University of Rhode Island
DigitalCommons@URI

Senior Honors Projects | Honors Program at the University of Rhode Island

2007

Students Sharing Feelings of Grief: An Elementary Curriculum on Loss

Kristen Gloumakoff
University of Rhode Island

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog

Part of the Child Psychology Commons, and the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Recommended Citation
Gloumakoff, Kristen, "Students Sharing Feelings of Grief: An Elementary Curriculum on Loss" (2007). *Senior Honors Projects.* Paper 46.
http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/46

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Program at the University of Rhode Island at DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu.

Students Sharing Feelings of Grief: An Elementary Curriculum on Loss

By Kristen Gloumakoff

Faculty Sponsor: Carolyn Hames, Associate Director, Honors Program

"It is only natural that we and our children find many things that are hard to talk about.

But anything human is mentionable and anything mentionable is manageable.

The mentioning can be difficult, and the managing too, but both can be done if we're surrounded by love and trust."

~Fred Rogers

Table of Contents

Week 1 …… 4

Week 2 …… 8

Week 3 ……... 11

Week 4 ……... 14

Week 5 ……... 17

Week 6 ……... 20

Book List ……... 23

References …… 24

Week 1: Feelings

Objectives	1. To introduce students to the concept of feelings and talking about their feelings. 2. To create a way to express feelings through a class activity.
Instructional Materials & Resources	For each student: • 4 paper plates • Markers • 4 popsicle sticks • Glue For the teacher: • Book, *Today I Feel Silly*, by Jamie Lee Curtis • Ring of feeling colors • Examples of activity
Instructional Activities & Tasks	**Opening:** • Teacher will ask students, "What are feelings?" (expected answer: things that you feel, examples) • Teacher will introduce the ring of feelings colors. The teacher will tell the students that each week that they meet they will use the color ring to show how they are feeling. They do not have to say what they are feeling, just show which color or pattern they feel. • Teacher will pass the ring of colors around the group and each student will show which color they feel. **Development:** • Teacher will introduce the book, *Today I Feel Silly* by Jamie Lee Curtis. The teacher will explain that the book is about feelings. • Teacher will read the book to the class and discuss the feelings mentioned throughout. • Teacher will lead a discussion about having different feelings in different situations. • Students will return to their desks and the teacher will explain the activity. • Students will create four faces on four different paper plates representing the feelings of happy, sad, mad, and scared. • Students will return to the rug and the teacher will read a series of scenarios. The students will have to hold up the plate that best represents the feeling that they would feel in that particular situation.

	Closing: • Students will go around and say his/her favorite part of that day's session. Did they like the book? The color ring? The activity? • What do they think they learned today? How will it help them?
Assessment	Teacher will do an informal assessment to make sure that students are participating in the activity and attentively listening during the reading of the book.
Learner Factors	• This activity accommodates all learners because students can be as creative as they like with their paper plate faces. • The book will be read to the class and the book is easy enough to understand so that the entire class will be able to understand it.
Environmental Factors	1. Students will start out sitting on the rug while the story is being read. 2. Students will then move to their desks to work individually on their paper plate faces. 3. Materials will be provided for each student. 4. Teacher will use normal policy to get the class' attention.

Scenarios for Week 1 Activity

1. You just got an ice cream cone and the ice cream falls off.
2. You hear thunder and lightning outside of your bedroom window.
3. Your parent brings you home a new toy that you've wanted for a while.
4. Your friend blames you for something that you didn't do.
5. You find out that you're going to Disney World on vacation.
6. You find out that school is cancelled because of bad weather.
7. Your sibling jumps out of the closet and yells "Boo!"
8. Your dog runs away and you can't find it.
9. You find out that your favorite TV show got cancelled and won't be on anymore.
10. You break your mom's favorite glass.

Week 1

In this first week, I intentionally decided not to jump right into the topic of death. Whether there is a student in the class who has had a significant loss or not, starting with death can be a little bit too intense for many young children. Instead, I began with feelings. Students all have feelings, but many have trouble expressing those feelings, especially when it comes to grief.

All people grieve both emotionally and physically, but many children do not know how to express themselves with words. Movement and activity encourage communication in young children (Dougy Center, n.d.). Therefore, this week's activity is about identifying feelings, without necessarily talking about them with words. By making paper plate faces, they are putting a name to each face that they make. Besides this, they are expressing their feelings nonverbally through drawing the faces and holding them up when they think they would feel that emotion.

Week 2: Loss

Objectives	1. To introduce students to the concept of loss. 2. To get students to explore their own losses.
Instructional Materials & Resources	For each student: • Paper • Markers, crayons, paints, etc. For the teacher • Book, *Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs*, by Tomie dePaola • Ring of feeling colors • Example of activity
Instructional Activities & Tasks	**Opening:** • Teacher will pass around the ring of feeling colors and elicit how each student is feeling that day. • Teacher will ask students, "What are some things you have lost?" (expected answer: toys, books, dog, possibly a grandparent) • Teacher will explain that they will talk about losing things. • Before the book is read, teacher will ask the students to think about the most important thing that they have ever lost. **Development:** • Teacher will introduce the book, *Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs* by Tomie dePaola. The teacher will explain that the book is about a boy who loses someone very special to him. • Teacher will read the book to the class, pausing when he/she feels that clarification is needed. • Teacher will ask the class questions about things or people that the students have lost. • Students will return to their desks and the teacher will explain the activity. • Students will choose something or someone important to them that they have lost. This can be as simple as their favorite toy or as deep as a pet or relative. • Students will then return to their desks and receive a piece of paper. Each student will fold the paper in half. On one half, the students will create a picture representing life before they lost their important thing, and on the other half they will create a picture representing life after they lost that thing.

	Closing: • Students will go around and say his/her favorite part of that day's session. Did they like the book? The discussion? The activity? • What do they think they learned today? How will it help them?
Assessment	Teacher will do an informal assessment to make sure that students are participating in the activity and attentively listening during the reading of the book.
Learner Factors	• This activity accommodates all learners because students can be as creative as they like with their pictures. • The book will be read to the class and the book is easy enough to understand so that the entire class will be able to understand it.
Environmental Factors	1. Students will start out sitting on the rug while the story is being read. 2. Students will then move to their desks to work individually on their before and after pictures. 3. Materials will be provided for each student. 4. Teacher will use normal policy to get the class' attention.

Week 2

In the second week, students will begin to explore loss. All students will be able to relate to this concept because we all have lost something. Although in the story that is read this week the boy loses a grandmother, students can feel free to discuss any sort of loss. This includes friends who have moved away, parents who have divorced, pets who have died, special toys that got left somewhere and haven't been found, or any other sort of loss that they can think of.

When a child experiences a death, they usually have a hard time understanding that a person is gone and not coming back. This is due to the fact that they cannot yet think abstractly, and death is certainly abstract (Dougy Center, n.d). Sometimes they will only feel grief at specific moments when they feel that the person is gone, such as when the person was supposed to tuck them into bed or take them out for pizza. It is important for these children to be able to express themselves, which is more likely to happen through pictures than through words and dialogue. That is why I have chosen to do a before and after picture for this week. In this activity, students can show how they feel when someone or something isn't there.

This is an important activity even for children who have not experienced a death. For example, if a child had a special place where they played with a friend, such as under a particular tree, and the friend has moved away, they may draw their first picture with the friend under the tree, and the second picture of the tree by itself. This would represent the fact that this place isn't as special without that certain friend. It is good for all students to figure out how they feel and what it is that is making them feel that way.

Week 3: Life Cycle

Objectives	1. To introduce students to the life cycle. 2. To help students understand the difference between life and death. 3. To have students create a collage to show their understanding of life and death.
Instructional Materials & Resources	For each student: • Paper • Magazines • Scissors • Glue For the teacher: • Book, *Lifetimes*, by Bryan Mellonie • Ring of feeling colors • Examples of things that are dead and alive • Example of activity
Instructional Activities & Tasks	**Opening:** • Teacher will pass around the ring of feeling colors and elicit how each student is feeling that day. • Teacher will ask students, "What is a life cycle?" (teacher may have to prompt students, starting with what a cycle is and moving into going from life all the way to death and life again) • Teacher will explain that they will talk about the life cycle and the difference between life and death. **Development:** • Teacher will introduce the book, *Lifetimes* by Bryan Mellonie. The teacher will explain that the book is about the life cycle. • Teacher will read the book to the class, pausing when he/she feels that clarification is needed. • Teacher will lead discussion about the life cycle. What else has a life cycle? Plants? Animals? People? • Teacher will also lead a discussion about the difference between life and death. What makes something alive? What makes something dead? During this time, teacher will show examples of things that are alive and things that are dead, such as live plants and dead tree branches.

	• Students will return to their desks and the teacher will explain the activity. • Students will look through magazines and cut out pictures of things that are alive and things that are dead or non-living. • Students will then each receive a piece of paper. Each student will fold the paper in half. On one half, the students will glue pictures of things that are alive, and on the other half they will glue pictures of things that are dead or non-living. **Closing:** • Students will go around and say his/her favorite part of that day's session. Did they like the book? The discussion? The activity? • What did they learn today? How will it help them?
Assessment	Teacher will do an informal assessment to make sure that students are participating in the activity and attentively listening during the reading of the book.
Learner Factors	• This activity accommodates all learners because students can cut and glue any pictures they want as long as it fits the criteria. • The book will be read to the class and the book is easy enough to understand so that the entire class will be able to understand it.
Environmental Factors	1. Students will start out sitting on the rug while the story is being read. 2. Students will then move to their desks to work individually on their collages. 3. Materials will be provided for each student. 4. Teacher will use normal policy to get the class' attention.

Week 3

In the book *Teaching Students About Death*, Robert Stevenson discusses some of things that should be included in a death education curriculum. One of these things is the idea that children need understand that death is the end of life. Students must understand that death is final, and that someone or something that is dead is not coming back. This is the point of the box of the things that are dead and alive. Again, elementary students understand best with things that are concrete and tangible (Stevenson, 1996).

Another thing that Dr. Stevenson suggests for a death education curriculum is talking about the life cycle. It is important to remind students that with each death there is a new life (Stevenson, 1996). With the collage that the students will be creating, they can see that for every thing that is, there is something or someone that is alive. By doing this, students can begin to see that life is something to be treasured, because death is inevitable.

Week 4: Ways to Remember

Objectives	1. To introduce students to remember someone or something that they have lost. 2. To create a box where they can store their memories.
Instructional Materials & Resources	For each student: • Wooden Box • Paint • Rhinestones • Magazines • Other decorations • Glue • Things to put inside of the box such as plastic figures, beads, etc. For the teacher • Book, *The Memory Box*, by Kirsten McLaughlin • Ring of feeling colors • Example of activity
Instructional Activities & Tasks	**Opening:** • Teacher will pass around the ring of feeling colors elicit how each student is feeling that day. • Teacher will ask students, "When you lose something or someone important to you, how do remember it/them?" (teacher may have to prompt students, to get them to think about memories) • Teacher will explain that they will talk about the memories and how to remember something or someone lost. **Development:** • Teacher will introduce the book, *The Memory Box* by Kirsten McLaughlin. The teacher will explain that the book is about one way to remember someone that you have lost. • Teacher will read the book to the class, pausing for that clarification as needed. • Teacher will lead discussion about memories. What kinds of things do the students want to remember? What are some other ways that we can remember things or people? • Students will return to their desks and the teacher will explain the activity.

	• At their desks, each student will receive a wooden box. • Teacher will explain that these boxes are to store memories of something or someone that has been lost. Each student may choose one person or thing that they have lost and want to remember. • Using paint, rhinestones, and other decorations, students may decorate the outside of the box. • Students will fill the box with things that remind them of something they have lost. This includes pictures from magazines, plastics figures, stickers, beads, and anything that they may have brought in from home. ***Note: Teacher must tell students in advance if they want to bring in things such as pictures and objects from home.** ***Note: Decoration of the box may take additional time on the day of the activity or on the next day.** **Closing:** • Students will go around and say their favorite part of that day's session. Did they like the book? The discussion? The activity? • What do they think they learned today? How will it help them?
Assessment	Teacher will do an informal assessment to make sure that students are participating in the activity and attentively listening during the reading of the book.
Learner Factors	• This activity accommodates all learners because students can be as creative as they like in decorating their boxes. • All students make a personal connection by choosing something that he/she personally lost. • The book will be read to the class and the book is easy enough to understand so that the entire class will be able to understand it.
Environmental Factors	1. Students will start out sitting on the rug while the story is being read. 2. Students will then move to their desks to work individually on their memory boxes. 3. Materials will be provided for each student. 4. Teacher will use normal policy to get the class' attention.

Week 4

They say that grief comes in waves. Children are likely to re-experience these waves of grief many times throughout their lives (Dougy Center, n.d.). As they grow, children who have had a loss can experience these "grief attacks" in a variety of different ways. One way to help a child through these difficult times is to acknowledge their feelings and have something or somewhere that they can go to remember good things about the person that they have lost.

In this session, students will be creating a memory box to remember the person or thing that they have lost. These memory boxes are beneficial to grieving children because they are made by the children and they can view the contents of the box whenever they want. It does what any other sort of memorial cannot- be always easily accessible to the child. Also, this box will contain things that are important to the students, so it will be very personalized and special to the child who makes it.

Week 5: How to help a friend who has lost someone

Objectives	1. To introduce students to being sympathetic to a friend who has had a loss. 2. To have students create a "soup," a composite of all of their feelings.
Instructional Materials & Resources	For each student: • Colored construction paper • Markers • Scissors • Glue For the teacher: • Book, *Tear Soup*, by Pat Schweibert • Plastic cauldron or metal soup pot • Ring of feeling colors
Instructional Activities & Tasks	**Opening:** • Teacher will pass around the ring of feeling colors and elicit how each student is feeling that day. • Teacher will ask students, "If you have a friend who has had someone close to them die, what are some things that you might do to help him/her?" (teacher may have to prompt students, and can write their answers on the board) • Teacher will explain that they will talk about one way that people deal with feelings. In this story, a woman has had someone close to her die. **Development:** • Teacher will introduce the book, *Tear Soup* by Pat Schweibert. The teacher will explain that the book is about dealing with death and one of the ways that they may be able to help out a friend. • Teacher will read the book to the class, pausing when he/she feels that clarification is needed. • Teacher will lead discussion about helping a friend. Did you get any ideas about how to help a friend who has had a loss? What do you think about tear soup? How does the soup help someone who has lost someone? • Teacher will explain that the class will be making their own tear soup. Teacher will also explain that this soup will be different from the one in the book. First, it will be a group soup. Second, the "ingredients" don't

	only have to put in their feelings about someone who has died. They may also put in feelings or frustrations that they have for a friend who has had someone die. They also may put in any other fears or feelings that they have about death. • Students will return to their desks and begin to work on making ingredients to put in the soup. They will write on pieces of construction paper and cut them into the shape of vegetables or anything else that they like. • Teacher will explain that these are anonymous and that they don't have to share these things with the other students in the classroom. • When they finish cutting out their shapes, the students will put their shapes into the soup pot. The teacher will stir the soup pot and the soup will be complete. **Closing:** • Students will go around and say his/her favorite part of that day's session. Did they like the book? The discussion? The activity? • What do they think they learned today? How will it help them?
Assessment	Teacher will do an informal assessment to make sure that students are participating in the activity and attentively listening during the reading of the book.
Learner Factors	• This activity accommodates all learners because students can write whatever they are feeling to go in the pot. • All students make a personal connection by writing what they feel. • The book will be read to the class and the book is easy enough to understand so that the entire class will be able to understand it.
Environmental Factors	1. Students will start out sitting on the rug while the story is being read. 2. Students will then move to their desks to work individually on their soup ingredients. 3. Materials will be provided for each student. 4. Teacher will use normal policy to get the class' attention.

Week 5

When children experience a loss, it is not always comfortable for them to talk to an adult. Sometimes, children need the support of their peers (Stevenson, 1996). But children do not always know how to help one another. Sometimes friends avoid grieving friends because they are afraid they will say the wrong thing or do something that will hurt their feelings. Many grieving children think that their friends don't care, don't understand, or are not sensitive to their situation.

The book *Tear Soup* helps students understand that grief is complicated. It is different for everyone, but everyone who grieves has similar feelings. It is not a one-time thing; it will come back. The grieving individual benefits by having someone with whom to share his/her "soup". By writing out their feelings and putting them in a pot of tear soup, the students connect to each other and see that they are all dealing with emotions, whether they are grieving or not. Hopefully this activity will guide students to be more sensitive when dealing with a friend who has experienced a loss.

Week 6: Celebrate Life!

Objectives	1. To build students self-esteem and learn to enjoy life! 2. To have students create a book about what they like about themselves and their life.
Instructional Materials & Resources	For each student: • Pages to the booklet, "What I like about me!" • Oak tag/card stock paper for front/back cover • Girl/boy outline for cover • Yarn, decorations for cover • Crayons/colored pencils • Pencil • Scissors • Glue For the teacher • Book, *I'm Gonna Like Me*, by Jamie Lee Curtis • Ring of feeling colors • Example of activity
Instructional Activities & Tasks	**Opening:** • Teacher will pass around the ring of feeling colors and elicit how each student is feeling that day. • Teacher will say to students, "We have spent the last five weeks talking about death. Now you may be a little bit nervous about death and unsure of when you will die or when others will die. I'm here to tell you that you probably won't die soon, and neither will the people around you. What we do definitely have is a life to live right now, and we need to celebrate that." • Teacher will explain that they will talk about liking themselves for who they are and enjoying the life that they have been given. **Development:** • Teacher will introduce the book, *I'm Gonna Like Me* by Jamie Lee Curtis. The teacher will explain that the book is about celebrating ours lives and all things that are good (and not so good) about us. • Teacher will read the book to the class, pausing when he/she feels that clarification is needed.

	• Teacher will lead discussion about esteem. What did the children in the book like about themselves? Were they all things they were good at? What do we like about ourselves? • Students will return to their desks and the teacher will explain the activity. • Students will create a book about things that they like about themselves. • On the cover paper, they will glue the girl/boy cutout and decorate it to look like them with yarn, decorations, crayons/colored pencils, etc. • On the inside of the book, students will write sentences about different things that they like about themselves, along with illustrations that they will draw. **Closing:** • Students will go around and say his/her favorite part of that day's session. Did they like the book? The discussion? The activity? • What do they think they learned today? How will it help them? • Teacher will end with asking the students how they felt about the program and what they learned about during the six weeks. • Students will write a short paragraph about their feelings so that they can share things that they maybe did not want to share openly with the entire class.
Assessment	Teacher will do an informal assessment to make sure that students are participating in the activity and attentively listening during the reading of the book.
Learner Factors	• This activity accommodates all learners because students can write whatever they want about themselves. • All students make a personal connection by writing about themselves. • The book will be read to the class and the book is easy enough to understand so that the entire class will be able to understand it.
Environmental Factors	1. Students will start out sitting on the rug while the story is being read. 2. Students will then move to their desks to work individually on their books. 3. Materials will be provided for each student. 4. Teacher will use normal policy to get the class' attention.

Week 6

By the time students approach the sixth week of this program, it is likely that they will have many questions answered, and many more still to ask. All this talk of death and loss may make some children more aware of their own eventual death. Throughout this program, students should be reminded that most people live very long lives, and that life should be fun, valued, and respected (Stevenson, 1996).

This last week will focus on these concepts. This program is not just about teaching students about death and how to deal with it. It is also about appreciating the life that we have. This week should contain a lot of discussion about how wonderful it is to have this life, and about how we should all learn to like ourselves and live life to the fullest!

Book List ~ Resources for Teachers

Teaching Students About Death: A comprehensive resource for educators and parents, by Robert G. Stevenson, EdD & Eileen P. Stevenson, RN, MA

Student Dies, A School Mourns: Dealing With Death and Loss in a School Community, by Ralph L. Klicker

Helping the Grieving Student: A Guide for Teachers, by Dougy Center for Grieving Children

35 Ways to Help a Grieving Child, by Dougy Center for Grieving Children

Help Me Say Goodbye: Activities for Helping Kids Cope When a Special Person Dies, by Janis Silverman

Book List ~ Books for Students

When Dinosaurs Die, by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown

What on Earth do you do when someone dies?, by Trevor Romain

I Miss You: A First Look at Death, by Pat Thomas and Leslie Harker

The Day Scooter Died: A Book About the Death of a Pet, by Kathleen Long Bostrom

I Don't Have an Uncle Phil Anymore: A story about death, grieving, and cherishing, written especially for children, by Marjorie White Pellegrino

Grandma's Purple Flowers, by Adjoa J. Burrowes

Goodbye Mousie, by Robie H. Harris

References

Dougy Center, The. (1996). *Facilitator Skills Manual.* The Dougy Center, The National Center for Grieving Children and Families

Stevenson, R.G., & Stevenson, E.P. (1996). *Teaching students about death: A comprehensive resource for educators and parents.* Philadelphia, PA: The Charles Press.