



Books That Heal: Sharing Experiences & Finding Comfort

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A tragic event is difficult to comprehend for even the most mature, knowledgeable adult. For children and adolescents faced with trying to understand such an overwhelming experience, the task is even more daunting. How can a young person grasp the enormity, meaning and consequences of an occurrence that brought death, injury or harm into his life? These are the times, as parents and teachers, that words fail us. Sometimes we are consumed with our own emotions and other times, we cannot seem to begin these important conversations. Children's and young adult literature can give us a starting point. What can we learn from reading books with our children?

Well-written and beautifully illustrated books tell a story, not about a singular problem or event, but about the lives of the characters. These people (and animals) emerge as friends, role models, storytellers and reliable advisors. There is an opportunity for self-revelation, problem solving and social support. Understanding links between the characters' lives and the authors' lives, and ultimately the readers' lives offers insight into the most difficult situations. Books and stories are an important complement to other therapeutic activities. Young readers may become inspired to write, paint or photograph their own experiences. When we read together in a group, it is easier to begin talking about difficult and often painful issues. The characters become members of the discussion group, and the group gives children and teens their voices...strong and authentic.

Some books tell one story while others allow the reader to share in many stories. For example, *911 The Book of Help* or *The Color Of Absence: 12 Stories About Loss and Hope* are collections of reflections, poetry and writings that allow readers to enter the authors' world. We learn something about our favorite storytellers. They have dared to trust us, the reader, with their own personal reactions and pain. Authors allow their characters to question, demand answers, get angry, feel sad and somehow learn to move forward and grow to make the world and their lives better. Picture books offer children and adults a unique opportunity to explore the interplay of words and images. Each page is filled with revelations. Young children and the adults who read with them will be inspired to share their own stories.

I asked colleagues in the field of children's literature- authors, educators, booksellers, and librarians to offer suggestions for children and teens. I'd like to share this "library" with you. These books focus on experiences loss and grief, yet they also tell stories of hope, comfort and resilience.

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Review and Annotation Sources:

Amazon.com, School Library Journal, Publishers Weekly, The Midwest Book Review, Mia Wenjen, Kirkus Reviews, Common Sense Media

YOUNG CHILDREN

Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley (Harper Collins, 1992)

Ages 4-up. Warm and sensitive illustrations reflect the hopeful mood of this tale about woodland animals learning to accept their friend Badger's death.

Saying Good-bye to Lulu by Corinne Demas (Little, Brown, 2009)

Pre-school – Grade 2. A young girl and her lovable dog, Lulu, are the best of friends. They play games together, explore their neighborhood, and even cuddle up to read bedtime stories each night. Lulu is the best dog a girl could ever hope for, but when she grows older and gradually becomes weak, the little girl must face the sad possibility of losing her dear friend, and inevitably, cope with the death of her canine companion. Though she is deeply saddened by Lulu's passing and misses her very much, over time the little girl discovers that the sweet memory of her beloved Lulu will live on forever.

The Dead Bird by Margaret Wise Brown (Harper-Collins 1995)

Ages 4 and up. Finding a still warm but dead bird, a group of children give it a fitting burial and every day, until they forget, come again to the woods to sing to the dead bird and place fresh flowers on its grave. An excellent handling of the subject of death in which all young children have a natural interest.

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney by Judith Viorst, illustrated by Erik Blegvad. (Atheneum, 1999).

Ages 4-8. A young boy copes with the death of his cat, Barney. My cat Barney died this Friday. I was very sad. My mother said we could have a funeral for him, and I should think of ten good things about Barney so I could tell them. But the small boy who loved Barney can only think of nine. Later, while talking with his father, he discovers the tenth -- and begins to understand.

Uncle Monarch and the Day of the Dead by Judy Goldman (Boyd's Mill Press, 2008)

Ages 7 and up. A family celebrates Día de Muertos, a holiday for remembering those who have passed. When the monarch butterflies return to her Mexican countryside, Lupita knows that Día de Muertos, "the Day of the Dead," is near. She and her favorite uncle watch the butterflies flutter in the trees. When a butterfly lands on Lupita's hand, her uncle reminds her that she should never hurt a monarch because they are believed to be the souls of the departed. Lupita and her family get ready for the holiday. When the first of November arrives, the family will go to the cemetery to honor the memories of their loved ones. But this year is different - Lupita's uncle cannot join them. Now, Lupita learns the true meaning of the celebration.

Loss of a Parent

Boats for Papa by Jessixa Bagley (Roaring Brook Press, 2015)

PreS-Gr 2—"They didn't have much, but they always had each other." So begins this spare tale of longing and acceptance. Buckley and his mother (a pair of beavers) spend their days near their ocean-front home, gathering driftwood treasures, playing together, and having picnics in the sand. His favorite pastime is using his discoveries to make miniature ships to send out to sea with a note that reads, "For Papa, Love Buckley." He is sure the boats will reach his father if they don't wash back up on shore. He works tirelessly over the course of a year to create new and beautiful boats for his absent parent. One evening when he forgets his customary note, he runs back to grab a piece of paper from Mama's desk and discovers his ships hidden there. That night when Mama goes to retrieve Buckley's boat, the note reads, "For Mama, Love Buckley." Bagley's

tender watercolors and lyrical text give weight and volume to a family's grief. Her portrayal of Buckley's hope and his mother's acts of love are heartbreakingly beautiful and authentic. The ambiguity of Papa's absence allows this story to transcend specifics and gives it a timeless and universal appeal.

Knock Knock My Father's Dream for Me by Daniel Beaty (Little Brown, 2013)

Grades: K-Gr 3. Beaty tells a poignant, heart-wrenching tale of love, loss, and hope. A boy narrates how every morning he and his father play the Knock Knock game. He feigns sleep while his father raps on the door until the boy jumps into his dad's arms for a hug and an "I love you." One day, there is no knock. Left with his mother, the child deeply misses his papa and writes to him for advice, receiving a moving letter in return. Collier's watercolor and collage illustrations enhance the nuanced sentiment of the text. Following the protagonist's journey from a grief-stricken child to an accomplished strong adult, the lifelike images intermingle urban and domestic backgrounds with the symbolic innerlandscape of the narrator. As the boy writes the letter and tosses paper airplanes out the window, he glides out on a life-size paper plane expressing his plea, "Papa, come home, 'cause there are things I don't know, and when I get older I thought you could teach me." Author and illustrator's notes at the end of the book elaborate on the personal meaning of this eloquent story that speaks especially to children who are growing up in single-parent homes.

My Father's Arms are a Boat by Stein Erik Lunde and illustrated by Øyvind Torsete (Enchanted Lion Books, 2013)

A young boy, grieving his mother's death, is unable to sleep. He climbs into his father's arms to find safety and comfort. Feeling the warmth and closeness of his father, he begins to ask questions about the birds, the foxes, and whether his mother will ever wake up. They go outside under the starry sky. Loss and love are as present as the white spruces, while the father's clear answers and assurances calm his worried son.

The Blue Roses by Linda Boyden (Lee & Low, 2011)

Ages 6 and up. Every spring Rosalie, a Native American girl, and her grandfather sow tiny seeds that blossom into bright flowers. A red rosebush, planted under Rosalie's bedroom window when she was born, is later joined by pink and yellow ones "to make a sunset," Papa tells her. Rosalie asks for a blue bush, to represent the sky, but Papa explains that roses do not come in blue. When he dies the following winter, Rosalie's blue rosebush comes to her in her dreams as a symbol of love, memory, and transcendence.

The Pursuit of Liberty Belle by Amber Deckers (Orchard Books, 2008)

"These days I don't know how to talk about the things I have inside me. I just feel empty, like part of me also drowned in the ocean. Or maybe I just don't want to feel better." Just when it seems like life is almost perfect for Liberty Belle, tragedy strikes. The loss of a loved one turns her world upside down. Wrapped in grief, she struggles to get through each day, losing faith with everything around her. Will Liberty ever be able to make peace with herself and the world?

Goodbye Mousie by Robie Harris, illustrated by Jan Ormerod (Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2001).

Ages 4-8. The story of a little boy who wakes up to discover that his pet mouse has died. After expressing anger and disbelief, the boy learns that sadness and memories are part of saying goodbye.

Samantha Jane's Missing Smile: A Story about Coping with the Loss of a Parent by Julie Kaplow and Donna Pincus, illustrated by Beth Spiegel (Magination Press, 2007)

Ages 4-8. This book will gently guide young readers and their families through the feelings, thoughts, and wishes that young children aged 4 to 8 experience when a parent dies. There are helpful tools for overcoming the natural and inevitable grief associated with such loss. *Samantha Jane's Missing Smile* should be a part of every elementary school and community library collection because every school and every community will, from time to time, have children who have lost a parent and stand in need of what Sammy Jane has to share with them.

Through The Mickle Woods by Valiska Gregory, illustrated by Barry Moser (Little Brown, 1992)

Ages 6-11. A folk tale feeling to grief and healing. A stately, elegantly cadenced tale about a king who reluctantly obeys his queen's last request: to go with young Michael, taking her ring to the bear in the "mickle" (great) woods. Though the king's responses are gruff, the old bear tells them stories--of a wealthy man who has a box of answers, but not the right questions; of a frail bird who sings despite life's perils; of a weaver who learns that everything must be included if his pattern is to be strong. Hearing, debating, pondering, the king learns to bear his grief and take comfort in the boy his wife had loved. A worthy, serious effort in a growing genre: picture books for older readers. Out of print but check libraries and used book stores.

The Scar by Charlotte Moundlic (Candlewick Press, 2011)

Grades K-3. This is not a book for everyone, but it could be an important one for those in need. From the opening line—"Mom died this morning."—It's clear that this is going to be a hard book to get through, and it is, with the unnamed little boy struggling with wild fluctuations of emotion: anger at being left behind; sympathy for his grieving dad; and panic about forgetting his mother, which he tries to counteract by closing all the windows, holding his breath, and running around until his heart pounds, since he was told that she'll always be "in your heart." A scrape on his knee provides the most salient metaphor—a wound he wishes to keep fresh so as to continue hearing his mother's consoling voice, until, without him realizing it, one day it turns into a scar. This is a tough book: Moundlic's text is unsentimental and Tallec's illustrations are heavily predominated by the color red, it's honest, and in such situations that matters most.

The Very Best of Friends by Margaret Wild/Julie Vivas (Sandpiper, 1994)

Grades 2-3. A story about relationships, love and loss, survival and recovery. James and Jessie are a farm couple, childless and of indeterminate age. Jessie merely tolerates William, James' beloved cat. On the other hand, William and James spend their days together, "the very best of friends." "Then one Sunday morning James died suddenly." In her grief, Jessie quite literally shuts William out, spurning all his efforts to help. He grows "mean and lean, and he hated everything and everyone." This book may help children see that grief may cause people to withdraw from others.

Death and a Traumatic Event

A Terrible Thing Happened by Margaret M. Holmes, illustrated by Cary Pillo (Magination Press, 2000).

Ages 4 and up. A bibliotherapy-style look at the symptoms that can plague children who've witnessed something traumatic and how such children might work through/communicate about them. A springboard for discussion.

One April Morning: Children Remember The Oklahoma City Bombing by Nancy Lamb, Floyd Cooper (Illustrator) (Lothrop Lee & Shepard, 1996).

Ages 6 and up. Fifty Oklahoma City children, ranging in age from three to 14, offer their memories of and feelings about the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, whose 169 fatalities included 19 children and the parents of 100 others. Though Lamb did not interview any young people whose immediate family members were injured or killed in the blast, deeming them "still too fragile" to participate in the project, those quoted here were obviously profoundly touched by the tragedy and its chilling repercussions. "The first night it rained, it seemed like God was crying, too," said Emili." Cooper's softly focused renderings of children, many in the embrace of a consoling adult, effectively serve as all-purpose, emotion-laden backdrops to the disquieting but ultimately life-affirming text. By so openly sharing their confusion, anguish, sadness and hope, the young contributors may well inspire their peers to communicate lingering, unspoken feelings about the tragedy.

Loss of a Sibling

This Book Is For All Kids, But Especially My Sister, Libby. Libby Died. By

Jack Simon, illustrated by Annette Simon (Idea University Press, 2000). Ages 4-8. Written by a young boy. Jack Simon was five years old when his sister, Libby, died. She'd been born with a rare disorder and wasn't expected to survive six months. But she lived three and a half years, giving Jack plenty of time to get to know her. When she died, Jack struggled to understand how God could take away his little sister. Jack's mom, Annette, encouraged her son to talk about his pain, and she insightfully began a diary. Jack's questions eventually became the picture book *This Book Is for All Kids, but Especially My Sister Libby. Libby Died*. His words were illustrated with his input by his mom, a graphic designer. A grieving Jack thought no one in the world could possibly know how he felt. In truth, his questions are universal. *This Book Is for All Kids* is a starting point for loving conversations about death, grief, and hope.

Loss of a Grandparent

Abuelita's Paradise by Carmen Santiago Nodar (Albert Whitman & Co., 1992)

A Puerto Rican girl is able to wrap herself in happy memories of her dead grandmother when she receives her Abuelita's rocking chair as a gift. As she rocks, Marita recalls Abuelita's stories about growing up on the lush island-her paradise-rife with sugar cane fields and waterfalls.

Bluebird Summer, by Deborah Hopkinson, illustrated by Bethanne Andersen, (Greenwillow, 2001).

Grade 2-5-When Mags, the narrator, and her younger brother, Cody, visit Gramps at the farm; they realize how different things are without Grandma. Although the wheat fields are still present, they belong to someone else. Grandma's garden is "a tangle of thistles and grass." Cody wonders where the bluebirds are and his sister remembers that Grandma said she had a deal with them. She'd grow their favorite foods and, in return, they'd warble in each new day. Mags begins to restore the garden while Cody studies the birds' habits.

Come Back Grandma by Sue Limb (Knopf Books for Young Readers, 1993)

K- Grade 2. Whenever her parents and friends were otherwise engaged, Bessie always had Grandma. The woman had speckled eyes, freckles, bendy thumbs, and, most of all, time. As a loving portrait of a grandparent, this picture book succeeds. It runs into trouble, however, when it tries to explain the woman's death and to give comfort. Bessie grows up and becomes the parent of a baby who, as she grows older, has many of Grandma's traits. Along the way, there is an attempt to make the deceased woman a part of nature and even to invoke the Hindu belief in reincarnation through a rather contrived introduction of a friend named Krishna. Although the soft

watercolor and pen-and-ink illustrations are soothing, the plot is too mechanical. Some readers may anticipate the final revelation—that Rose is just like Grandma—before it is disclosed.

Goodbye Pappa by Una Leavy (Orchard/Watss Group, 1999)

Originally published in hardback in 1996, a sensitive story about two children who are coming to terms with the death of their grandfather. Illustrated in color by Jennifer Eachus.

Granpa by John Burningham (Red Fox, 2002)

Ages 3 and up. Adorable Granpa gamely nurses his granddaughter's dolls, eats her pretend strawberry-flavored ice cream, takes her tobogganing in the snow, and falls in step with her imaginary plans to captain a ship to Africa—like all good grandfathers should. Winner of the Kate Maschler Award, this poignant tale of friendship and loss is one children will long remember.

The Grandad Tree by Trish Cooke, (Walker Children's Paperbacks, 2001)

Leigh and Vin used to play with Grandad under the apple tree in their garden. Now Grandad has gone but, like the tree, the children's love for him lives on forever. This is a tale about the cycle of life and the enduring power of love.

The Heart and The Bottle by Oliver Jeffers (Philomel Books, 2010)

Ages 4 and up. A little girl delights in the endless discoveries of the world around her with her father (or perhaps her grandfather). They enjoy their explorations but then one day the man's chair is empty. The girl puts her heart in a bottle to seal away the pain, but it is only temporary. As she grows older, she no longer finds the world as exciting or worth exploring. Her sense of wonderment is gone. It isn't until she meets a small girl, much like younger self, that she finds a way to allow her heart to be free again. She finds that she can sit in the chair and return to those same feelings of joy she felt with her father/grandfather. She no longer locks her heart in a bottle.

MIDDLE READERS

911, The Book of Help (Authors Respond to the tragedy) Edited by Michael Cart, Marc Aronson and Marianne Carus (Cricket Books, 2002)

Ages 12 and Up. Twenty award-winning writers share their responses to the September 11, 2001 tragedy. There are 25 essays, short stories, and poems divided into four sections: "Healing," "Searching for History," "Asking Why? Why? Why?" and "Reacting and Recovering."

Charlotte's Web by EB White (Harper-Collins, 2006)

Over 60 years ago, *Charlotte's Web* was published, one of the most beloved children's books of all time. It is the story of a little girl named Fern who loved a little pig named Wilbur—and of Wilbur's dear friend Charlotte A. Cavatica, a beautiful large grey spider who lived with Wilbur in the barn. In this story of friendship, hardship, and the passing on into time, Charlotte dies at the end. It is sad and touching but in the final moments, baby spiders are born, and the cycle of life continues.

Love That Dog by Sharon Creech (Perfection Learning, 2003)

Ages 9 and up. This story is told exclusively through Jack's dated entries in a school journal, the book opens with his resistance to writing verse. Readers sense the gentle persistence of Jack's teacher, Miss Stretchberry, behind the scenes. A Robert Frost poem sends Jack into a tale (in verse) of how he found his dog, Sky. At first, his poems appear to be discrete works. But when a poem by Walter Dean Myers ("Love That Boy" from *Brown Angels*) unleashes the joy Jack felt with his pet, he becomes even more honest in his poetry. Jack's next work is cathartic: all of his

previous verses seemed to be leading up to his best poem, an admission of his profound grief over Sky's death.

Loss of a Parent

A Million Miles from Boston by Karen Day (Yearly, 2012)

Ages 8 and up. The reverberations from the death of her mother might not be noticeable, but still, perhaps, are affecting rising 6th grader Lucy as she returns to her favorite spot in the world, her family's summer home in Maine. It's here that she most remembers her mother who died when she was six. But this summer, things are different. Ian, the annoying boy from school, is here too. And her father has a new girlfriend who seems to be trying to insert herself into Lucy's life. Worse of all, her memories of her mother seem to be fading, but could it be that not all her memories are accurate?

Be Light Like a Bird by Monika Schroeder (Capstone Young Readers, 2016)

Ages 8 and up. 12-year-old Wren is grieving after the death of her father, but her life only gets more difficult when her mom decides start a new life, moving them from the only home she's known. In this new environment, Wren is bullied and must rebuild the pieces of her life, including facing her past and forgiving those closest to her. Through loss, Wren also finds hope and a new path to forge for the future.

The Green Glass Sea by Ellen Klages (Puffin Books, 2008)

Ages 8 and up. 11-year-old Dewey Kerrigan moves to New Mexico to live with her mathematician father who is working on a secret project in a town, Los Alamos, that doesn't officially exist. The year is 1943 and this project, "the gadget," will change the world forever. Dewey's life change dramatically too, when her father unexpectedly dies in the midst of this important project.

Jim Thorpe's Bright Path by Joseph Bruchac (Lee and Low Books, 2008)

Grades 1-4. In 1999 the U.S. Congress recognized Thorpe as "Athlete of the Century. This book is a story of Thorpe's resilience, overcoming the death of a twin brother and then his parents. Thorpe, who was named "Bright Path," by his Pottowatomie mother, spent a childhood marked by remarkable physical prowess until he was sent to an Indian boarding school at age six. He lost his twin brother (pneumonia), his mother ("sudden illness"), and his father (snakebite), but persevered, finally proving himself on the Carlisle Indian School football field in his teens.

Mama's Gonna Buy You a Mocking Bird by Jean Little (Viking, 1986)

Grades 5-7. Young Jeremy and Sarah learn to cope with their grief and drastically changed lifestyle during their father's battle with cancer, which forces their mother to sell their house and return to school full time.

Miracle's Boys by Jacqueline Woodson (Puffin, 2001, Speak, 2010-reprint edition)

Ages 10 and up. Lafayette, whose mother has recently died, is worried that some day he will be separated from his two older brothers: high-school-graduate Ty'ree, who gave up a scholarship to MIT to take care of his younger siblings; and Charlie, the rebellious middle boy, who, after spending more than two years in a correctional facility, has returned home cold and tough. (Lafayette calls him "'Newcharlie,'" because his brother, with whom he was once so close, now seems unrecognizable to him.) Viewing household tensions and hardships through Lafayette's eyes, readers will come to realize each character's internal conflicts and recognize their desperate need to cling together as a family. The boys' loyalties to one another are tested during a cathartic climax. Urban violence and poverty play an integral part in this novel, but what readers will remember most is the brothers' deep-rooted affection for one another. An intelligently wrought, thought-provoking story. Winner of the Coretta Scott King award. (Publishers Weekly)

Missing May by Cynthia Rylant (Scholastic Paperbacks, 2004)

Ages 11 and up. This book revolves around a few delightfully named characters: Summer, Uncle Ob, Aunt May and Cletus Underwood. After being passed among relatives, Summer joins her aunt and uncle and marvels at the couple's deep love for one another. But after Aunt May dies, Summer and Uncle Ob are brought together in their struggles to come to terms with the death. Cletus, a neighbor boy, comes along to help provide an answer. This simple and sweet story won the Newbery Medal in 1993.

One Hundred Spaghetti Strings by Jen Nails (Harper Collins, 2017)

Ages 8-12. Finding the kernel of truth about her family's simmering secrets sets one girl up with a recipe for confusion. Steffy Sandolini has been living in Greensboro with Auntie Gina and her sister, Nina. However, the return of her long-absent father and Auntie Gina's desire to move in with boyfriend Harry send the Sandolini girls' lives into a tailspin. Their mother lives at the Place—a long-term care facility—due to traumatic brain injury suffered in an accident. Steffy confronts the turmoil the best way she knows how—cooking. Nails convincingly captures Steffy's zigzagging thoughts as the 11-year-old struggles to make sense of why her father left or her mother's new reality. While older sister Nina, 13, is defiant toward their taciturn father, Steffy remains hopeful that all the unsaid things will magically coalesce like gravy, smoothing out the worry and regret. Although death is not at the center of this story, the grief of parental absence, longing for meaningful communication and the support of caring adults are powerful elements. (Kirkus Reviews)

Rebound by Kwame Alexander (HMH Books, 2018)

Ages 10-12. In this prequel to Newbery Award-winning *The Crossover* (2014), Alexander revisits previous themes and formats while exploring new ones. For Charlie Bell, the future father of *The Crossover's* Jordan and Josh, his father's death alters his relationship with his mother and causes him to avoid what reminds him of his dad. At first, he's just withdrawn, but after he steals from a neighbor, his mother packs a reluctant Charlie off to his grandparents near Washington, D.C., for the summer. His grandfather works part-time at a Boys and Girls Club where his cousin Roxie is a star basketball player. Despite his protests, she draws him into the game. His time with his grandparents deepens Charlie's understanding of his father, and he begins to heal. "I feel / a little more normal, / like maybe he's still here, / ... in a / as long as I remember him / he's still right here / in my heart / kind of way." Once again, Alexander has given readers an African-American protagonist to cheer. He is surrounded by a strong supporting cast, especially two brilliant female characters, his friend CJ and his cousin Roxie, as well as his feisty and wise granddaddy. Music and cultural references from the late 1980s add authenticity. The novel in verse is enhanced by Dawud Anyabwile's art, which reinforces Charlie's love for comics. An eminently satisfying story of family, recovery, and growing into manhood. (Kirkus Reviews).

Summerlost by Ally Condie (Puffin, reprint edition, 2017)

Ages 10-13. A year after losing two family members, Cedar spends the summer in a small town with a Shakespeare festival. Mom buys a summer house for herself, 12-year-old Cedar, and 8-year-old Miles in Iron Creek, where Mom grew up. It's been a year since a drunk driver killed Cedar's father and other little brother, Ben. As Cedar gets a job selling concessions at the Shakespeare festival, makes a friend named Leo, and finds herself and Miles obsessed with a morbid soap-opera arc on TV. The author touches everything lightly but deftly with the family's grief. Leo and Cedar research—and give unauthorized tours about—a long-dead, famous actress from the town; Cedar's pulled by that research because she knows, now, that things can disappear forever. Ben was disabled (maybe autistic), and their relationship is sometimes difficult. Her relationship with Miles is stolid and understatedly touching. Details are careful and never extraneous; there's a reason it matters, at a certain moment, that "the milk was perfectly cold and the bananas not too ripe" in a bowl of cereal. Despite indicating that Cedar bonds with Leo because they're both outsiders—she as a biracial Chinese-American, he for reasons that are vague—an explanation for their friendship isn't necessary. Although Cedar's narration as a

character of color is largely convincing, white is still the default for other characters unless otherwise specified. There's no monumental grief breakthrough, nor should there be: this is the realistic going on, day by day, after bereavement. Honest, lovely, and sad. (Kirkus Reviews) For a longer review go to this link <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/19/books/review/summerlost-by-ally-condie.html>

The Birchbark House by Louise Erdrich (Perfection Learning, 2002)

Ages 9 and up. A 7-year-old Ojibwa girl Omakayas, or Little Frog, named because her first step was a hop. The sole survivor of a smallpox epidemic on Spirit Island, Omakayas, then only a baby girl, was rescued by a fearless woman named Tallow and welcomed into an Ojibwa family on Lake Superior's Madeline Island, the Island of the Golden-Breasted Woodpecker. We follow Omakayas and her adopted family through a cycle of four seasons in 1847, including the winter, when a historically documented outbreak of smallpox overtook the island. Parallel, in many ways, to Wilder's "Little House" series.

The Boy in the Black Suit by Jason Reynolds (Atheneum, Reprint edition, 2016)

Ages 11-18. With his mother newly dead, a job in a funeral home somehow becomes the perfect way for Matthew to deal with his crushing grief. Initially skeptical, he plans to use his early-release senior year program to work at a fried-chicken joint that's staffed by an entrancing girl with whom he eventually develops a gentle, tenderly depicted relationship. But the funerals intrigue him and then become deeply satisfying; Matthew finds solace in seeing others experiencing his pain. Matthew's neighbor, Mr. Ray, the funeral director with a sad back story, becomes almost a surrogate father when Matthew's dad gets drunk and then has an accident. Matthew's voice is authentic and perceptive as he navigates the initial months without his mom; he's supported by a believable cast of fully fleshed-out characters. Reynolds writes with a gritty realism that beautifully captures the challenges—and rewards—of growing up in the inner city. A vivid, satisfying and ultimately upbeat tale of grief, redemption and grace. (Kirkus Reviews). For a longer discussion go to the link below.

<https://www.npr.org/2015/01/08/374036118/try-on-black-suit-for-a-beautifully-real-approach-to-grief>

The Night Diary by Veera Hiranandani (Dial, 2018)

Ages 8 to 12. After introverted Nisha receives a diary for her 12th birthday, she begins to find her voice as she documents her family's upheaval amid the 1947 Partition of India. Nisha's journal entries, which are addressed to her deceased mother, take on new urgency as she witnesses India being "split in half like a log" along religious lines after gaining independence from Britain. As the daughter of a Hindu father and a Muslim mother, Nisha questions which side of the Indian-Pakistani border to call her own. But when her family is no longer safe in their home in the city of Mirpur Khas (which became part of Pakistan), they set out for "the new India." Hiranandani (*The Whole Story of Half a Girl*) places Nisha's coming of age against the violent birth of a nation. The diary format gives her story striking intimacy and immediacy, serving as a window into a fraught historical moment as Nisha grapples with issues of identity and the search for a home that remain quite timely. (*Publishers Weekly*). See the link below for a longer review.

<https://www.npr.org/2018/03/11/592392633/partition-through-a-childs-eyes-in-the-night-diary>

Loss of Friend

Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson (Harper Festival, 2006)

Ages 9-up. This Newbery-winning novel revolves around two friends. Jess Aarons is eager to start fifth grade and wants to become the fastest runner at school. All seems to be on track, until the new girl in class, Leslie Burke, leaves all the boys in the dust, including Jess. Jess and Leslie become inseparable. Together, they create an imaginary, secret kingdom in the woods called Terabithia that can be reached only by swinging across a creek bed on a rope. But one morning a

tragic accident befalls Leslie as she ventures alone to Terabithia, and Jess's life is changed forever. In 1976, author Katherine Paterson's son David was 8 years old when his friend, Lisa Hill, was struck by lightning and killed. A year later *Bridge to Terabithia* was published.

Each Little Bird That Sings by Deborah Wiles (Harcourt, 2005).

Ages 8-12. Ten-year-old Comfort Snowberger has attended 247 funerals--her family owns the local funeral home, after all. And even though Great-uncle Edisto keeled over with a heart attack and Great-great-aunt Florentine dropped dead--just like that--six months later, Comfort knows how to deal with loss, or so she thinks. She's more concerned with avoiding her crazy cousin Peach and trying to figure out why her best friend, Declaration, suddenly won't talk to her. But life is full of surprises. And the biggest one of all is learning what it takes to handle them.

Lost in the Sun by Lisa Graff (Puffin, 2016)

Ages 10 and up. Less than a year ago, 12-year-old Trent Zimmerman accidentally contributed to the death of his teammate Jared during a hockey game, after nailing him with a puck (Jared had a "bad heart"). Already prone to overthinking, Trent is overwhelmed by disturbing thoughts, which he draws in a closely guarded book, and very angry. He backs away from his best friend, acts out at school, and clashes with his family. With help from a persistent classmate, who is known as much for the large scar on her face as for her weird outfits, and a similarly dedicated teacher, Trent is gradually able to let go of his intense guilt and regain his confidence. Trent's barely constrained rage is visceral, and the moments when he lashes out, verbally and physically, are as frightening as they are realistic. In an ambitious and gracefully executed story, Graff (*Absolutely Almost*) covers a lot of emotional ground, empathically tracing Trent's efforts to deal with a horrible, inexplicable accident and to heal the relationships that have become collateral damage along the way. For a longer review <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/10/books/review/lost-in-the-sun-by-lisa-graff.html>

On My Honor by Marion Dane Bauer (Sandpiper, 2012)

Ages 9 and up. Joel's best friend, Tony, is a daredevil. It was Tony's idea to make the long bike ride to the Starved Rock state park, and Tony's idea to stop for a swim in the dangerous Vermillion River. So why does Joel feel so much guilt when tragedy strikes?

Rain Is Not My Indian Name by Cynthia Leitich Smith (HarperCollins, 2001).

Ages 10-up. Cassidy Rain Berghoff didn't know that the very night she decided to get a life would be the night that Galen would lose his. It's been six months since her best friend died, and up until now, Rain has succeeded in shutting herself off from the world. But when controversy arises around her aunt Georgia's Indian Camp in their mostly white Kansas community, Rain decides to face the world again—at least through the lens of a camera.

Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes by Eleanor Coerr (Puffin, 2004)

Grade 2-6. Based on the true story of a young Japanese girl who contracts leukemia as a result of the atom bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima, the story follows Sadako as a healthy schoolgirl winning relay races, through her diagnosis with the atom bomb sickness, to her long stay in the hospital. It is in the hospital that she first begins making origami cranes to pass the time. Her ultimate goal is to make 1000, but she dies with only 644 completed. Sadako's classmates finish making the remaining cranes, and all 1000 are buried with her. There is now a picture book version, *Sadako*.

The Thing About Jellyfish by Ali Benjamin (Little Brown, 2017)

Ages 10 and up. Capturing the angst of coming of age, *The Thing About Jellyfish* is a story of the politics of middle school girl friendships and the pain caused by shifts in order to upgrade to a

more popular strata. In this case, Suzy can't accept that her best friend drowned, and has an alternate theory that she decides to prove by setting off into the world by herself. Her journey is also one of self discovery and ultimately resilience and hope.

The Truth as Told by Mason Buttle by Leslie Connor (Harper Collins, 2018)

Ages 9- 14. Under a cloud of suspicion after the death of his best friend, a boy with a “*trifecta* of troubles” continues as best he can. Lt. Baird is sure seventh-grader Mason Buttle knows more about the death of Benny Kilmartin than the story he’s told over and over. Now he’s writing it, with the help of speech-recognition software in the school social worker’s office (a process that is reproduced with unlikely accuracy). Loyal and good-natured, Mason is large for his age, highly dyslexic, abnormally sweaty, and the regular target of bullying neighbor boys. He feels his emotions as colors—green for stress, shades of pink for happiness. There hasn’t been much pink in Mason’s life in the 16 months since Benny’s accidental death, but now there’s a new friend, tiny Calvin Chumsky, and the bullying neighbor’s dog, Moonie, who prefers Mason. Using Mason’s conversations with the detective and his voice-to-text storytelling, the author weaves the backstory into a narrative of redemption chronicling his growing friendships. The climactic revelation reveals the gaps in everyone’s understanding of the event and propels his struggling, apple-farming family—grandmother, unemployed uncle, and the stray, shopping-addicted young woman his uncle brought home—to make some needed changes. Connor’s gift for creating complex characters extends to the supporting characters and makes this a compelling read. An unlikely hero in Mason, a large, lonely seventh-grader whose grieving heart aches for just the simplest moments of connection with the people he loves. (Kirkus Reviews)

Loss of a Sibling

Can you hear me smiling? A child grieves a sister. Jackson, A. (Washington, DC, Child & Family press, 2004)

The book’s 9 year old author recounts with honesty, tenderness, and courage the story of her older sister's illness and passing and the range of emotions she experienced during this difficult time. Communicates to young survivors of a sibling death that they are not alone.

Love, Aubrey by Suzanne LaFleur (Yearling, 2011)

Grades 4-6. A beautifully written and deeply moving middle-grade novel with characters to cherish and a story that deals with tragedy and loss in a fresh way. Aubrey has suffered an unbelievable loss (father and sister), and goes to live with her grandmother in Vermont in order to heal. There she makes new friends, learns to cope with what has happened, and begins to figure out how to move on. Readers will fall in love with Aubrey from page one, and hold their breath until the very end, when she has to make one of the biggest decisions of her life.

Loss of a Significant Adult

Ms. Bixby’s Last Day by John David Anderson (Walden Pond Press, 2016)

Gr 4–6. Topher, Steve, and Brand all have their reasons to treasure their sixth grade teacher. Readers find out early on that their beloved Ms. B. has cancer and has to leave school immediately. The boys come up with an elaborate plan to honor her. In a pilgrimage as involved as Dorothy going to see the Wizard of Oz, the "Nerd Patrol" ditch school and travel to Ms. B.'s hospital in hopes of throwing her the farewell party of her dreams complete with cheesecake, wine, and Beethoven. In alternating chapters, we learn just why it is so necessary for each boy to partake in this adventure. During the immensely humorous and touching journey, the boys discover their own bravery and the strength gained through true friendship. This story provides a full-spectrum, emotionally satisfying experience that will have readers laughing, crying, and everything in between.

Olive's Ocean by Kevin Henkes (Greenwillow Books, reprint, 2005)

On her family's Cape Cod vacation, Martha is haunted by a journal entry left by a dead classmate. Olive, an unremarkable loner, hoped to have Martha ("the nicest girl in the class") as a friend. This summer 12-year-old Martha is noticing her grandmother's aging, experiencing adolescent alienation from her affectionate family, and feeling the self-consciousness of yearning for her neighbor Jimmy. Jimmy, 14 and an aspiring filmmaker, surprises Martha with his attentions, inquires whether she has ever been kissed, and asks to film her for his video. Their kiss captured on film, as it turns out, is the result of a wager. Well-plotted, the working out of Martha's feelings of humiliation, her renewed connection to family, and her final gesture towards the dead Olive are effected with originality and grace. Henke's characters never lack for the inner resilience that comes from a grounding in the ultimate decency of family. Characters and setting are painted in with the deft strokes of an experienced artist. Few girls will fail to recognize themselves in Martha. (*Fiction. 10-13*)

Summer of the Gypsy Moths by Sara Pennypacker (Blazer and Bray, 2013)

Ages 8 and up. It's a complicated relationship between two foster girls living in the same house. 11-year-old Stella loves her great-aunt Louise's house and is living there because her mom is unreliable. Great-Aunt Louise has also taken in another foster child, Angel. If that's not complicated enough, Great-Aunt Louise passes away and now the girls must find a way to work together in order to live at her house until Stella's mom can be found and brought in to help.

YOUNG ADULT

Loss of Sibling

A Summer to Die by Lois Lowry (Ember, 2007)

Ages 12 and Up. Meg isn't thrilled when she gets stuck sharing a bedroom with her older sister Molly. The two of them couldn't be more different, and it's hard for Meg to hide her resentment of Molly's beauty and easy popularity. But now that the family has moved to a small house in the country, Meg has a lot to accept. Just as the sisters begin to adjust to their new home, Molly's constant grouching, changing appearance, and other complaints are not just part of a new mood. And the day Molly is rushed to the hospital; Meg has to accept that there is something terribly wrong with her sister. That's the day Meg's world changes forever. Is it too late for Meg to show what she really feels?

Carolina Autumn by Carol Lynch Williams (Delacorte, 2000)

Grade 5 and up. A story of a 14-year-old coming to grips with the death of her father and sister in a plane crash, her own coming-of-age, and the healing process she and her mother go through to find forgiveness for themselves and one another.

For This Life Only by Stacey Kade, (Simon and Schuster, 2016)

Ages 14 - 18. When Jacob's near-death experience fails to live up to his Christian beliefs, he is desperate to find out the truth. The person he turns to in his fear and doubt shocks even him. After a car accident takes his brother's life and leaves him seriously injured, 16-year-old Jace cannot shake the feeling that the wrong twin died. Eli was an exemplary student, a talented debater, and the pastor's model son. Jace, the troubled one, dreams of the day when he can finally escape the scrutiny of his family and his father's church. Overwhelmed by guilt and doubt, the teen is desperate for answers. When his faith wavers, he turns to the only person who seems to neither blame him nor hate him: Thera, the local psychic's daughter. Thera speaks of a different kind of belief, one where you can choose your own doctrine. Kade's contemplation of life and the afterlife is unflinching, and Jace's journey through his grief is messy, raw, and, above all,

real. Spot-on dialogue and an authentic voice keep this story fresh. Poignant and powerful.
(Kirkus Reviews)

Kira-Kira by Cynthia Kadohata (Atheneum, 2006)

Grades 6-8. This lively, funny and sad novel won the 2005 Newbery Medal. The Japanese-American Takeshima family moves from Iowa to Georgia in the 1950s when Katie, the narrator, is just in kindergarten. Though her parents endure grueling conditions and impossible hours in the non-unionized poultry plant and hatchery where they work, they somehow manage to create a loving, stable home for their three children: Lynn, Katie, and Sammy. Katie finds her own way in a family torn by illness and horrendous work conditions. Katie's parents can barely afford to pay their daughter's medical bills, yet they refuse to join the growing movement to unionize until after Lynn's death.

Long Way Down by Jason Reynolds (Caitlyn Publishers, 2017)

Ages 12 and up. After 15-year-old Will sees his older brother, Shawn, gunned down on the streets, he sets out to do the expected: the rules dictate no crying, no snitching, and revenge. Though the African-American teen has never held one, Will leaves his apartment with his brother's gun tucked in his waistband. As he travels down on the elevator, the door opens on certain floors, and Will is confronted with a different figure from his past, each a victim of gun violence, each important in his life. They also force Will to face the questions he has about his plan. As each "ghost" speaks, Will realizes how much of his own story has been unknown to him and how intricately woven they are. Told in free-verse poems, this is a raw, powerful, and emotional depiction of urban violence. The structure of the novel heightens the tension, as each stop of the elevator brings a new challenge until the narrative arrives at its taut, ambiguous ending. There is considerable symbolism, including the 15 bullets in the gun and the way the elevator rules parallel street rules. Throughout, readers get a vivid picture of Will and the people in his life, all trying to cope with the circumstances of their environment while expressing the love, uncertainty, and hope that all humans share. (Kirkus Reviews)

My Sister Lives on the Mantelpiece by Annabel Pitcher (Little Brown, 2012)

Gr. 7-10. To ten-year-old Jamie, his family has fallen apart because of the loss of someone he barely remembers: his sister Rose, who died five years ago in a terrorist bombing. To his father, life is impossible to make sense of when he lives in a world that could so cruelly take away a ten-year-old girl. To Rose's surviving fifteen year old twin, Jas, everyday she lives in Rose's ever present shadow, forever feeling the loss like a limb, but unable to be seen for herself alone.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie (Little Brown, 2009)

Ages 12 and up. Junior is a budding cartoonist growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation. Junior experiences the loss of his dog then grandmother, sister, and friendships. Determined to take his future into his own hands, Junior leaves his troubled school on the reservation to attend a farm town high school where the only other Indian is the school mascot. Heartbreaking, funny, this story is based on the author's own experiences, coupled with poignant drawings that reflect the character's art, chronicles the contemporary adolescence of one Native American boy as he attempts to break away from the life he thought he was destined to live.

The Color Of Absence: 12 Stories About Loss And Hope Edited by James Howe (Atheneum, 2001).

Ages 12-up. A collection of short stories for teens. Contributors include Avi, C. B. Christiansen, James Howe, Angela Johnson, Annette Curtis Klause, Chris Lynch, Norma Fox Mazer, Walter Dean Myers, Naomi Shihab Nye, Michael J. Rosen, Roderick Townley, Virginia Euwer Wolff, and Jacqueline Woodson.

The Sky Is Everywhere by Jandy Nelson (Speak, 2011)

Lennie plays second clarinet in the school orchestra and has always happily been second fiddle to her charismatic older sister, Bailey. Then Bailey dies suddenly, and Lennie is left at sea without her anchor. Overcome by emotion, Lennie soon finds herself torn between two boys: Bailey's boyfriend, Toby, and Joe, the charming and musically gifted new boy in town. While Toby can't see her without seeing Bailey and Joe sees her only for herself, each offers Lennie something she desperately needs. But ultimately, it's up to Lennie to find her own way toward what she really needs-without Bailey.

Trouble by Gary D. Schmidt (HMH Books for Young Readers, 2010)

Ages 12 and up. It's masterfully written, weaving the story of an old-money Blue Blood New England family in a small Maine Town with how racism has shaped them, with both incidents in the past and present. Henry, our middle school protagonist, is grappling with the car accident that put his older "perfect" brother into a coma. As he tries to make his way through the fog that has now beset his family, he unweaves the pieces that lead up to this tragedy; his sea captain ancestor who amassed their family fortune has played a role, a Cambodian boy at his older siblings' private school is involved, and then there's this mountain that challenges him to scale it. The Cambodian character, Chay, has his own story to tell, and unwinds, first in a "misty" way, as italicized teaser paragraphs at the end of the early chapters in the book. When Chay begins to interact with Henry in the story, the reader can see how their lives intersected and how racism has marked their family with "trouble" that they had long been avoiding. Chay's refugee story is embedded too, and gives the reading a non-flinching view of what the boat refugees faced, both in their home country and now in America. This is a book that is difficult to put down, with a story that leaves an indelible impression about white privilege and racism in America.

Loss of a Friend

Ever After Ever by Jordan Sonnenblick (Scholastic, 2014)

Ages 12 and up. This is from an earlier review: In this YA novel, two best friends are both cancer survivors. Jeffrey Alper and Thad Ibsen are eighth graders going through the angst of teenage adolescence as well as grappling with the after effects of their battles with cancer. In Jeffrey's case with a rare form of leukemia, he has a slight limp, difficulty paying attention, and a tough time learning math concepts. Thad's mental capacity is razor sharp as is his wit, but he's wheelchair bound. In an effort for each to "win the girl," Jeffrey and Thad goad each other to rise to new challenges. Jeff, tutored with great discipline by Thad, must pass the state standardized test in order to graduate to high school. Thad, as challenged by Jeffrey, must get out of his wheelchair to practice walking again.

One Green Leaf by Jean Ure (Delacorte Books, 1989)

Grade 7-12-- Four teenagers have been friends for years. David and Abbey, Robyn and Zoot are good friends. Suddenly their expanding world is constricted by David's hospitalization for cancer surgery and eventual death. Robyn tells the story of how this unexpected tragedy affects young minds and emotions and gain insight and understanding. A novel that weaves the themes of friendship and loss.

Please Ignore Vera Dietz By A S King (Ember, 2012)

Ages 14 and up. Vera and Charlie are lifelong buddies whose relationship is sundered by high school and hormones; by the start of their senior year, the once-inseparable pair is estranged. In the aftermath of Charlie's sudden death, Vera is set adrift by grief, guilt and the uncomfortable realization that the people closest to her are still, in crucial ways, strangers. As with King's first novel, *The Dust of 100 Dogs* (2009), this is chilling and challenging stuff, but her prose here is richly detailed and wryly observant. The story unfolds through authentic dialogue and a nonlinear narrative that shifts fluidly among Vera's present perspective, flashbacks that illuminate the tragedies she's endured, brief and often humorous interpolations from "the dead kid," Vera's father and even the hilltop pagoda that overlooks their dead-end Pennsylvania town. The author

depicts the journey to overcome a legacy of poverty, violence, addiction and ignorance as an arduous one, but Vera's path glimmers with grace and hope. (Kirkus Reviews).

The Fault in Our Stars by John Green (Dutton, 2012)

A soulful novel that tackles big subjects--life, death, and love--with the perfect blend of levity and heart-swelling emotion. Hazel is sixteen, with terminal cancer, when she meets Augustus at her kids-with-cancer support group. The two are kindred spirits, sharing an irreverent sense of humor and immense charm, and watching them fall in love even as they face universal questions of the human condition

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas (Harper/Collins, 2016)

Ages 14- adult. Sixteen-year-old Starr Carter is a black girl and an expert at navigating the two worlds she exists in: one at Garden Heights, her black neighborhood, and the other at Williamson Prep, her suburban, mostly white high school. Walking the line between the two becomes immensely harder when Starr is present at the fatal shooting of her childhood best friend, Khalil, by a white police officer. Khalil was unarmed. Khalil's death becomes national news, where he's called a thug and possible drug dealer and gangbanger. His death becomes justified in the eyes of many, including one of Starr's best friends at school. There are protests in the community, turning it into a war zone. Questions remain about what happened in the moments leading to Khalil's death, and the only witness is Starr, who must now decide what to say or do, if anything.

With smooth but powerful prose delivered in Starr's natural, emphatic voice, finely nuanced characters, and intricate and realistic relationship dynamics, this novel will have readers rooting for Starr and opening their hearts to her friends and family. (Kirkus Reviews)

Loss of a Parent

If Only by Carole (Scholastic, 2012)

Ages 10 and up. Corinna's world is crushed after her mother dies of cancer. How does she get through the funeral, trays of ziti, a father who can't communicate, the first day of school, Mother's Day, people who don't know what to say, and the entire eighth-grade year? Despite her alienation from many of her peers, including her best friend, she succeeds in finding support. She dares to bare her innermost fears, hurts, and wishes, and even allows herself to have a flowering crush on a boy in the school band. She also finds out deep secrets about her mother, which she never knew. It's a year that will change Corinna's life forever.

No-Name Baby by Nancy Bo Flood (Namelos, 2012)

When Sophie's pregnant mother falls, she blames herself for the accident. Premature labor begins, and everyone worries about the infant. Aunt Rae has come to help care for the baby and mother, but her presence only increases the tension in the family. Then Aunt Rae finds her niece talking with the young man from a neighboring farm and confronts her, revealing something that shakes Sophie's world. No-Name Baby is an intimate portrait of a young girl as she discovers the truth about herself and her family.

One of those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies by Sonya Sones (Simon & Schuster, 2005)

Ages 12 and up. My name is Ruby. This book is about me. It tells the deeply hideous story of what happens when my mother dies and I'm dragged three thousand miles away from my gorgeous boyfriend, Ray, to live in L.A. with my father, who I've never even met because he divorced my mom before I was born. The only way I've

ever even seen him is in the movies, since he's this megafamous actor who's been way too busy trying to win Oscars to even visit me once in fifteen years. Everyone loves my father. Everyone but me.

Orchards by Holly Thompson (Ember, 2012)

Ages 12 and up. After a classmate commits suicide, Kana Goldberg—a half-Japanese, half-Jewish American—wonders who is responsible. She and her cliquy friends said some thoughtless things to the girl. Hoping that Kana will reflect on her behavior, her parents pack her off to her mother's ancestral home in Japan for the summer. There Kana spends hours under the hot sun tending to her family's *mikan* orange groves. Kana's mixed heritage makes it hard to fit in at first, especially under the critical eye of her traditional grandmother, who has never accepted Kana's father. But as the summer unfolds, Kana gets to know her relatives, Japan, and village culture, and she begins to process the pain and guilt she feels about the tragedy back home. Then news about a friend sends her world spinning out of orbit all over again.

The Astonishing Color of After by Emily X.R. Pan (Little, Brown, 2018)

Ages 14 – 18. Grief, regret, and loneliness form the backdrop of a family's life following a suicide, but a path for healing reveals itself in the form of a magical red bird.

Fifteen-year-old Leigh Chen Sanders, daughter of an Irish-American sinologist father and a Taiwanese pianist mother, is in love with her best friend, Axel Moreno. The two have much in common: as well as sharing a passion for art, he is half Filipino and half Puerto Rican and also stands out in their racially homogeneous school. However, a rift has opened between them since their first kiss coincided with the day Leigh's mother took her own life. Now left alone with a distant, judgmental father, Leigh is directed by a red bird she is convinced is her mother to visit her estranged grandparents in Taiwan. There, she seeks out places that were meaningful to her mother and uncovers long-hidden family secrets. The Taiwanese setting is enticingly portrayed, and the magical realism of the bird spirit offers transportive flashback journeys into the family's history. The stigma of mental illness and the terrible loneliness of not being accepted form the heart of this emotionally honest tale, but the device of having Leigh express her feelings in terms of color is distracting and adds little to the story. An evocative novel that captures the uncertain, unmoored feeling of existing between worlds—culturally, linguistically, ethnically, romantically, and existentially—it is also about seeking hope and finding beauty even in one's darkest hours. (Kirkus Reviews)

We Are Okay by Nina LaCour (Dutton, 2017)

Ages 12 and up. It's December in New York, and college freshman Marin is in her dorm room, contemplating a solitary month-long stay after everyone else has left for winter break. Her single respite will be a brief visit from her best friend, Mabel. Marin is dreading the stay for reasons that are revealed in flashbacks: she fled San Francisco without informing anyone after the sudden death of her beloved Gramps, who raised her. Over the course of three days, secrets about Gramps, Marin's long-dead mother, and the girls' complicated relationship are revealed in short, exquisite sentences that evoke myriad emotions with a minimum of words. "I must have shut grief out. Found it in books. Cried over fiction instead of the truth. The truth was unconfined, unadorned. There was no poetic language to it, no yellow butterflies, no epic floods . . . The truth was vast enough to drown in." A surprise arrival at story's end leads to a tearful resolution of Marin's sorrow and a heartfelt renewal of her relationship with Mabel and her family. An elegantly crafted paean to the cleansing power of truth. Prinz Award. (Kirkus Reviews)

Loss of a Significant Adult

Notes From The Midnight Driver by Jordan Sonnenblick (Scholastic, 2007)

Ages 10- 18. When usually well-behaved Alex hatches one of his possibly-not-so-brilliant schemes to shake up his separated parents, it lands him in some serious hot water with the

police. But when you're a confused sixteen-year-old and your parents are separated and your father is dating your third-grade teacher you might do the same thing. When Alex is ordered to do community service at a senior center he is assigned to Solomon Lewis, or "Sol", a "difficult" senior with a lot of attitude, advice for Alex, and a puzzling (yet colorful) Yiddish vocabulary. Through their relationship, both are profoundly changed. Like "Tuesdays With Morrie," this is a surprising story of a friendship of a lifetime. Sonnenblick deftly infiltrates the teenage mind to produce a first-person narrative riddled with enough hapless confusion, mulish equivocation, and beleaguered deadpan humor to have readers nodding with recognition, sighing in sympathy, and gasping with laughter — often on the same page. (Horn Book)

TO BEGIN THE CONVERSATION . . .

Bertolt by Jacques Goldstyn (Enchanted Lion Press, 2017)

Ages 4-9. This is a charming, touching story about an imaginative boy whose best friend is an oak tree named Bertolt. The boy admits to being an outlier among his peers, but insists that while he is alone, he is never lonely. Being independent suits him, and he considers his difference to be his advantage. A daily refuge is his tree, Bertolt, who provides him a literal and metaphorical vantage point from which to observe the world. Bertolt gives by simply being—he is host to the boy's imaginative adventuring. In springtime, when Bertolt's leaves are abundant and communities of animals make their homes in the tree's nooks and branches, the boy tucks himself away to observe everyday happenings. He remains plucky and unbothered, even as he says goodbye to Bertolt for the winter season. After the last frost, when the trees are in bloom, the boy notices that Bertolt is yet bare, and comes to the conclusion that his tree must have died. The boy's strong spirit manifests itself in his desire to honor his friend's life and generosity, revealing to readers the real, sweet mutuality of this friendship.

Cry Heart, Never Break by Glenn Ringtved and Charlotte Pardi (Enchanted Lion Books, 2016)

Ages 4 and up. Aware their grandmother is gravely ill; four siblings make a pact to keep death from taking her away. But Death does arrive all the same, as it must. He comes gently, naturally. And he comes with enough time to share a story with the children that helps them to realize the value of loss to life and the importance of being able to say goodbye.

Death, Duck and the Tulip by Wolf Erlbruch (Gecko Press, 2016)

Grades K-3. It's bold enough to deal with death head-on in a picture book, but this German import goes a step further and personifies it as a skull-headed character that's equally cute and creepy. The ominous words that open this story set the tone right off: "For a while now, Duck had a feeling." Sure enough, Death is right behind her, and while Duck is understandably alarmed, Death reassures her that even though he's close, he isn't the one who ends things: "Life takes care of that." Over time they become close in a fashion, engaging in cryptic conversations that touch on the afterlife and what gets left behind. Like all things, Duck eventually passes, and Death, "almost a little moved," moves on. The spare design, in which Duck and Death are the lone figures in pages dominated by white space, emphasizes the somber resolution that's not entirely comforting, nor should it be. Death is a profound and captivating subject even for kids, and this book deals with it in an elegant, understated, and dignified fashion.

The Flat Rabbit by Bardur Oskarsson (Owlkids, 2014)

Grades: 1–3. Spare illustrations by the author are the highlight of this quirky picture book dealing with the death of a neighbor. Pen-and-ink and watercolor pictures in blue and brown show a pot-bellied dog and a kinky-tailed rat contemplating a dead rabbit lying in the street, clearly flattened

by a large vehicle. The two ponder what they should do with the dead animal: "Where could they move her? And what if somebody found her and ate her?" Deciding on a plan to send her to a better place, they tape her to a kite and sail her aloft. Readers might cringe as the rat and dog gently peel the dead rabbit, pink tongue lolling, off the pavement. Although the author may have intended to spark readers' compassion, the bizarre decision about what to do with the rabbit is odd and may have trouble finding an appreciative audience.

The Sad Book by Michael Rosen (Candlewick, 2008)

Grade 3 and Up. This is a personal and moving account of the author's experiences with grief over the loss of his son and mother and various ways of dealing with the melancholy that attends it. "Sometimes sad is very big. It's everywhere. All over me." The gentle text assures readers that despair, anger, and hopelessness are common feelings when dealing with death, but that memories of happier times can elicit a spark of joy and optimism for the future.

Sidewalk Flowers by JonArno Lawson and Sydney Smith (Groundwood Books, 2015)

Grades: K-Gr -3. An emotionally moving, visually delightful ode to the simple powers of observation and empathy. A young girl and her father walk home from the grocery store through busy city streets in this wordless picture book. Along the way, Dad is preoccupied—talking on his cell phone, moving with purpose, eyes forward—while his daughter, a bright spot of red in a mostly black-and-white world, gazes with curiosity at the sights around her. In graphic novel-style panels, readers see what she sees: colorful weeds and wildflowers springing up from cracks in the pavement. She begins to collect these "sidewalk flowers" as they make their way past shops, across bustling avenues, and through a city park. Halfway through their journey, the little girl surreptitiously begins giving pieces of her bouquet away: a dandelion and some daffodils to a dead bird on a pathway; a sprig of lilac to an older man sleeping on a bench; daisies in the hair of her mother and siblings. With each not-so-random act of kindness, the scenes fill with more and more color, until the pen-and-ink drawings are awash in watercolor, her world now fully alive and vibrant.

Where Do We Go When We Disappear? By Isabel Minhós Martins (Tate, 2013)

Who can say with absolute certainty where people go when they disappear? Do we go to the same place that lost socks go to? Or do we perhaps evaporate into the skies like puddles? Children ask big questions, and this book seeks to provide some answers. This charming book tackles a serious theme in a philosophical and often whimsical way by drawing on the world around us for ideas, and offers children a new way of looking at the world. The conclusion? "Nothing is too empty a place to be in. And if we all go there, it will cease to be nothing in no time."

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