

Dealing With Grief, Loss And
Feelings Of Sadness
LKS2 Lesson Plan



Overview

Two book options provide distinct lesson plans and can be used independent of each other. However, to reinforce learning opportunities they can be used as separate, but thematically linked, lessons.

Purpose

- Talking about loss is important not only in its acknowledgement of those feelings, but also in the language and space it provides children with which to manage their own experiences.
- Using books as a launch pad for discussion and activities can help children make sense of their own emotions. It can also offer a non-confrontational exploration of the theme through characters' experiences, providing an opportunity for self-reflection, which isn't mandatory for the lesson's value.

For Parents/Carers

- It is important to keep parents and carers informed when tackling tricky, potentially triggering emotions. You may wish to adapt the [Letter Home](#) and send home prior to this lesson.
- Consider having a conversation with parents or carers particularly if there has been a recent bereavement, to establish if they're comfortable with their child being part of the lesson.

Lesson Context (2 mins)

[Relationships and Health: Pupils should know that mental wellbeing is a normal part of daily life; understand that there is a normal range and scale of emotions; recognise and talk about emotions, including a varied vocabulary when talking about feelings; know that it is important for children to discuss their feelings]

- Explain to children that you will be reading a book about someone dying, which some might find a bit sad. Acknowledge that some may have experienced the death of a loved one, but that loss isn't always about people dying. We can feel loss when our lives change dramatically, or when people move away.
- We can feel loss for family, friends, pets, places, etc. and it's important to talk about difficult feelings.
- Encourage children to understand that feelings of sadness, loneliness and fear are things we all share.

Reading Focus (10 mins)

Out to Sea by Helen Kellock (published by Thames & Hudson) is the story of Lara's journey through grief after her nana dies. Overwhelmed initially, she begins to come to terms with the loss and see the light again. It is quite a confronting book about the immediate aftermath of death.

The Cat Mummy by Jacqueline Wilson (published by Yearling) details a girl's attempt to preserve her cat Mabel after she dies, and how Mabel's death makes her think about the death of her own mum years before. It is a moving account of the importance of talking about death and the dangers of bottling up feelings.

Out to Sea

- Read the book in full.
- Draw children's attention to the "thoughts that had no name or shape" and talk about how these thoughts might feel, e.g. *frightening, confusing, powerful, unwelcome*.
- Revisit the idea of tears filling the room with "no space left to hold them" and talk about the image of this – and how it makes children feel.
- Discuss the imagery of where Lara's tears take her – out to sea, and what that represents, e.g. *the vastness of the ocean is a dark, lonely place where Lara is lost and small*.
- Ensure children understand what is meant by the reference at the end that this wouldn't be Lara's last trip out to sea, e.g. *that other people in her life will die*.

The Cat Mummy

- Read pp10–13, from "Gran says I've got to remember that Mabel is very, very old" until "When she's not asleep" and check that children understand why it's easier for Verity to talk to Mabel rather than members of her family, e.g. *she's there, she listens, she doesn't cry, she doesn't get upset*.
- Continue reading to the end of p19 until "I wanted Mabel so badly I wouldn't have cared." Explore the reasons why Verity's tummy keeps clenching when she talks about Mabel – ask children what they think she's feeling. Touch on the mix of emotions that surround loss.
- Read pp39–40 from "I gave a little gasp" until "I'll keep you safe." Highlight that Verity is so shocked about Mabel that she can't contemplate burying her.

Talk About It (10 mins)

[English, Reading comprehension: Pupils should listen to and discuss a wide range of fiction; draw inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives; participate in discussion about books, taking turns and listening to what others say]

Out to Sea

- Ask children how they think Lara is feeling as she heads out to sea on her river of tears, encourage them to think about the overwhelming nature of grief and how isolating it can feel.

- Look together at the picture of Lara on the seabed and note that there are no words on this page. Suggest that this might symbolise the depths of sadness when there is nothing more to say – like hitting rock bottom.
- Check with children about what the pearl represents for them, e.g. warmth, beauty, possibility, light. Draw attention to the use of colour in the pictures – pink, yellow and orange around the pearl in contrast to the dark blue, grey of the sea, and ask children if this helps them to think about what the pearl might mean.
- Talk together about Lara finding her way home, and how part of the grieving process is learning how to carry on. Discuss any strategies that children can think of which might help with this.
- Draw children’s attention to the animals that surround Lara throughout, but that she still feels so alone. Talk about ways that children can let people in, even when they feel really cut off.

The Cat Mummy

- Ask children why they think Mabel is so important to Verity, e.g. *Mabel was a connection to her mum and also a good listener when she wanted to talk about her mum.*
- Talk together about how it can be easier to channel feelings into something more manageable (like the death of a pet) rather than thinking about less comprehensible events (like the death of a relative).
- Encourage children to think about why Verity’s family might not like talking about her mum, e.g. *they don’t want to show their sadness, it’s hard to think about.* Ask children how not being able to talk about her mum might make Verity feel and encourage them to talk about how sharing their own feelings has helped them.
- Think together about the guilt that Verity feels because of how she spoke to Mabel, and her fear about not being able to put that right. Encourage children to acknowledge that not all our memories of people we love are happy, and that can make loss harder to come to terms with.
- Verity has a strong reaction to burying Mabel, talk about why she’s against it, e.g. *it’s final, it makes the death real, it reminds Verity of her buried mum.* Think together about healthy ways to keep someone’s presence alive after they’ve died, such as by talking about them, looking at photos, keeping something physical of theirs, etc.

Get Creative! (15 mins)

[Art & design: Pupils should improve their mastery of art and design techniques, including drawing, painting and sculpture with a range of materials]

Out to Sea

- Ask children to create their own landscape to symbolise loss – for instance a barren harsh desert, a cold moon floating in space, etc. using different art materials.
- Revisit the images of the different animals in the book and encourage children to create a fact-file about a friendly animal – either real or imaginary – that helps them feel less lonely.

- Encourage children to draw a picture of something special that they do with someone close to them, such as going to the park, baking, walking to school, etc.

The Cat Mummy

- Ask children to design a plaque/gravestone for Mabel to help Verity come to terms with the burial.
 - Encourage children to make a poster, similar to the missing poster, commemorating Mabel's life.
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Write It! (10 mins)

[English, Writing composition: Pupils should organise paragraphs around a theme; create setting, characters and plot]

Out to Sea

- Ask children to use the [Diary Writing Frame](#) to write a diary entry from Lara's perspective about a day she spent with Nana, encourage them to really think about conveying how and why it's special.
- Children could write a descriptive piece about their imagined landscape to go with their artistic creation. Ask children to use powerful descriptive words and to think specifically about whether it's hot or cold, what they can see and smell, and what (if anything) lives there.
- Look at the dedication at the back of the book and ask children to write a letter of dedication to someone in their life who helps them when they feel alone. Encourage them to think about how they help and why they're important.

The Cat Mummy

- Ask children to use the [Letter Writing Frame](#) to write a letter from Verity to her mum, expressing how she feels about her.
 - Encourage children to write a series of thoughtful, kind questions they could ask a friend who has experienced a loss and is finding it hard to talk about.
 - Children could write their own story about loss – it can be about a person, a pet or an object. Encourage them to think about how their protagonist deals with the loss.
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Closing Q&A (3 mins)

- Reflect on how lonely loss can feel and highlight the power of sharing the experience or thoughts surrounding it with others, even if those thoughts seem overwhelming, negative, or scary.
- Encourage children to share an experience of talking about their feelings, and how it affected them. Discuss what it means to be a good listener and acknowledge that listening to people talking about difficult emotions can feel uncomfortable.

Extension Opportunities

Out to Sea

- **Drama:** Children could act out the book using mime – no words, developing their expression of emotions.

The Cat Mummy

- **Reading:** Read the whole book, 96pp.