

**SHAKESPEARE BATS CLEANUP
BY RON KOERTGE**

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2006
Grades 6-8**

Submitted by Phyllis Heroy, Director of Library Services & Instructional Technology
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Title: Shakespeare Bats Cleanup
Author: Ron Koertge.
Publisher: Candlewick Press, 2003
Pages: 128

Summary

When a fourteen-year-old baseball player catches mononucleosis, he discovers that keeping a journal and experimenting with poetry not only helps fill the time, it also helps him deal with life, love, and loss.

Fourteen-year-old Kevin Boland's life revolves around two things: baseball and girls. A starting player on his high school team, Kevin is upset when he learns he has mononucleosis and will be confined to bed for weeks and miss part of the baseball season. His dad almost casually tosses him a journal (wise father!) and out of boredom, Kevin begins to write in it. Soon, he begins to read one of his dad's books about poetry and to experiment with writing different types of poetry. Through Kevin's poetry, the reader learns about his love of baseball and girls, his difficulty in dealing with the recent death of his mother, his desire to get back to the baseball team and his friends, and his gradual growing love of poetry. By the end of his book, some things haven't changed – he still loves baseball – but he has developed a stronger sense of who he is, found a new girlfriend, and come to terms with his mother's death, while developing a closer relationship with his father.

School Library Journal called this book a “finely crafted story,” a “funny and poignant novel [that] celebrates the power of writing to help young people make sense of their lives and unlock and confront their problems.”

Author's Biography

Ron Koertge grew up in an old mining town in Illinois, on the banks of the Mississippi River. He has lived in California for many years and has been on the faculty of Pasadena City College for more than 35 years. He also teaches in the M.F.A. Writing for Children Program at Vermont College. Koertge has written several young adult novels and also has written poetry for both adults and young adults. His books are popular with teenagers, in part because they are infused with reality and a sense of humor. They also are irreverent and feature characters that challenge the norm,

something that may bother adults but that teens embrace. He says, "I don't like pretense or hypocrisy."

Other Titles by Ron Koertge

Novels

Where the Kissing Never Stops (1986)

The Arizona Kid (1988)

The Boy in the Moon (1990)

Mariposa Blues (1991)

The Harmony Arms (1992)

Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright (1994)

Confess-O-Rama (1996)

The Heart of the City (1998)

Stoner & Spaz (2002)

Margaux with an X (2004)

Novels In Verse

The Brimstone Journals (2001)

Shakespeare Bats Cleanup (2003)

Related Titles

Novels in Verse

Aleutian Sparrow by Karen Hesse

The Brimstone Journals by Ron Koertge

Becoming Joe Dimaggio by Maria Testa

Girl Coming in for a Landing by April Halprin Wayland

God Went to Beauty School by Cynthia Rylant

Locomotion by Jacqueline Woodson

Love That Dog by Sharon Creech

Make Lemonade by Virginia Euwer Wolff

Out of the Dust by Karen Hesse

Under the Pear Tree by Brenda Seabrooke

Witness by Karen Hesse

Baseball Novels

Bases Loaded by Dean Hughes

The Boy Who Saved Baseball by John H. Ritter

Choosing Up Sides by John H. Ritter

High Heat by Carl Deuker

Shoeless Joe and Me by Dan Gutman

Striking Out by Will Weaver

Classroom Connections

- Divide students into pairs. Have each pair select one poem from the book that they think shows Kevin's struggle with one of the issues in his life addressed in the book such as: struggle with identity, peer pressure, insecurity, death of his mother, etc. On paper or using a word processing program, ask them to create three columns. In the first one, students make a list in their own words of the topic(s) Kevin includes in his poem. In the second column, students list the words or phrases Kevin uses to express that idea or thought. In the third column, students are to list another word or phrase Kevin might have used.
- Divide students into groups. Give each group copies of two poems from the book. Ask students to read the poems, and compare and contrast the poems. Which contains more information? Which is more descriptive? Which addresses an issue and shows the reader Kevin's opinions or thoughts? What if the topics in the two poems were switched? Could Kevin have expressed his thoughts in a different format just as successfully?
- Divide students into groups. Assign each group one type of poetic form to research and then to write a definition of their assigned form. Give each group a copy of two poems from the book: one that is an example of that format and one that is a poem explaining the format. Ask students to tell their classmates whether the poems in the book provide a good example and explanation of the format.

Poems to use (page numbers in parentheses)

- Haiku: How Do You Do, Haiku (6 and 7) and Haiku for Goldie (47)
- Sonnet: In That Book of Dad's I Borrowed (15) and It Took Forever (16)
- Pantoum: Pantoum for Mom (29) and Just Not a Very Good Pantoum (30)
- Ballad: After the Funeral (37-38) and Plain Words and Short Lines (39)
- Blank Verse: More Poetry (43) and That's Blank Verse (44)
- Sestina: And a Half Order of Sestina, Please (50-51)
- Couplets: Twelve Couplets: One Poem (53); See Ya! (54); and Secret Couplets (97)
- Pastoral: Life in the Country (59) and The Pastoral (60)
- Free Verse: I Work Out With the Team (78) and The Land of the Free (79)

Web Sites

Authors 4 Teens (Paid subscription service)

<http://www.authors4teens.com/>

Contains an interview and bibliography of the author.

Candlewick Press

<http://www.candlewick.com/authill.asp?b=Author&m=bio&id=2109&pix=n>

Biography of author Ron Koertge.

Common Sense Reviews

<http://www.commonsemmedia.org/reviews/review.php?id=2805&type=Book>

Review contains a breakdown of the book's content, plot summary, excerpt, and a list of related books.

Walker Books

<http://www.walkerbooks.co.uk/Ron-Koertge>

Contains interesting facts about Ron Koertge.