



## Olive's Ocean

By Kevin Henkes  
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About the Book: Olive Barstow had been in Martha Boyle's class...until she was killed by a hit-and-run driver while riding her bicycle. Then Martha finds out that Olive, a girl she never really knew, wrote in her journal about wanting to be friends with Martha, and wanting to be a writer. Martha can't quit thinking about Olive, even when she goes with her family on vacation to the ocean, to stay with her grandmother. In the midst of experiencing first love, loneliness, embarrassment, and fears of her beloved grandmother growing old, Martha allows Olive's death to teach her lessons about living.

Discussion Questions:

1. When Olive's mother gave Martha Olive's journal entry, Martha is startled by the coincidences in the two girls' lives. What are those coincidences, and how do they affect Martha?
2. Godbee plays an important role in Martha's life, and Martha feels safe with her, able to tell her secrets she would never tell anyone else. For example, "I want to be a writer" (pg. 56); and "I think I like Jimmy Manning" (pg. 83). What character traits does Godbee possess that enabled Martha to be so honest with her?
3. On page 81, Godbee tells Martha about a short story she once wrote, about a girl who moved from the ocean to a new home far inland. Does the story of the girl give an insight into Godbee herself, as she thinks about her own mortality?
4. On pages 86-87, Martha thinks about her most embarrassing moment. But later, when she discovers that Jimmy made a bet that he could get her to kiss him on video, she is mortified. Which do you think is worse? Why?
5. After the incident with the videotape, Martha "became intensely aware of her separateness to the whole world" (p. 132). If she is separate, why is she so distraught over Jimmy's betrayal? Why do you think she is so angry with Vince, who had very little to do with Jimmy's plan to kiss her on tape?
6. Martha decides that she will "pretend the kiss and the tape were meaningless...Like Olive, she would quietly proceed with her life" (p. 133). Can she do this? How does she decide to handle the situation?
7. After Martha falls into the ocean and almost drowns, she begins to understand that the world does not revolve around her and that it would continue to exist without her (p. 165). How does this affect the decisions she makes and the rest of her vacation at Godbee's house?
8. Mr. Henkes uses foreshadowing throughout the book to build tension. When Tate writes Martha a note that reads, "I think I know what to do" (p. 172), readers are left anxiously waiting to find out what Tate will do. Do you think Tate came up with a good plan? Do you think Martha feels better afterwards? Why?
9. Mr. Henkes uses Martha's dream (p. 185) and her grandmother's dream (pp. 150-151) to move the story forward. How do these dreams relate to their lives? What effect do the dreams have on the decisions they make?
10. When Martha gets the videotape from Tate, she realizes that "what was inside her head and heart made her feel as though there was no one else in the whole world she would rather be" (pp. 199-200). Why is she so happy about who she is?
11. After returning home, Martha tries to take Olive's ocean to her mother. As she sits on Olive's front porch, Martha thinks, "If I met you now, I would be your friend, Olive" (p. 216). What events in Martha's life brought her to that discovery? Why did Martha personally bring Olive's Ocean to her home?
12. Olive wanted to be Martha's friend but never told her. When Olive died, though, Martha became, in many ways, a close friend. Martha's actions are the actions taken by a true friend. Discuss the irony of this situation.
13. Early in the book, Martha writes Olive's name on the curb at the site of her accident (p. 15). At the end, Martha writes her name in ocean water on the steps of Olive's home (p. 216). How are the two instances different? Does Martha feel differently about Olive? About life?

About the Author: Kevin Henkes became an author-illustrator at the age of nineteen. He flew from his home in Racine, Wisconsin, to New York City with his portfolio, hoping to find a publisher. Susan Hirschman at Greenwillow Books made his dream come true, and his first picture book *All Alone*, was published in 1981. Since then Kevin Henkes has published twenty-five picture books and eight novels for older readers. When asked, he says, "I never thought I'd be lucky enough to be a real author and illustrator. I wouldn't trade it for anything."

Kevin Henkes is the author and illustrator of the Caldecott Honor Book *Owen*, the ABBY Award Winner *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*, and the New York Times #1 Bestseller *Wemberly Worried*.

The seed for Kevin Henkes's books always begins with the character, and he wants his characters to be believable. When asked about writing a novel, Kevin says "I can delve much deeper into a character's psyche...I can deal with subject matter that is more complex than the subject matter of my picture books. But because I'm a visual person, I do have very strong images in my head as I work. I love describing my characters and their environments. Setting a scene — providing proper lighting, the colors and textures of things, sounds — is one of my favorite things about writing a novel."

Reading Group Guide by Susan Geye, Library Media Specialist, Crowley, Texas.