

Dealing With Grief, Loss And
Feelings Of Sadness
UKS2 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)

Waiting for Wolf by Sandra Dieckmann (published by Hodder Children's Books) is the story of Wolf's death and his friend Fox's attempt to come to terms with it. It looks at the darkness of loss and the peace offered by acceptance.

Pax by Sara Pennypacker (published by HarperCollins) examines a boy's friendship with a fox cub which helps repair his broken heart after the death of his mum, but which inevitably ends in a heart-wrenching farewell. It is a moving and thought-provoking story of loneliness, loss and the importance of companionship.

Waiting for Wolf

- Read the book in full.
- Draw children's attention to the idea of Wolf being starlight, and check that children understand that this is a metaphor for death.
- Think together about the "velvety star blanket" and discuss whether this is a physical blanket, or a representation of the darkness and emptiness of Fox's loss.
- Look at the imagery at the end of the book of the moon shining "peacefully" and the stars dancing in the sky and think about how this reflects how Fox is feeling, e.g. *calm, content, full of life*.

Pax

- Read pp9–11, from "Peter dropped the toy back into the tin" until "...about apples and the trees they were stuck underneath" and explain that Peter has gone to live with his grandfather because his father has gone to war. Highlight that Pax (Peter's fox cub) had to be released back into the wild and ask children how they think Peter is feeling.
- Continue reading to the end of the chapter (p22). Explore the range of feelings that Peter associates with loss, e.g. *anxiety, anger, shame, guilt, bitterness, fear*.
- Read pp47–48 from "When Peter's mother had died" until "And did she blame him for what happened?" Make sure that children understand that Peter's mum died in a car accident and that Peter thinks he somehow caused the accident. Discuss how this might make Peter feel.

Talk About It (10 mins)

[English, Reading comprehension: Pupils should continue to read and discuss an increasingly wide range of fiction; draw inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives; discuss and evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language, considering the impact on the reader; participate in discussion about books, taking turns and listening to what others say]

Waiting for Wolf

- Look back at Fox and Wolf's last day together, and especially when Wolf asks that Fox always remembers how perfect it is and explains that "tomorrow I will be starlight". Talk with children about whether they think Wolf knows she's going to die, and whether she's sad or at peace with that.
- Look at the spread where the book is held in portrait and talk about the impact of the illustration in this format, e.g. *it gives a greater idea of the scale of the landscape, and how far away the stars are*.
- Discuss what Fox is trying to achieve as she attempts to reach the stars, and how desperately sad loss can feel – that those left behind might be willing to try anything to get the person who's died back.

- Talk together about Fox's failure to reach Wolf, how her world becomes dark, empty and quiet. Her sadness is all-consuming and envelops her.
- Draw children's attention to the importance of Fox's tears – that they wash away the dark blanket and reveal the light and colour and talk about how crucial it is to accept sadness and to cry. Suggest happiness and joy return to Fox, once she has really "sat" with the loss.

Pax

- Discuss the different sorts of loss that play a part in the story, e.g. losing pets and animals, moving home, separation from a parent, death, and talk about how loss is varied and comes in different guises.
- Discuss the connection between people and animals (Peter's father's with Duke, Peter's with Pax, his mother's with the baby rabbit), and how the word "inseparable" conveys the power of the connection and the severity of the loss. Ask children about people and/or things they feel inseparable from.
- Encourage children to think about what Peter means by "Something bad is going to happen because you aren't where you should be", and how guilt and blame are woven into his feelings of loss. Talk about how these emotions feel and whether children have any experience of them.
- Revisit the way that Peter describes anxiety as a physical thing: "it seemed like a snake...ready to slither up his spine" and encourage children to talk about how that image makes them feel, ask whether the picture of the snake helps them understand how the anxiety feels.
- Peter talks about the memories of his mother fading, encourage children to think about how this might feel, e.g. *frightening, anxiety-inducing*, and the fear of forgetting someone who's died.
- Talk together about the different characters' anger, and how Peter tries to avoid confrontation with that emotion. Discuss how anger shapes their experience of loss, e.g. *stops them talking, stops them feeling happy or sad together, stops them sharing, creates anxiety, is isolating and lonely*.

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]

Waiting for Wolf

- Ask children to create pictures representing sadness and joy, using a wide variety of art materials, encourage them to think specifically about colour, texture and perspective.
- Children could draw or paint a picture of their perfect place, where is it, what's the weather like and is anyone else around?
- Encourage children to create an invitation to celebrate Wolf's life, suggest that they think about what this event would be like, what it would include and what the purpose would be.

Pax

- Ask children to create a model of an animal which embodies an emotion for them. It doesn't have to be anxiety, as with the snake for Peter, but could be a representation of happiness, relief, comfort or a more confronting feeling such as anger, fear or loss.
 - Encourage children to create a picture of anger – it can be of anything, or be abstract, and use any art material, but needs to embody the power of that emotion.
 - Children could draw or make a model of a pet that has meant a lot to them, or an animal they would love to have as pet.
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Write It! (10 mins)

[English, Writing composition: Pupils should identify the audience for and purpose of the writing; consider how authors have developed characters and settings; select appropriate grammar and vocabulary, understanding how such choices can change and enhance meaning; describe settings, characters and atmosphere and integrating dialogue to convey character]

Waiting for Wolf

- Ask children to use the [Letter Writing Frame](#) to write to a special friend telling them what they mean to them and what they enjoy doing with them.
- Children could write a descriptive piece about loss, Fox explains it as a “velvety star blanket”, how might they describe sadness using metaphors and similes.
- Encourage children to write about their perfect day, what they would be doing and with whom?

Pax

- Ask children to use the [Letter Writing Frame](#) to rewrite the note Peter writes to his grandfather, explaining his real reasons for leaving. Encourage them to think about how Peter feels.
 - Encourage children to write their own prequel in which Peter says goodbye to Pax, paying particular attention to how this farewell would feel (you could then share Chapter 1 of the book).
 - Children could write about a loss they've experienced, this doesn't have to be a death, but could be a house move, a parental separation, changing school, etc.
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Closing Q&A (3 mins)

- Reflect on the importance of acknowledging and recognising sadness, of crying and talking about it, of accepting it and living with it, and how this is a crucial part of grieving.
- Encourage children to share an experience of talking about their feelings, and how it affected them.

Extension Opportunities

Waiting for Wolf

- **Music:** Listen to the song referenced in the dedication, “Some Things Last a Long Time” by Daniel Johnston, encourage children to write their own lyrics or create a melody for a song about loss.

Pax

- **Reading:** Read the whole book, 276pp.