

Books by Ben Mikaelson: A Selected Bibliography



Ghost of Spirit Bear

Tr 978-0-06-009007-4 • \$16.99 (\$19.99)

Lb 978-0-06-009008-1 • \$17.89 (\$20.89)

In this sequel to *Touching Spirit Bear*, Cole and Peter face their biggest challenge yet: high school.



Touching Spirit Bear

Tr 978-0-380-97744-4 • \$16.99 (\$18.99)

Lb 978-0-06-029149-5 • \$17.89 (\$22.89)

Pb 978-0-380-80560-0 • \$5.99 (\$6.50)

Pb Rack 978-0-06-073400-8 • \$6.99 (\$7.50)

★ "Mikaelson's portrayal of this angry, manipulative, damaged teen is dead on."
—*School Library Journal* (starred review)

- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- Book Sense 76 Pick
- Nautilus Award for Young Adult Literature
- California Young Reader Medal
- Florida's Sunshine State Young Reader's Award
- Minnesota's Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award
- Nebraska's Golden Sower Award
- Nevada Young Readers' Award
- North Dakota's Flicker Tale Children's Book Award
- Utah's Beehive Award
- Wisconsin's Golden Archer Award
- Wyoming Soaring Eagle Award



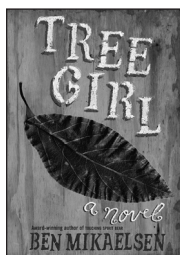
Red Midnight

Pb 978-0-380-80561-7 • \$5.99 (\$7.50)

"A terrific survival story."

—*School Library Journal*

- IRA Notable Book for a Global Society
- IRA/CBC Young Adults' Choice
- NCSS/CBC Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies
- Nevada Young Readers' Award



Tree Girl

Tr 978-0-06-009004-3 • \$16.99 (\$21.50)

Pb 978-0-06-009006-7 • \$7.99 (\$8.75)

★ "This moving and poetic based-on-fact novel explores personal grief and moral responsibility in the face of brutality."

—VOYA (5Q, 4P)

- IRA/CBC Teachers' Choice

Courtesy Ben Mikaelson



About the Author

Ben Mikaelson is an award-winning author of nine books for young readers, three of which have been optioned for film. Ben's articles and photos have appeared in numerous magazines around the world, and he has been featured on *Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures*, as well as on German national television. A world traveler and adventurer, Ben has journeyed to such places as Central America, South America, and the North Pole. He lives in a log cabin near Bozeman, Montana, with a 750-pound black bear named Buffy, whom he adopted and has raised for the last twenty-five years. Visit Ben Mikaelson online at www.benmikaelson.com.

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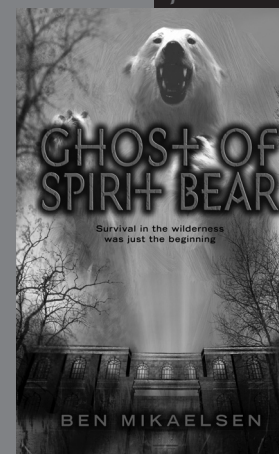
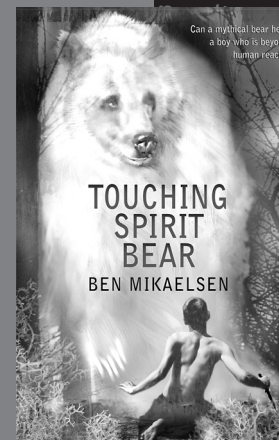
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This guide was prepared by Laura Williams McCaffrey, a library consultant and children's book author, East Montpelier, Vermont.

Reading Group Guide



Touching Spirit Bear and Ghost of Spirit Bear

By Ben Mikaelson

About the Book: *Touching Spirit Bear*

Fifteen-year-old Cole Matthews is furious. He's furious at his aggressive father. He's furious at his frequently drunk mother. He's furious at all those who want him locked in prison for repeatedly smashing fourteen-year-old Peter Driscall's head against a sidewalk. Instead of prison, Cole's Tlingit parole officer offers him Circle Justice, a program based on Native American traditions that emphasize healing rather than punishment. Cole's Circle banishes him to an uninhabited Alaskan island. After he fails to escape and barely survives an attack by a mysterious white bear, Cole chooses to prove to the Circle—and to himself—that he's capable of profound change.

Discussion Questions: *Touching Spirit Bear*

1. Many characters discuss justice in *Touching Spirit Bear*. What do you think justice is? What is its purpose? Why is it necessary?
2. Why does Cole feel angry? How do his angry responses affect him and those around him? What makes you angry, and what do you do as a result? Is anger ever productive, or is it always destructive?
3. Do you think Cole would have changed if the Spirit Bear didn't attack him? Why, or why not? Why do serious injuries or dire circumstances change people? Are such changes permanent, or do they fade over time?
4. What does surviving in the wilderness teach Cole? How might the things he learns help him to survive better in civilization, and how might they hinder him?
5. What are the different circles (also called cycles) described in *Touching Spirit Bear*, and why are they important to the characters? What life circles are important to you? Why? How might better understanding these life circles help you know more about yourself and others?
6. Forgiveness becomes essential to Cole's and Peter's healing. Why? When people hurt each other, must they forgive before they can heal? Why, or why not?

About the Book: *Ghost of Spirit Bear*

Cole Matthews and Peter Driscall leave the Spirit Bear and their remote Alaskan island. Though both boys think that healing is the most difficult thing they've ever done, returning to school proves to be just as difficult. Bullies target Peter for his injuries and Cole for his past. Rather than confront the bullies, the high school teachers and principal just ignore them. Cole is tempted to lash out with his fists, as he used to, but instead he strives to preserve his inner peace, to help Peter to do the same, and to maybe—just maybe—teach the entire school how to find its own Spirit Bear.

Discussion Questions: *Ghost of Spirit Bear*

1. When Cole and Peter return to Minnesota, they no longer have the places and rituals they used on the island to find inner peace. What new rituals do they try, and how well do these rituals work? If you were in their situation, what might you have tried? Why?
2. Why does Cole sometimes think of his anger as a monster? In what ways might we all have such monsters inside of us? What are the best ways to cope with our inner monsters?
3. In discussing school bullies in Chapter 3, Garvey tells Cole: "How you react creates your reality." What do you think Garvey means? How could you use his philosophy to help solve problems in your own life?
4. Why might adults, like Ms. Kennedy and Cole's teachers, fail to successfully stop bullies? What could they do to better address bullying problems at school? In what ways could they collaborate with students and parents to prevent bullying?
5. Which of Cole and Peter's tactics to respond to bullies are most effective? Why? How could you apply similar tactics to situations at your school?
6. The old homeless man doesn't appear often in the story, but he becomes an important character. Why? Is he real, or have Cole and Peter only imagined him? How do you think he's related to the Spirit Bear?

Extension Activities:
Touching Spirit Bear and Ghost of Spirit Bear

1. Consider the principles on which Circle Justice is founded. Write your own set of justice principles and then design a justice system based on your principles.
2. In *Touching Spirit Bear*, Edwin tells Cole: "Your totem is your story, your search, and your past" (p. 183). Draw or carve a totem that represents your story, your search, and your past. Explain to your friends or classmates what the totem is and what it means to you.
3. Surviving alone in the wilderness, as Cole does in *Touching Spirit Bear*, requires certain tools and skills. Pretend that you are preparing to survive in the wilderness. Research the items you'd need to have and the things you'd need to know in order to survive. Write up a plan that describes how you would learn and acquire these things before your trip.
4. Research an organization in your area that works with troubled kids like Cole. Create a brochure describing the organization, the services it provides, and its contact information. Share this brochure with classmates and also make it available to your school's Guidance Department.
5. Collect national information on bullying. Some aspects of the issue that you may consider investigating include: a definition of bullying, how often bullies hurt people, and what schools and towns are doing to prevent or end bullying. Collect the same kinds of information about your own school or town. Once you've finished your investigation, create a multimedia presentation about your findings. As part of your presentation, provide suggestions of ways to better address local bullying problems.
6. Choose one fundamental change that you'd like to see made in your school or town. Design a mascot that represents this change. Draw, sculpt, or carve your new mascot.