

Book Island

Teacher Notes

Mum's Jumper

by Jayde Perkin

Synopsis

Where has Mum gone? What is death? Everyone says they're sorry, but it's not 'their fault'. We tread the path of a daughter through her mother's death, from separation, through the language and behaviours that make little sense.

The loss and her grief change everything within her familiar world. She is angry and confused. Can she move forward? How does she do this? How can the daughter make sense of what has happened and what is to be? How can she stay connected to her mother when she has died?

'Mum's Jumper' is an honest picture book that acknowledges the trauma of bereavement, especially upon a young person. It demonstrates the impact and confusion, while offering awareness, hope and reconciliation.

Picture book maker

Bristol-based illustrator Jayde Perkin is a comic maker. She works in inks and gouache. Jayde Perkin has examined themes of loss, from her own experience, in mini-comics such as 'Insides on the Outside', 'Time May Change Me' and 'I'm Not Ready'. The last creation won the East London Comic and Arts Festival x We Transfer Prize in 2018 and will debut in longer form at this year's festival.

Themes

'Mum's Jumper' offers strong visual metaphors that present the themes tangibly.

Colours employed are symbolic, e.g.

- * pinks and reds of hope, love and blood connection
- * daffodils and yellow, for Easter, spring, new life, seasonal movement
- * black for grief, death
- * white and blue for cold and emptiness

We travel from a hospital farewell to a funeral, the conventions of behaviour in bereavement, anger, separation, sadness, and reconciliation.

The themes include grief, sadness, separation, empathy, anger, guilt (in moving forward, in being happy, in not remembering, in growing up), memory, difference (the lone child), happiness and progress.

Flowers and words, e.g, the soundbite dialogue, offer a sense of overwhelming tumult, e.g. 'I'm so sorry'.

Activities

1. Share the book. Pause. Ask, 'How do you feel?' Do not qualify responses. Use space to encourage contributions.
2. Show first two pages. Say, 'Look at the characters. Suggest what any one of them might be feeling from the way you feel when you look at them.'
3. Say, 'Look at the different settings of the first two pages.' Say, 'What do you see when you look at the settings? Why do you think Jayde Perkin has created these two scenes to sit page-by-page together? What do they suggest?'
4. Ask, 'What is your experience of visiting somebody in hospital? What did you see? How did you feel?' Do not qualify contributions. Move forward over incidental or irrelevant contributions. Allow space for responses.

Words and Meanings

1. Prepare large labels of two statements used in 'Mum's Jumper':

- She's gone.
- I'm so sorry.

Discuss in pairs: What do these words mean? Where else could they be applied? What are people saying in these situations really?

Consider: 'Why do we choose words like these in death?'

2. Look at the flowers shown in the book.

Ask: 'In your experience, when are flowers shared?' For what reasons? In your experience, what do flowers mean?'

(See themes) - Show pictures of some flowers and volunteer their symbolism, e.g.

<https://www.flyingflowers.co.uk/page/hidden-meaning-of-flowers/>.

How are flowers used in 'Mum's Jumper'?

3. Create your own collage flower bouquet. Consider the meaning of the colours you choose. Think about the flowers you wish to create, or recreate, and what they mean. Use a variety of collage papers. Add mini labels to direct visitors to your meanings.

Bereavement

In other faiths and cultures

1. Ask: 'What experience or knowledge do you have you may like to share of bereavement in a different culture?'

<https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/life/culture/explainer/funeral-customs-around-world>

2. What happens in Maori culture?

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/tangihanga-death-customs/print>

Personally

1. Invite the children to write a memory of somebody they know who has died. Be sensitive to the class construction and history. Some may recall a pet, or their knowledge of another family member's experience of bereavement.

Colours

Jayde Perkin uses colours to show the characters' feelings through the book. Slowly look through the book as a class without reading aloud. Ask the children to note down any colours they see that are associated with feelings and changes in feelings.

1. Say, 'Share what you see.'
2. Ask, 'Why is Mum's jumper red?'
3. Ask, 'What do you notice about the way black is used in the book? How does it change?'
4. Ask, 'Where is yellow employed?'

Colours and words

Show: preponderance of black on the funeral pages, through the soundbites - pause, ask for a response;

All at sea: floating in blue and black- 'my body ached, like I'd been swimming for days; how could I get to the shore?' Say, 'These words are symbolic. 'What does the girl mean?'

Look at the grey tones of the playground. Ask, 'Can you find the main character? What do these double pages suggest to you? She says, 'all really kind, ___ 'I still felt so alone'. Describe the contrast of words and pictures in these pages.

Ask, 'Why did Jayde Perkin choose to make Mum's jumper red?'

Conclusion

Look at the washing line picture on the concluding pages.

Suggest, 'List what you see.'

Ask, 'How is Mum's jumper shown differently?'

Then, 'What are the deeper meanings of the many colours?' And, 'Why does Jayde Perkin include large sunflowers?'

Consider the feelings in the final text, 'I don't need to wear it every day. But I like to know it's there' and 'I feel Mum everywhere'.

Create

1. Draft a 'What I love to remember' list poem. Read it aloud to a writing partner. Ask your writing partner to peer check its shape, language and meaning. Proof read it again.
2. Create the shape of a favourite piece of clothing that could be washed and hung on a line. Make sure it's big enough to write your proof read list poem upon.
3. Write your 'What I love to remember' poem carefully upon your clothing shape. Hang on a classroom 'washing line' of happy memories.

Plenary

1. Share the book finally. Pause. Ask, 'How does 'Mum's Jumper' make you feel?'
2. Ask. 'How do you think 'Mum's Jumper' would make a young person whose parent has died, feel? Why?'
3. Teacher shares what she/ he has learned from reading 'Mum's Jumper'. Then, ask 'What about you? What new understanding do you have from your experience of reading 'Mum's Jumper'?

These teacher notes have been written for Book Island by Bronnie Mayho from [Bookwagon](http://www.bookisland.co.uk).

www.bookisland.co.uk