

Blake Snyder's Beat Sheet

The Bear and the Piano by David Litchfield

1. **Opening Image:** In the opening image we see a young bear cub who has stumbled upon an abandoned piano in the middle of a lush green forest. Barely able to reach the keys, he paws at it, making an awful plonking sound.
2. **Theme Stated:** The heavenly light that streams in through the forest canopy hints at themes of aspiration and escape.
3. **Set-Up:** In the first few pages we've been introduced to the curious bear who, for days, weeks, and months, keeps coming back to the piano to play. Clearly, he's both talented and persistent, and he's happiest when he plays because the sounds take him away from the forest into "strange and wonderful lands." This is reiterated in the illustrations as well: We see a close-up of the bear, closing his eyes in concentration and contentment as he plucks at the piano keys. The three small panels on the page seem to echo the content as well, suggesting individual music notes. We're also introduced to the other bears who are drawn to the "magical melodies" and gather each evening in the forest's clearing for an impromptu concert.
4. **Catalyst:** One night a girl and her father come across the clearing. They name the instrument the bear has been playing (a piano) as well as the sounds he's been making (music), and they try to entice the bear to come to the city with them and perform on Broadway. The girl insists he'll hear such beautiful sounds it will make his "fur stand on end."
5. **Debate:** Will the other bears be sad if he leaves the forest?
6. **Break into Two:** We turn the page and see a full page spread with the bear sandwiched between the girl and her father in the middle of a canoe. Two bears stand in the foreground, their backs to the reader, comforting each other as the hero marches – or

paddles – toward the distant city into act two. The ellipses in the last line as well as the canoe’s movement from left to right encourage us to turn the page and continue the story.

7. **B Story:** In the B story, we’re introduced the bustling city, a setting that’s so important it becomes a character in and of itself. There’s another full page spread, emphasizing this as a turning point in the bear’s musical career. We see his name in lights – quite literally here – and the large billboard on the verso page features him in a tuxedo, showing how his transformation from a wild mammal into a professional musician has begun.
8. **Fun and Games:** The bear plays in giant theaters to sold-out crowds. At the height of the fun and games, we have a full spread, and each page contains three panels, once again mimicking and building on the music the bear creates until it reaches a crescendo: “wild applause and standing ovations and huge admiration.” The polysyndeton adds to the climax while the phrase “wild applause” hints at the inherent tension between the two worlds the bear inhabits: the wild forest and the civilized city. The fun and games continue on the next spread as well as the bear’s fame continues to spread. Now he’s recording albums, interviewing for magazines and winning awards. The clever puns in the headlines clipped to the bulletin board (“Piano Playing Bear is a Real Smash!” and “Paws for Thought!”) add to the lighthearted, playful tone.
9. **Midpoint:** The stakes are raised when we turn the page and see the story’s high point both literally and symbolically: The bear sits atop a roof amidst the city skyline. “The city was everything he had hoped it would be,” the text tells us, but this is a false victory for our friend.
10. **Bad Guys Close In:** That the next line starts with a “But” emphasizes the contrast, the something that is tugging at bear’s heart. He misses the forest. He misses his old friends. And he misses his home. The repetition of “missed” three times (each iteration is also on its own line) illustrates emptiness and loneliness. The somber colors (dark blues, greens, blacks and browns) add to the downcast mood. That the bear has undone his tie and seems unaware of the falling star in the sky emphasizes his defeat.

11. **All Is Lost:** After the bear decides to return to the forest (the two horizontal panels mimic his movement as he runs back to the forest on all fours, a moment that is reminiscent of Peter Brown's *Mr. Tiger Goes Wild*), he reaches the clearing and it's empty. The artful sentence fragment highlights this void: "No piano, no bears, no anything." It seems that everything has collapsed around our hero. He's given up his music career, and now he doesn't even have his old friends; he has nothing. This is a false defeat.
12. **Dark Night of the Soul:** On the recto page of the spread, there are no figures (the bear himself is butted up against the gutter on the verso page), only words in the middle of this forest clearing. The text informs us of the bear's greatest fears: that his friends have forgotten him or, even worse, left him behind. This is the darkest point in bear's journey, but the heavenly light streaming in from the top of the page hints at a happy-ever-after ending.
13. **Break into Three:** A gray bear, a familiar friend, steps out from behind a tree. Without saying a word, this friend leads the bear on a chase through the forest. Ultimately, they arrive at a sight that truly does make the bear's "fur stand on end": the bear's beloved piano surrounded by signs and symbols from his stint on Broadway. The bear's two worlds have been combined to form a harmonious whole.
14. **Finale:** The bear realizes he hadn't been forgotten and that his friends would always be there to listen and watch – even if from afar. The two panels on the recto page suggest the bear's story – and the inherent music within the story's pages – is winding down.
15. **Final Image:** The bear puts on his most important concert for his most important audience: his four-legged friends. Compared to the opening image where the bear stands by himself next to his newfound piano, now the bear is the center of attention (he's also almost literally the center of the page), and the other bears surround in admiration and awe. That the circle extends across the foreground makes us part of the supportive audience as well.

The last image on the end pages shows the bear sans tuxedo with his arm around the gray bear, emphasizing the theme of companionship and contrasting with the empty end papers at the story's start.