

Books Dealing with Loss for Home and School Discussions

Elementary/Picture Books:

- ***The Invisible String***, by Patrice Karst, a favorite in the field. It is about that unseen, but heart-inspired, tie that connects us to our loved ones at all times, in all places—here and beyond. A comforting thought for a grieving child and their family and one that would offer a wonderful opportunity for a creative expression activity--inviting the child or youth to draw a picture of them and the one who died with a heartstring connecting the two. As children also fear further loss of loved ones after an experience of death—the child could show that string connecting everyone they love and who cares for them.
- ***Remembering Ethan***, by Lesléa Newman. It explores the idea that people grieve differently. Parents sometimes have a difficult time talking about their dead child while a sibling may be stuck grappling with their own grief.
- ***The Memory Box***, by Joanna Rowland—a heartfelt and comforting book about how to keep love and memories of a beloved family member alive after they die. It's simply and lyrically rendered, while being honest about a young person's feelings as they come up. The book also offers the perfect model for a child doing their own memory box, too—sometimes it's comforting to share our memories of that person with other family members.
- ***Why Do We Cry?*** by Fran Pintadera. This is not specific to grief, but it explores in amazing detail all the emotions that may be expressed as we cry—all emotions that might be experienced by a grieving child.
- ***The Rabbit Listened***, by Cori Doerrfeld. Not about death per se, but a wonderful fable/story for what happens after loss and how different people may try to make you feel better or have advice for you—when really what you need is someone to listen, to simply be with you in empathy. A good story to help kids learn to find the way they need to express their feelings and to help understand what support they need.
- ***Cry, Heart, But Never Break***, by Glenn Ringtved. A story about the loss of a grandparent that helps children understand the value of loss and the importance of being able to say goodbye.
- ***Ida, Always***, by Caron Levis. This is the story of two zoo polar bears. Ida becomes sick with an illness that cannot be healed and later dies. The book explores the range of emotions that happen during a terminal illness, with a focus on making the most of our time with loved ones.

Grades 3-5:

- ***The Taste of Blackberries***, by Doris Buchanan Smith. This book follows a boy who whose best friend dies unexpectedly. Good for class and family discussions.
- ***The Summer of the Gypsy Moths***, by Sara Pennypacker. This is the story of two foster children who must find a way to work together after their caregiver dies. Two very different girls come together in the face of loss and learn to create family from new beginnings.
- ***Isaiah Dunn Is My Hero***, by Kelly J. Baptist. The story follows a boy who is told he must be the man of the house after his father dies. He negotiates the sadness of his family members while

he uses the stories in his father's journal to give him courage. A good book about change, growing up, and the inspiration we take from others.

- ***Bridge to Terabithia***, by Katherine Paterson. This is the classic story of friendship and loss. A young boy learns how to rely on his family and the gifts and memories of a special friendship to sustain him through his grief.

Middle School:

- ***The Stars Beneath Our Feet***, by David Barclay Moore. This is a story about complex relationships and complex grief as a young teen grapples with his brother's gang-related death, and yet it is told with grace and clarity. It is also about resilience, art as healing, and an unlikely friendship.
- ***The Thing about Jellyfish***, by Ali Benjamin. This story deals with a young girl's guilt and grief around her best friend's death and how she negotiates all of this through an intense exploration of jellyfish.
- ***The Crossover***, by Kwame Alexander. This is a novel in verse about twin boys who lose their father to a heart attack toward the end of the story and who discover what matters most. A great book for boys, a lyrical, easy read. The death doesn't happen until the end but extremely strong, heartfelt writing. Excerpts would make for excellent group discussions.
- ***Red, White, and Whole***, by Rajani LaRocca. A middle grade novel in verse about an Indian American girl struggling with her own cultural identity and her mother's new cancer diagnosis. A coming-of-age story about individualism and communities, the emotions of being a middle schooler, dreams for the future, and how families negotiate serious illness.
- ***The Care and Feeding of a Pet Black Hole***, by Michelle Cuevas. Middle schooler Stella Rodriguez visits NASA and unexpectedly brings a black hole (that swallows everything it touches) home with her as she navigates life after the death of her father. A story about grief and loss that is also unexpected, original, and funny.
- ***Mockingbird***, by Kathryn Erskine. This novel follows a young girl with Asperger's whose brother dies in a school shooting. Her brother had been the one to help her negotiate a sometimes confusing world, so she feels very alone as her father is also lost in his own grief. New friendships sustain her as she begins to make new connections.
- ***After Zero***, by Christina Collins. The main character chooses to become mute after a loss in order to deal with her depression and anxiety. A story about the power of words, both said and unsaid.
- ***From You to Me***, by K. A. Holt. The story follows a girl whose sister died a few years before. She discovers a wish list of things her sister wanted to do in middle school, so Amelia decides to undertake this list herself in hopes that it will "cure" her grief. She eventually realizes that there is no going back to her "old" self and that she has to move forward. Also a good look at how a death affects a whole family and community.

High School:

- ***The Sky Is Everywhere***, by Jandy Nelson. This novel is about a teenage girl and her guardian grandparents dealing with her sister's death and finding a new normal.



- ***Long Way Down***, by Jason Reynolds. The book takes place over the course of 60 seconds but examines gun violence, revenge, the emotions and assumptions trapped in your head. A powerful meditation on self-awareness and self-regulation.
- ***Remembering Mog***, by Colby Rodowsky. The story follows the teenaged Annie, whose pending high school graduation triggers memories of her sister's murder two years before. A good depiction of the shock, denial, and raw grief that accompanies a violent loss.
- ***Hush***, by Jacqueline Woodson. A poignant look at a family torn apart by grief and a young woman trying to determine who she is now in the face of violence, loss, a move, and new identities.
- ***I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter***, by Erika L. Sanchez. The main character loses her sister and must navigate how different cultures handle grief, the expectations that are placed on surviving children, and her own complicated emotions.
- ***The Astonishing Color of After***, by Emily X. R. Pan. Leigh Chen Sanders, half Asian and half white, travels to Taiwan after her mother's suicide to meet her grandparents for the first time. Love, magic, and family secrets all coexist as Leigh begins to explore how conversations about mental health had been something her family did not discuss.
- ***Patron Saints of Nothing***, by Randy Ribay. A coming-of-age story about a Filipino-American teenager who tries to uncover the truth about his cousin's murder. The protagonist struggles to reconcile faith, his family, his immigrant identity, and his dreams for his future.
- ***The Truth Is***, by NoNieqa Ramos. Fifteen-year-old Verdad is struggling with the recent death of her best friend (who died during a racially-motivated mass shooting) and the expectations of her family. Then she meets and feels a deep connection with a new trans student, and she must explore her own prejudices and understanding of identity. Captures the turbulence of loss, change, and teenage emotions.