

Question 2: “If we insist on telling children that everything in the garden is lovely, we’re doing them a disservice” (Browne quoted in Crown, 2009, p. 12). Analyse the work of illustrators and, particularly, author illustrators who tackle difficult, sensitive and sometimes shocking themes.

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Illustration BA

Creative Research: IMAGE, BOOK, TEXT

Media of all types can communicate and convey thoughts, ideas and messages about difficult topics, picture-books aren't an exception to this and can be an exceptional tool for anyone, but especially children to be exposed to and learn about some of the more difficult realities we will face in our lives.

One of the most difficult and sensitive topics to anyone but especially children is loss, whether it be a pet, family, or our own passing. Picture-books can help explore loss and the following grief in a controlled and easy to understand way, to inform or even reassure children about this sensitive topic.

Till We Meet Again written by Julie Muller and illustrated by Camryn Cox uses colour effectively to convey emotion alongside its dialogue, blues used in fig.1 are light, subdued and paired with the narration "it hurts deep down inside" (Muller and Cox, 2016, p. 3) gives a feeling of emptiness and desolation. Fig.2 also features a predominantly blue page, this time it's darker but not overwhelming, showing us a family under the night sky. The white moon creates negative space and room for the image to breathe while also illuminating the page, leaving the blue feeling less sad and more tranquil. Here we see blue used twice but in varying contexts, which works with the idea of accepting your sadness and memories of loved ones who have died, there is a duality we see in these colours just like life and death.



The blue evokes an aura of emptiness and desolation (Muller and Cox, 2016, p. 3)



Using blue in a different context promotes seeing death in a different way (Muller and Cox, 2016, p. 8)

Furthermore, the same is done with red, with the fig.3 of the book depicting a red sky with hints of orange and yellow. It's paired with many questions such as "How did this happen?" and "Where did you go?" (Muller and Cox, 2016, p. 4), the way in which the image is structured with this dialogue conveys feelings of being hurt and confused, the clouds in the sky also add to this as it could be commenting on one's mind being clouded while in a state of grief. Red is seen later predominantly in fig.4 but this time with much more yellow, the clouds have parted and the general emotion that's put forth is that of warmth, with the dialogue referencing the "Sun", but also that "Love endures" (Muller and Cox, 2016, p.7) showing children that these previous feelings and colours which were predominantly negative can be thought of differently and positively as they are all associated with a figure they love. By using the colours twice in different contexts, the authors suggest that how you feel won't always be the same and that you can move on from the loss of someone by keeping in mind that they loved you.



Red is used to highlight confusion and painful thoughts regarding death and grief (Muller and Cox, 2016, p. 4)



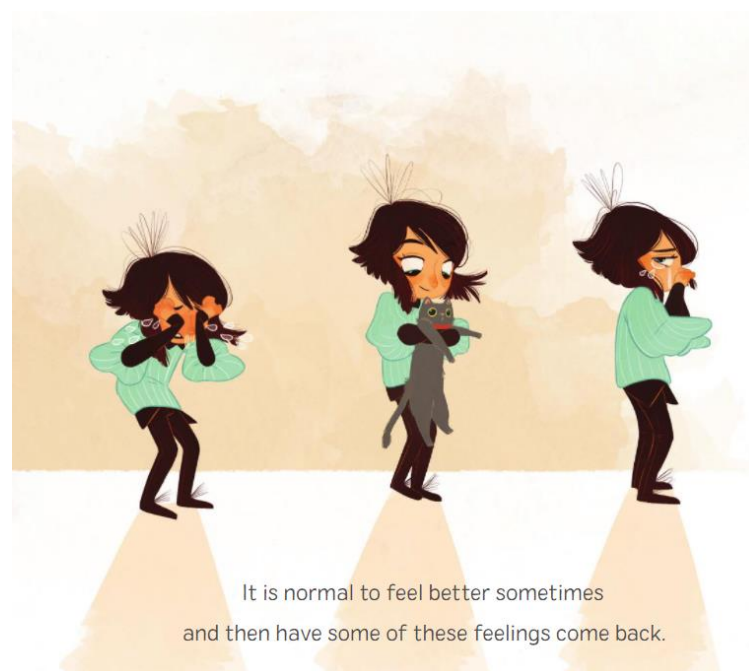
The same colours are used to show warmth and love, like the blue it presents a dualistic nature which could be applied to death (Muller and Cox, 2016, p. 7)

Why do I feel Sad written by Tracy Lambert and illustrated by Elena Napoli talks about various forms of grief particularly centred around the loss of someone fig.5 features a very striking page of a young girl looking forlorn, we see her shadow as well as her grandfathers with the text “My grandpa has died” (Lambert and Napoli, 2020, p. 12). Aside from these details is fully white which is a great and simple way to convey the absence of something using negative space and the absence of detail, adding to this only the grandfathers shadow remains, symbolically this could represent the memories of her grandfather that this girl still has. Like the previous book the idea of retaining one’s memories of loved ones is a constant in children’s picture books when depicting death, likely due to it focusing on positive feelings that can be used to give the lives of the deceased and our lives meaning, it’s nicer for children to remember something pleasant and use that to enrich their lives from such a negative experience.



The negative space highlights an absence of the grandfather figure (Lambert and Napoli, 2020, p. 12)

A recurring visual in *Why do I feel so Sad* is there's a lot of light and shadow, this adds depth to the images but also gives the book a softer feel overall. Symbolically the idea of light and shadow present a duality and a balance of negative and positive emotions, this can be seen in text on fig.6 with it stating, "It is normal to feel better sometimes and then have some of these feelings come back" (Lambert and Napoli, 2020, p. 32). Showing children there will be better times and harder times and this is okay, often they merge which is seen in the use of light and shadow in the artwork. Beams of light and shadow are often seen spreading outside from a character (fig.6), perhaps indicating that we will always carry that shadow and the baggage of grief with us and at times it may shift and feel lighter or overbearing depending on the day. On fig.7 we see sunlight pour through a window illuminating a young girl's face, in context this references how you should seek support from adults you trust to feel better about your grief. This sunlight could embody the idea of sharing your grief to lighten your load, which would be a play on words through imagery, in simple terms though it could represent positive energy reaching the girl, symbolized as an adult helping her.



Shadows are present in every image showing the permanence of grief and loss (Lambert and Napoli, 2020, p. 32)

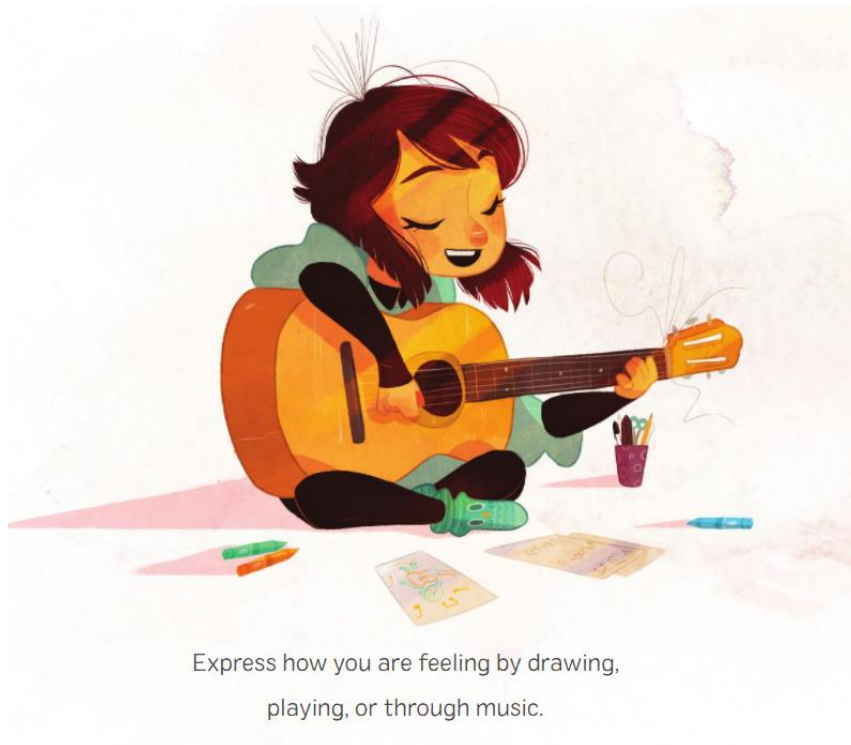


Light can be symbolized to show the positive force others might have in helping deal with grief
(Lambert and Napoli, 2020, p. 34)

Following this we get imagery of the girl partaking in creative activities with the text:

“Express how you feel by drawing, playing or through, music” (Lambert and Napoli, 2020, p.35), while this acts as a potential idea a child could partake in to help process their grief over loss in a symbolic way it shows children that they can express their emotions and rebalance the shadow and light within them, we see beams of light hit the girl, indicating an intake of light and positive energy, and shadows come off of the guitar and creative implements such as crayons, indicating an absorption or a redirection of shadow. This page is an interesting way visually to communicate how helpful creativity can be to children who are experiencing grief, they could healthily put their emotions into something creative and

explore them just like in the book they're reading, which in a meta way the authors are also doing with this book.



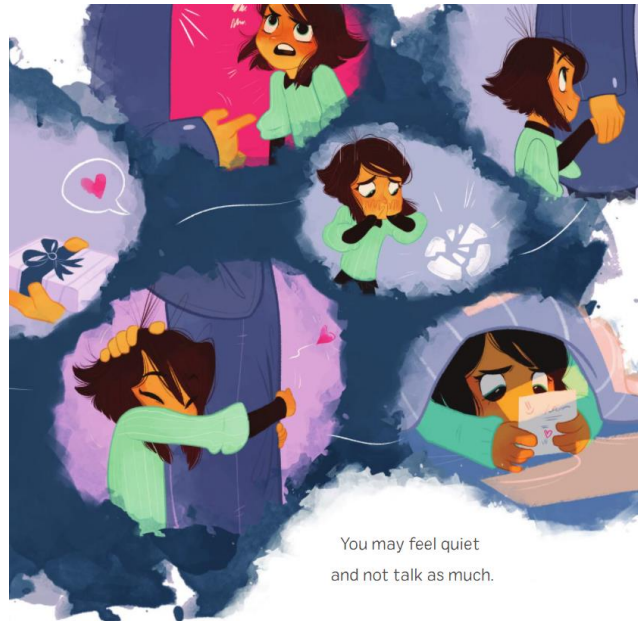
Creating can help us redirect the sad parts of our grief and rebalance us, as seen in the shadows and the light (Lambert and Napoli, 2020, p. 35)

An aspect of dealing with any sort of emotional problem including mortality and grief is how confusing it can be for those who are suffering. On fig.9 we get an interesting visual effect, colours partially obscure our main figure, and the page is accompanied with the text "You might have trouble listening or paying attention at school". It's important to acknowledge the physical and mental effects these feelings could have on children alongside just talking about the event, which is what this book does, by not only drawing the girl looking inattentive and out the window but also obscuring her with an effect. This could make children empathise and realize that they have trouble like that too, normalizing this

behaviour and not leading to them thinking worse of themselves because they haven't been able to try their best. Fig.10 utilizes wilder and messier paintbrush techniques with a harder to read page which could be indicative of how confusing one's thoughts might be, jumbled like the pictures on this page.



The effect obscures the image which mirrors the feelings of confusion one could experience when grieving (Lambert and Napoli, 2020, p.26)



The messy brush techniques applied add to the confusing nature of loss (Lambert and Napoli, 2020, p.28)

My Dad will never die authored by Aldrich Linton uses a myriad of techniques to enhance its simple message to a very effective degree. One of the most notable ways Lindon uses to convey meaning is through the size of the character, they are tiny, fridges, bed and tables are gigantic in comparison which is a very carefully considered choice when you add the context of the words. The narrator talks seemingly from the boy's perspective and the images show the boy doing these activities such as "We read together near the bedroom window" Linton, 2021, p.3), however the boy is alone, and coupled with his size it feels as if something is missing but the ideas conveyed here are that even when alone the boy's dad is still with him. The boy's size might also highlight how difficult it is when dealing with loss and grief as well as the potential loneliness the boy may feel (fig.11) , even though through dialogue the story makes us believe that the boys dad is with him, we see exactly the opposite, he's alone in a massive bed, the way Lindon plays with size to convey different meaning which is at odds to the text is very interesting and heavy, it adds a secondary

element to the entire story, the struggle of someone coping with grief as they hold on to these memories of their loved one. Whilst other books I've previously mentioned like *Till we meet again* go over this idea and how it can help, Linton brings a certain amount of realism which is deeper within the book, the reality of your feelings beneath those memories of your loved one, children may wonder why the boy is alone and so small and come to their own conclusions which is good to help them come to their own understanding of what grief and dealing with death may mean to them.



The use of size could indicate possible difficulty the burden of loss has over him (Linton, 2021, p. 3)

Linton uses colour in an interesting way throughout the book, first in a very surreal imaginative way much like how a child would colour, it's artificially sweetened to look more vibrant, but as the book progresses, we get less and less of this multicoloured pattern style, it jumps from the background, onto the table and then a thin swing set as if the mental idea of "My Dad will never die" starts to fade. Fig.12 may mark a realization or a gap in this idea, the colours are much more desaturated, Gray and green, and from here on out they're largely colourful but more normalized, this may reflect the way a child's mind may change its perception of events to a more realistic one as time goes on.



Compared to the previous image the colours are more desaturated as if the boy has his colourful ideals tested (Linton, 2021, p.8)

Alongside a photo of family on fig.13 the multicoloured pattern returns, again promoting this idea of keeping memories dear and using them to keep fostering positive feelings of love instead of dwelling in more negative emotions. There's possible room for cynicism of that idea here but overall, the book seems to be trying to convey the importance of memories which is reinforced by the text "sometimes I crave memories" Linton, 2021, p. 12) which is something the child narrator really wants. The title and ending of the book state "My Dad will Never die" Linton, 2021, p. 18), in a sense someone only really dies when they are forgotten, so in keeping his dad's memories alive the boy's dad never dies, putting further importance onto memories.



The importance of memories to the boy lies in this page and ties the idea of memory to death

(Linton, 2021, p. 12)

The way typography is used in this book is also very important to convey its messages, fig.14 uses this the position and size of the typography to great effect, as it's much smaller and hidden on the very right side in a window. The way it's laid out lets the image breathe, and with the context it makes it very sombre and genuine, as soon as you read your eyes are drawn to the boy with his yellow top his pose indicates he's there thinking which promotes anyone reading to do the same. This is also the first time we see the boy at a normal size, indicating his growth but he still thinks about these events, his loss, and the grief he carries with him perhaps.

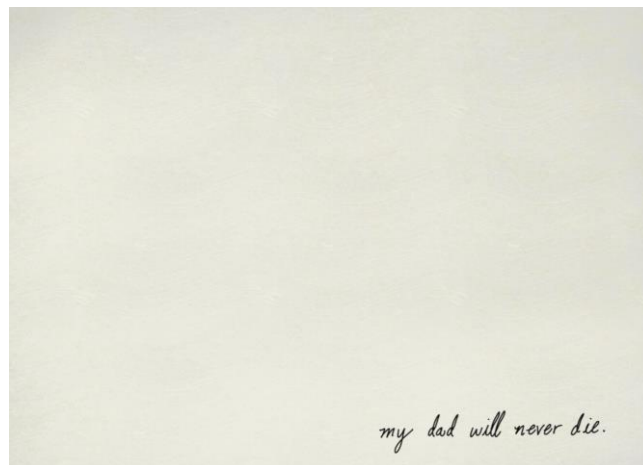


Typography is used to great effect here to show a more introspective and sombre side to the boy (Linton, 2021, p. 15)

Fig.15 and fig.16, are evocative in its use of minimalism, first is a dark black sky which the boy assumedly looks out into, filling the whole page in a vast darkness. It is however not without the light of the stars, which could signify hope or of something that's beyond far beyond the boy, the book talks at length about "craving" Linton, 2021, p. 8) earlier on so this could be an extension of wanting more, and after reading there's a sort of determination to this page which carries onto the next. Fig.16 is entirely white and in the bottom right corner where the next page would be turned is the text: "My dad will never die" Linton, 2021, p. 18). It stands alone but resolute, due to it being built up throughout the book and by the previous darkness of the page beforehand creating contrast it makes this very memorable despite there being little there. There is massive emotional weight at the end since we get to see wavering throughout and questioning even if not directly, and it ends with a strong message about memories which could help children deal with the death of a loved one by keeping them close.



The dark sky is vast and serves to contrast the final page to heighten its impact (Linton, 2021, p. 17)



The final page is very minimalistic by pushing its core message using the lack of image (Linton, 2021, p. 18)

There is a variety of ways children's picture book illustrators tackle the sensitive issues of mortality, loss, and grief, these can be from colour influencing the emotions of children, the way words and typography are used in tandem with the artwork to present complex issues

in a simpler way for children to puzzle together. Many of these authors and artists convey meaning that's digestible to children in the way it's drawn, coloured, and written but has advice and lessons that are very important to impart onto children. There is a lack of bluntness or heavy-handedness which is respectful as it tackles very difficult issues without making the world seem like a hostile and unforgiving place, instead they are inclusive to all and simple as to improve the feelings and lives of the children who read them.

Bibliography

Muller, J. and Cox, C. (2016) *Till We Meet Again*. Professional Women's Publishing/Hummingbird Books.

Lambert, T. and Napoli, E. (2020) *Why Do I Feel So Sad?: A Grief Book For Children*. California: Rockridge Publishing.

Linton, A. (2021) *My Dad Will Never Die*. Aldrich Linton.