

Dealing With Grief and Loss

A Language Arts Unit

Dear Educator,

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 1 in 9 children will experience the death of a parent by the age of 20. And students face other losses—the death of siblings, classmates, and school community members.

With support from The New York Life Foundation, Scholastic has prepared the lesson plans included in this guide to help students explore the subject of loss through the lens of language arts. These materials are intended to help students begin to gain a better understanding of grief and loss, by building greater compassion for a bereaved peer or a stronger foundation for managing their own grief in the future. Our lesson plans encourage creativity and self-expression as a way to manage complex feelings relating to loss.

The lesson plans enclosed may spark strong emotions in a child who has recently experienced the death of a loved one. If you are seeking more concrete guidance on helping a student manage a loss, or ways to navigate a loss in the school community, please visit our comprehensive website at www.scholastic.com/childrenandgrief.

We hope that the enclosed lesson plans and resources will build students' compassion and creative expression, broaden their understanding of loss and grief, and foster open discussion in a safe environment.

Sincerely,

The New York Life Foundation and Scholastic Inc.

What's Inside

Page 2—Response to Literature:

Have students read the poem "Say Not in Grief" and answer the questions on the page. Then have them complete Worksheet 1, along with a partner, to explore what they read.

Page 3—Memory Books: Making a memory book helps children memorialize and honor someone who has

been lost. In this activity, students will create their own memory books. Have them use Worksheet 2 to brainstorm ideas for their books.

Page 4—Advice From Teachers: Read valuable tips and coping strategies from teachers who have experienced a loss in the school community.



"Say Not in Grief" Poetry Activity

ABOUT THIS LESSON PLAN

SUBJECT

Language Arts

DURATION

45 minutes

OBJECTIVE

Students will read and respond to a poem, answering a series of questions about the poem's meaning, structure, and style.

MATERIALS

Worksheet 1, pencil or pen, photocopy of this page.

DIRECTIONS

Share the poem below with students. Invite students to answer the questions. Next, pass out a copy of Worksheet 1 to each student, and invite him or her to complete the three activities.

Say Not in Grief

Say not in grief that she is no more
but say in thankfulness that she was
A death is not the extinguishing of a light,
but the putting out of the lamp
because the dawn has come.

—Rabindranath Tagore

QUESTIONS

1. How does this poem make you feel? Is it a hopeful or a sad poem? Why do you feel the way you do about it?

2. What does "extinguishing" mean? How does the word relate to death?

3. The poet is grateful for the life of the person who was lost. Who are you thankful for, and why?

4. The poet compares a life ending to "the putting out of the lamp/because the dawn has come." Compare and contrast a "lamp" with "dawn." How are they the same? How are they different?

"I Remember You" Memory Book Project

ABOUT THIS LESSON PLAN

SUBJECT

Language Arts

DURATION

45 minutes

OBJECTIVE

Students will be gently encouraged to deal with personal feelings by sharing favorite memories, creating art, writing letters, and expressing themselves creatively with this Memory

Book project. Classroom teachers may find it helpful to include a school guidance counselor in this activity.

MATERIALS

Worksheet 2, old photographs, card stock (8 x 10 size, five sheets per student), markers or crayons, pencils, glue, a 3-hole punch, and yarn for binding the books together.

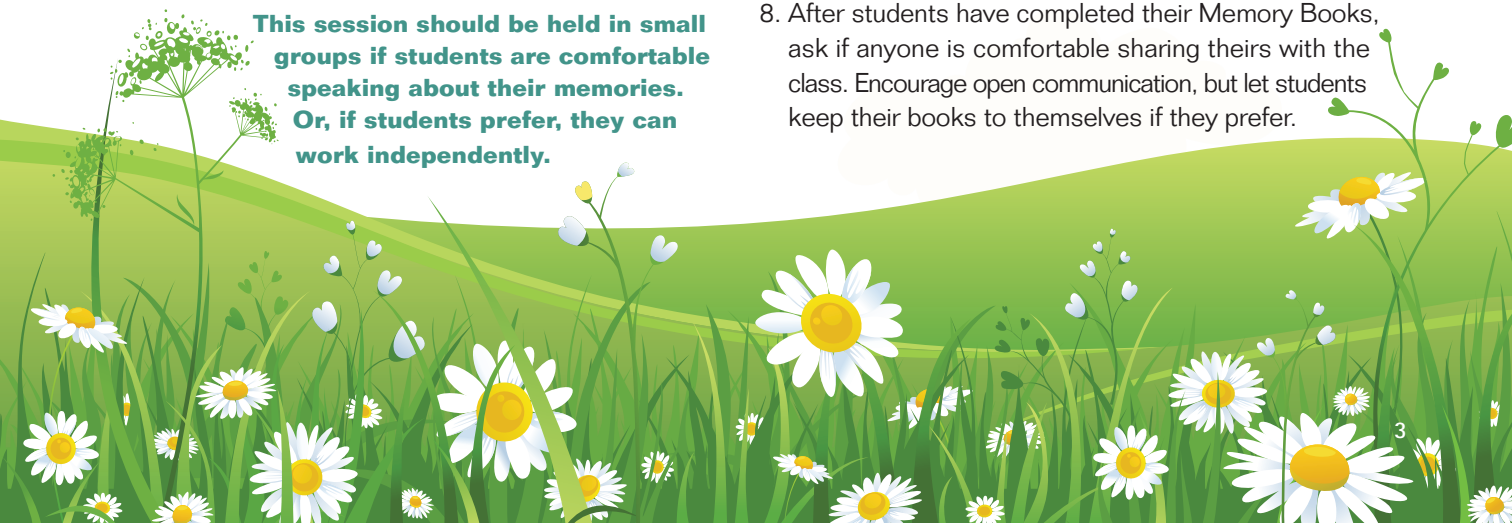
DIRECTIONS

1. Give students five sheets of cardstock. Have them punch three holes along the left side of each sheet of cardstock (so the pages can be bound together to make a book).
2. Fasten the pieces of cardstock together by tying pieces of yarn through each hole.
3. Ask students to paste the photograph or illustration of their special person in the center of the cover of the Memory Book. Encourage them to write the person's name underneath.
4. Next, on page one of the Memory Book, invite students to write about their chosen person and how he or she is related to them.

SET UP AND PREPARE

1. A few days before this project, ask students to think of a person, historical figure, or pet who has passed away whose memory they'd like to honor. Ask students to bring in a photograph or draw an illustration of this person. Students may also bring in keepsakes—such as buttons, fabric, other photographs, or drawings—that remind them of this person.
2. On the day of the project, have each student write down the person's name and hold a brief brainstorming session to answer questions about him or her. Ask the questions (see steps 4, 5, 6, and 7) that appear in the Directions section. Students should use Worksheet 2 to take notes.
5. On page 2, ask students to write about their favorite memory with this person. Encourage them to add illustrations, keepsakes from home, or keywords and decorations.
6. On page 3, invite students to write or illustrate what this person was good at, any special skills or talents, or what made him or her unique.
7. On page 4, encourage students to write or illustrate how he or she will remember this person. Maybe they can share a special poem, an activity they plan to do, or the name of a person they will talk to about the person or pet they lost.
8. After students have completed their Memory Books, ask if anyone is comfortable sharing theirs with the class. Encourage open communication, but let students keep their books to themselves if they prefer.

This session should be held in small groups if students are comfortable speaking about their memories. Or, if students prefer, they can work independently.



Teachers Speak About Loss

Below, teachers who have experienced a loss in the school community share their wisdom and strategies for dealing with grief. For more helpful resources, visit our website at www.scholastic.com/childrenandgrief.

"We are a family in my classroom, so when someone needs extra love and compassion after a loss, we all step in to offer it. Even first graders recognize this. They offer extra hugs, invite the person to sit next to them at lunch, and aren't judgmental when someone cries. I have allowed students to bring a stuffed animal to school that was given to them by their loved one. They can hug the animal when they are sad. This is a visual cue to me as well. I know when they may need extra space or an extra hug. I have also allowed them to keep a small picture frame of their loved one on their desk, if they request it. Over the years, I've become better at showing my compassion for students. *It's a hard situation and everyone grieves differently.* Experience has taught me to be on the lookout for trigger situations that can bring the grief crashing down on the student. I also have learned to give an adjustment time with behavior. *Young children don't always have the verbal skills to express themselves.* So, they use behavior and sometimes aggression to deal with grief. Instead of office referrals, I've learned to involve parents and the guidance counselor first. It's hard to know what to say to your student. You feel almost helpless. You're not sure how they grieve. I try to talk with parents before they come back to school. That way I can assess behavior, moods, or changes in eating habits. When they arrive back, all you have are your words and actions. I've learned that actions sometimes speak louder than words. *Hugs, pats on the shoulder, holding hands* while walking to the lunch room, and reading a book with that student during independent reading time will be the things that help the most."

—Jennifer Capps, First Grade Teacher, York, SC

"One of our classroom teachers passed away, and our school community saw tremendous grief on the part of the kids. There were *counselors available for kids* and families as needed. Mostly it was found that letting kids and adults talk about her was the best medicine. For children, *consistency is best*; keeping the same routines, in school and at home. Let them draw, write, create for the ill or passed away friend. We teachers let them talk and did not "disallow" the name of the *person who passed away* to be used. We were also honest with the kids about what happened."

—Amy Locke, Kindergarten Teacher, Jackson, MI

"In the past few years, we have had many students who have lost a parent due to illnesses, or siblings due to tragic accidents. Many times, *school is a place of refuge*, because it is a constant in the student's life. It is a place where they can find normalcy whereas there might be chaos at home. If the student is having emotional problems due to a loss, the *guidance department and crisis counselor* will help in any way possible to counsel the student and recommend additional outside counseling if necessary."

—Angela Smith, Middle School Teacher, Roebling, NJ

Children and Grief Website

For further resources, please visit www.scholastic.com/childrenandgrief, which contains a wealth of links and information for educators and families. It includes:

- How to React When a Death Strikes the School Community
- Leading Children Through Their Grief: Downloads and Guides
- Ways to Commemorate a Loss: Memorials, Sympathy Cards, and More
- A downloadable PDF of The New York Life Foundation's informative and helpful guide, *After a Loved One Dies—How Children Grieve*. You may also order a free bound copy from www.nylgriefguide.com.

Live Webcast: March 24, 2011

Hear more from students who have experienced a loss. A live Scholastic webcast is planned for March 24, 2011, with youth grief expert Dr. David Schonfeld. It will feature advice for educators on the subject of dealing with loss.

Sign up today by visiting
www.scholastic.com/childrenandgrief