

Picture Books on Grief and Death

(* denotes series)

Picture Books

Maybe Tomorrow? by Charlotte Agell

This tender exploration of loss illuminates the sustaining power of kindness, empathy, and friendship. It will resonate with anyone who has experienced hardship or grief, from the death of a loved one or a pet, to the transition to a new home, family situation, or learning environment. It is especially comforting during this time of social distancing and the uncertainty around what the future holds, sensitively demonstrating that we are stronger together.

Where Do They Go? By Julia Alvarez

"When somebody dies,/where do they go?" This poem explores death through simple but evocative questions. ("Do they drift with the snow?/Are they sad? Are they cold?") Each question leads naturally to the next, providing gentle prompts for possible solace along the way: "Is it them that I feel, alive in my heart?/Is it there that I go when I'm sad we're apart?"

If Nathan Were Here by Mary Bahr

In this book, author Mary Bahr gently explores the grief of a young boy whose best friend has died. With the help of an understanding teacher, a kind neighbor, and an empathetic parent, the boy finds ways to give expression to his questions and sorrow and to reach out to someone else who needs him.

We Dream Medicine Dreams by Lisa Boivin

When a little girl dreams about a bear, her grandfather explains how we connect with the knowledge of our ancestors through dreams. Bear, Hawk, Caribou, and Wolf all have teachings to share to help us live a good life. But when Grampa gets sick and falls into a coma, the little girl must lean on his teachings as she learns to say goodbye.

The Dead Bird by Margaret Wise Brown

One day, the children find a bird lying on its side with its eyes closed and no heartbeat. They are very sorry, so they decide to say good-bye. In the park, they dig a hole for the bird and cover it with warm sweet-ferns and flowers. Finally, they sing sweet songs to send the little bird on its way.

Big Cat, Little Cat by Elisha Cooper

"There was a cat/who lived alone./Until the day/a new cat came . . ." And so a story of friendship begins, following the two cats through their days, months, and years until one day, the older cat has to go. And he doesn't come back.

Bear Island by Matthew Cordell

Louise and her family are sad over the loss of their beloved dog, Charlie. But on a visit to an island Charlie loved, something strange happens: She meets a bear. At

first, she's afraid, but soon she realizes that the bear is sad, too. As Louise visits more often, she realizes that getting over loss takes time. And just when she starts to feel better, it's time for Bear to bed down for the winter. Once again, Louise believes that life will not be the same. But sometimes, things can change for the better, and on the first warm day of spring, her family welcomes a new member.

Grandad's Island by Benji Davies

At the bottom of Syd's garden, through the gate and past the tree, is Grandad's house. Syd can let himself in any time he likes. But one day when Syd comes to call, Grandad isn't in any of the usual places. He's in the attic, where he ushers Syd through a door, and the two of them journey to a wild, beautiful island awash in color where Grandad decides he will remain. So Syd hugs Grandad one last time and sets sail for home. Visiting Grandad's house at the bottom of the garden again, he finds it just the same as it's always been -- except that Grandad isn't there anymore.

Ride the Wind by Nicola Davies

Javier has a secret. On one of his father's fishing trips, still hurting from the loss of his mother, he finds an albatross caught on the hooks—alive, if only barely. Against the orders of his father, who has been distant and disparaging, Javier smuggles the bird to safety and begins nursing it back to health. Every day the albatross accepts a little more food, but she shows no sign of wanting to use her wings. And if Javier's new friend refuses to fly, how will she ever find her way home?

Nana Upstairs & Nana Downstairs by Tomie DePaola

Tommy is four years old, and he loves visiting the home of his grandmother, Nana Downstairs, and his great-grandmother, Nana Upstairs. But one day Tommy's mother tells him Nana Upstairs won't be there anymore, and Tommy must struggle with saying good-bye to someone he loves.

The Rabbit Listened by Cori Doerrfeld

When something sad happens, Taylor doesn't know where to turn. All the animals are sure they have the answer. The chicken wants to talk it out, but Taylor doesn't feel like chatting. The bear thinks Taylor should get angry, but that's not quite right either. One by one, the animals try to tell Taylor how to act, and one by one they fail to offer comfort. Then the rabbit arrives. All the rabbit does is listen . . . which is just what Taylor needs.

When Sadness is at Your Door by Eva Eland

Sadness can be scary and confusing at any age! When we feel sad, especially for long periods of time, it can seem as if the sadness is a part of who we are--an overwhelming, invisible, and scary sensation. Eland brilliantly approaches this

feeling as if it is a visitor. She gives it a shape and a face, and encourages the reader to give it a name, all of which helps to demystify it and distinguish it from ourselves.

Finding François by Gus Gordon

Alice, a little piglet, loves life with her grandmother, making lists and crème brûlée, organizing buttons, and taking walks. Still, Alice wishes she had a sister--or even a brother. So, she does the sensible thing: She writes a note, tucks it into a bottle, and tosses it into the river, where it drifts out to sea, is captured by an octopus, picked up by a seagull, and arrives at a faraway lighthouse. There, François, a little dog, lives with his dad. François is everything Alice could wish for in a friend, and soon the seas are busy with their bottled correspondence. But when a big change comes, and Alice can't bring herself to write François more letters, will the simple comforts of time, love, and friendship restore the light to Alice's life?

Dance Like a Leaf by AJ Irving

As her grandmother's health declines, a young girl begins to lovingly take the lead in their cozy shared autumn traditions.

The Invisible Leash by Patrice Karst

"When our pets aren't with us anymore, an Invisible Leash connects our hearts to each other. Forever." That's what Zack's friend Emily tells him after his dog dies. Zack doesn't believe it. He only believes in what he can see. But on an enlightening journey through their neighborhood—and through his grief—he comes to feel the comforting tug of the Invisible Leash. And it feels like love.

The Invisible String by Patrice Karst

A mother tells her two children that they're all connected by an invisible string. "That's impossible!" the children insist, but still they want to know more: "What kind of string?" The answer is the simple truth that binds us all: An Invisible String made of love. Even though you can't see it with your eyes, you can feel it deep in your heart, and know that you are always connected to the ones you love. Does everybody have an Invisible String? How far does it reach? Does it ever go away?

The Boy and the Gorilla by Jackie Azua Kramer

On the day of his mother's funeral, a young boy conjures the very visitor he needs to see: a gorilla. Wise and gentle, the gorilla stays on to answer the heart-heavy questions the boy hesitates to ask his father: Where did his mother go? Will she come back home? Will we all die? Yet with the gorilla's friendship, the boy slowly begins to discover moments of comfort in tending flowers, playing catch, and climbing trees. Most of all, the gorilla knows that it helps to simply talk about the loss—especially with those who share your grief and who may feel alone, too.

If You Miss Me by Jocelyn Li Langrand

Charlie loves to dance her way through life with her grandma. They may not always be together, but each time they part Grandma says, "If you miss me, look at the moon." Then winter brings unexpected change, and not even dancing feels the same. What will Charlie do? Will Grandma come to see her dance again? In the biggest show of the year, Charlie finds her answer.

Ida, Always by Caron Levis

Gus lives in a big park in the middle of an even bigger city, and he spends his days with Ida. Ida is right there. Always. Then one sad day, Gus learns that Ida is very sick, and she isn't going to get better. The friends help each other face the difficult news with whispers, sniffles, cuddles, and even laughs. Slowly Gus realizes that even after Ida is gone, she will still be with him—through the sounds of their city, and the memories that live in their favorite spots.

When We Fly by Jess McGeachin

Lucy has always been good at fixing things--the wonky mailbox, broken watches, even Dad's old binoculars. And Lucy is happy to help her dad; they share a special bond. It's just the two of them, after all. So when Lucy finds a tiny bird with a broken wing, she's sure she can fix him too--but not everything that's broken can be fixed.

When Grandfather Flew by Patricia McLachlan

Milo's grandfather is fascinated by birds. He admires their freedom and never loses an opportunity to point out the things that make each one special. When he can no longer see as well as he used to, Milo helps him spot and take care of some of his favorites: hovering kestrels, fragile chickadees, and the bald eagle soaring high overhead. One day when Milo comes home, Grandpa isn't there. But when the boy sees an eagle swooping through the sky above, he knows Grandpa is still with them: reborn in the skies, just as he'd wanted.

Always Remember by Cece Meng

After Old Turtle swims his last swim and breathes his last breath, and the waves gently take him away, his friends lovingly remember how he impacted each and every one of them. As the sea animals think back on how much better Old Turtle made their lives and their world, they realize that he is not truly gone, because his memory and legacy will last forever.

Addy's Cup of Sugar by Jon Muth

Addy has moved to a new neighborhood with her beloved kitten, Trumpet. They are best friends, and inseparable. But when Trumpet is hit by a car, Addy seeks her wise friend, Stillwater. She is sure he will know how to bring Trumpet back to life. Stillwater tells Addy she will need to find a special medicine. To do this, she must go to everyone in the neighborhood and collect a cup of sugar. But there is

one condition: it can only come from the home of someone who has never been touched by loss. Addy goes from house to house. And when she returns home, Stillwater asks for her cup of sugar. But, of course, she has none. For there isn't a person who has not felt the pain of loss. How Addy comes to understand how this special medicine works makes for a reassuring story of consolation and healing.

The Goodbye Book by Todd Parr

Through the lens of a pet fish who has lost his companion, Todd Parr tells a moving and wholly accessible story about saying goodbye. Touching upon the host of emotions children experience, Todd reminds readers that it's okay not to know all the answers, and that someone will always be there to support them. An invaluable resource for life's toughest moments.

Where Lily Isn't by Julie Paschkis

Lily ran and jumped and barked and whimpered and growled and wiggled and wagged and licked and snuggled. But not now. It is hard to lose a pet. There is sadness, but also hope—for a beloved pet lives on in your heart, your memory, and your imagination.

Still Mine by Jayne Pillemer

Our hands around a cup of hot chocolate, sweet and warm. Our boots splashing in puddles. The song you sing to me when the sun comes up. This is how we say "I love you" every day. But what happens when the person you love is gone? Your heart hurts and you miss them, but even though your eyes can't see them anymore and your arms can't hug them, they are still there, still yours to love . . . just in a different way.

You'll Find Me by Amanda Rawson Hill

Loss becomes remembrance in this book that offers tender ways to pay tribute to, and meaningfully incorporate, a loved one's lost presence into present and future life experiences. Be it departed friends, family, pets, and more, memories can carry us beyond the precious moments we have together to keep the ones we loved before in mind forever.

The Memory Box by Joanna Rowland

The child in the story creates a memory box to keep mementos and written memories of the loved one, to help in the grieving process. The unique point of view allows the reader to imagine the loss of any they have loved - a friend, family member, or even a pet.

One Wave at a Time by Holly Thompson

After his father dies, Kai experiences all kinds of emotions: sadness, anger, fear, guilt. Sometimes they crash and mix together. Other times, there are no emotions at all—just flatness. As Kai and his family adjust to life without Dad, the waves

still roll in. But with the help of friends and one another, they learn to cope—and, eventually, heal.

The Biggest Thing of All by Kathryn Thurman

One day, Grandpa lets her in on a secret: pointing to an ant, he says that everything is a part of something bigger. One ant is part of a colony. One rain drop becomes part of the ocean. One star is part of the universe. When Lily's Grandma passes away suddenly, Lily struggles to deal with and understand her grief. She comes to realize that they are all part of something bigger - a family - and that LOVE is the biggest thing of all.

Wherever You Are, My Love Will Find You by Nancy Tillman

Love is the greatest gift we have to give our children. It's the one thing they can carry with them each and every day. If love could take shape it might look something like these heartfelt words and images from the inimitable Nancy Tillman.

Old Pearl by Wendy Wahman

Theo loves feeding the birds. All the birds. But he tries his hardest to aim his seeds to the old bird with the raggedy wing—Pearl. Soon, they are sharing apples and peanut butter, enjoying a good breeze, and sitting heartbeat to heartbeat. But sometimes friends have to say goodbye.

The Longest Letsgoboy by Derick Wilder

Poignant, hopeful, and lovingly told, this dog's journey—told by the dog himself in his own unique words—proves that love abides beyond a lifetime, out of sight but never far away.

Nonfiction Books

Goob and His Grandpa by Stephen Covey (ER 158 COV)

After the death of his grandfather, Goob has a hard time getting back into his normal routine. But when all of his friends spend time with him doing the things he loves to do, he discovers ways to stop feeling so sad.

Saying Goodbye to Uncle Joe: What to Expect When Someone You Love Dies by Nancy Loewen (JPN 155.9 LOE)

When someone you love dies, you might feel sad, lonely, and confused. What do you do? No matter who your loved one was, this story can help you through the tough times.

Lost in the Clouds by Tom Tinn-Disbury (JPN 155.9 TIN)

You don't have to weather the storm alone! Billy misses his mommy very much. She lives in the clouds. Some days when he and Daddy play in the garden, he knows that Mommy is letting the sun shine for them. But not all days are like that. Sometimes Mommy's clouds are dark, and Billy feels sad and alone. This moving book about grief shows children that, despite their loss, they always have someone to talk to.

In Loving Memory: A Child's Guide to Understanding a Funeral and Starting the Grieving Process by Katherine Pendergast (JPN 155.937 PEN)

Harper is really sad. One morning after she hears unhappy news that her grandma has died, the ten-year-old finds comfort in her mother's caring arms. And already missing her relative's kindness, she is inspired when encouraged to share her favorite moments of spending days together. When it's time to start the funeral process, Harper wonders how she'll join her family in laying her grandmother to rest. And with supportive parents letting her decide what she wants to do, the devoted girl gets a chance to say goodbye in her own way.

Little Unicorn is Sad by Aurelie Chien Chow Chine (JPN 159.4 CHI)*

A little unicorn's rainbow-colored mane shifts to a single color when he's feeling a particularly strong emotion. It seems like a storm comes over him when he's sad, and his mane turns deep blue. But when he repeats a breathing exercise, the clouds clear and his rainbow returns--and if he ever feels sad again, he'll know just what to do.

When Dinosaurs Die by Laurie Krasny Brown (JNF 155.9 BRO)*

No one can really understand death, but to children, the passing away of a loved one can be especially perplexing and troublesome. This is true whether the loss is a family member, friend, or pet. Here to offer advice and reassurance are the wise dinosaurs from the bestselling Dino Tale series. This succinct and thorough guide helps dispel the mystery and negative connotations associated with death, providing answers to kids' most-often asked questions.