



GRANDPA'S WINDOW

LAURA GEHL AND UDAYANA LUGO

"Offering a tender view of one girl's experience, this powerful picture book shows children that they can feel both heartbreak and ongoing love simultaneously."—*Kirkus Reviews*

In *Grandpa's Window*, Daria brightens her grandpa's last days with her love, companionship, and creativity. Each time Daria visits Grandpa, she holds his hand and they look out his window at the ocean, talking about when they can play on the beach together again. Though Daria mourns him after his death, she also takes comfort in her memories of Grandpa. With moving simplicity, this story illustrates not only the difficulty of losing those we love but also the power we have to comfort them during illness and the solace that treasured memories can bring.

This reading guide suggests ways for you to explore these ideas further with children. Below are conversation starters and art activities to help children express their feelings. Also included is a note for adults by child psychologist Sharie Coombes, which offers advice on how to help a child grieve. At the end of the guide, you will find a list of organizations that offer support for grieving children and families. You can access this guide online at www.flyawaybooks.com/resources, where you can follow the links for more information.



How to Support Children Who Are Grieving

A DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITY GUIDE

BY LAURA GEHL

CONVERSATION STARTERS

After reading *Grandpa's Window*, take time to discuss the story. Children may want to talk about the book or a loved one who has died but may not know how to do so. Below are questions you can ask to encourage conversation. These questions assume a family setting and reference a grandmother who has died, but they can be tailored to other situations.



- Does the story remind you of how you felt when your grandma was sick?
- Daria can't make her grandpa well, but she's able to comfort him by visiting. Can you remember a time when you visited Grandma?
- When Daria's grandpa has an oxygen mask over his face and can't talk to her, he squeezes her hand. She knows this means "I love you." She squeezes back to let him know she loves him too. Can you think of a time when Grandma told you something without words? What was it? Do you ever communicate without words? When?

- In Daria's room, she has many pictures of her grandpa. Do you have pictures of Grandma that are special to you? What is it you like about the pictures? Do they help you miss Grandma a little less? Which one is your favorite?
- The book shows Daria and her family grieving together. How is our family grieving and comforting one another? Can you think of more ways we can help one another?
- Daria and her family attend her grandpa's funeral. Funerals are usually very sad, but the words and memories offered during the service can be comforting. Was Grandma's funeral comforting for you? (If your child didn't attend the funeral, offer to relay some of the remembrances that were shared.)



- Let's both share something we miss about Grandma. What is one of your favorite memories?
- Daria wants to fly kites and build sandcastles with her grandpa. Is there something you wanted to do with Grandma that you weren't able to do? What do you wish you could do with Grandma if she were here now?
- I miss talking to your grandma. Do you? What would you say to her if you could talk with her now?
- Sometimes people feel angry when someone they love dies. Do you ever feel angry? When?
- Even though we all miss Grandma every day, it's OK to feel happy. Were you happy when [mention a recent positive experience]? If so, you don't need to feel guilty. Grandma would want you to have fun!

ART ACTIVITIES

Creating art can help children cope with difficult times. In *Grandpa's Window*, Daria draws happy scenes at the beginning of the book. Then she draws a storm with pounding rain and lightning. This is Daria's way of trying to deal with her emotions as her grandpa's illness gets worse instead of better.

Whether dealing with the loss of a loved one, a sick pet, or a problem at school, creating art can help express difficult emotions. Suggest some of the following ideas to your child:

- Draw a heart. Inside the heart, draw people or things that you love.

- Make a collage by gathering images from magazines that relate to how you are feeling. Think about which emotion each picture represents.
- Think about the colors that represent how you are feeling. Then use those colors to draw or paint.
- Draw a picture of the perfect day. Then draw a picture of a terrible day.
- Draw a picture of a place that feels happy or safe. It can be a real place or an imaginary one.
- Think about what type of animal you relate to. Then draw yourself as that animal.
- If you are missing a person who has died, make a memory box.



You can use an old shoebox or any type of container. Decorate the box any way you like. You could use markers or paints, or you could glue on pictures or other decorations. Once your box is ready, fill it with items that remind you of your loved one, such as photographs, letters, cards, or small objects. When you are feeling sad and missing the person whom you lost, you can look through your memory box. You can also draw a picture of a special time you spent with that person and put it into the box.

- Make a scribble. Then look carefully at the scribble and think about what the scribble could turn into. Could it become a cat? A truck? A roller coaster?
- Make art that lets you use your hands and fingers in a different way. Try finger paint or sculpting an object out of play dough or clay. Squishing and squeezing things with your hands can help you relax!
- Create a picture using chalk on a driveway or draw a picture in sand using a stick. These pictures won't last forever, and that's OK. Difficult feelings and emotions won't last forever either.

LAURA GEHL is the author of *Grandpa's Window* and *Apple and Magnolia*, which received three starred reviews and was called "a gem" by *School Library Journal*. Her nearly three dozen books for children have received many accolades and have been included on numerous best-of-the-year lists. She lives in Chevy Chase, Maryland. www.lauragehl.com.

A Note for Adults

BY SHARIE COOMBES

For all of us, and especially for a child, saying goodbye to a loved one who has died is hard. It can be difficult to understand what's happening and what death means.

Because grief is experienced in the heart, head, and body, children are likely to show a wide range of feelings and behaviors during and after a loss. They might be sad and

want a hug or quiet comfort. They might act as if nothing has happened or seem as if they've forgotten about the person who has died. You might see angry or aggressive behavior or a regression to younger ways of talking and acting. Children might have questions or may feel lost and confused. It's important to help children explore their feelings about what has happened. Remember to keep talking about and remembering their loved one.

Use clear language, such as "Grandpa has died." Saying that Grandpa is sleeping or has "passed away" can be too abstract for a child to understand. If a child asks whether the loved one is coming back, be honest. You may wish to say something like, "No, but we can always remember the special times we had with them."

Our faith traditions address the biggest questions of life and death. An experience of loss may offer an opportunity for you and a child to explore these questions together; it is important, though, for the child to understand that their loved one won't be seen again in this life.

Children often believe they've caused something to happen because of what they did, said, or thought. Reassure them that nothing they did prompted the death and that they could not have done anything to prevent it.

Feelings will naturally come and go. Remind children that it's OK to be sad and equally OK not to be sad. Their loved one would both understand their sadness and want them to be happy and have fun again.



Grief might bubble up at unexpected times and on anniversaries. There's no right amount of time for grief. Children don't have to understand death right away or all at once. The experience of grief evolves over time for a child, just as it does for an adult. If you feel that your child would benefit from expert advice and guidance, seek it out at any time, even well after the loss has occurred.

Reading and talking about stories like *Grandpa's Window* can help, as can hands-on activities, such as those offered here. Be creative and do what comes naturally. The priority is for children to understand that the love they shared with the deceased still matters.

Look after yourself—you are grieving as well. Turn to your own support network for comfort or contact one of the organizations listed below.

DR. SHARIE COOMBES, known simply as Dr. Sharie, spent almost thirty years as a teacher before earning her masters in child psychology. She has worked with children and teens in schools, in private practice, and at one of the United Kingdom's leading mental health hospitals. Her books have been widely published. To learn more about her work, visit www.drsharie.com.



Organizations That Offer Support for Those Who Are Grieving

Children's Bereavement Center

www.childbereavement.org

The CBC provides free virtual grief support groups for children, teens, and adults.

The National Alliance for Children's Grief

www.childrengrieve.org

The NACG raises awareness about the needs of children and teens who are grieving a death and provides education and resources for anyone who supports them.

Sesame Street in Communities

www.sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/grief

Sesame Street in Communities offers printable activities, videos, and articles on answering children's questions about death.

Hospice Foundation of America

[www.hospicefoundation.org/Grief-\(1\)](http://www.hospicefoundation.org/Grief-(1))

The HFA educates the public and health care professionals about death, dying, and grief and offers support for families who are grieving a loss.

