



## Henry Builds a Cabin

*D.B. Johnson*

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### The Barnes & Noble Review

Thoreau for the kiddie set? Definitely. Author and illustrator D. B. Johnson revives the 19th-century writer's desire to live a simple life with this brilliant picture book starring one determined bear. Henry the bear wants to build a cabin in the woods. As he gathers his materials and begins his project, friends stop by and offer him advice. The small frame of the beams prompts his friend Emerson to observe, "Henry, your cabin looks too small to eat in!" Henry replies, "It's bigger than it looks." He explains that the bean patch behind the cabin shall be his dining room. When his friend Alcott notices it's a bit dark inside the cabin, Henry states that the sunny spot next to the house will be his library. Miss Lydia's remark that there is barely enough room to dance inspires Henry to dance in the curved path to the pond, his "ballroom with a grand stairway." When the cabin is finished, Henry enjoys his dining room and other amenities to the fullest. When a rain shower falls, Henry fits snugly in the walls of his cabin and says, "This is just the room I wear when it's raining!"

Johnson evokes the true sensibility of Thoreau's actions. Enjoying nature and using its bounties, Henry lives outside of his material world. Young readers will learn that constrictions of the world are only in their minds. Johnson uses colored pencil and paint on paper to illustrate the mighty Henry in the woods. Warm colors and an excellent use of angles and lines allow kids to see Henry's work from various perspectives. Youngsters will love seeing the meditative bear linger around his newly built home, reading in his "library," and eating beans in the "dining" room. The beauty of nature fills every page, from the greenery of the forest to the animals in the woods. Johnson makes every effort to illustrate the joy Henry experiences while living in his cabin.

This creative retelling of one man(bear)'s quest to live in harmony with Mother Earth is sure to inspire young readers to explore and appreciate their very own green ballroom in their own backyard. (Amy Barkat)

## Henry Builds a Cabin Details

Date : Published February 26th 2002 by HMH Books for Young Readers

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Author : D.B. Johnson

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## From Reader Review Henry Builds a Cabin for online ebook

### Cheryl says

I love all the Henry books. I think Johnson captures the essence of what the Transcendentalists, especially Thoreau, were striving for.

Henry Builds a Cabin is probably not my very favorite, because I just wince every time I read about him cutting down those trees. And of course winter in Massachusetts is long. And I know from other readings that Henry did spend a fair bit of time visiting (mooching off) friends in town. But still, the main concept of the book, that living simply & w/ thrift, and spending a lot of time out-doors, is valuable.

([Since I read it for Financial Literacy month in Children's Books, I added there:] And, imo, thrift, recycling, and upcycling are definitely part of financial literacy. For example, maybe you \*need\* a bicycle for transportation, but you still don't have to buy it new, instead you can refurbish a castoff. If we only define financial literacy in the narrowest of terms about how to handle cash, we'll not be able to teach much to the picture-book audience.)

Btw, Henry's friend Miss Lydia is probably Lydia Maria Child, author of *The American Frugal Housewife* and other books. Shame I had no clue until I looked her up. Y'know, we learn how oppressed women were, and how they didn't get to choose anything except marriage or schoolmarm... but it turns out that a few managed to do more (like Child, Lovelace, Somerville, Markham, and others I've learned about recently). But if we don't learn about them, their efforts go for naught. So, there's not only Oppression going on, but until fairly recently there was also Suppression. If feminists my age had heard more about the accomplishments of those women who had managed to follow their dreams, more of us would have been more successful, too. And, as a side benefit, we might have fewer whiny feminists, fewer Women's Studies departments that focus so tightly on the oppression.

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### Destiny Dawn Long says

I love the Henry books. They're based on the life of Henry David Thoreau and have all sorts of fun little details in their illustrations. This volume details the building of his cabin at Walden Pond. It's a great chance to teach children about how houses got built. It also opens opportunities to discuss materialism.

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### SamZ says

I love the literary names of the bears, and after reading the author's note I understand why they are names as such! I though this was a cute story, and possibly a good introduction to small children if you were going to discuss Thoreau or *Walden*. I suppose the best "financial" related information is the quote at the end of the author's note from Thoreau about a house being a simple thing and not trying to keep up with your neighbors. Not my favorite story, but cute nonetheless.

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## **Jenny says**

I liked this story quite a bit and it has several angles that could be discussed or could be the source of teaching points. Henry is, of course, Henry David Thoreau although he and the other characters are portrayed by bears. (I love the illustrations so I, personally, like his portrayal as a bear.) Henry is building a very small home with the help of his friends. They are concerned about how small it is...but he points out where his library and ballroom and dining room will be (all outside in nature).

The book contains an author's note that introduces Thoreau and his life on Walden Pond. It includes a table that shows the items he used to build his house and how much he paid for them.

I wish the author's note also noted what an average home cost at the time as a source of comparison. I also wish the author's note introduced the reader to Thoreau's friends, Emerson, Alcott, and Miss Lydia. While adults may know who the friends are, child readers would not and this information would be a valuable addition, in my opinion.

This book could lead to discussions on what is needed versus what is wanted, Thoreau and his writing, information on the historical time period and the other historical figures, discussion on the money spent on his house (only \$28.12 1/2) and even, perhaps, discussion on the value of spending time in nature.

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## **David says**

I had no idea what this book was, and I wish I had. It was good, to begin with, but I probably would have waited until I was more prepared to have a good discussion about it. This is a children's version of Walden's Pond. Henry is a bear who builds a cabin by a pond. His friends keep asking him if it will be sufficient, and of course he assures them it will, and he is right. It was a fine book for little kids, but I do wish I had known. Now you will.

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## **Carly says**

“Henry Builds a Cabin” by D.B. Johnson, published by Houghton Mifflin Company; copyright 2002

1. Awards: No awards.
2. Appropriate grade level: K-2nd grade
3. Summary: This story tells the tale of Henry the bear who builds himself a cabin in the woods. Although his friends think his house is too small, he thinks it's just right.
4. Review: This book is very cute and includes very nice illustrations. I think the backstory given at the end gives insight to Henry's actions. The bear is a characterization of Henry David Thoreau, an author who was appreciative of nature.
5. 2-3 possible in-class uses:
  - Have students write about their dream house
  - Have students build Henry's cabin out of popsicle sticks.

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### **Beverly says**

I really liked the illustrations, and I was not really put off by the famous people imagined as bears. Perhaps the illustrator thought this representation would be more appealing to young children. I liked the way he depicted rain--with the picture cut into panels that don't fit exactly together. This book doesn't touch much on financial education, apart from recycling and being frugal.

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### **Kaethe says**

I don't have any idea why Johnson made Thoreau a bear (or a dog, whatever). It's an odd choice. But it works. Of course, Johnson doesn't mention that the land belongs to Emerson, and that Thoreau went home for dinner every day, but it's still great. Unless you were Thoreau's mom. Then, no doubt, you just wish he'd grow up and move out for good.

Anyway, the art is fabulous, and it's a fun book for the eco-conscious among the young set, as well as for young lovers of nonfiction. And for cranky women who like their transcendentalists in cuddly animal form. Hey, I like that idea. What if all the philosophers had their texts boiled down to the catchy, quotable bits, like The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail: A Play, and then presented them in picture book form as fuzzy critters. I'd read a D.B. Johnson book about Plato, presented as a platypus, poisonous spurs and all.

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### **Dolly says**

We've read Henry Hikes to Fitchburg and Henry Climbs a Mountain by D.B. Johnson, both of which tell anecdotes about Henry David Thoreau.

This book is all about his book, Walden, or Life in the Woods, when he spent two years living in a cabin he built himself beside Walden Pond.

I finally finished that book this year and was excited that our library had a copy of this book, so I could share a little bit of the story with them.

We really enjoyed reading this story together and I love sharing a bit of the history of the area near where my hubby and I grew up.

This book was selected as one of the books for the September 2016- Financial Literacy discussion at the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books Group here at Goodreads.

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### **Mary Borgese says**

Henry Builds a Cabin is a great picture book for older readers to learn about both nature and history. The book reflects the life of the author Henry David Thoreau, who lived a simple, natural life by taking

advantage of the world around him. D.B Johnson writes about a bear who decides one day to build a cabin. Throughout Henry's construction, his neighbors stop by, one by one, to give him advice on what he needs to include in his cabin. They mention a space to dance, a spot to read, and a large area to eat in. Henry takes their advice into consideration and mentions that his cabin will have all those things and more! When the cabin is finished on an important day in our nations history, July 4th, he is very pleased with how it turned out. When the cabin was complete it was just big enough for Henry to have shelter from the rain and a place to sleep. The rooms that all his friends mentioned, were there, just not within his cabin. Instead, he was alluding to the natural world around him where nature gave him the space needed to do all the things mentioned throughout the story, like dancing, eating and reading.

The illustrations that accompany the text are vibrant with colors and natural characteristics. Nature is the main focal point when we see Henry building his cabin. This feature gives the readers an idea of what the main point and meaning of the story is. The most important message to get out of this picture book is the appreciation for the natural world around us. With the illustrations, the author makes it very easy for us to pick up on this lesson.

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### **Jack says**

I like the complete series of Henry (Thoreau) children's books by D.B. Johnson. I think Thoreau is much nicer as a bear. The books capture key points from *Walden* in an entertaining way for young and very old (grandparents) children.

Age Range: 4 - 7 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

Lexile Measure: 170

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### **Manybooks says**

Henry Builds a Cabin provides a generally delightful introduction to Henry David Thoreau for younger children, although while I do and greatly appreciate both D. B. Johnson's narrative and accompanying illustrations, I personally would definitely have preferred it, had Henry NOT been depicted as a bear, but as a person (as Henry David Thoreau the man, and not Henry the bear); I am simply not all that much of a fan of anthropomorphic animals, especially in picture books featuring or alluding to cultural and literary icons. That being said, Henry Builds a Cabin does leave me smiling with much appreciation (especially at how Henry with engagement and imagination is able to simplify his existence with a small, frugal and inexpensive cabin serving his basic needs, but is then both willing and able to make use of the free of charge natural beauty and tranquility of the surrounding woods to augment, enhance and support his lifestyle requirements).

Sweet and engaging as a narrative in and of itself (although due to my already mentioned issues with anthropomorphic, humanoid like animals, especially the depictions of the diverse bears in 19th century period clothing, while definitely evocative and successfully rendered, do tend to leave me rather cold), the supplemental information on Henry David Thoreau (including how much, or rather how little money Thoreau actually spent constructing his cabin in the woods) is an added bonus. However, I do sorely miss the inclusion of a bibliography with suggestions for further supplemental reading (as well as information on the historical figures also mentioned in the narrative, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott, and Miss Lydia,

who according to my GR friend Cheryl might have referred to Lydia Maria Frances Child). And why does Nathaniel Hawthorne not make an appearance, as he was also a good friend of Henry David Thoreau? Recommended, but also not in any way spectacular (and as such, I have now, my appreciation of Henry Builds a Cabin notwithstanding decided on two stars and not the three star rating I had originally considered).

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### **Leatha says**

Henry is a bear who decides to build a cabin in the woods by a pond. He is very detailed in his building plans. As he builds his house he puts on a front door, windows, and a roof. As he is building his house his friends stop by to see how he is doing. Henry plans for his house to be a small because he also has the outside to do things.

This is a great picture book for children in 4th grade. The pictures are really detailed and funny. The book has a great meaning of sometimes the small things in life are the best things we have

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### **Lorraine says**

*"Most men appear never to have considered what a house is, and are actually needlessly poor all their lives because they think they must have such a one as their neighbors have."* Thoreau as quoted by D. B. Johnson in his explanation "About Henry's Cabin."

I am very taken with D. B. Johnson's artwork. His illustrations are quirky, inviting, and lovely to behold. And Henry David Thoreau in the form of a bear is quite delightful! Thoreau certainly followed a precept that is being reintroduced, the idea that less is more. And Mr. Johnson admires Thoreau's philosophy.

Children who read this series of books will come away with an understanding of Henry David Thoreau's views, and his desire to live as lightly on the earth as is possible. Author/artist Johnson takes a quote from Thoreau's writings and tells a story that encompasses the Walden Pond experience. In the process, kids will come to think of a cabin in very different ways.

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### **Brenda says**

Henry decides to build a cabin in the woods by a pond. As he is building, each of his friends stop by offering their advice and help, as friends often do. This is a beautifully illustrated book and has a wonderful message. The most fascinating part though came after reading the book and finding the authors note that the book was based off of the life of the author Henry David Thoreau. There were some wonderful details about how much it cost Thoreau to build his cabin and would make for some fun discussions in a classroom. I do wish that the ending would have been a little different but I am sure children would find it entertaining.

