

# cole matthews touching spirit bear

**Cole Matthews Touching Spirit Bear** is a compelling story that explores themes of healing, redemption, and the profound connection between humans and nature. Written by Ben Mikaelson, this novel follows the journey of a troubled teen, Cole Matthews, who is grappling with anger, violence, and a troubled past. The narrative unfolds in a remote Alaskan wilderness, where Cole is sent for a unique form of rehabilitation after he brutally attacks a classmate. Through his encounters with the spirit bear and the elements of nature, Cole embarks on a transformative journey that ultimately leads him to confront his inner demons and seek forgiveness.

## Background of the Novel

*Touching Spirit Bear* was published in 2001 and has since gained popularity among young adult readers. The book is often used in educational settings due to its important themes and messages related to personal growth and the effects of violence.

## Author's Inspiration

Ben Mikaelson, the author, drew inspiration from his experiences and his deep appreciation for nature. He has a personal affinity for bears, having raised a black bear named Buffy for several years. Mikaelson's love for wildlife and the wilderness is evident in his vivid descriptions and the way he crafts the natural world as a central character in the story.

## Plot Summary

The story begins with Cole Matthews, a 15-year-old boy who feels trapped in a cycle of anger and

violence. After attacking his classmate, Peter, Cole is faced with serious consequences. Instead of serving time in juvenile detention, he is given a chance to undergo a rehabilitation program known as Circle Justice, which is rooted in Indigenous principles of healing and restoration.

## Circle Justice

The Circle Justice program emphasizes the importance of community involvement and personal accountability. It encourages offenders to confront their actions and understand the impact of their behavior on others. Key elements of Circle Justice include:

- Restoration: Helping the victim heal and restoring harmony in the community.
- Understanding: Forcing the offender to reflect on their actions and the pain they have caused.
- Connection: Building a relationship between the offender and the community to foster empathy and support.

Cole is skeptical about the program and initially resists the opportunity for growth. However, he is sent to a remote Alaskan island as part of his sentence, where he will spend a year in isolation, without the distractions of modern society.

## The Island Experience

Upon arriving on the island, Cole's arrogance and anger are palpable. He views the wilderness as a prison rather than a place of healing. His initial days are marked by defiance and a refusal to engage with the environment. However, as he confronts the challenges of survival, including building a shelter and finding food, he begins to develop a different relationship with nature.

The turning point in Cole's journey occurs when he encounters a spirit bear. This majestic creature symbolizes strength, resilience, and the beauty of the natural world. Cole's interaction with the bear becomes a pivotal moment in his life, forcing him to confront his fears and vulnerabilities.

# The Role of the Spirit Bear

The spirit bear serves as a powerful symbol throughout the novel. It represents Cole's internal struggles and his potential for change. The bear's presence is both intimidating and awe-inspiring, prompting Cole to reflect on his actions and their consequences.

## Symbolism of the Spirit Bear

- Strength and Resilience: The bear embodies the qualities that Cole must develop in order to overcome his challenges.
- Connection to Nature: The spirit bear illustrates the interconnectedness of all living beings and the importance of respecting the natural world.
- Self-Discovery: Cole's encounters with the bear lead him on a path of self-discovery and healing.

Through his relationship with the spirit bear, Cole begins to understand the significance of respect—both for himself and for others. This realization is a crucial step in his transformation.

## Thematic Elements

Touching Spirit Bear is rich with themes that resonate with readers of all ages. The novel addresses the consequences of violence, the importance of forgiveness, and the healing power of nature.

## Violence and Consequences

At the core of Cole's story is the exploration of violence and its repercussions. The novel illustrates how anger can spiral out of control, leading to destructive behavior. Cole's journey highlights the

importance of recognizing the impact of one's actions and taking responsibility for them.

## **Forgiveness and Redemption**

Forgiveness is another central theme in the novel. As Cole starts to confront his own pain and the pain he has caused others, he learns the value of forgiving himself and seeking forgiveness from those he has hurt. This journey towards redemption is essential for his healing process.

## **Healing Through Nature**

The novel emphasizes the healing power of nature. Cole's time on the island allows him to reconnect with the earth and gain a deeper understanding of himself. As he learns to appreciate the beauty and tranquility of his surroundings, he begins to heal emotionally and spiritually.

## **Character Development**

Cole Matthews undergoes significant character development throughout the novel. His transformation from a troubled teen to a more self-aware individual is a testament to the power of introspection and growth.

## **Key Characters**

- Cole Matthews: The protagonist who struggles with anger and violence but ultimately seeks redemption.
- Peter Driscoll: The victim of Cole's attack, whose journey of healing parallels Cole's transformation.
- Garvey: Cole's probation officer and mentor, who introduces him to Circle Justice and provides

guidance throughout his journey.

- The Spirit Bear: A powerful symbol of Cole's struggles and growth.

As the story unfolds, readers witness Cole's evolution as he learns to confront his demons, embrace vulnerability, and ultimately find peace within himself.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Cole Matthews Touching Spirit Bear is a profound exploration of the human experience, emphasizing the importance of healing, forgiveness, and the connection to nature. Through Cole's journey, readers are reminded of the potential for change that exists within all of us, regardless of our past actions. The novel serves as a powerful reminder of the impact of violence, the necessity of personal accountability, and the transformative power of nature. Ultimately, Touching Spirit Bear is not just a story about a boy and a bear; it is a poignant tale of growth, resilience, and the enduring quest for redemption.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What are the main themes explored in 'Touching Spirit Bear'?**

The main themes in 'Touching Spirit Bear' include healing, forgiveness, the impact of nature, personal growth, and the consequences of violence.

### **How does Cole Matthews change throughout 'Touching Spirit Bear'?**

Cole Matthews undergoes significant transformation from a troubled and angry youth to a more reflective and understanding individual, learning empathy and the importance of responsibility.

## **What role does the Spirit Bear play in Cole's journey?**

The Spirit Bear symbolizes both Cole's inner struggles and his path to healing; it represents the power of nature and the need for respect, ultimately guiding him towards self-discovery and redemption.

## **How does the setting influence the story in 'Touching Spirit Bear'?**

The remote Alaskan wilderness serves as a backdrop for Cole's journey, providing a stark contrast to his previous life and enabling him to confront his emotions, learn survival skills, and find peace.

## **What is the significance of the circle justice concept in the novel?**

Circle justice emphasizes accountability and healing rather than punishment, allowing Cole to understand the impact of his actions on others and to seek reconciliation with his past.

## **How does Cole's relationship with his father affect his character development?**

Cole's abusive relationship with his father contributes to his anger and feelings of worthlessness, which he must confront and overcome to ultimately find his sense of self-worth and identity.

## **What lessons does Cole learn from his experience with the Spirit Bear?**

Cole learns about the importance of humility, respect for nature, and the power of forgiveness, both towards others and himself, which are crucial for his healing process.

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