



Kitten's First Full Moon

by Kevin Henkes

Teacher's Guide

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Synopsis

Kitten sees her first full moon, which she takes to be a bowl of milk in the sky. To get the milk, Kitten closes her eyes and licks. She gets a bug on her tongue, not the milk! Determined to get the milk, Kitten leaps from the top step of the porch. Instead of reaching the milk, she falls down the stairs.

Next, Kitten chases the bowl of milk – the moon—all around the yard and neighborhood. She does not get any closer to it. Then Kitten climbs the tallest tree she can find, but she still can't reach the milk. Perched on the top of the tree, the frightened Kitten looks at the moon's reflection in the pond. She thinks she sees another bowl of milk, only larger. To get this milk, Kitten races down the tree and leaps into the pond. Now she is sad, wet, and hungry. Returning home, she finds a bowl of milk on the porch. Lucky Kitten!

Award Highlights

- 2003** Henkes' young adult novel *Olive's Ocean* published.
- 2004** *Kitten's First Full Moon* published. *Olive's Ocean* named a Newbery Honor Book.
- 2005** *First Full Moon* wins the Caldecott medal.

Author Sketch

Writer and illustrator Kevin Henkes was born in 1960, in Racine, Wisconsin. He attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He and his wife Laura, whom he married in 1985, make their home in Madison.

Henkes became an author-illustrator at a very young age, when he was just nineteen years old. He went to New York City with his portfolio, hoping to find a publisher. Greenwillow Books recognized his talent and published his first picture book, *All Alone*, in 1987. Since then, Henkes has written and illustrated many picture books and several novels. He likes experimenting with shapes, colors, and designs to keep his work interesting. On his web page, Henkes explains how he feels about being a children's book writer: "I used to live with my parents and brothers and



sister and work at a card table in my bedroom. Now I live with my wife and son and daughter in our own house and work at a drawing table in my own studio. I never thought I'd be lucky enough to be a real author and illustrator. I wouldn't trade it for anything."

Critic's Corner

Henkes' career has enjoyed a steady upward arc. In 1986, *A Weekend with Wendell* was named a Children's Choice Book by the Children's Book Council and the International Reading Association. Two years later, *Chester's Way* was named a notable book by the American Library Association. In 2004, *Olive's Ocean* was nominated for a Los Angeles Times Book Award and named a Newbery Honor Book. The following year, *Kitten's First Full Moon* received a Caldecott Medal and the Charlotte

Zolotow Award. These extraordinary achievements amply demonstrate that Henkes is equally outstanding at writing for young children and teenagers.

Critics praise Kevin Henkes' fiction and picture books for their light-hearted yet sensitive portrayal of common occurrences in young children's lives. Karin Snelson, reviewing *Kitten's First Full Moon* for Amazon.com, wrote: "In this beautiful picture book, winner of the 2005 Caldecott Medal, Kevin Henkes captures the sweet, sometimes slapstick struggle of Kitten, who sees her first full moon and thinks it's a bowl of milk in the sky... The winning combination here is the simplicity and humor of the story, paired with gorgeous black-and-white illustrations with thick black lines (mirrored by the thick bold sans-serif font) and shades of grey that are as luminous as a moonlit night should be... Children will love Kitten's quest and ensuing comedy of errors, but what they will love even more is that there's an actual bowl of milk waiting on the porch for Kitten."

Wendy Lukehart, writing in *School Library Journal*, was equally enthusiastic. She called the book "An irresistible offering from the multifaceted Henkes. ... The rhythmic text and delightful artwork ensure storytime success. Kids will surely applaud this cat's irrepressible spirit." Gillian Engberg, reviewing the book in *Booklist*, wrote: "Henkes creates another winner in this simple, charming story about a naive little kitten who mistakes a round, shining moon for a bowl of milk. Henkes' text, reminiscent of Margaret Wise Brown's work in the elemental words, rhythms, and appealing sounds, tells a warm, humorous story that's beautifully extended in his shimmering, gray-toned artwork. Working in bold black lines and the silvery palette of moonlight, he creates a lovable, expressive character in the determined kitten, and his dramatic contrasts of light and dark capture the excitement of a nighttime adventure."

Henkes' Other Works

All Alone (1981)
Clean Enough (1982)
Margaret and Taylor (1983)
Return to Sender (1984)
Bailey Goes Camping (1985)
Once Around the Block (1987)
Grandpa and Bo (1986)
Two Under Par (1987)
Sheila Rae, the Brave (1987)
A Weekend with Wendell (1987)
The Zebra Wall (1988)
Chester's Way (1988)
Good-bye, Curtis (1995)
Circle Dogs (1998)
Jessica (1989)
Shhhh (1989)
Julius, the Baby of the World (1990)
Julius's Candy Corn (1990)
Lilly's Chocolate Heart (1990)
Chrysanthemum (1991)
Words of Stone (1992)
Owen (1993)
Owen's Marshmallow Chick (1993)
Sheila Rae's Peppermint Stick (1993)
Wemberly's Ice Cream Star (1993)
Good-Bye, Curtis (1995)
The Biggest Boy (1995)
Protecting Marie (1995)
Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse (1996)
Sun & Spoon (1997)
The Birthday Room (1999)
Oh! (1999)
Wemberly Worried (2000)
Kitten's First Full Moon (2004)
So Happy! (2005)
Lilly's Big Day (2006)
Good Day (2007)

Bibliography

New York Times Book Review, April 28, 1991, p. 22.
Publishers Weekly, December 18, 1981, p. 70.
Sixth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators, H. W. Wilson, 1989, p. 123-24.
Tribune Books, May 14, 1989, p. 5.

General Objectives

1. To understand what Kitten sees in the night sky
2. To identify with Kitten's misunderstanding
3. To realize why Kitten closes her eyes and licks
4. To sympathize with Kitten's plight
5. To appreciate the book's humor
6. To recognize that Kitten can never reach the moon
7. To understand why Kitten falls down the stairs
8. To analyze the author's style
9. To enjoy the pictures
10. To use the pictures and words to understand the story

Specific Objectives

1. To understand that Kitten thinks the moon is a bowl of milk
2. To grasp that Kitten has never seen a full moon before
3. To find it amusing that Kitten thinks she can lick the moon but gets a bug on her tongue instead
4. To recognize the patterns of repetition and the refrain
5. To predict ways that Kitten might try to get to the "bowl of milk"
6. To use the white space as well as the pictures to understand the story and appreciate the writer's unusual style
7. To comprehend why Kitten gets frightened
8. To brainstorm ways to help soothe Kitten
9. To trace the steps in Kitten's night-time journey in quest of the bowl of milk
10. To enjoy the happy ending

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Kevin Henkes' style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

Refrain: a repeated phrase or sentence at the end of a stanza of poetry or prose. In *Kitten's First Full Moon*, Kevin Henkes uses the refrain "Poor Kitten!" This sets off each of Kitten's attempts to reach the moon, which she takes to be a full bowl of milk. It also serves to unify the book and give it a musical tone.

Pallet: the illustrator's choice of colors. Henkes uses only black and white in this picture book, a sharp departure from most of today's lushly-colored books. The stark pallet gives the book an old-fashioned, retro look, similar to classic children's books such as *Goodnight, Moon*. It also shows the power of the moon to transform a familiar landscape into something mysterious and enticing.

Style: the author's distinctive way of writing. Style is made up of elements such as word choice, sentence length and structure, figures of speech, and tone. An author may change his or her style for different kinds of writing and to suit different audiences. In poetry, for example, an author might use more imagery than he or she would use in prose. In *Kitten's First Full Moon*, Henkes uses surprisingly sophisticated words for a primary reader, such as "wiggled," "tumbled," and "might." Henkes also uses a great deal of repetition, as we would expect in a primary book. Style also includes an illustrator's distinctive way of drawing. Henkes uses a bold style, with assertive brush strokes, thick lines, and a marked lack of detail. The pictures have deep shading, too. The brushstrokes gives the book a stark and stylized look, almost Asian.

The Importance of Setting

Kitten's First Full Moon takes place at night, in an isolated rural or suburban area. The setting is important in this picture book because Kitten must be able to see the moon clearly. The story would not work if the night were overcast or rainy, for the moon would not be visible.

In addition, Kitten must be left alone to pursue the moon. The story would not make sense if people came out to help Kitten. As young readers must often discover important truths about their environment on their own, so Kitten must have the freedom to explore her environment yet be taken care of, as the bowl of milk at the end proves.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Picture Books

Frank Asch, *Moongame*
Margaret Wise Brown, *Goodnight, Moon*
Lois Ehlert, *Feathers for Lunch*
Wanda Gag, *Millions of Cats*
Cynthia Rylant, *Cat Heaven*
Carol Saul, *Barn Cat*
Judy Schachner, *Skippy Jones*
Judy Schachner, *Skippy Jones in the Dog House*
Rosemary Wells, *Yoko*
Sara Varon, *Chicken and Cat*
Elizabeth Wallace, *The Sun, the Moon and the Stars*

Videos/DVDs

The Adventures of Milo and Otis
Air Bud
Babe
The Bear
That Darn Cat
Free Willy
Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey
The Incredible Journey
Mouse Hunt
Shiloh
Shrek
Shrek II

Audiocassettes

Goodnight, Moon
Kitten's First Full Moon

Internet

Kevin Henkes Home Page
www.kevinHenkes.com

falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/Henkes.htm

www.ucalgary.ca/~dKbrown/k6/Henkes.html

www.carolhurst.com/authors/kHenkes.html

BookPage Children's Interview: Interview with author and illustrator Kevin Henkes
www.bookpage.com/9609bp/childrens/

Educational Paperback Association Kevin Henkes
www.edupaperback.org/showauth.cfm?authid=31

Kidsreads.com - Kevin Henkes
www.kidsreads.com/authors/au-Henkes-kevin.asp

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Kevin Henkes' *Kitten's First Full Moon* should include these aspects:

Themes

- bugs
- climbing
- confusion
- hunger
- jumping
- milk
- moon
- night
- pond
- waiting

Motifs

- being confused
- finding a bug on your tongue
- seeing your first full moon
- wanting a bowl of milk
- running through the night
- confusing the moon for milk
- getting hurt jumping
- being scared in a tree
- getting all wet in a pond
- drinking a bowl of milk at the end

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the picture book. Explain the meaning of each.

1. It was Kitten's first full moon. When she saw it, she thought, There's a bowl of milk in the sky. And she wanted it.
(Kitten is very young, so she has never seen a full moon before. It is natural that she would confuse it with a bowl of milk, because that's what she has seen—and what she wants most of the time. It is humorous that Kitten would mistake the moon for a bowl of milk, because people confuse the moon with many things, but rarely a bowl of milk.)
2. But Kitten only ended up with a bug on her tongue. Poor Kitten!
(In a futile attempt to reach the moon, Kitten licks in its direction but gets only an insect on her tongue for her attempt. Her baffled expression— created by her wide eyes and outstretched tongue— is very amusing. Children are likely to enjoy this page very much.)

3. Still, there was the little bowl of milk, just waiting.
(This is the first refrain in the book. It echoes what readers are doing as they wait to see what will happen to Kitten. How will she get her bowl of milk? After all, there is no way that she can ever reach the moon. And even if she could, it's not made of milk.)
4. Poor Kitten!
(This is the second refrain in the book. It helps rouse children's sympathy for Kitten's plight. Children are likely to identify with Kitten as they, like her, learn the ways of the world.)
5. But Kitten still couldn't reach the bowl of milk, and now she was scared.
(Until now, the book has been humorous. Here, though, it takes a serious turn as readers wonder how Kitten will get down from the tree. She might even get hurt! Henkes uses this scene to build suspense and propel the plot. Kitten's baffled expression echoes the words. The picture is especially appealing, showing Kitten's wide-eyed stare and knitted brow.)
6. So she raced down the tree and raced through the grass and raced to the edge of the pond.
(In the tradition of the best picture books for very young readers, Henkes uses repetition to unify the story, create musical effects, and give the prose the rhythm of a single, unified chase.)
7. So she went back home.
(Henkes takes the story in a circle, giving it unity.)
8. and there was a great big bowl of milk on the porch...
(The words are arranged in steps to clue readers about how they should be read. The page should be read as follows: "and there was / a great big / bowl of milk / on the porch." Like a comedian telling a joke, Henkes arranged the phrases this way to build to the story's climax.)
9. just waiting for her.
(After all of Kitten's travails during the night, it's rewarding that she will indeed get her bowl of milk. In a larger sense, this bowl of milk symbolizes that Kitten is cared for and loved. This warmth makes the book especially comforting, an ideal bedtime story for all children. Its tone also suggests that the book will become a classic, in the vein of Goodnight, Moon.)
10. Lucky Kitten!
(The last page is a clever reversal of the refrain "Poor Kitten!" that has been repeated through the book. Children will delight in Kitten's reversal of fortune and her subsequent great good luck. She got what she wanted after all.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. Does the story take place during the day or at night?
(It takes place at night.)
2. What does Kitten think the moon is?
(She thinks it is a bowl of milk.)
3. Why does she make this mistake?
(She has seen a bowl of milk, but she has never seen a full moon before. She compares it to the only thing she knows that looks similar.)
4. What happens when Kitten sticks out her tongue to lick to moon?
(She gets a bug on her tongue.)
5. What happens when Kitten leaps at the moon?
(She tumbles down the stairs, bumping her nose, banging her ear, and pinching her tail.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. What part of the book did you think was funny?
(It was funny when Kitten thinks she is licking a bowl of milk and gets a bug on her tongue instead.)
7. How is this picture book different from other picture books that you have read?
(The pictures are all black and white. Nearly all other picture books have brightly-colored pictures.)
8. What do you think Kitten might do differently the next time?
(She might learn from her experience. If she does, she will not chase the moon all over, thinking it is a bowl of milk.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Did you like that the book was black-and-white rather than color? Why or why not?
(Children who like the book might enjoy how the black-and-white pictures show what it was like for Kitten at night. They also show how Kitten thinks: everything is very black-and-white, very simple.)

10. Do you think Kitten learned anything from her experience? Why or why not?
(Probably not, because she is a kitten, and a very young one at that.)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Photocopy one of the pages. Then color it in.
12. Work with some friends. Draw another adventure that Kitten had. Tell the story, too.

Across the Curriculum

Language Arts

1. Kitten wanted a bowl of milk. Write three sentences about something you wanted a lot. Did you get it? Why or why not?
2. Kitten can never reach the moon. But pretend that she did get there. Write a story about what happened to Kitten when she got to the moon.
3. How will Kitten act next month, when she sees her second full moon? Write some sentences about Kitten's second full moon.
4. Write as Kitten. Tell how you feel during your adventures.
5. Imagine that you could go to the moon. Write what happens to you on your trip. Make your story exciting and fun to read.

Art/Music

1. Draw a new cover for the book.
2. Some people say there is a man in the moon. That is not true, but some people think it is. Draw a picture of the man in the moon!
3. Work with some friends to make a mural. Show all the things Kitten does.
4. Make up a song about night time. Tell about one of your dreams.
5. Make up a song about Kitten's adventures. Sing it for some friends.

History/Social Studies

1. Make a map showing the path that Kitten takes.
2. Kitten confuses the moon with a bowl of milk. Some people thought the moon was made of green cheese! List some other things that people might confuse with the moon.

3. There are many myths about the full moon. For example, some people think that the full moon makes people act strangely. Have a parent help you find other myths about the full moon.

Speech/Drama

1. Show how to take care of a pet. It can be a cat, dog, or any other pet.
2. Tell this same story with a different animal. It can be a dog or a bear, for example.
3. Make believe that you are Kitten. Act out this story.
4. Make a puppet from a sock, craft stick, or other materials. Then put on this story as a play.
5. Put on a play about looking for your missing kitten. Your friends can help you, if you want.

Mathematics/Science

1. What is the moon? Report on the moon. Give as many facts as you can about the moon.
2. Kitten sees her first full moon. What does this mean? Explain the four phases of the moon. Show them on a poster.
3. Kitten drinks milk. List some good foods that kids should eat.
4. The bugs look like fireflies. Find out what makes fireflies glow.
5. The tree has leaves on it. Tell about the four seasons. Make a poster that shows what the trees look like in each season.
6. Kitten likes milk. Find out what foods cats like to eat.

Alternate Assessment

1. List some ways that you could help Kitten get out of the tree.
2. Draw one more page for this book. Show one more thing that happens to Kitten.
3. Kitten gets wet and sad and tired and hungry. Show how you would make Kitten feel better.
4. Copy some of the faces that Kitten makes. Have a friend match each face to the picture in the book.

Vocabulary

Draw a picture of the word in the space provided.

1. kitten

2. lightning bug

3. bowl of milk

4. tree

5. pond

6. stairs

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Order (20 points)

Put the events in order. Write the numbers on the lines.

- _____ Kitten falls down the stairs.
- _____ Kitten chases the moon around the yard.
- _____ Kitten sees her first full moon.
- _____ Kitten leaps from the top step of the porch
- _____ Kitten gets a bug on her tongue.

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Match the letter to the description. Write the letter in the correct space.

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| _____ 1. Kitten | A. It flies around. |
| _____ 2. moon | B. It is wet. Frogs live in it. Fish swim in it. |
| _____ 3. bug | C. She thinks the moon is a bowl of milk. |
| _____ 4. milk | D. It is round. It is in the sky. |
| _____ 5. pond | E. Kitten likes this food. |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark these sentences T if they are true or F if they are false.

- _____ 1. Kitten climbs a tall tree.
- _____ 2. A fire fighter gets her down.
- _____ 3. Kitten jumps in the pond.
- _____ 4. A fish bites her nose!
- _____ 5. Kitten does not get her milk.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose one. Answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Tell why you liked this book. Write three sentences or more.
- 2. Tell where Kitten goes. Tell what she does. Write three sentences or more.
- 3. Pick a picture you liked. Tell about it. Write three sentences or more.
- 4. Tell what you learned about kittens from this book. Write three sentences or more.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Story Events (20 points)

Circle the two events that are not part of the story.

1. Kitten sees her first full moon.
2. She thinks it is a bowl of milk in the sky.
3. Kitten starts to cry. Everyone wakes up!
4. Kitten falls down the stairs.
5. Kitten chases the moon.
6. A dog barks. Kitten gets scared.
7. Kitten gets all wet.

Part II: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

Circle the word to complete each sentence.

1. Kitten gets a **(bird, bug)** on her tongue.
2. Kitten leaps from the top step of the **(porch, fence)**.
3. Then Kitten climbs the tallest **(house, tree)** she can find.
4. Kitten sees the moon in the **(pond, road)**.
5. At the end of the story, Kitten goes **(home, to the moon)**.

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements T if they are true or F if they are false.

- _____ 1. Kitten bumps her nose and bangs her tail.
- _____ 2. Kitten chews an old shoe.
- _____ 3. Kitten likes to jump.
- _____ 4. Kitten gets a bowl of milk at the end.
- _____ 5. The pictures have many colors.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose one. Answer in complete sentences.

1. Tell how you are like Kitten. Tell how you are different. Write three sentences or more.
2. Would you want Kitten as a pet? Why or why not? Write three sentences or more.
3. Tell what happens when Kitten sees the moon. Write three sentences or more.
4. Which part of the book did you like the best? Tell why. Write three sentences or more.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

Pictures should represent:

1. kitten
2. lightning bug
3. bowl of milk
4. tree
5. pond
6. stairs

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Order (20 points)

- __4__ Kitten falls down the stairs.
__5__ Kitten chases the moon all around the yard.
__1__ Kitten sees her first full moon.
__3__ Kitten leaps from the top step of the porch
__2__ Kitten gets a bug on her tongue.

Part II: Matching (20 points)

1. C 2. D 3. A 4. E 5. B

Part III: True/False (20 points)

1. T
2. F
3. T
4. F
5. F

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Story Events (20 points)

3. Kitten starts to cry. Everyone wakes up!
6. A dog barks. Kitten gets scared.

Part II: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

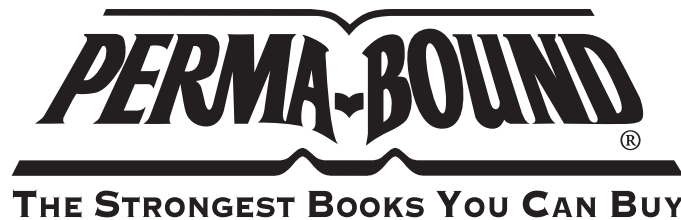
1. bug
2. porch
3. tree
4. pond
5. home

Part III: True/False (20 points)

1. T
2. F
3. T
4. T
5. F

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.



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