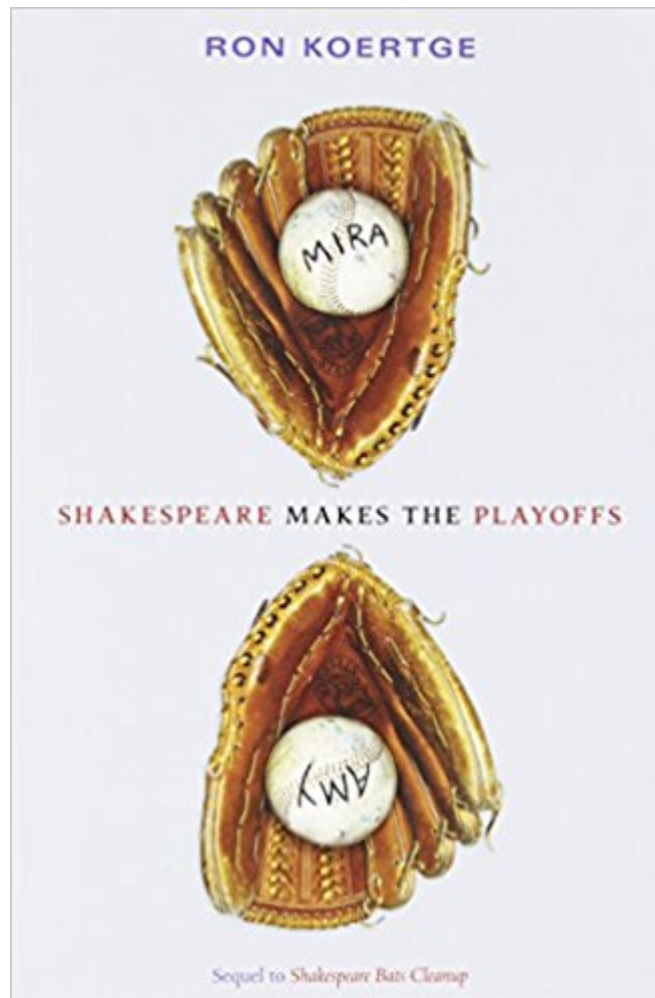




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# Shakespeare Makes The Playoffs



## Synopsis

Fielding his social life is a bigger challenge for Kevin than hitting a fastball in Ron Koertge's funny, insightful sequel to *SHAKESPEARE BATS CLEANUP*. Fourteen-year-old Kevin Boland has a passion for playing baseball, a knack for writing poetry, and a cute girlfriend named Mira who's not much interested in either. But then, Kevin doesn't exactly share Mira's newfound fervor for all things green. So when Kevin signs up for open mike night at Bungalow Books and meets Amy, a girl who knows a sonnet from a sestina and can match his emails verse for verse, things start to get sticky. Should he stay with Mira? Or risk spoiling his friendship with Amy by asking her out? Ron Koertge, master of snappy dialogue and a deft poet, offers a fast-paced, sympathetic story that interweaves two narrative voices with humor and warmth.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Kevin Boland has been too busy with baseball and his girlfriend, Mira, to write much poetry since we first met him, in *Shakespeare Bats Cleanup* (2003). In this verse-novel sequel, his dad gives him a new journal, and Kevin remembers how much he likes writing. His already waning interest in Mira decreases further after he attends an open-mike poetry reading and meets Amy, who has a boyfriend and just wants to be "poetry friends." The two teens exchange e-mails and poems, experimenting with form, including couplets, pantoums, and tankas. Kevin observes,

“If she can write a sestina, I’m gonna love her madly.” The well-crafted poetry is firmly rooted in the experiences of regular teens and addresses subjects that range from breakups to baseball. Koertge works in some unobtrusive poetry instruction, and poems like Amy’s funny Transylvanian limericks and Kevin’s poignant reflections on “moving on” will inspire teens to try writing their own. Appealing and accessible, this sequel provides rewards on many levels. Grades 6-9. --Lynn Rutan --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Ron Koertge is the author of many acclaimed novels, including DEADVILLE, STONER AND SPAZ, THE BRIMSTONE JOURNALS, and his first novel-in-verse about Kevin Boland, SHAKESPEARE BATS CLEANUP. A two-time winner of the PEN Award, Ron Koertge lives in South Pasadena, California.

What’s wonderful about this book, the sequel to Shakespeare Bats Cleanup, is the types of poems the hero writes: they are outstanding examples of what a high school poet can write. I can see that teachers would want to use this book in class. What’s weak about the book is the plot: it’s not that interesting. The hero seems oblivious, for a poet. Of course, he is a teen, so he does have a lot of learning ahead of him, but, ironically, the first book, in which the hero was bedridden and weak, had a more compelling plot. But if you’re considering buying one of the many YA books written in free verse or, in this case, some traditional poetic forms, Koertge’s are still at the top of the list.

One of the few poetry books written for boys in Middle School. While there are many poetry books for girls, this one is finally for a boy. My son needed a poetry book for school and loved this one. It’s written in free verse and reads like a story rather than a poem. My son used this book to write his Forensic Speech piece (topic: poetry interpretation). The boy in the book talks about the loss of his mom, how he gets along with dad, his friends, his girl friend and baseball. I would recommend it to any Middle School student.

I’m preparing to use this in a middle school classroom. Lots of white space on the page. Great use of figurative language and poetry examples. The best part is my students will eagerly be ready to voice their opinions on the plot and characters.

"I like Amy already, if she can write a sestina, I’m gonna love her madly. Admire her, I mean. I’ll

admire her madly." - Kevin Boland Since his bout with mono, Kevin Boland's life has been more or less back to normal. Now Kevin's dad has given him a new journal, so Kevin's decided to mess around with poetry again. He's not sick anymore, he has plenty of other things to do, but writing poetry fills a need for Kevin - it gives him an outlet for whatever is percolating inside his mind. For the most part, what's percolating seems pretty good. Kevin's girlfriend, Mira, is still a part of his life and his baseball team has made the playoffs. It's a shame that those two things have to be separated, but Mira doesn't really know anything about baseball - or poetry. It turns out there are a few darker things under Kevin's skin as well. His dad is ready to take the first few tentative steps away from grieving for Kevin's mother and Kevin isn't really sure he's okay with that. Then there's Mira. Yes, she's still really cute, but she's not always all that fun to be with. And would it be so hard for her to learn about either baseball or poetry? They are the two most important things in Kevin's life right now. It's while Kevin is musing on these thoughts that he meets Amy at an open mic poetry night. Amy, who is everything that Mira isn't. Kevin has a girlfriend. Amy has a boyfriend and she only wants to be poetry buddies anyway. So why can't Kevin get Amy off his mind? This follow up to Shakespeare Bats Cleanup has all of the wonderful qualities that made that novel about Kevin's first forays into poetry such an interesting read. Kevin's journal (which he calls "Shakespeare's Secret Diary" is full of free verse, couplets, ghazals, a villanelle and one memorable sestina. Using poetry, Kevin is able to sort through his emotions and be completely honest with himself, at least, about how he really feels. As with Shakespeare Bats Cleanup, Mr. Koertge has delivered an engaging and entertaining novel in verse that perfectly captures the inner musings of a thoughtful fourteen-year-old boy.

I come in tired from baseball practice, and Dad catches me guzzling OJ right out of the carton. "Want a journal?" he asks. "You're a writer. All writers need journals." I put the orange juice away and hold out my mitt, the one Mom bought me. "I'm a first baseman." "Who used to write poetry. Your teammates called you Shakespeare." He hands me a notebook. "And it doesn't have to be poetry. It doesn't even have to be a journal. It could be a diary." He lays it on the table, opens the first page, and writes with his favorite gel pen: Shakespeare's Secret Diary Maybe I should start again. I play ball a lot, because if I don't, I get rusty. All I need now are some secrets. Kevin, a.k.a. Shakespeare, doesn't seem to have a lot of secrets, at least none that he feels like sharing. The people in his life, however, bombard him left and right with secrets that take him by surprise, and not necessarily in a good way. For instance, Kevin's dad has lately taken to throwing away all of his deceased wife's belongings --- much to Kevin's dislike --- and wants Kevin to meet a new woman,

Anna. Kevin isn't sure what to think about his father dating, so firing off a poem or two is his best way of coping. Kevin seems to be doing a lot of coping lately, especially concerning his girlfriend Mira. Sure she's cute, popular and funny, but she doesn't appear interested in anything that Kevin enjoys. This includes skipping all of his beloved baseball games, wrinkling up her nose at his poetry, and focusing on more important things, like the environment. Kevin likes Mira, but perhaps it's time to find someone he's more compatible with. Someone like Amy. Kevin meets Amy at an open mike night at the Book Bungalow, and they instantly click. Amy is impressed that Kevin writes and shares poetry; Kevin is enthralled with the easy-going nature of Amy, not to mention her incredible talent in the arts. They start swapping poems over email, and he finds himself falling for her --- big time. Just when Kevin is ready to declare his feelings, Amy lets out her secret: she already has a boyfriend. Is there a proper way for utter despair and misery to be expressed eloquently in a poem? I appreciate SHAKESPEARE MAKES THE PLAYOFFS for so many reasons. First, the poetry is amazing. Ron Koertge has his characters spend time experimenting with many different forms. This helps break up the blank verse poems in between and adds a twist of fun every now and then. It also is inspiring to the readers to go ahead and give it a try. Second, I appreciate that the main character is a boy who is completely and utterly cool with writing poetry. It's a part of him, and he has no shame in expressing his feelings about all that is happening in his life through verse. If anything, the poems help clarify his thoughts, which is another important message to the reader. Finally, the overall storyline is fun and insightful. Everyone can relate to the teenage angst in SHAKESPEARE MAKES THE PLAYOFFS and have fun at the same time.

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