen and "understood" the "Water Lilies" of Manet, for example -- hey, I even visited and was thrilled by Monet's garden at Giverny. And I understand how impressive the techniques are to combine Just Right those small patches of colors to capture light and mood and impressions. But, when you stand back and take a look at a painting of a bridge or a pond of water lilies -- they are a bridge and a pond of water lilies: it does not excite me. Bird Lake Moon is sparkling at many points, mysterious as well, and a young coming-of-age story done poetically. Many "patches" of beautiful language and revelation are combined just right to capture this significant summer in two little boys' lives. But, this is not a story that took me to another plane. I am never a lover of representations of objects in art. Maybe because I want someone to surprise me, to make me laugh or to awe me, or to perplex me (can perplex be used this way?): so, give me Cubism, Surrealism, or even Post-modernism, and I am thrilled -- finally, I understand myself and how I can categorize a bunch of books as impressionistic and explain why I am not entirely taken by them!

Mandy says

The emotions and actions of the characters were very real and true-to-life, but something about the writing was lacking. It didn't seem consistent. Carefully crafted descriptive phrases were followed by dull explanations of the characters' feelings. There wasn't enough suspense or surprise to hold my attention...I felt like I knew too much for the plot to be interesting. However, I'm glad that the "ghost of Matty" wasn't played out as the central plot line. I appreciate how Henkes portrays the kids in the book, and I think children will really relate to those characters.

****F.M.S. = Fear of Missing Something****

Carol Brill says

Mitch's parents are getting a divorce and his world turns upside down.
A sweet YA story of longing, loneliness, fleeting friendship, and adjusting

Bethany Ayers says

This book would be considered to be contemporary fiction. It touches base with family problems and friendship.

Mitch Sinclair is a 12 year old boy that thinks his life is falling apart. His parents are in the beginning of getting a divorce. For the summer, Mitch and his mom move to Bird Lake to live with his grandparents. After awhile, Mitch becomes sick of his grandparents and his mom, so he spends most of his days next door at a vacant house his liked to call his house. When a young boy, Spencer, his younger sister and parents moved in to "his" house Mitch was devastated so Mitch came up with sneaky tricks to play on this family. His plan doesn't seem to work. Once he meets Spencer, they become extremely close. Mitch shares with Spencer how the divorce of his parents is bothering him, and Spencer tells Mitch about his older brother that had drowned at Bird Lake. This book is very touching, and is a great story about friendship.

I think by having a student do a dramatic monologue would be great to do for this novel. There are so many opportunities for a monologue that would connect with a young student.

I also think it would be a great idea for students to write the author of this book after they read it to ask questions or to express their feelings about a character or an event in the book.

CLM says

A melancholy story about two boys who meet at Bird Lake in Wisconsin, each suffering. Mitch's father has just left his family for younger woman, leaving Mitch and his mother to seek refuge from her not very congenial parents. Spencer's family has avoided their vacation home since his brother drowned. The boys are not the same age but they become friends; however, before their friendship can really develop, Spencer's mother decides the sad memories are too much for her and she insists on returning to Madison. Although Mitch begins to come to terms with his parents' divorce by the end, I found the story very depressing and could not figure out who the audience would be - surely not boys the age of the protagonists? I am a big fan of Henkes' picture books and must admit I wish he would stick to those!

Christy says

Bird Lake Moon, written by Kevin Henkes, portrays the lives of two young boys faced with family hardships. Both boys visit Bird Lake hoping to receive answers to their many questions. The main character, Mitch, is struggling to accept the fact that his father has left his mother for another woman. Henkes skillfully reveals Mitch's personality by sharing his inner thoughts along with his actual dialogue. Empathizing with Mitch is natural even when he makes wrong choices.

Like Mitch, readers connect with Spencer easily. Spencer's family is still coping with the loss of his older brother who drowned at Bird Lake several years before. Spencer's concern for his mother and drifting thoughts of his deceased brother make him a likable character. Spencer's little sister, Lolly, likes to use different voices and do imitations. Henkes brings Lolly to life using the voice and language of a typical 7 year-old girl.

Eventually, Mitch and Spencer meet and become friends only to have their trust tested. They share their own stories with each other and learn about family, relationships and friendship together. Although both main characters grow from their experiences and the writing is superb, Bird Lake Moon left me feeling despondent. My despondent feeling, however, was probably due to the fact that the characters were so authentic and the writing so heartfelt. The ending, although positive, does not fix every problem. There is an overall glum mood throughout the book, yet glum is appropriate considering the subject matter.

Bird Lake Moon is definitely for an older elementary and middle school audience. It is not appropriate for primary elementary students. Bird Lake Moon meets the criteria for a Newbery Award. The writing is "distinguished." There is a clear, well-written theme. Henkes beautifully ties the stories of both boys together. The plot is well-developed and the story makes sense. The characters are believable and three-dimensional. The setting is thoroughly depicted as each scene of the story unfolds. It is easy to imagine the tranquil sights and sounds of Bird Lake.
