



PICTURE BOOKS BRING HOPE TO THOSE WHO GRIEVE

MICHELLE COLLINS looks at how picture books can explore the idea of grief and how they can help those who are experiencing it.

As a librarian I am humbled by how anything from heart-breaking teen fiction to a Jungian exploration of dreams can offer a lifeline to someone trying to make sense of loss. In particular, picture books amaze me in their poetic insight into grief.

Two classics stand out for me; Margaret Wild's *Old Pig* always moves me to tears. Similarly, Michael Rosen's *Sad Book* offers a raw and honest exposé of the loss of Rosen's adult son, Eddie. Poignantly illustrated by Quentin Blake, it catches me off guard that such sadness be encountered in the pages of a picture book. Yet, the simple universality of grief makes picture books the perfect place to celebrate the joys of the 'good thing' we're losing and the heartbreak of this loss.

Britta Teckentrup's *The Memory Tree* recognises the legacy a loved one leaves us in our recollections of their kindness and how their good life continues to bear fruit despite our sorrow in their absence.

Grief, of course, isn't limited to experiences of death. Libby Gleeson's and Anna Pignataro's, *Clare's Goodbye*, poignantly acknowledges a child's grief in saying goodbye to a family home. While Dee, Oliver and Tiffany Huxley's creative response to the brutal murder of their family member, *My Brother*, is a gob-smackingly gorgeous book acknowledging the confusing and crushing blow of his death before illuminating this experience with the wonder of what they loved about their brother. The final pages are drenched in hope and their belief that he is now 'surrounded by light in a land so pure, so beautiful and so safe.'

This act of searching for a lost sibling echoes *My Brother's Book*, by Maurice Sendak. This fairy-tale for grownups was Sendak's lyrical response to his brother Jack's death and perhaps also the loss of his partner, Eugene Glynn. Both Sendak's and the Huxleys' books are metaphysical journeys seeking their deceased loved one and finding peace in the process.

Patrick Guest's *The Second Sky*, illustrated by Jonathan Bentley, could be read as a story of a little penguin wanting to fly alongside a subtler interpretation of the transition from illness, to death and into a beautiful afterlife. *The Second Sky* celebrates the hope of spreading our wings and reaching for the sky with a profound peace and even joy in the journey.

It's important that we have stories to share with children (and, let's be honest, adults) to help them make sense of loss long before they're ready to encounter the five stages of grief. It's wonderful to witness the emergence of new, poignant and profoundly evocative explorations of loss, grief and ultimately hope, in picture book format. Hats off to the writers, illustrators and publishers who have tackled this deeply personal theme. ✨

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