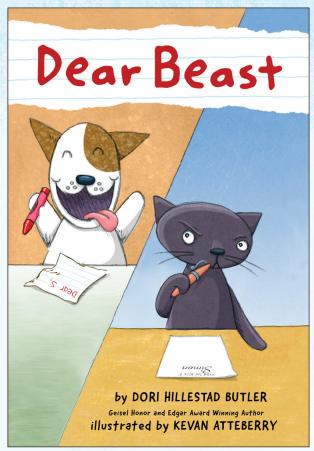# HOLIDAY HOUSE
EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

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Dear Beast

by Dori Hillestad Butler
illustrated by Kevan Atteberry

ABOUT THE BOOK

A jealous cat really, really, REALLY wants to drive away his young owner's new dog in this playful illustrated chapter book, the first in a new series, from a two-time Geisel Honor winner.

Simon has taken care of his owner, Andy, for many years. He's a good cat. Clean, responsible, and loyal. What more could a boy want? Even when Andy's dad moves out, Simon is certain that Andy doesn't need another pet. So why would Andy's dad adopt a DOG?! To make matters worse, the animal is a rude, rowdy troublemaker.

Simon's job is clear: The beast has got to go. He decides to write him a letter. Strongly worded, of course. But when the dog's response sets off an unexpected correspondence, Simon realizes the beast may be here to stay. Can he make room for another pet in Andy's life?

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

- Take a close look at the cover art. How does the illustration reveal the two main characters of the book? Which character is Simon? Who is Beast? How do the art and the title of the book suggest that the book is written in letters between the characters?

- Explain the term "snail mail." Discuss the significance that Snail delivers the mail. Note the direction that Snail travels. How does Snail lead the reader to the next page?

- Simon tries to teach Baxter the proper way to write a letter. Discuss the parts of a letter. What is a "salutation"? How many unique ways does Simon address Baxter? How does this suggest Simon's problem with Baxter? What is the meanest name he calls Baxter? Explain why Simon finally addresses Baxter by his name (p. 68). Note the way Simon closes his letters. How does this indicate that he is getting impatient with Baxter?

- "Conflict" in a novel is the problem to be solved. How does the first double-page spread (pp. 4–5) suggest the conflict in Dear Beast? What role does Bubbles play in solving the conflict between Simon and Baxter? Discuss the roles of the following characters: Cheeks, the squirrel; Tom, the cat; the Terrier Twins; Stinky, the skunk; and Edgar Allan Crow.

- A "theme" is a single word that says what the book is about. Define "jealous." Debate whether "jealousy" is the theme of the novel. Cite sentences that indicate that Simon is jealous of Baxter.

- Simon seeks help from Bubbles. Study the illustration where Bubbles receives Simon's first letter (p. 43). What is Bubbles' reaction to the letter? What mean thing did Simon do to Bubbles. Discuss how Simon tries to warn Bubbles about Baxter. How does Bubbles blame Simon when Baxter runs away?

- Why does Simon think it is Baxter's fault when Andy breaks his arm? Debate whether this is one more way Simon tries to get rid of Baxter. How does Andy react when Baxter runs away?

- How does Simon convince Baxter that it's time to return home? Why does Baxter finally agree that Simon should call him Beast? Baxter asks Simon if he missed him (p. 71). Why doesn't Simon answer the question?

- Andy's dad thinks that having a pet teaches responsibility. Which pet in the book requires the most care? Which is the best companion for Andy?

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

ABOUT THE CREATORS

DORI HILLESTAD BUTLER is the author of *Dear Beast,* the first book in a new chapter-book series. She is also the award-winning author of mysteries and books for all ages, including the King and Kayla series and the Haunted Library series. She is a two-time Geisel Honor recipient and an Edgar Award winner, and she has been nominated for children's choice awards in nineteen states. Dori lives in the Seattle area with her husband and their very large dog, Mouse. Visit her online at kidswriter.com.

Credit Cheryl Fusco Johnson

KEVAN ATTEBERRY is the illustrator of *Dear Beast* and has written and/or illustrated many books for children, including *Ghost Cat* and *Tickle Monster.* Many of his books have been best-sellers, but one of his biggest claims to fame is that he created Clippy, the paperclip helper in Microsoft Office. Kevan lives in the Seattle area. Visit him on the web at kevanatteberry.com.