

Read-Aloud Family Event (4-7 grades)

Welcome

- You may want to ask parents to sign in for a record of who attended.
- Introduce yourself and extend an invitation to parents to look around at displays, books, etc.
- Talk to families about the purpose of the workshop. Let parents and children know that they are there to have fun—and to learn something about reading together, as well.
- Talk about the fun families can have reading together and how everyone learns from the experience.

Dear Mr. Henshaw

By Beverly Cleary

Reader Notes

- Written as a series of letters and diary entries from a young boy to a children's book author, this story tells of Leigh Bott's challenges during his elementary school years. Leigh struggles with changes in his life following his parents' divorce, including not seeing much of his Dad, moving with his Mom to a different house and attending a new school. To top it off, someone at school keeps stealing the good items from his lunch bag!

Mr. Henshaw is the author of Leigh's favorite book, *Ways to Amuse a Dog*. Leigh wrote his first letter to the author in the second grade as a class assignment. He later used *Ways to Amuse a Dog* for a book activity in third grade and a report in fifth grade. From second grade through fifth grade, Leigh sporadically corresponds with Mr. Henshaw. These letters give Leigh an outlet for sharing his feelings. The author's responses and questions help Leigh have a different perspective on his difficulties. In the process, Leigh practices writing and is motivated to become an author, too.

- In advance of the event, put each of the letters on pages 1-6 on transparencies or make copies, so that families can read them along with you during the workshop. Also, read the section of the book that will be used for the read-aloud (pages 16-17). This will help prepare you to emphasize certain words, explain

new vocabulary, and know exactly where to encourage listeners to make predictions about what might happen next.

- Create a simple take-home activity around *Dear Mr. Henshaw* to give families.

Set Read-Aloud Stage

- Show the book cover and ask families what they can tell about the book from what they see (such as the main character being a boy, his age, what he's doing and to whom he's writing).
- Tell families that Beverly Cleary is the author of many books, which they can find in the library.
- Point out that *Dear Mr. Henshaw* is a Newberry Medal winning book. The Newberry Medal is awarded annually to the author of an exceptional children's book.

During Read-Aloud

- Have *Leigh* written on a chalkboard or chart paper for families to see and explain that the boy on the cover of the book is the main character and his name is Leigh (pronounced Lee) Botts. From the title, have families guess what Leigh is writing.
- Ask families to tell about things they write. Does anyone write letters? What kind of letters and for what purposes? Show the illustration next to the title page and ask for families to describe what they see. (In this picture, Leigh is writing in a notebook, probably his diary. The pictures behind him are some of the many things he thinks about when writing.)

Connecting a story to children's own experiences helps them understand and relate personally to the characters and events in the story.

- Introduce the word *diary* and ask participants to think about the kinds of things people write in them. Does anyone keep a diary?

Teaching new information in context makes it more meaningful.

- As a way to have families become comfortable with the style of the book and to get a good idea of Leigh's age, show the transparencies that you have prepared or ask families to look at the copies you have made for each of the letters on pages 1-6. Ask families to follow along as you read the letters. Point out what Leigh means when he spells *friend* on page 2, with the "i" coming before the "e" so it spells "end" at the end. Point out on page 4 where Leigh writes *Enclosure* at

the bottom of the letter. Ask if anyone knows what that means—that something else is enclosed with the letter (in this case, Leigh’s picture).

- After reading the letter on page 6, explain that Leigh writes Mr. Henshaw again in 6th grade. He’s in a new school and this time sends the author a list of questions for a class assignment. Mr. Henshaw replies, but his response is full of questions for Leigh to answer. Leigh is irritated and doesn’t want to take the time to answer questions, but his mother insists that he write a reply.
- During Thanksgiving break, without a TV and little else to do, Leigh begins to write his response. Read aloud pages 16-17, then turn to pages 20-21 and show the pictures. Begin to discuss a little about Leigh and how he feels. Is he lonely? Why?

Read-Aloud Discussion

- After beginning the story, have families discuss what they think will happen to Leigh.
- Talk about how Leigh feels when he finds food missing from his lunchbag. Ask if anyone has ever been angry because of what someone else has done. What happened to cause the anger?
- Tell families about Leigh’s dog, Bandit, why he isn’t with Leigh and his mother, and how Leigh feels when his father brings Bandit to him. Ask children why they think Leigh gave his dog, Bandit, back to his father.
- Explain a little about the situation with Leigh’s mother and father and read the last paragraph of the book. Ask children what they think Leigh meant in the last sentence of the story when he says, “I felt sad and a whole lot better at the same time.” Ask if anyone has every felt sad and happy at the same time.

Review

- Review the strategies that you modeled for parents as you read. Remind parents these are things they can do when they read with their children.
 - Connecting a story to your child’s own experiences can help him understand and relate personally to the characters and events in the story.
 - Ask open-ended questions (questions that can’t be answered with yes, no or another one-word answer) to increase comprehension of what is being read.
 - Teach new information (such as vocabulary words) in context to make it more meaningful.

- Answer any questions parents may have.
- Close the session with an activity you have prepared. For example, pick some words (*chapters, Bandit, grownup*) from the passages you read, write them without the vowels and ask families to identify them by inserting the correct vowel; or ask parents and children to work together to answer the question, “Why do you think the author wrote this book? What was her purpose?” Invite them to share their answers.

Closure

- Give each family a copy of the take-home activity you have prepared. For example, you might ask parents to help their child write a letter to a favorite author or to someone who is important in their life or pick a word from the story (e.g., *handwriting*) and ask families how many other words they can make from it.
- If you are able, provide each family with a copy of the book to take home and read together. Or, point out that the book is available at the school or public library, as are many other books by the same author. Encourage families to read the whole book.
- Ask children to help you distribute give-away items, if you have them.
- Thank families for attending and invite them to join you in having some refreshments.

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