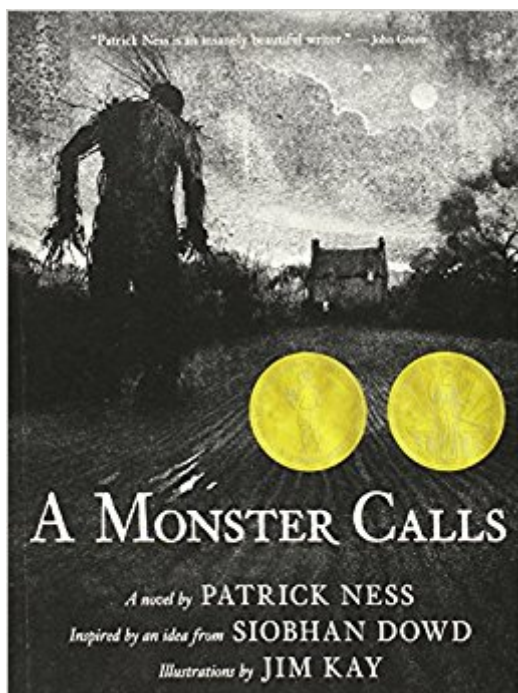


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# A Monster Calls: Inspired By An Idea From Siobhan Dowd



## Synopsis

A #1 New York Times bestseller An unflinching, darkly funny, and deeply moving story of a boy, his seriously ill mother, and an unexpected monstrous visitor. At seven minutes past midnight, thirteen-year-old Conor wakes to find a monster outside his bedroom window. But it isn't the monster Conor's been expecting-- he's been expecting the one from his nightmare, the nightmare he's had nearly every night since his mother started her treatments. The monster in his backyard is different. It's ancient. And wild. And it wants something from Conor. Something terrible and dangerous. It wants the truth. From the final idea of award-winning author Siobhan Dowd-- whose premature death from cancer prevented her from writing it herself-- Patrick Ness has spun a haunting and darkly funny novel of mischief, loss, and monsters both real and imagined.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There's no denying it: this is one profoundly sad story. But it's also wise, darkly funny and brave, told in spare sentences, punctuated with fantastic images and stirring silences. Past his sorrow, fright and rage, Conor ultimately lands in a place - an imperfect one, of course - where healing can begin. *A MONSTER CALLS* is a gift from a generous storyteller and a potent piece of art. *The New York Times* A nuanced tale that draws on elements of classic horror stories to delve into the terrifying terrain of loss. . . . Ness brilliantly captures Conor's horrifying emotional ride as his mother's inevitable death approaches. In an ideal pairing of text and illustration, the novel is liberally laced with Kay's evocatively textured pen-and-ink artwork, which surrounds the text, softly

caressing it in quiet moments and in others rushing toward the viewer with a nightmarish intensity. A poignant tribute to the life and talent of Siobhan Dowd and an astonishing exploration of fear. — Kirkus Reviews (starred review) Profoundly moving, expertly crafted tale... a singular masterpiece, exceptionally well-served by Kay's atmospheric and ominous illustrations... tackles the toughest of subjects by refusing to flinch, meeting the ugly truth about life head-on with compassion, bravery, and insight. — Publishers Weekly (starred review) A brilliantly executed, powerful tale. — School Library Journal (starred review) Ness twists out a resolution that is revelatory in its obviousness, beautiful in its execution, and fearless in its honesty. Kay's artwork keeps the pace, gnawing at the edges of the pages with thundercloud shadows and keeping the monster just barely, terribly seeable. — Booklist (starred review) A masterpiece about life and loss that will stay with the reader long after the final page is turned. — Library Media Connection (starred review)

Patrick Ness is the author of the critically acclaimed and best-selling Chaos Walking trilogy. He has won numerous awards, including the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, the Booktrust Teenage Prize, and the Costa Children's Book Award. Born in Virginia, he lives in London. Siobhan Dowd spent twenty years as a human rights campaigner for PEN and Amnesty International before her first novel, *A SWIFT PURE CRY*, was published in 2006. She won the Carnegie Medal posthumously in 2009 after her death at the age of forty-seven. Jim Kay studied illustration and worked in the archives of the Tate Gallery and the Kew Royal Botanic Gardens, two experiences that heavily influence his work. His images for *A MONSTER CALLS* use everything from beetles to breadboards to create interesting marks and textures. Jim Kay lives in Edinburgh, Scotland.

I have been reading aloud to my twins every night, and I thought this might be a book they would enjoy, because of the illustrations. I ended up finishing it with them within 24 hours. You know how you come across a book, and after reading it, you feel like EVERYONE needs to read it as well? That is how I felt with this book. As a mother, this book ripped my heart to shreds, and put me in an emotional state as I was reading it to my sons. But it was worth every tear I shed. Guys, if you haven't read this book, Do it! The story, the writing, the illustrations, this book was pure perfection and a total 5 out of 5 stars for me. If you have read this, what were your thoughts?

Beautifully written and hauntingly illustrated, Ness's novel tells the story of Conor, a young boy who suffers from a recurring nightmare about his mother, who is ill with cancer. Practically friendless — save for a girl named Lily, whom Conor seems to

shun and bullied in school, Conor copes with his loneliness and fear by calling on a monster who appears to him in the form of a yew tree. The monster whose real purpose grows apparent as the novel progresses tells Conor three stories in preparation for hearing Conor tell his own story. A narrative about the truth and knowledge contained within stories and their inherent ability to empower us, Ness's novel tackles the experience of youthful trauma with sensitivity, poignancy, and grace.

It's the first of his novels that I've read, but it certainly will not be the last.

We tend to have all these preconceptions about how a story should unfold: the good guys win, the line between good and evil is well-defined, there should be an overall theme or lesson. But that's not always how it is and oftentimes we feel cheated when our expectations or desires are not met. Such is the case with life. This book uses a supernatural being (a monster) to convey a very important albeit difficult real-life message: that in order to heal we must come to terms with reality, in all its bitterness, and with ourselves, as the complex human beings that we are. Our feelings are not black and white, life is full of loss and pain, and things don't always work out just because we believe they will. This is reality. It is the truth. And we need to accept it. To move on and truly live, we need to meet life on life's terms and take responsibility for ourselves. Usually I don't read books with pictures, but boy am I glad I gave this one a go. The pictures are brilliant. They're dark and dreamlike, creepy yet beautiful, and perfectly placed. They accentuate the book nicely.

Patrick Ness knows that of which he writes. The feeling of relief is real. Was real. I remember it, but I rarely spoke of it. Different readers will be at different stages of grief. I am not a psychiatrist, I am someone who has lost a son in the military and later a wife because of a unidentified pulmonary disease. The disease took three years to kill her. (It is hard to write those words.) I sought grief counseling for me and my family before the loss of my wife and their mother - while she was dying. I also read books that helped a lot - almost all recommended by someone. From my experience with grief, I do not believe giving this book to someone who just learned they will lose someone they love would be a good idea. It seems to me that it would help a person who has gotten past Denial; someone who is where Conor was at the end of the book. It would be an affirming book at that time for them. Perhaps this book will get reviews by professionals as well as those like myself sharing experience. I related to much of the feelings of the main character, Conor. But my loss was as a husband rather than a young son. I still had three teens at home. And, my loss was because of an

illness lasting three years. I had accepted my wife's condition was terminal sometime in the first year. Conor's experience seemed to span a much shorter time and death occurred very soon after his acceptance. To me, that seems to have been a sudden loss. A sudden loss, or one in which the hope that death will be avoided endures, is not the same as my experience. I never had a monster even when my wife and I were separately and together ready for it to be over in the last months. Most significant to me is that my wife and I, having believed Jesus, we are going to Heaven and that we can want to go. I do not see that in Conor's life and it makes a difference. The book does not tell what Conor thinks will happen to his mom after she dies. You can read that a monster took his mom or you can read that he felt like a monster because of his internal emotions about her death. There are stages of grief and having a counselor to help you understand what is happening to you is really worth it. A book helps but it is not the same at all. And books can be helpful at different times as events happen. This book deals with denial, bargaining, and anger. As I read it I felt the book was best for someone who has accepted that their loved one will die. After the person dies, we say 'you must move on'. Well, yes, you do - but...Another book, "Don't Take My Grief Away From Me" by Doug Manning and Glenda Stansbury (also on ) deals with how people differ in 'moving on' with their lives. I needed that book. (I also gave a copy of the book to a couple of people so they would 'back off' from me and my children.) The Manning / Stansbury book helped me with acceptance and a self-comfort that my grieving was 'normal' after my wife died. I am not sure when I would have wanted Ness' book. I think that a few weeks after I believed my wife was probably going to die and when I was dreading what we were going to have to deal with, "A Monster Calls" would have helped. I can say I am glad Patrick Ness wrote this book and I pray it gets into the hands of many who need it.

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