



Words of Stone

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Blaze Werla is having a routine summer. He spends his days alone, wandering around the hill next door, and his nights awake, avoiding the dreams that haunt him. Then a message appears on the side of the hill and Blaze's predictable summer suddenly takes a turn toward the mysterious. By the time he meets outgoing Joselle Stark, Blaze finds himself in entirely new territory, where the unexpected seems almost normal.

Words of Stone Details

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From Reader Review Words of Stone for online ebook

Laura says

Kevin Henkes' books for younger readers (like Chrysanthemum, Lily and the Purple Plastic Purse) are favorites of ours, so I thought we'd try this novel. I have very mixed feelings about it. It has memorable, poetic imagery and strongly drawn characters. Joselle is so unlikable though that it is hard to empathize with her. I found the writing itself uneven, the vocabulary (and sometimes ideas) too sophisticated for the middle-school audience it's aimed at. And yet the ending was lovely. Maybe Henkes needed to let the book percolate a bit longer?

Linda Lipko says

Ten year old shy, red-haired Blaze Werla is hurting. Losing his mother to cancer has a profound impact on him. Added to the trama is the fact that he was badly burned and scared from a freak carnival accident.

Each year he returns to the ferris wheel hoping he can have the courage to overcome his fears, and each year he fails.

He has a strong support base of a loving father and grandmother, but still his imaginary friends are the ones to whom he turns.

When Joselle Stark arrives in the neighborhood, his life is turned upside down and he struggles to share and develop a relationship with a real life friend.

Abandoned by her near do well mother and dumped at her grandmother's house, Joselle is not exactly the best choice for a trustful friend.

A liar, cheat and sneak by nature, Joselle's insecurities prompt her to harm anyone who tries to befriend her.

While the description I wrote seems simplistic, actually, this book covers many complex issues. It is an ALA Notable Children's Book, a Publishers Weekly Best Book, one of the American Booksellers Association "Pick of the Lists" and a Library of Congress Children's Book of the Year.

Highly recommended.

Josiah says

Kevin Henkes is a remarkable novelist. His descriptions of everyday life and the ostensibly mundane events that go on around us all the time elevate those little moments to become miniaturized works of art in the eye of the thoughtful reader. His feel for the nuances of the English language is extraordinary, but I think that what is even more key to his captivating descriptive prose than that is his unfailing attention to detail. He doesn't miss the importance of the little things about life that most people would never even notice, and his observations of the natural beauty all around us and in everything that happens lays a perfectly supportive

foundation for the stories that he tells. Kevin Henkes is definitely one of the best.

Following the death of his mother five years ago, ten-year-old Blaze Werla (one of my all-time favorite names for any character in American literature!) is still trying to overcome his fears and uncertainties about the world around him. His mother is gone, fallen victim to the dreadnought called cancer, but Blaze continues on with a life that really includes only his father and grandmother. Blaze's many fears are rooted mainly in experiences that he associates with bad things that have happened to himself, such as the burn scars around his ankles that he received due to an electrical malfunction one Fourth of July, or the final ride on the Ferris Wheel that he took with his mother shortly before she died. Being afraid of much of life is simply the state in which Blaze has become comfortable, and despite creating a new imaginary friend each year to help him overcome his phobias, it never works. Blaze may need some help of a different kind.

Living just up on the next hill from Blaze is Joselle, who has come to stay with her grandmother while her own mother, The Beautiful Vicki, goes on vacation with her newest boyfriend. When Joselle has had time with her mother to herself in the past, everything has seemed really nice; however, with the addition of a boyfriend to their lives, it seems that Joselle is always the odd one out. So for as long as the current exclusionary vacation lasts, which has yet to be determined or announced by The Beautiful Vicki, Joselle will be living a couple of hours away from home with her grandmother.

If Blaze still carries around scars?both psychological and physical?from the ordeals of his past, Joselle's are even more apparent, at least on an emotional level. She can't seem to help but act in ways that displease the people she's most commonly with, almost as if daring them to be like her mother and head for the hills. If Joselle is too much of a pain for her own mother, then how could anyone else be willing to put up with her? Maybe it would be best just to show them from the very beginning what they're getting into with her, knowing that their response to her behavior is sure to be the same as her mother's. Who wants a bunch of pretenders around who will leave eventually, anyway?

When Joselle hears about the boy on the next hill whose mother died from cancer, an odd response bubbles up from within her as to how she wants to treat him. It's as if her instincts are telling her that if Blaze's problems are obviously way worse than her own, then somehow it will be as if the abandonment by her mother isn't all that big of a deal, and she'll be okay. Hardly knowing what she's doing or why, Joselle arranges a mysterious, anonymous sign that Blaze is sure to see, hoping that as she causes his misery to increase, it will alleviate her own.

However, her continued plans to pick on the boy next door are derailed one day when she comes across Blaze outside, and begins talking to the orphaned boy. Joselle and Blaze have little in common as far as personality traits are concerned, but they seem to be to each other what they both most need. Whereas all of the imaginary friends that Blaze had created in the past never helped him to successfully confront his strongest fears, Joselle is a fount of indomitable spirit and bravery. She pets big dogs and talks to people she doesn't know and runs around soaking wet in the rain, and seems happy for it all. For once, Blaze has a friend willing to take him along on some adventures and show him that there's really nothing to be scared of, that the fun and humor of trying new things can be worth the risks required to do the trying. For Joselle, Blaze is present in a way that few others have been in her life, and he matches her interest in their friendship byte for byte. That is very important for Joselle, that someone actually cares about her just as much as she cares about them, and despite their differences, Blaze and Joselle seem almost like the perfect friends.

Almost, that is; that annoying *almost* cannot be forgotten, as much as one might want to forget it. Because Joselle still has her flaw of instinctively pushing people away so that they won't do as her mother did and push Joselle away first, and she still has kept the secret of the trick that she pulled on Blaze back before she

knew him. In similarly heartbreak fashion to the "escape" plan that Gilly Hopkins impulsively engineers in *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, Joselle has a knack for doing everything she can to sabotage herself just when it looks as if the tide is at last turning in her favor, and many of us know exactly how it feels to walk in those lonely shoes. When the joy of a friendship newly found suddenly becomes mingled with the sharp sadness and bitter pangs of hurt of a relationship gone sour, all of the emotions collage into a big blur that's too mixed up to even sort out anymore. There's too much upset to just forget about it and move forward in the friendship, but there's also too much positive energy and emotion from the past to drop the person and act as if they were never even a part of your life. It hurts too much to go forward and it hurts too much to go back, and standing in one place isn't any more comfortable than the other two options. A broken friendship can feel as if the world has ended or that you wish it would, but when there's no easy fix for damage done, how can a resolution be reached?

Long after finishing *Words of Stone*, readers will still feel the gentle sting of its prevalent emotions, will still connect with the core thoughts and feelings of both Blaze and Joselle and the friendship that they shared. As I've come to expect from Kevin Henkes as a writer of middle-grade novels, no easy solutions or unrealistic endings are offered in this book, so that what good does come about feels authentic and hard-won, true to life in a way that most novels are not. In a similar manner to that of his later book, *Bird Lake Moon*, Kevin Henkes grants his readers access to the rainbow of emotions experienced by two very different kids, and does not guard us from even the most intense of those emotions. The subjects of death and loss are always poignant for people, which I believe is why it is often so easy to remember books that deal with these topics. We remember with our emotions, and the most powerful emotions we have are usually tied in with personal loss. Like a silent, watchful bird, *Words of Stone* flies in and gently settles on those emotions for a brief span of one hundred fifty-two pages, revealing to us the happenings of a few weeks in the friendship of two kids in Wisconsin, before flying off again with no ultimate resolution to the story having been reached. The events of the narrative are so quiet that we could be living right next door to it all as it unfolded, and we still might miss out on it entirely if our eyes were not tuned in to truly see what's happening around us.

No one is better at bringing real emotion out of a subtle story than Kevin Henkes, and *Words of Stone* is one of his best efforts in that regard. Filled with strong emotional truths and built upon superbly genuine characters, this book undoubtedly will have something important to say to every reader who opens it about the realities that touch all of our lives most deeply. I highly recommend the experience.

Ruth says

This is a cute sweet kids book about friendship and loss. It reminded me of the summers of childhood when all there is is time and friendships are quick-forming and volatile.

Miss Marple says

We had to read this book for school and sorry, but my whole class hated it. I do not know if it is because of the German translation we all read, but Blaze (in the German version he is called Nick) just seemed very strange and mad to us. We did not get a connection to him and also Joselle was not really beloved. I think the author wants the reader to feel sorry for Blaze and of course we understood him, because all these terrible things which happened. But he just was not sympathetic to us! The things he did, like with Noah's ark, I know they are symbols for the loosing of his mother, but when we read it, as 6th grade students, it just

looked mad. If I would read it now, maybe I would like it more, but this is what I remember of the book. Sorry to all fans:(!

Carina says

I still keep this book around from my childhood. I absolutely love it. I love the way that even though you know that what Joselle is doing is wrong, you still have sympathy for her, and understand what leads her to be the way that she is. I think there is an important lesson in this book. No one ever knows exactly everything that someone else is going through, so one shouldn't judge others until they attempt to sympathize with whatever they're going through.

I also like that the book ends rather unresolved. We don't know if Blaze ended up conquering his fears and riding the ferris wheel. We don't know how him and Joselle interacted after he woke up and saw her apology in the stones. We don't know how Blaze's father reacted to the entire story. And I think that leaving all these things unknown was a good choice on behalf of the writer.

A great book.

Marianna says

A story about a boy name Blaze who is scare of everything. Joselle comes into his life, despite the awful things Joselle did to Blaze at first. Joselle soon realize she wants to be friends with Blaze. Joselle is an unlikable character, but I see where she coming from. Howell's mom drop her off at grandma's for summer and runs off laying about were she going. What I like about Words of stone is I get two sides of the story, Blaze and Joselle.

I like it to be a little bit for Blaze to found out what Joselle did and the ending feels open. Some reviewers say that the characters are weird. What weirder, two people sanding hunch in a corner whispering about a girl being weird as she walks by or actually knowing someone and understanding that everyone has their perks. The story is great it follows the theme of forgiveness.

Scooping it Up says

Disturbing, sad, but endearing. I think many young readers may find both main characters "too weird;" the kind of children they would tease or ostracize at school, and being exposed to their awkwardness in such an intimate way is both uncomfortable and important. Everyone has junk and a story, especially when it involves kids who act differently. Reminding children that they are all fighting battles at home, and that some of those battles are painful and huge and terrible gives great perspective. A good, humbling read for kids 11 and up.

Bernadette says

Although this book did not grab me from the beginning, it definitely had some quirky and unforgettable characters! Henkes does use unusual names that represent his characters. His main character, Blaze, reminds me of Wemberly in his picture books – characters who worry or are scared about things. I quite liked how the story turned out and was very touched that two seemingly different characters could become such great friends. For use in the classroom, I can imagine discussions about family relationships and death, but one of my favorite things that happened in the book was the therapeutic use of art. This is something that is discussed in my health textbook – how people use art to help them grieve and understand and I believe that was what Glenn and Blaze did. This book could also be a great discussion starter on friendships and the effects of lying. Overall, a very touching story that I think students would enjoy. I wonder, though, if male students would enjoy it as much as female students.

Rosario Villamor says

Words of Stone by Kevin Henkes is one of those "feel-good" books, those that you can read without feeling depressed or anything. Blaze Werla is quite an amusing kid what with his Noah's ark collection with only one of each animal where there should be two, his lost key collection. His lost key collection. I found it pretty adventurous when he said the reason for his lost key collection was so someday, he'd be able to find those doors or boxes which open to those keys. I guess, in essence, we all have our own lost key collection. Or more accurately, a "box with no key" collection. Subconsciously, we have all these thoughts, talents, memories, that are just hidden away in our mind, waiting for the right moment to be opened up. When the right time comes, they open up in our mind are exposed for the world to see. All in all, I give Words of Stone 4 of 5 stars with its wonderful capture of a child's thoughts and how the world seems to him at a very young age.

Houseofshoes says

This one is hard to review because it is hard to condense into a sound bite but this is where its strength lies. It has a subtlety and sincerity that sets it apart from many books (and particularly from many kids' books that always have to be ABOUT SOMETHING and the author needs to hit you over the head with the MESSAGE!!!) Know what I mean?

Amhveggie says

Not as good as some of Henkes' others (i.e Olive's Ocean, Protecting Marie, Bird Lake Moon. . .)

Theresa says

Words of Stone

Henkes, Kevin

His mother had died, he was burned when he tried to relive his last memory with her, and now he has secret messages written to him on the hill. He had tried to adapt, he made a new imaginary friend each year, and each year when he was unable to accomplish his goal he lost his friend. This year was not any different until the stones on the hill spelled his mother's name. She was alone and lonely. She has always felt unloved by her mother, and a little bit of a trouble maker. She thought her best solution was to miss behave with the poor boy next door, then she would not upset her grandmother. The beginning of her adventure may lead to more than she would have expected.

Katie Fitzgerald says

This review also appears on my blog, [Read-at-Home Mom](#).

Every summer since his mother died of cancer, Blaze Werla has created an imaginary friend and subsequently buried him in the backyard. This summer, after the yearly burial, someone begins leaving messages made of stones on the hill behind Blaze's house. First, he sees his mother's name. Later, the messages become more personal. He suspects his father's new girlfriend, in whom he has confided, might be the one leaving the words of stone, but while he decides what to do about it, he surprises himself by making friends with Joselle Stark. Joselle herself is troubled by her own absent mother, and as she and Blaze grow closer, she realizes she must tell Blaze an important truth if they are to be true friends.

Like Henkes's more recent novels such as *Olive's Ocean* and *Junonia*, *Words of Stone* is a quiet, introspective story. Blaze and Joselle are both sensitive kids who have endured their share of pain and confusion, and because of this, much of the story takes place inside their heads. (Though the narration is all in the third person, the chapters alternate between the two characters so we know both of their thoughts.) Outside events do influence their internal struggles and triumphs, but there is very little physical action. This is definitely a literary novel, where the language and word choice are the most prominent features. It reads like a lot of the serious fiction (*The Cay*, *The Lottery Rose*) I was assigned in late elementary school. The writing is lyrical and at times, almost eerie, as Blaze reflects on his mother's death and on the accident he had on a ferris wheel. His toy Noah's Ark and the graves of his imaginary friends are powerful images that represent his pain and his loss, and it is Henkes's use of these symbolic objects that makes the book stand out.

I would be surprised if this book had ever become super popular, because it dwells so much on the emotions of its main characters. There are readers, though, who are not satisfied by fast-paced action novels, like the *Percy Jackson* series, or by cruelty thinly veiled in humor, like the *Wimpy Kid* books, and I think it is those more serious readers who appreciate Henkes's style. Kids who mourned the loss of a parent, or who have trouble making and trusting new friends will empathize strongly with Blaze's loneliness. Those who have grown up reading Henkes's picture books will be pleased to see that his writing for older children continues to provide validation and support for the myriad challenges of growing up.

Words of Stone was published in 1992, and it is still in print. The cover of the most recent edition is much better suited to the story than the cover of the edition I read (shown at the top of this post), and I think kids would be interested in picking it up. It is a great read-alike for *As Simple As It Seems* by Sarah Weeks, *Remembering Mrs. Rossi* by Amy Hest, and *The Last Best Days of Summer* by Valerie Hobbs.

Sarah says

I thought this book was interesting. I am starting to dislike that most of Kevin Henkes characters have strong male figures and females that are less than desirable in this and Margaret and Taylor that was the case. i enjoyed it but it was not my favorite Henkes book by far.
