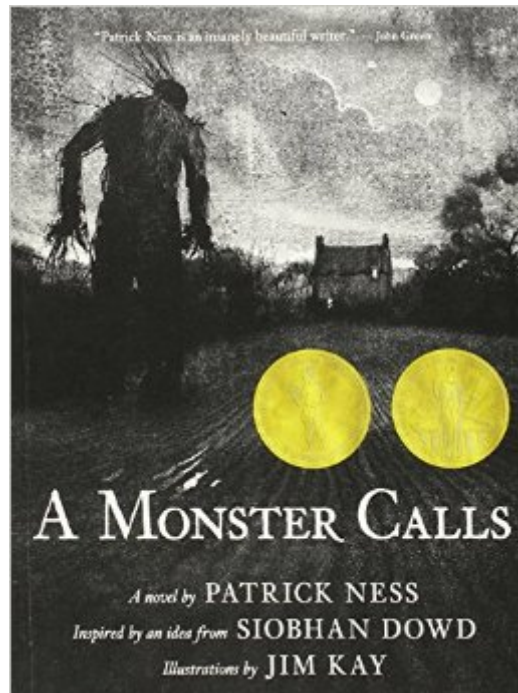


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# A Monster Calls: Inspired By An Idea From Siobhan Dowd



## Synopsis

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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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

In the dark of night, when the house is still, what fears creep into your heart? For Conor O'Malley, his nightmares take the shape of a very old and very dangerous monster who visits him every night at seven minutes past midnight. He's half-convinced that these must be dreams of his fevered mind. But how can they be, when the visits are so vivid and when he finds physical evidence of the monster's existence the next day? Conor's nightmares begin shortly after his mother starts her

treatments for cancer. He's also dealing with a father who lives far away and is engrossed with his new family, a brisk and determined grandma who doesn't understand him, and schoolmates who don't seem to see him anymore. As readers learn more and more about Conor's story and the terrible monster who comes to visit, it is impossible not to feel worry and fear and sadness for this boy, whose must shoulder problems that have toppled many adults before him. But even in his anger and pain, Conor's defiant spirit shows flashes of dry humor and painful hopefulness that are difficult to witness, but make him impossibly endearing. *A Monster Calls* is a children's book, but it's a children's book in the way that Roald Dahl or Shel Silverstein wrote children's books--that is, the surface stories are certainly well-written and compelling, but underneath that are the themes of confusion and loneliness and sadness that elevate them to timeless works of literature. And while *A Monster Calls* chooses to confront its demons more literally than some other books may, it does so with such fierce intelligence and ease that it never feels didactic or forced. This an incredible book about the enormous burdens of responsibility and grief and loss. I read most of it with anxiety in my heart and as the story intensified, the ache in my throat got worse and worse. By the time I reached the end, hot tears were dripping onto the last two pages, and continued to fall as I immediately read those pages again, and as I read them yet again. But more than anything else, I felt a great deal of love as I was reading this. Love for Conor, love for his mum, love for his grandma, and love for everyone who has ever experienced a profound loss. This is such a beautiful book, such an important book, and one that I think so many children and so many adults will appreciate. I cannot imagine that there will be another children's book written this year that will provide such a moving experience, or one that will so easily become an instant classic. In just 215 pages, *A Monster Calls* shatters your heart and then wraps it up tightly again so that you can go and be present in the world as an infinitely wiser, more loving human being.\*\*\*Please consider buying the hardcover over the ebook in this case, as the starkly beautiful illustrations add to the reading experience in an integral way.\*\*\*\*An advance copy of this book was provided by the publisher for review.\*

Five stars: This is a haunting, heartbreaking book that will grab onto your heart strings. *A Monster Calls* is one of those books that has the ability to break your heart and touch your soul. On the surface it is supposedly a children's book; one where a monster comes roaring to a window one night. A great, old, wild terrible monster but he is not the horrible nightmare Conor O'Malley has been expecting; for you see he has been haunted repeatedly in his nightmares by something far worse. This horror of his dreams is something so cruel and terrifying he dares not acknowledge it. The monster at his window, who is strangely constructed from the ancient yew tree in the graveyard,

imparts three different tales to Conor; three tales of truths. The monster warns that when the last tale has been told Conor must tell his own tale. He must confess his great truth, his greatest fear, or be eaten but he cannot reveal to anyone that which is devouring his soul or can he? Besides the monster is just a dream after all but why is his room mysteriously covered with needles and berries from a yew tree? Thus, the journey begins. The story opens with thirteen year old Conor bearing the crushing toll of his mother's cancer. He slowly watches as the disease ravishes her body, steals her vitality and hair and sucks away her life. Each day he shoulders more and more of a burden too heavy for a boy his age. At school he has become the invisible boy. Everyone is afraid to speak to him, for he is the boy whose mother has cancer. Day in and day out he endures the whispers and looks of pity, surrounded by people, who inadvertently ignore him because they fear saying the "wrong" thing. Conor is screaming inside for anyone to recognize him, even if it means drawing the attention of a bully. He wants desperately just to have some part of his life be normal. He has no one to turn to. His Grandmother is controlling and obsessed with her own troubles so they end up sparring with each other instead of admitting that they are both haunted by the same specter. His father selfishly walked out of Conor's world and into a new existence in America with a wife and infant daughter. He has a life now that does not provide a space for his son. He reappears briefly but he does not offer the refuge Conor seeks. It seems that Conor is alone until the monster storms in through the window. So what is this monster? The author leaves the interpretation up to the reader. For me the monster is a construct made up of all the agony, fear, loneliness and conflicting emotions that wage in Conor's mind. I saw the three tales as Conor's way of trying to understand some of the issues that plague him. Through Conor's eyes I lived the constant pain and turmoil surrounding his mother's illness. I felt his optimism and I understood his refusal to believe that the medicines might not hold the cure. As the cancer closes in the pain becomes an agonizing vice grip on your heart. There are glimmers of hope but there is always the choking dread. When Conor and the monster reach the end of the saga and he comes to terms with the fear that has been shredding his soul, my heart broke. I cried for Conor and for myself; for I too have faced down that fear and I have seen the eyes of his nightmarish monster. Yes, this book tore my heart but I found relief too. I was glad to know that I shared the same discordant emotions that Conor felt and that these feelings were normal and acceptable. In the end I was comforted as Conor took shelter in the arms of the yew tree; knowing he had faced and conquered his ultimate terror. I know he has found his peace. As have I and hopefully the countless others who have endured this life altering event. This is a book based on the ideas of Siobhan Dowd, a new, talented voice with such promise. Ultimately she was silenced too early; she died of cancer in 2007. Her first novel was published in 2006. Several award

winning works including, *A Monster Calls* were published posthumously. She had outlined the idea and characters for this book before the cancer snatched her away. Patrick Ness does a tremendous job in completing her work and fulfilling her vision. To me he even brought forth her spirit as I imagined it was her pain and suffering that I witnessed in Conor's mother. This is a book that speaks to both young and old. I fear the label of a young adult book for this work. This book transcends far beyond a book for youth. It has the ability to touch all of us because at some time in life we all find ourselves facing down the great dread of illness and death. This work will speak differently to everyone who reads it. It is an amazing and powerful piece of literature that everyone should experience. This is a book that gets into your head, brushes your soul and changes you.

Favorite Quotations: "Stories are wild creatures, the monster said. When you let them loose, who knows what havoc they might wreak." "Sometimes people need to lie to themselves most of all." "There is not always a good guy. Nor is there always a bad one. Most people are somewhere in between." "Belief is half of healing." "Stories are important, the monster said. They can be more important than anything. If they carry the truth." "I couldn't hold onto her any more. She got so heavy." "The answer is that it does not matter what you think, the monster said, because your mind will contradict itself a hundred times each day." "Your mind will believe comforting lies while also knowing the painful truths that make those lies necessary. And your mind will punish you for believing both." "You do not write your life with words, the monster said. You write it with actions. What you think is not important. It is only important what you do." "I wish I had a hundred years," she said, very quietly. "A hundred years I could give to you."

STOP. Seriously, don't read any further if you don't want to know my reaction to this novel. Because this book will grab your mind, body, heart, and soul. Okay, I warned you. *A Monster Calls* SHOULD be read in one sitting. It's so powerful, so painful that it feels like a gaping wound right where your heart is. I only read one review on Goodreads and I knew I had to pick up this book. The author of that review said she cried and cried. I braced myself. I picked up this book knowing that it would tear at my heart, make me think. About life. About death. It's a book about holding on and letting go. It's about control and losing control. It's about lies and truths. As I said, I braced myself. Only once did I get misty-eyed. I didn't want to cry. But when I finished the last page I paced my living room floor. Dry-eyed. A book like this MUST impact the reader in some way because seriously if it doesn't, I truly would wonder if stone exists in place of a heart. But the real question is what do you DO with a book like this? I say gobble it up. Take it in. Hold it close. Then. Let. It. Go. Live life with meaning and purpose. Be kind to others. Be kind to yourself. Work on letting go of old hurts. Turn your

dreams into action. Don't just talk. DO! Because all we really have to hold onto is what we do in the here and now. I realize it's not an easy way to live all the time. But this book reminds us that life is precious. We can't waste it. That WE are responsible for finding meaning to our own lives and making something special out of it. That's how I see it. I did warn you.

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