Henry wants a new bike more than anything, but his parents can't afford one. As he thinks about what he can do to get one, his dog, Ribsy, decides to steal the Grumbies' roast and run away. Eventually Scooter, a boy who has a bicycle and makes Henry jealous, comes to the rescue. He takes the roast away from Ribsy and returns it to Mr. Grumbie.

When Henry is walking home one day through a vacant lot, he finds lots of discarded boxes of pink bubble gum. He decides that by selling the gum, he can make money for his bike fund. However, the principal tells every class in the school that chewing gum is not a good idea, and Henry ends up taking the gum back to the vacant lot.

Henry's next plan for making money is to take over Scooter's paper route during Easter break. The morning after he has talked Scooter into this plan, Henry discovers that Ribsy has learned to fetch papers so well that he brings every paper on his street to Henry's front door. To keep his deal with Scooter, Henry has to figure out a way to break Ribsy's habit. He does this by shooting Ribsy with a water gun every time he picks up a paper.

Beezus knows how much Henry wants a bike and tells him about an auction of bikes at the police station. Henry can go, but he has to take his friend Beezus and her little sister, Ramona, with him. At the auction Henry realizes that the only way to buy a bike is to be heard by the auctioneer. He gets his chance when Ramona gets lost, and the auctioneer finds her. When Beezus retrieves Ramona, she bids on a bike for Henry. Henry is thrilled until he discovers it's a girl's bike.

Henry takes home the broken-down bike and tries to fix it up. When he tries to ride it and takes a fall in front of his friends, he decides to put it away and forget about it. His mother offers to buy him a second-hand bike, but he decides he will wait until he can buy a new one.

Henry's dream finally does come true one evening when he and his family attend the grand opening of a huge supermarket. He wins a door prize of fifty
dollars worth of services at a beauty salon, which his
mother and other women agree to buy from him.
Soon he has almost enough money to buy his bike.
His father agrees to throw in ten dollars, and Henry
rides home on his shiny red bike. He makes sure he
sounds the horn as he rides past Scooter's house.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for
class discussions, student presentations, or
extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding
Why did Henry make sure he rode past Scooter’s
house on his way home with his new bike?

He likely wanted to show off in front of Scooter.

Literary Analysis
Who is the antagonist in the book? Why?

Scooter is the antagonist because he has a bike and
keeps flaunting that fact in Henry’s face. This
causes conflict between the two boys, as well as
conflict within Henry because of his jealous feelings.

Inferential Comprehension
Should Henry have bought the bike at the auction?

Although the bike Henry ended up buying was a
girl’s bike needing so much work that he abandoned
it, buying it taught him something. He realized he
didn’t want to settle for a second-hand bike at all, he
wanted a new one and would wait until he could get
it.

Constructing Meaning
Predict how Henry will feel in the parade.

He will be proud that he has his own bike with
glittery spokes.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting  The story takes place in a
middle-class neighborhood in America. Have the
class change the setting and discuss how it would
change the story. For example, have them put
Henry in an upscale neighborhood. Would he
even have the problem he has -- no bike? Most
likely his parents would have the money to buy
him one. Then put him in a low-income
development. Would he ever have been able to
buy a bike?

Understanding Characterization  Henry is
jealous of Scooter’s bike. This is a common
feeling between students. Have the students
think about something now or in the past that
they want or have wanted that has made them
feel jealous. What did they do about it? Were
they like Henry who worked hard every chance he
could to make money to buy a bike? Did they act
openly jealous toward the other person? Have
them discuss their feelings and situations in small
groups.

Understanding the Author's Craft  The story was
told in the third person, but from Henry’s
perspective. Ask the students to rewrite a part of
the story from a different perspective. For
example, they could tell it from Beezus’s point of
view and see how the story would change. Or
they could tell it as a narrative in the first person.

Recognizing Feelings  When Henry is
embarrassed by the door prize he has won, he
acts on impulse to try to make everyone forget
what has happened by eating dog food. Have the
students think about a time when they felt
embarrassed. What was their reaction? Would
they have acted differently if they were in Henry’s
shoes? In general, what do they do when they
are embarrassed?