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Introduction

A good book can touch our lives like a good friend. Within its pages are words and characters that can inspire us to achieve our highest ideals. We can turn to it for companionship, recreation, comfort, and guidance. It can also give us a cherished story to hold in our hearts forever.

In Literature Units, great care has been taken to select books that are sure to become good friends!

Teachers who use this literature unit will find the following features to supplement their own valuable ideas.

- Sample Lesson Plans
- Pre-reading Activities
- Biographical Sketch
- Book Summary
- Vocabulary Lists and Suggested Vocabulary Ideas
- Lessons grouped for study with each section including:
 - *a quiz*
 - *a hands-on project*
 - *a co-operative learning activity*
 - *cross-curriculum connections*
 - *an extension into the reader's life*
- Post-reading Activities
- Book Report Ideas
- Research Ideas
- Culminating Activity
- Two Unit Test Options
- Bibliography
- Answer Key

We are confident that this will be a valuable addition to your planning, and we hope your students will increase the circle of “friends” they have in books!



Dear Mr. Henshaw

by Beverly Cleary

(Dell, 1984)

(Available in Australia through Transworld Publishers)

Dear Mr. Henshaw has received several honors. It was included on School Library Journal's list of "Best Books 1983" and the Horn Book honor list in 1983; received the Commonwealth Club of California Award, 1983; was selected by the *New York Times* as a Notable Book of the Year, 1983; received the Newbery Medal in 1985; and received the Christopher Award in 1984.

Leigh Botts first writes to Mr. Henshaw in grade two, after his teacher has read Henshaw's *Ways to Amuse a Dog*. Leigh continues to write to the author in grade three, four, five and six. As part of a grade six assignment, Leigh sends a list of ten questions to Mr. Henshaw. Henshaw replies and sends Leigh a set of questions to answer also. Leigh's mother makes him respond to Mr. Henshaw's questions.

Leigh describes himself as "just a plain boy," probably the "mediumest boy" in his class. His dad is a truck driver, and his mother works part time for a catering business while she takes a couple of college classes. Leigh explains that his parents are divorced and that he really misses his dog, Bandit, who travels with his dad.

Leigh and his mother live near the coast in California. Leigh feels frustrated throughout the story because someone steals the good things from his lunch bag. Leigh often feels lonely, angry, and as if he is to blame for his parent's divorce.

Later, Leigh pretends to write letters to Mr. Henshaw in his personal diary. Mr. Fridley, the school cleaner, tries to encourage Leigh and explains that Leigh is not the only child with problems. Finally, Leigh builds an alarm for his lunch box, becomes friends with Barry, and enters a story in the Young Writer's Yearbook. Leigh's alarm is successful, and his story wins Honorable Mention. He gets to go out to eat with a famous author who has met Boyd Henshaw. The author explains that Leigh's writing strength was that he wrote like himself and didn't try to write like someone else.

In the end, Leigh's dad returns to see if there is a chance for him and Bonnie (Leigh's mum) to get back together. By now, Leigh knows he can't count on anything his dad says. Leigh feels "sad and a whole lot better at the same time."

