

Teacher Guide

Grades 7–8

# Touching Spirit Bear

Ben Mikaelson

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# TOUCHING SPIRIT BEAR

by  
Ben Mikaelson

## Teacher Guide

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### Note

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**Please note:** This novel deals with sensitive, mature issues. Parts may contain descriptions of violence. Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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## Skills and Strategies

### Critical Thinking

Interpreting evidence, compare/contrast, forming opinions, identifying stereotypes, paradox, pros/cons, research

### Comprehension

Cause/effect, classifying, details, generalizing, inferencing, main idea, predicting, summarizing

### Writing

Article, description, column, list, narrative, letter, report

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral report, role-playing, interviewing

### Vocabulary

Compound words, context clues, synonyms, antonyms, definitions

### Literary Elements

Analogy, characterization, descriptions, foreshadowing, plot development, setting, point of view, simile, theme, figurative language

### Across the Curriculum

Art—architecture, drawing;  
Science—bears, insects, salmon, physical therapy;  
Social Studies—maps, history, culture, laws; Math—statistics, percentages;  
Technology—Internet research; Music—drums, dancing

# Word Map for a Verb

What does it mean?

What kind of actions does it describe?

Dictionary:

Focus word:

In Use:

What are examples of when to use the word?

Other uses:

## Using Predictions

We all make predictions as we read—little guesses about what will happen next, how a conflict will be resolved, which details will be important to the plot, which details will help fill in our sense of a character. Students should be encouraged to predict, to make sensible guesses as they read the novel.

As students work on their predictions, these discussion questions can be used to guide them: What are some of the ways to predict? What is the process of a sophisticated reader's thinking and predicting? What clues does an author give to help us make predictions? Why are some predictions more likely to be accurate than others?

Create a chart for recording predictions. This could either be an individual or class activity. As each subsequent chapter is discussed, students can review and correct their previous predictions about plot and characters as necessary.

Use the clues and ideas the author gives.

Use your own prior knowledge.

Apply any new information (i.e., from a discussion) that may cause you to change your mind.

Predictions




6. Why does Cole kill the caterpillar? What does this say about his character? Has it changed any since the beginning of the book? (*He thinks he's teaching it a lesson, but he's trying to exert some control over a situation where he is helpless. Answers will vary. pp. 71–72*)

7. **Prediction:** Will Cole see the bear again?

**Supplementary Activities**

1. Science: Read about different types of bears and make a list of how many different species live in North America.
2. Writing: Write a paragraph about a time you discovered someone was being dishonest.
3. Literary Analysis: List examples of foreshadowing from the novel. Recall that Cole was warned about the Devil's Club and now he's grabbed it. Recall that Peter wishes Cole could know how it feels to have his head mangled, and now Cole has been mauled by a bear.
4. Art: Draw a picture of your vision of the white Spirit Bear.

**Chapters 9–12, pp. 74–102**

Cole lies in bed in pain. He watches another sparrow feed her babies in a nearby tree and feels anger. The Spirit Bear returns, but just looks at him. When lightning strikes a tree, Cole wonders if the little birds are okay. He sees the dead little birds and decides how wants to live. He eats grass, worms, and bugs. He covers parts of his body with mud to keep the mosquitoes away. The Spirit Bear returns and comes close to him. Cole thinks the bear may kill him, but he feels trust, and he reaches out and touches it. He drifts in and out of consciousness. He thinks birds are attacking him when Garvey and Edwin arrive and take him off the island in a skiff.

**Vocabulary**

- haphazard (75)
- relentlessly (76)
- torrents (77)
- paralyzed (77)
- stench (80)
- solitary (82)
- fragile (82)
- suffocating (85)
- survive (91)
- dredged (92)
- bombarded (98)
- parched (99)
- surged (100)
- delirium (101)

**Discussion Questions**

1. Why does Cole feel such anger toward the mother sparrow and her young? How does he feel after lightning hits the tree? Why do you think his feelings changed? (*He sees the sparrow treating her young as if he would have liked to have been treated by his mother. He wonders if they are okay. Answers will vary. pp. 75, 79*)
2. Once Cole decides to live, he figures out that his power of making people afraid of him is fake. What is the real power? What has changed his thoughts? (*Power to make choices. He thinks of the baby birds and what their lives are like. pp. 83–84*)
3. The author goes into great detail about Cole eating the mouse. How is the death of the mouse different from the first caterpillar Cole kills? What would you eat if you were in Cole's situation? (*The mouse provides sustenance for Cole; he killed the first caterpillar out of hate. Answers will vary. pp. 88–89*)
4. Each time the Spirit Bear comes, Cole feels different emotions. Why do you think his attitude toward the bear change? (*He's fearful of death at first, then he's defiant, and the final time he is calm and accepts that if he dies, then it is his time. He understands the circle of life. Answers will vary. pp. 76, 91–96*)

5. Why does the Spirit Bear treat Cole with mere curiosity when Cole sees it the last time? Do you know someone who has treated animals badly? (*The bear has treated him as he's been treated. Edwin told Cole, "Whatever you do to the animals, you do to yourself" [p. 18]. Answers will vary. pp. 91–96*)

- Although Cole is in horrible physical shape, he tells Garvey that he's okay. What does he mean by this statement? (*He means that he is at peace with himself and nature. Answers will vary. p. 102*)
- Prediction:** Will Cole be taken back to the island when he's well?

**Supplementary Activities**

- Literary Analysis/Similes: Add to your list of similes. Examples include: “thunder rumbled across the sky like empty barrels rolling toward the horizon” (p. 77), and “Clinging to life was like hanging from a bar on the playground at school” (p. 97).
- Science/Math: Research lightning strikes and report statistics on how many strikes occur each minute in the world and in the United States. The Internet is a good source to find this information.
- Writing: Observe a bird of prey and write a paragraph about it.

**Chapters 11–15 (pp. 103–133)**

Cole has a rough start as he awaits transfer to the hospital. Garvey says he's sorry he got Cole into this, but Cole admits it's his own fault. He goes to see the Spirit Bear, but doesn't think anyone believes in it. Six months later he gets out of the hospital and knows that time has changed. He goes to his detention cell and then to the Justice Circle. His father doesn't come to the Circle, but his mother has quit drinking and talks to Cole about starting over. Cole's father has been charged with child abuse, and Cole learns that his grandpa isn't his father. He hopes not to carry on that cycle of abuse. The Circle talks of sending Cole to the court system, and Cole is resigned to that fate. Edwin comes to the Circle from Alaska, and Garvey convinces the Circle to allow Cole to go back to the island.

Vocabulary
increased (103)
vengeance (104)
reluctantly (111)
warrant (116)
testify (116)
therapy (117)
circulation (117)
noticeably (122)
violated (123)
reverently (124)
diminished (126)
linoleum (127)
significant (128)
verdict (130)

**Discussion Questions**

- As Cole lies near death at Rosey's, Garvey tells him he's sorry he got him into this. Cole says it's his fault. What does this say about Cole's attitude? Has Cole changed for good? Why or why not? (*He's not blaming someone else for the situation he's in. Answers will vary. p. 102*)
- Cole wants something to take away the monster that lives in and in his life. Rosey tells him only he can do it. How can he do this? (*He must take responsibility for his actions and how it affects the world. Answers will vary. pp. 105–109*)
- Cole says he's done being mad, but Edwin tells him, “Anger is a memory never forgotten. You only tame it” (p. 110). Do you agree with this? Why or why not? (*Edwin believes that anger will always lie below the surface, but a person must learn to control it. Answers will vary.*)
- Cole's dad was abused as a child. He is abusive to Cole. How do you feel toward Cole's dad now that you understand him better? (*He is still in charge of his own life and makes his own decisions. Students may be more sympathetic, but Cole's dad must live with the consequences of his actions. Answers will vary. pp. 121–122*)