

Teacher Guide

Grades 5–6

# Dear Mr. Henshaw

Beverly Cleary

NOVEL UNITS<sup>™</sup>



NEW WAYS TO TEACH READING,  
WRITING, & CRITICAL THINKING



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# DEAR MR. HENSHAW

by  
Beverly Cleary

## Teacher Guide

Written by  
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### Note

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## Skills and Strategies

### Critical Thinking

Brainstorming, compare/contrast, inferences, evaluation, predicting

### Comprehension

Cause/effect, drawing conclusions, decision-making, summarizing, creative thinking, identifying attributes

### Writing

Poetry, short story, essay

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, dramatization, oral presentation

### Vocabulary

Definitions, parts of speech, synonyms/antonyms, application

### Literary Elements

Point of view, character analysis, figurative language, genre, theme, conflict/resolution, author's purpose

### Across the Curriculum

Science—burglar alarms; Art—book cover, journal cover, postcard, sketch; Research—truck driving, Yellowstone National Park, Citizens' Band radios, butterfly gardens, famous author; Geography—locations on U.S. map



## Tuesday, February 6–Saturday, March 17

Leigh's frustration mounts as he yearns for friends and a sense of normalcy. Observant Mr. Fridley notices Leigh's gloom and offers him advice. On his way home from school, Leigh visits a butterfly garden, which inspires renewed hope in him. He begins writing a story for the Young Writers' Yearbook. Needing an author's advice, Leigh writes to Mr. Henshaw about the problematic ending to his fiction story. Using money his father sent him, Leigh purchases hardware and carefully constructs a burglar alarm for his lunchbox. When no one steals anything from his lunch, Leigh must activate the alarm himself in the cafeteria. Friends befriend Leigh, whose burglar alarm idea spreads school-wide. Leigh finally speaks to his father on the telephone again.

### Vocabulary

billions  
positively  
grove  
flitting  
yanked  
insulted  
wince  
clamp  
tackle  
prowls  
fad

### Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Mr. Fridley helps Leigh stay out of trouble? What does Mr. Fridley's concern signify for Leigh? *(Answers will vary. It seems that Mr. Fridley helps Leigh stay out of trouble because he believes Leigh is a genuine nice boy. He realizes Leigh is going through a difficult time and any trouble he made would be a result of his stress, not his character. Therefore, Mr. Fridley stops Leigh from doing senseless things like ruining someone else's lunch. Leigh feels isolated at his new school and thinks no one cares about or notices him. Being ignored by his father also most likely makes Leigh feel unworthy of attention. Therefore, Leigh is surprised when Mr. Fridley shows real concern.)*
2. How does Leigh feel in the grove of butterfly trees? What might the butterflies signify for him? *(Leigh is delighted and amazed by the butterflies' seeming invisibility and also by their beautiful appearance once the Sun shines on them, illuminating their bright colors. Answers will vary but the butterflies may symbolize Leigh. The butterflies' "transformation" from invisible to proud and stunning might represent Leigh's transition in life. Like the butterflies, Leigh hopes to go from nearly invisible to noticed and appreciated.)*
3. Why is Leigh angry over his father's apology note? *(Answers will vary. The note, which was written on a napkin, seems to have been dashed off quickly. Leigh seems insulted that his father didn't take the time to write him a real letter and is further angered by his father including Bandit as an apology for losing Bandit. Mostly, Leigh seems frustrated that he doesn't understand his father, though Leigh's mother explains that his father was never good at expressing himself.)*
4. Mr. Henshaw tells Leigh that a character in a story should solve a problem or change in some way" (p. 91). Do you think the author of *Dear Mr. Henshaw* uses this strategy when writing the book? *(Answers will vary, but most students will probably agree that Leigh solves several problems and changes gradually in the book. Leigh solves simpler problems, such as keeping his lunch safe and finding things to do before school. But Leigh also must contend with a much larger problem: how to cope with his parents' divorce and his new life in Pacific Grove. Over the course of the book, Leigh forgives his father, becomes more honest with his mother, adopts a more positive attitude at school, and makes a few friends.)*
5. How does Leigh make a lunchbox alarm? What does this indicate about Leigh? *(Leigh researches batteries and electricity and puts together what he would need for an alarm. Then, he goes to a hardware store for supplies [and receives advice from a friendly clerk]. After fiddling with the alarm, Leigh improvises several times and creates a functioning alarm system. Answers will vary, but students will likely agree that Leigh's actions demonstrate that he is intelligent, resourceful, independent, and determined.)*

6. What happens the first day Leigh brings his alarm-rigged lunchbox to school? Why is Leigh still bothered, considering his alarm was successful? (*The lunch thief does not strike, and Leigh is forced to trigger his alarm in order to access his lunch. When the principal, teachers, and other students marvel at his invention, Leigh feels “like some sort of hero” [p. 102]. He is surprised to learn other students have had lunches stolen, and he feels happy to be noticed by others for once. Although he enjoys the attention, Leigh is still bothered because he failed to catch the lunch thief.*)
7. Why is Leigh ultimately glad he does not know the lunch thief’s identity? How does Leigh’s reasoning reflect his maturation over the course of the book? (*Leigh reasons that catching the thief would have only gotten him/her into trouble. He feels sympathetic toward the thief and considers that the thief could have been just a kid, who’s mother packed bad lunches [or] had to pack his own lunches and there was never anything good in the house” [pp. 103–104]. Leigh also points out that whoever the thief is, Leigh has to attend school with that person. Answers will vary, but Leigh’s appreciation for others’ difficult situations has grown considerably over the course of the book. His thought process reflects that he has become a more thoughtful, considerate person.*)
8. How does Leigh’s phone conversation with his father show that Leigh has forgiven him? (*Leigh bravely broaches the topic of Bandit and talks to his father normally. He confesses that he still misses his father and the two end the conversation with their customary goodbyes. As a whole, the conversation demonstrates Leigh’s new level of maturity and acceptance of his situation. He is able to speak to his father calmly and honestly, without becoming angry.*)
9. **Prediction:** What will Leigh submit to his Young Writers’ Yearbook contest?

### Supplementary Activities

1. Research: Read a for a lesson about butterfly gardens. Create a visual aid explaining how to cultivate a successful butterfly garden, including what types of plants to include and where to place the garden. Present your information to the class.
2. Science: Create a simple burglar alarm using the instructions at [http://www.canstockkids.com/make-stuff/projects/burglar\\_alarm.html](http://www.canstockkids.com/make-stuff/projects/burglar_alarm.html) (active at time of publication)

### Tuesday, March 20 Saturday, March 24

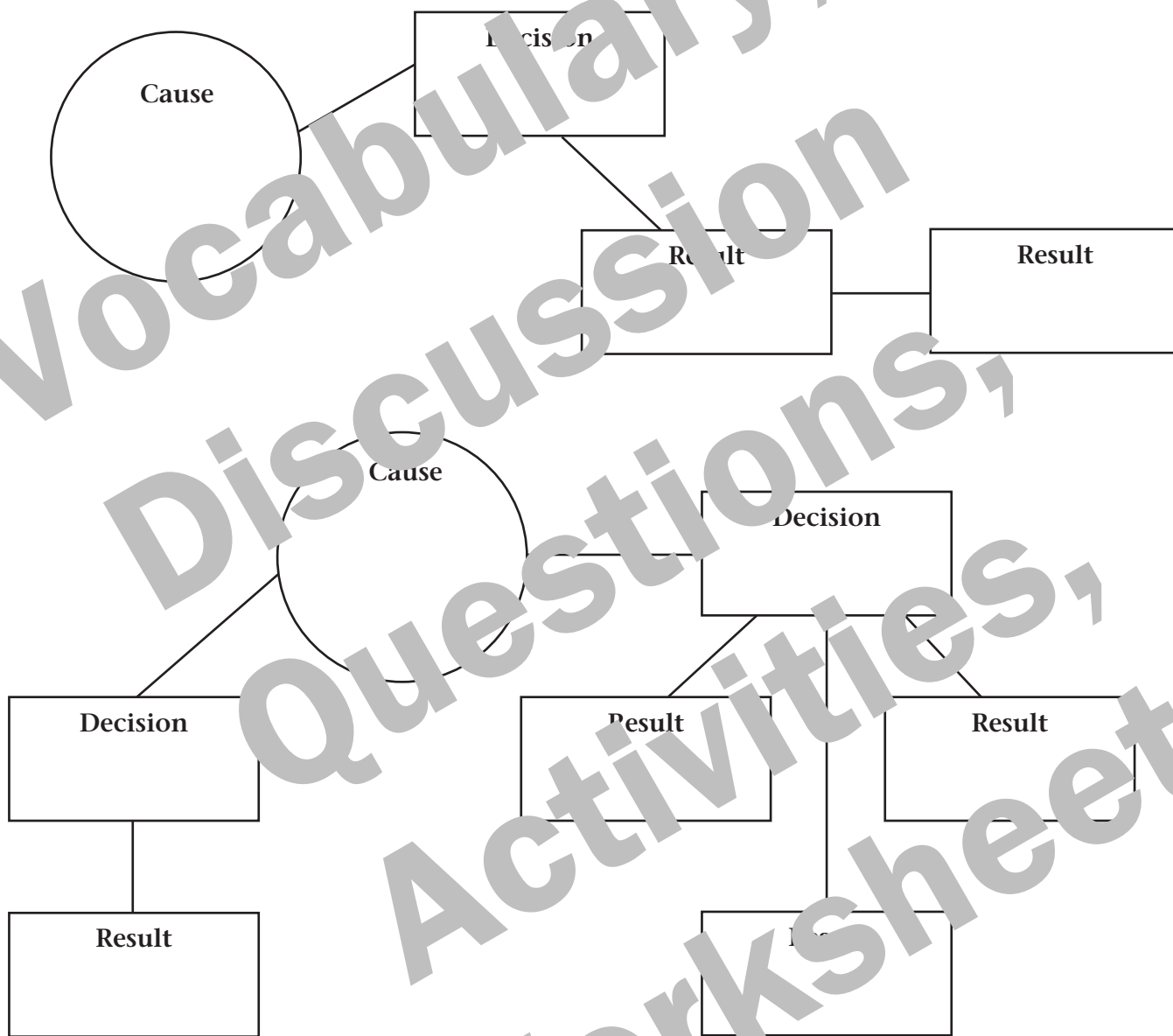
Leigh submits a description of a day spent with his father for the Young Writers’ Yearbook. Leigh and Barry continue spending time together, and Barry comes to Leigh’s house for dinner. When Leigh’s description receives an “Honorable Mention” in the Young Writers’ Yearbook, Leigh is disappointed that he won’t be meeting a famous author. However, through a twist of fate, Leigh gets to meet the famous author, Angela Badger, who compliments his work. Leigh’s father visits unexpectedly and surprises Leigh by bringing Bandit. After Leigh’s mother gently refuses Leigh’s father’s attempt to restart their relationship, Leigh bids his mother goodbye with mixed feelings.

### Discussion Questions

1. How does having Barry as a friend impact Leigh’s life? (*Answers will vary, but students will most likely agree that Leigh feels much less lonely now that he is friends with Barry. Leigh also learns he is lucky in ways he never considered—lucky to have peace and quiet when he needs it, lucky to have privacy, etc. Barry helps Leigh feel like a regular kid, and visiting Barry’s house exposes Leigh to another household and way of life.*)

## Cause/Effect Chart

**Directions:** Make a flow chart to show decisions a character made, the decisions s/he could have made, and the result(s) of each. (Use your imagination to speculate on the results of decisions the character could have made.)



## Making Decisions

**Directions:** Determine three to seven possible solutions to the problem you write below.

- State each solution in a short sentence.
- Design three to five “criteria” (questions you can ask to measure how good a particular choice may be).
- Rate the criteria for each solution: 1 = yes; 2 = maybe; 3 = no.

**Problem:** \_\_\_\_\_

Solutions ↓	Criteria		
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			