



Educators' Guide for

The Year of Billy Miller Billy Miller Makes a Wish and Oh, Sal

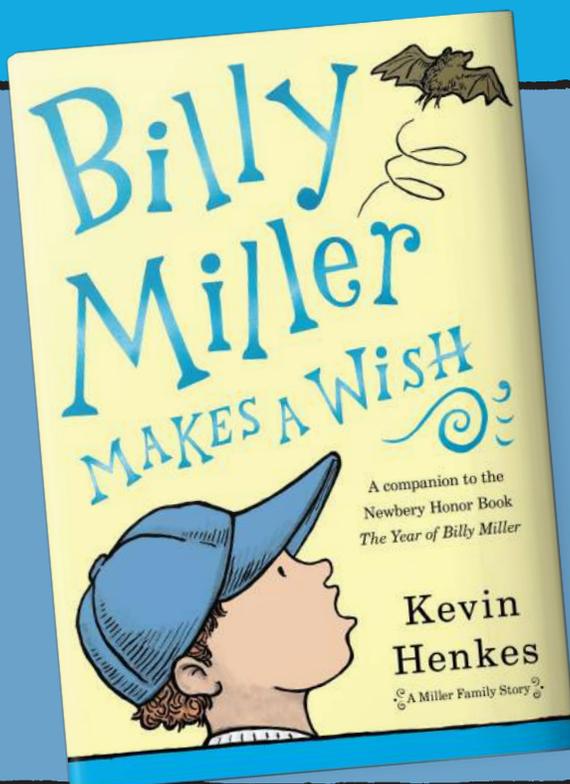
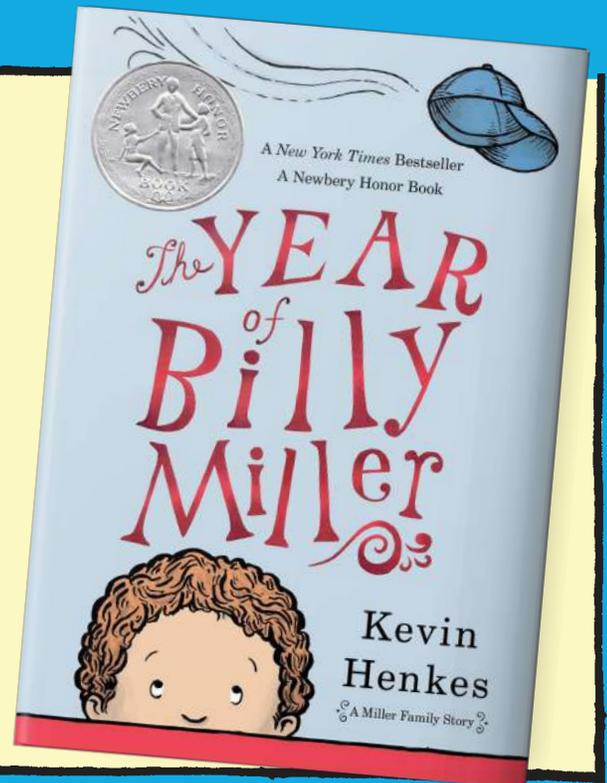


The Miller Family Stories





Billy's mom is a teacher and his dad works at home as an artist, spending his days finding objects he can use for his found-art sculptures. When Billy begins second grade, he is scared and unsure of how he will perform in school. To make matters worse, there is a new girl who sits at his table, and she constantly criticizes him. As the school year progresses, Billy



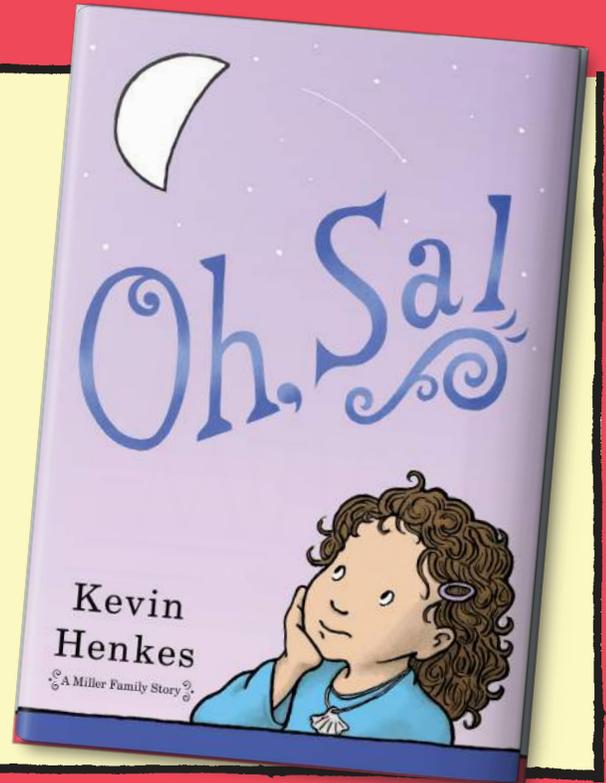
Billy Miller has a long summer ahead of him before he starts a new school year, and the vacation begins on his eighth birthday. Blowing out the candles, he makes a wish that something exciting will happen. And immediately exciting things *do* begin to happen . . . not always for the best. Did Billy's wish create all the drama of the week after his birthday—sirens, ambulances, a critter in the basement, misplaced love letters, chimney fires—or did those things just happen because his father went to camp for a week? Read this funny and accessible story to find out how Billy's family copes with extraordinary problems in the best way possible and how Billy's wish has a very happy ending.



About the Books



Sal is not having a happy holiday season. The new baby, born on Christmas Eve, does nothing but sleep or cry and takes too much of her mother's attention. Uncle Jake, who is visiting, teases her by calling her "Salamander," which she absolutely hates. Her older brother Billy loves doing things with their uncle, and Sal feels left out of their fun. And now part of her favorite Christmas present is missing. Sal has cried every day of this holiday week, but maybe, just maybe, she will find a way to feel better by the end of New Year's Day.



About the Author

KEVIN HENKES is the author and illustrator of more than fifty critically acclaimed and award-winning picture books, beginning readers, and novels. He is the winner of the American Library Association's 2020 Children's Literature Legacy Award; he received the Caldecott Medal for *Kitten's First Full Moon*





Questions for Group Discussion

1. How does Billy's father support and encourage him when he is fearful or troubled?
2. What are some of the situations Billy worries about? How does Billy's worrying affect his actions?
3. How does Billy feel when Ms. Silver tells him he is smart? Why is it such a relief for him to hear praise from his teacher?
4. How does Billy treat Sal? Why does she irritate him so much? Do Billy's feelings toward his sister change?
5. Why does Billy want to call his father Dad instead of "Papa"? How do his parents react to their new names?
6. What does Billy's dad mean when he talks about something "shredding his heart"? How does Billy react to his father when he hears this phrase?
7. How does Billy feel when his attempt to stay awake all night fails? Why was it so important to him to achieve his goal of staying up all night?
8. Throughout the book, Emma says unpleasant things to Billy, and her comments motivate him to action. What does Billy accomplish because of Emma's remarks?
9. How does Billy decide whom to write his poem about? Why does he choose his mother?
10. On page 10, Billy's papa encourages him with the thought that his second-grade year will be "the Year of Billy Miller." Then on page 229, Billy tells his mother, "This is the Year of Billy Miller." What lessons does Billy learn throughout the book that help him grow from a scared second grader to a confident boy?

Extension Activities





Questions for Group Discussion

1. Why do you think Billy is having a hard time calling his father Dad rather than Papa? Does it make a difference to his parents what he calls them? Does it make a difference to him?
2. What is the best birthday present Billy receives? What is the worst? Why is Billy afraid that his birthday wish has made bad things happen? How does Papa make him feel better?
3. Compare Billy and his sister Sal. Besides their difference in age, how are their personalities the same and how are they different? Are there any ways in which Billy and Sal are similar?
4. How do Billy, Sal, and Mama each react to Papa going away during the week? How does his absence affect each member of the family? Why does Billy feel at the end of the week as if Papa has been gone “forever” (p. 110)?
5. Why does Billy’s mother decide to clean the basement while Papa is away? What makes her say, “Sometimes I wish I could see the world through your eyes, Billy Miller”(p. 53)? Why do you think she later changes her mind about cleaning the basement?
6. What is it about the basement of their house that reminds Billy of a bat cave? Why does he think it is his fault when an actual bat flies around the basement? How does Billy react to that event?
7. Why does Billy feel responsible when Sal uses his markers on her legs? What does he mean when he says that this happened “on his watch” (p. 101)? How does Mama make him feel better? How does a bad situation turn into a funny and interesting one later?
8. Why is Billy so embarrassed by the “mail” that Sal delivers in the neighborhood? Is he more embarrassed by Sal’s behavior or by the content of the letters? Why did he react to Sal’s behavior or by?



Questions for Group Discussion

1. Describe Sal's feelings about the new baby when she first sees her. How would you describe a feeling "as if a tiny bell in Sal's heart had started to ring" (p. 2)? How do her feelings about the baby change after that first reaction?
2. What does Uncle Jake do that annoys Sal so much? How do her feelings about Uncle Jake change by the end of the week he spends with them? Does Uncle Jake remind you of relatives in your own family?
3. Why do you think it bothers Sal so much that the baby still doesn't have a name a week after she was born? Why do you think her parents are taking so long to name the new baby? If you could pick a name for a new sibling, what would it be?
4. How does Mama make Sal feel better about losing her favorite present? Why does Sal like to hear "stories in which Mama or Papa cried" (p. 31)? What is the effect on

