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# Touching Spirit Bear



## Synopsis

After severely injuring Peter Driscoll in an empty parking lot, mischief-maker Cole Matthews is in major trouble. But instead of jail time, Cole is given an alternative: a one-year banishment to a remote Alaskan island. This program "called Circle Justice" is based on Native American traditions that provide healing for the criminal mind. To avoid serious jail time, Cole resolves to go. While there, Cole is mauled by a mysterious white bear and left for dead. Thoughts of his abusive parents, helpless Peter, and his intense anger cause him to examine the root of his troubled ways and seek redemption "from the spirit bear that attacked him, from his victims, and from himself. Author Ben Mikaelson delivers a poignant depiction of the vicious cycle of violence and one boy's journey to healing. Correlates to the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 670L (What's this?)

Series: Spirit Bear (Book 1)

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: HarperCollins; Reprint edition (April 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 038080560X

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Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.5 x 7.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars See all reviews (681 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,135 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #3 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Violence #3 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories > Native North & South Americans #10 in Books > Children's Books > Animals > Bears

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 5 and up

## Customer Reviews

I am a parent of an 11 year old who read this for her 6th grade book report. As she was reading she was excited about it and read some of it to me in small pieces. I told her a few times it sounded like something that shouldn't be in the school library. She insisted it was good. She finished the book last night and told me, "It changed my life". How many 11 year olds tell you that? I was amazed.

She said it touched her and made her want to be a better person. That is how I came here to . Any book that has that kind of affect I want to research and get a copy of so I can read it. I want to know what changed my daughters outlook. She said this book replaced 'Where the Red Fern Grows' as her favorite. That is big!

Touching Spirit Bear is about a troubled 15-year old boy named Cole. His parents are alcoholics and abuse him. After he hurts Pete, he is sent to a remote island in Alaska. He has a near death experience and realizes all the things he did wrong in his life. I read the whole book in 4 1/2 hours nonstop. I think this book not only shows how Cole changed but it shows how people with many troubles can change. I think this book shows a valuable lesson about life. I would recommend it to anyone who likes to read about adventure, courage, and life. This book definitely deserves a five star rating!

I just finished reading this excellent book with my Fundamentals of Writing Sophomore Class. The vast majority of my class being non readers, they were immediately captivated by the book's protagonist- Cole Matthews, a violent juvenile offender and his quest for healing while being banished to a remote island off the coast of Alaska. This easy to read book, written in accessible prose by Mikaelson incorporates a wide variety of themes and issues. The concepts of healing, forgiveness, survival in the wilderness and personal discovery all work together to weave a narrative that inspires great writing and discussions from any class-even a class of "non-readers". This book easily became one of my most successful units to date in my 16 year teaching career. A rich, entertaining and didactic read!

"Touching Spirit Bear" is a book about a very angry and abused fifteen year old who is facing a prison sentence for attacking and injuring a fellow ninth-grader. While waiting for the courts decision Cole, the boy, was kept in a detention center. During his stay in the detention center he was asked to apply for circle justice. After all of the arrangements were made Cole was sent to live by himself on an island off the coast of Alaska for a year. His stay on the island was cut short by a near death experience that somehow made Cole realize what life had to offer and wanted to change. Cole was given a second chance and he takes the opportunity this time by helping himself and Peter, the boy he beat up. I hope there is a sequel.

The concept of "timeout" is here taken to the extreme. Teenage Cole Matthew's journey from an

angry, lying thug to a sensitive, thoughtful human is compelling, if a little overwrought. Beaten by his alcoholic father (who himself was beaten), Cole has to come to terms with who he is and what he has done, which is little short of lying throughout his life and senselessly beating classmate Peter for no reason. For this crime, he is about to be jailed. But the offer by Garvey, his parole officer and himself a one-time offender, of "Circle Justice" - a concept practised by native cultures that has healing and forgiveness as its core elements - is an option he cannot refuse, even though it means isolation on a remote island in Alaska. Whether it is the process of self-awareness that Cole moves through first in his near escape from death one day into his banishment and afterwards during a year on the island, or whether it is the care and thoughtful attention of his mentors, Garvey and Edwin, his surrogate parents, is left for the reader to decide. Probably it is a combination of both -- and no less of an actual encounter with a large, white "spirit bear." The symbolism of the bear is clear. It represents all that is instinctively good and powerful in nature. The "spirit bear" is utterly sensitive to the truth; it will tell Cole (and the reader) if redemption is possible and it will tell Peter if he can forgive Cole. Only then will healing take place and the circle of justice completed. You cannot read this book without looking at yourself and asking what happens during those moments of rage that we all feel. Take a deep breath; take a time out; get away to an island for as long as you can to know yourself and your place in the circle of life.

Touching Spirit Bear has to be one of the best books I've ever read. It really shows how a tragic incident can have a huge impact on a person's life. Ben Miksa's writing made it feel like you were really there. Here is a brief summary of the book: Cole Matthews is a violent and mean kid. One day he smashes a kid named Peter Driscoll's head into the sidewalk, causing him to have severe head injuries and possibly permanent brain damage. Cole blames everyone else but himself including his abusive dad and alcoholic mother. As punishment for his actions, he gets banished to a remote Alaskan island. After being mauled by a Spirit Bear, will he then change his observation of life? Again good book, it teaches valuable life lessons and the process of healing. For those of you who haven't read this book, let me just say that there is a shocking twist towards that you would never guess would happen. Final word: READ THE BOOK!

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