

Assignment 2, Part One: Brief Analysis of Kevin Henkes and His Works

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Overview of the Author, Background

Born in Racine, Wisconsin, about an hour and a half of driving distance north of Chicago, Kevin Henkes grew up in the nineteen-sixties a big working-class family, within a neighborhood full of children. His childhood environment potentially led him to an interest and, later, career in children's books.

A passionate artist, American author and illustrator Kevin Henkes went through phases of drawing cars since quite young, drawing cars and copying cartoons from newspapers he read. With his family, he frequented museums and libraries locally to his hometown. Henkes maintains a fairly unique character according to his ways of growing up for, normally, a child's mercurial, quickly changing moods were in sharp contrast to the even-tempered dispositions of, say, their parents or their elder adolescent companions. In his senior year in high school, Henkes was introduced by a school librarian to a book titled *American Picturebooks* by Barbara Bader, a reading that further and more formally brought him to the context of picturebooks. Later in his career, he had written and illustrated till this day over forty picturebooks, along with thirteen novels tailored for young readers.

Decades of dedication and intimate connection with feelings of children through his depiction of characters made him recognized, both among readers and the literature communities. Henkes voiced strongly on the importance of both literature and art exploration for children. He is very good at handling emotions and feelings in his works, featuring little boy Ben's adventure in *The Birthday Room* (1999), sensitive girl mouse in *Chrysanthemum* (1991) who arrived at a new school, group of toy characters who looked earnestly outside of the window (*Waiting*, 2015), and many more. His 2004 picturebook, *Kitten's First Full Moon* (2004), was

recognized for his Randolph Caldecott Medal the year after, an annual recognition to the artist “of the most distinguished American picture book for children”.

Writing with Skills and Conscience: An Author and A Friend to His Readers

“I feel as if I’ve been removed from ordinary time and am living in some parallel universe, a world of grace and wonder,” quoting Henkes’ own words—apparently, he managed to create a sacred zone both of his own and of his audience. He considers words always coming before pictures, and when writing, he first makes notes and rough drafts longhand with paper and pen before typing them up on a typewriter. And then he turns to the art, for which he begins with refined pencil sketches. Then, he does a black line drawing for each image. Finally, he adds color by using watercolor paints or colored pencils.

Henkes picture books are known for exploring themes such as anxiety, worry, and emotions—helping children be aware of these, and then understanding them and cultivating them for betterment of life. Social nonverbal cues are addressed; moral lessons are taught of the world around them. Besides, for protagonists, his books are normally filled with animal characters as many children’s authors would do; he said he could “better tap the humor of the text”—some are anthropomorphic, whereas others are just the animal itself. Also importantly, he also voiced strongly on the importance of both literature and art exploration/expression for children.

Featured Stories

In *Chrysanthemum* (1991), gradually through a sequence of events at school, classmates began to accept her name as part of who she was. Chrysanthemum even played a flower in her school musicale. In the end, her name even became popular and adopted by her teacher to name after a new-born baby. The story unfolds a process of experiencing social judgment, from the angle of a youthful child, and the overcoming of biases through time and social interaction.

Penny in *Penny and Her Marble* (2013) seems to me a very kind, sensitive, and curious character; after taking the blue marble from the street, she went through this process of trauma – if we put a magnifying glass on it – that her thinking about the marble’s ownership generated a sense of guilt which pertained in her mind even before she went to sleep. This thought continued to “haunt” her. After she put the marble back, and the true owner Mrs. Goodwin talked to her and gave it to her as a gift, she finally got relieved – or in some sense rewarded for her mental struggle and eventual returning of the object; and even further, with a moral magnifier, the marble was rewarded for her guilt. Eventually, Penny goes back to the same location and puts the marble back into the ground, only to encounter Mrs. Goodwin who sees and asks her about how she found it. The story ends with Mrs. Goodwin awarding Penny by giving her the marble as a gift, implicitly acknowledging her honesty and being truthful.

Wemberly (Henkes, 2000) is a girly mouse “worrier”—she worries about a lot of things: she seeks assurance on her parents’ presence and whereabouts, thinks she may sink in a bath, night-and-day. Her parents tell her not to, but she continues to feel worried at times. She does loosen up a little bit on her birthday, but then she realizes she worries about not having enough cakes! Although this might be slightly bothering to those around her from time to time, it also, at the same time, allows us readers to see the curious imagination side of hers—after all, the too many “what-if”s” are all her inquiries through observation into the world around her, and only a sensitive heart can capture all these. Later, Wemberly in fact turns out being a good friend among her classmates at school—people feel comfortable at her presence.

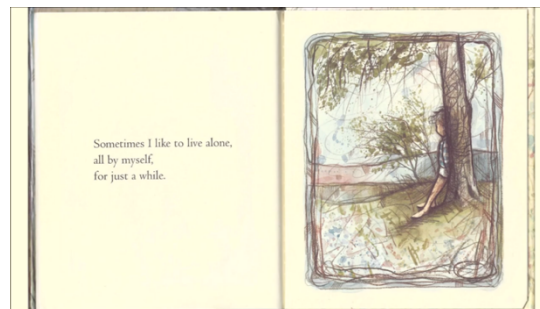
Educators can cultivate the ingredients in books such as Kevin Henkes’, books that not only show but also *invite* us congenially into inquiries and sympathies. Henkes’ works allow young readers to perceive psychological constituents of life while without losing sight to

individuality. His books allow readers think more deeply, and compassionately, expecting us to make positive changes in our own lives. Above all, they also offer a safe and fun space for kids to explore and recognize their sensitivities and emotions. Reading Kevin Henkes is to have the door of our heart pulled opened, and your mind sanitized; it raises our emotional awareness, keeps us honest, and ultimately is good for our mental health and well-being.

Annotated Bibliography (Brief): Selected Works by Kevin Henkes

Henkes, K. (1981). *All Alone*. Greenwillow Books.

A child staying alone observes many natural and living scenes as he can. He narrates by and for himself, telling the reader the process of his thoughts, his



All Alone

feelings, and through his lens the beautiful natural surroundings. The story of his being all-alone inspires us to see, to feel and touch our senses, and to learn and think quietly, as the protagonist shares his joy of solidarity with us.

Henkes, K. (2007). *A Good Day*. Greenwillow Books.



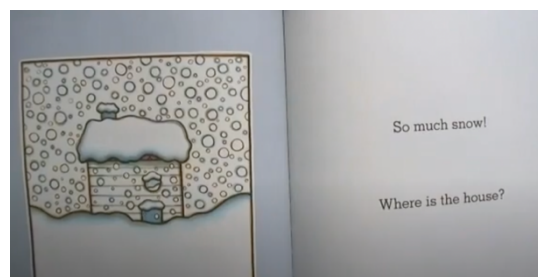
A Good Day

A little yellow bird, a white dog, an orange fox, and a brown squirrel began the story in a day that was not too good for them: they all had their own issues, loss, or troubles. Henkes invites us to this story of how a day that started “bad” was gradually transformed into a good one, by finding solutions and more importantly through optimism. In his simple narrative

storyline, the author instills upon readers the simplicity and effectiveness of optimism that exemplifies closely and beautifully with a general but accurate title—a good day.

Henkes, K. (2021). *A House*. Greenwillow Books.

Using rhetorical questions to guide observations and thinking, this book depicts a simple, country house being in different weather conditions and under

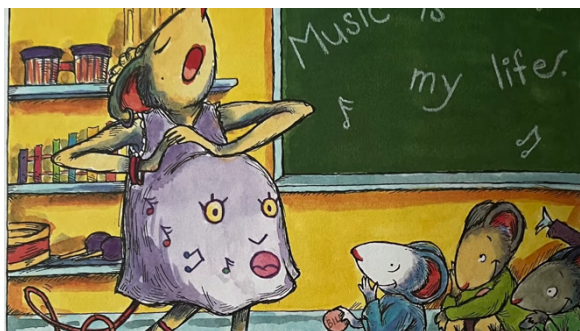


A House

different scenarios. It examines the window, the door, the crowd, and more.

Henkes, K. (1991). *Chrysanthemum*. Greenwillow Books.

A baby mouse was born and named “Chrysanthemum” as she grew up. The story describes her early life at school, in which Chrysanthemum initially felt absolutely fond



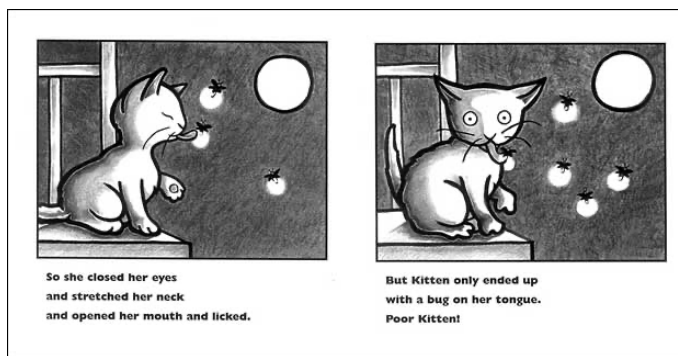
Chrysanthemum

of her own name and self-image, while later on at school she was looked upon weirdly for her name because it was considered too long as well as being named after a flower. Although she was not necessarily insulted nor ashamed, the classmates

of Chrysanthemum's constant making fun of her long name made her feel bad about herself, and she went home expressing her feelings, to her compassionate parents who gave her consolation and encouraged her.

Henkes, K. (2004). *Kitten's First Full Moon*. HarperCollins Publishers.

This book tells in black-and-white coloring about a little cat, Kitten, who explores what she sees through the window and in the sky by chasing them and discovery. Kitten does not always get what she anticipates, but her exploration led her to many sites—the pond, the



Kitten's First Full Moon

trees, the grass; and she ever got wet in the pond! Lucky her, when she came back home a bowl of milk was there for her.

Henkes, K. (1996). *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*. Greenwillow Books.

The school, mouse girl Lilly is the protagonist of this story, in which she navigates through school as well as home lives. She meets people and seniors at school, and she dreams about her future career when she grows up. Sometimes Lilly is impatient with her thoughts, opinions, and being considerate when she wants to show and share with others her findings and works, nonetheless very sympathetic and adorable. Mr. Slinger is her schoolteacher who constantly gives Lilly some good advice.

At home, Lilly somehow becomes angry as she was impatient about her drawing of Mr. Slinger, so she draws something that express her mood. She receives objective guidance, though, when she returns to class to-morrow. The purse she carries is a constant scene through the progression of her story. Later, Lilly and her classmates respond to their teacher in class, when being asked what they want to become in the future, that they want to become a teacher, and Lilly answers the most enthusiastically.



Lilly

Henkes, K. (2000). *Wemberly Worried*. Greenwillow Books.



Worrying Wemberly

There our Wemberly the girly mouse is a “worrier”. She worries about a lot of things: she seeks assurance on her parents’ presence and whereabouts, thinks she may sink in a bath, night-and-day. Her parents tell her not to, but she continues to feel worried at times. At her birthday, she finally is loosening up a little bit, but then she realizes she worries about not having enough cakes! Her worrying nature might be slightly bothering to those around her from time to time, while it also allows us readers to see the curious imagination side of

hers—after all, the too many “what-if’s” are all her inquiries through observation into the world around her, and only a sensitive heart can capture all these. Later, Wemberly turns out being a good friend among her classmates at school—people feel comfortable at her presence.

Henkes, K. (2012). *Penny and Her Doll*. Greenwillow Books.

With her Mama, Penny explores the garden and loves the roses. They receive a box mailed to them, from which they found a note from Grama and a doll as a gift to Penny—it is a pink doll with big dress, big buttons, and Penny hugs her and loves her. Her parents, mom and dad, do become a little critical and picky on this new doll of hers, wondering why their daughter would like it so much. Overall, this account allows both Penny and her parents to understand sometimes they don’t need to think too hard on anything, such as a new doll.



Penny and Her Doll

Henkes, K. (2012). *Penny and Her Song*. Greenwillow Books.



Penny and Her Song

Penny invents a new song today and sings it to her mom. Then, she turns to her dad and sings this “very own song” to him as well, however dad tells her that she ought not to disturb the sleeping babies, so she goes back to her room to sing instead. She finds out that she can sing into the mirror to herself. Later the other day, she sings to the rest of the family at dinner time, but it is not very popular

among family. The story ends in a harmony when they all feel tired and decide it is time to go to bed.

Henkes, K. (2013). *Penny and Her Marble*. Greenwillow Books.

Little girl mouse Penny pushes her doll in a stroller and goes on for a walk, when she discovers a shiny, blue marble in the grass. She ponders about who this marble belongs to, and thinks hesitantly before putting it into her pocket. After she takes the marble home, she continues to feel uneasy about the fact that she has taken it, and it bothers her consistently and she feels unwell. It even haunts her in her sleep, that the could-be owner, Mrs. Goodwin, would look for the marble and chase her.



Penny and Her Marble

Henkes, K. (2019). *Penny and Her Sled*. Greenwillow Books; Illustrated edition.

It is a wonder when it would snow, to Penny who likes to go skating. Penny then starts to interview everyone around her to find out this. At night, during the afternoon, and anytime, she observes the sky wondering about the coming of snow, even in her dreams. Her parents do not think it would be snowing, either. Later, Penny uses her sled to build a bridge at home. Finally, they find in the garden “snowdrops” in the fountain, which are



Penny's Sled

actually small flower buds in snow shapes—but Penny is happy about this finding, and picks up some of these snowdrops: they do not melt.

Henkes, K. (2015). *Waiting*. Greenwillow Books; Illustrated edition.

A group of toy characters who looked earnestly outside of the window. The rain, the snow, and the rainbow make them happy, who stand in a line by the window of a bedroom. They are always waiting, to see what would happen next.



They are waiting quietly