Based on

**Dear Mr. Henshaw**
By Beverly Cleary

**About the Book:**
Leigh Botts is a new kid in the sixth grade at school. He lives with his mother but misses his father and dog, Bandit, terribly while they travel cross-country. Mr. Botts works as a truck driver, and Leigh is struggling with the recent divorce of his parents. He is angry with a mysterious thief who keeps stealing things from his lunch box at school. When Leigh’s teacher assigns a letter-writing project, naturally Leigh chooses to write to his all-time favorite author, Boyd Henshaw. After all, Leigh has loved his books ever since he was in second grade. Can Mr. Henshaw’s answer change Leigh’s life forever?

**Set the Stage:**
Use the following to get the students ready to read:
- Who is your favorite author? If you wrote a letter to him/her, what questions would you ask?
- Have you, or anyone you’ve known, ever been affected by divorce? Explain your answer with details.
- Moving to a new school is a scary experience for children of all ages. Have you ever had to move to a new school? How did you feel while attending it on the first day? What things would you do in order to make a new student feel comfortable?
- What do you know about writing letters? What are the important parts to include in letters? Do you enjoy receiving letters (mail) or telephone calls? Which do you prefer? Why?
- Has a classmate at school ever done something to bother you? What was done to you and how did you resolve the problem?
- Is there an adult, other than one of your parents, who you feel comfortable sharing your ideas and feelings with? Who is this person? Explain your answer with details.

**Review:**
After reading the book, discuss the following:
- Why did Mr. Henshaw's answers to Leigh's questions for his project arrive late?
- How does Leigh feel about answering Mr. Henshaw's questions? What would you do in the same situation?
- What occupations do Leigh's mom and dad have?
- When Leigh's mom makes him answer Mr. Henshaw's questions, Leigh views it as a lot of work. What does Leigh do in each letter to show that he is upset about this?
- How does Leigh describe himself? How would you describe Leigh at the beginning of the story?
- How would you describe the economic status of Leigh and his mom? What clues from the story help explain your answer?
- What things bother Leigh?
- How does Leigh feel about writing after he finishes answering all of Mr. Henshaw's questions?
- As Leigh progresses in school, what changes do you notice about his writing?
- Leigh wants to be an author when he grows up and clearly enjoys writing. What does Mr. Henshaw suggest in order to help Leigh meet his goal?
- What are two ways Leigh tries to solve the “lunch box” problem? Do either of these ways work? Explain your answer with specific details from the story.
- What are Leigh's feelings about his dad? Explain your answer with details.
Why does Leigh write in his diary instead of sending all of his writings to Mr. Henshaw?

Who is Mr. Fridley? Describe Leigh’s relationship with him.

What happened to Bandit?

How does Leigh decide to use the $20 that his dad sends him?

Leigh’s lunchbox alarm helps him socially. How does his invention help him socially?

Where is Leigh’s “special place”? Why does it make him feel so good?

How does Leigh end up placing in the Young Authors’ Contest?

Leigh gets the privilege of eating lunch with Angela Badger. What words of encouragement does she give to Leigh?

At the end of the story, Leigh’s dad finally visits. What surprise does Leigh’s dad bring with him?

How do you think Leigh feels about his parents’ divorce at the end of the story? Compare these feelings with those he felt at the beginning.

**Student Activity** *(found on the last pages of this PDF)*: Students will conduct a character comparison.

**Related Activities:**
To extend students’ enjoyment of the book, try these:

**Author Activity:** Ask students who their favorite author is. Have them choose one and compile a list of questions that they would like to ask him/her. Help students to find an address for the author. Following the format of a friendly letter, ask students to compose a letter to this special author, including their questions. You or a parent can mail the letter to the author. Ask children to share authors’ responses with the class.

**Dear Diary:** One of the greatest ways in which Leigh improves his writing is by keeping a diary. Diaries are kept in order to express personal emotions, thoughts, and events. Using a diary or spiral notebook, have students keep a diary for at least two weeks. Tell them to include the personal events in their life (as they won’t be shared with others). After recording many things for this period of time, ask students to write a separate journal entry describing their feelings about this activity.

**Doggie Danger:** Leigh allows his dog Bandit to travel cross-country with his dad. But when his dad is careless regarding Bandit’s activities, Bandit goes missing. Ask students: Do you have a pet? What kind of pet do you have and what is its name? What things do you do each day to make certain that your pet is well attended to? If you don’t have a pet, what kind would you like to have? How would you take care of it? Have students draw a picture of their pet, or the one they’d like to have. Then, have them make a list of the things they feel are or would be important when caring for it.

**Dealing with Divorce:** Like many children his age, Leigh is struggling to understand and accept his parents’ divorce. He has mixed feelings regarding the effect the divorce has had on him, his mom, and his dad. Ask students: If you could write a letter to Leigh about divorce, what would you say? On a piece of notebook paper, have students pretend they are Mr. Henshaw responding to one of Leigh’s journal entries. What would they say to him? Could they comfort him and make him feel better? Then have them write a letter to Leigh telling him their feelings about divorce and their experiences with the issue.

**Dear Mr. Henshaw Isn’t Just About Writing!:** Although it is apparent that the author, Beverly Cleary, wants the readers to understand and embrace the importance of writing, much dedication in the book is given to the concepts of growth, responsibilities, and divorce. Have students create a timeline of the important events in the story that show Leigh’s growth and stages of maturity. Then have them use the dates of his journal entries to record when each event took place.
**Character Comparison**  
Based on *Dear Mr. Henshaw* by Beverly Cleary

Beverly Cleary provides readers the opportunity to get to know the characters in the story intimately. Their good traits are shown, as well as their bad ones. This leaves readers with mixed emotions about them, and opinions change regularly about each person.

**Directions:** Think about the characters in *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. What things make them endearing? What things are not their best qualities? Complete the chart below with the physical description of Leigh and occupations of Bonnie and Bill Botts and Mr. Henshaw. The positive and negative traits for all characters should be based on opinions.

### Leigh Botts

**Physical Description:** ______________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Positive Traits:** ______________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Negative Traits:** ______________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________

### Bonnie Botts

**Occupation:** _________________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Positive Traits:** ______________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Negative Traits:** ______________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________

### Bill Botts

**Occupation:** _________________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Positive Traits:** ______________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Negative Traits:** ______________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________
Mr. Boyd Henshaw

Occupation: ______________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________

Positive Traits: ______________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________

Negative Traits: _____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________