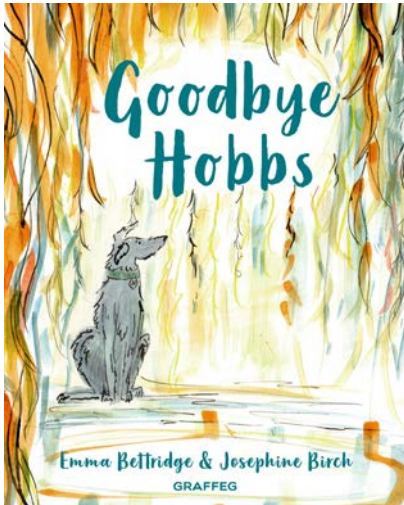


Goodbye Hobbs



Author: Emma Bettridge
 Illustrator: Josephine Birch
 Age: 5-7
 Format: Paperback
 Size: 200 x 250mm
 Price: £8.99

Before you start:

Grief and bereavement

This thoughtful book explores feelings of loss when a dog's beloved best friend dies, and enables young children to reflect on different behaviours and emotions associated with grief and how we might remember those no longer with us through cherished memories. There may be children in the class or group who have experienced bereavement and you will need to consider this in how you share this book most sensitively.

For teachers, volunteers, parents, or anyone working with bereaved children and using this book as a tool, both [Child Bereavement UK](https://www.childbereavementuk.org/) and the [Childhood Bereavement Network](https://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org/) have a wide range of resources to support you and those in your care.

Journal

As you read through the book it would be helpful to use a group journal to organise and store discussions and responses to the text. The journal could be a place to capture reflections on the plot, characters and themes, as well as how the words and pictures make the children feel.

Vocabulary

As you read, you may also want to encourage the group to pause to consider words and phrases that may or may not be familiar to them and discuss and clarify their meanings and origins. These might include but will not be limited to glances, heaves, plods, familiar, trots, Labrador, bridleway, dappled. Add these to a glossary, either on a word wall in the classroom or in the back of the group journal, following up on new and unfamiliar vocabulary by drawing on familiar vocabulary meanings and the context of the book, personal experience and existing knowledge, as well as using photographs and film sources to bring these words to life.

Front cover

Look at the front cover with the children but cover the title with a piece of paper.

What are your first thoughts or impressions, upon seeing the cover? Where is it set, and at what time of year? How do you know? Who is this character and what are they doing, thinking and feeling? What makes you think that?

Draw attention to the dog's body position, gaze and facial expression, inviting the children to share any personal experiences and knowledge of dogs to support the discussion.

Now ask the children to summarise their response to the cover illustration by thinking of one word to describe the dog and collect these in the journal.

Title

Now reveal the title to the children, *Goodbye Hobbs*.

Is this what you expected? How does this change what you first thought about this illustration and the dog?

Is the word you would choose now to describe it the same or different? Why? Why not? Who is Hobbs? Where has Hobbs gone? What might this title tell us about this character?

Elicit ideas and answers from the children around who Hobbs might be and what their relationship is, or could be, to the grey dog on the front cover.

Some children may think that Hobbs is the grey dog featured, others may think it is someone different. Value all responses, encouraging the children to share their thinking with each other.

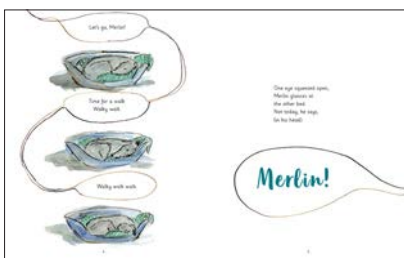
Invite the children to visualise and sketch who the grey dog might be looking at, sharing their ideas while they draw. Pin up the children's artwork and give them time to respond to each other's predictions.



Endpapers

Open the book to the blue endpapers and pause to invite the children's initial responses, drawing attention to the illustrative choices of the small, line drawn picture of the dog in the basket on the page turn corner and it's placement on the blank spread as well as the author's choice of flat colour.

You will compare these endpapers with the orange ones at the end of the story once you have finished reading as well as exploring the symbolic choice of season and its relation to the human theme of the story.



Pages 4 & 5

Share the first double page spread and read the first three speech bubbles with attention to prosody.

Is this what you expected? Why? Why not?

Give the children time to closely read the illustrations and discuss what is happening and what it tells them about Merlin and his life.

Encourage the children to pay particular attention to Merlin's eye, ear and nose, which move very slightly in each picture, but give us as readers a lot of information.

Why might the speaker be repeating the word 'walk' and how might they be saying it? Are they shouting it, or saying it quietly? How does the speaker feel about Merlin?

Ask the children to repeat the opening speech bubbles, using different voices (angry, loud, quiet, encouraging, soft). Which one do they think is the most appropriate and why?

Read the following page and pause over '**Not today, he says (in his head)**'.

Why doesn't Merlin want to go walking today? Is he tired or lazy?

Ask the children to consider what else Merlin might be saying in his head, when being called by the speaker and reflect on how he might articulate these things as you note them in the class journal.

Discuss that although animals, and dogs, cannot speak, they do have other ways of communicating what they want to humans.

Ask the children how dogs show humans what they might be thinking and feeling (barking, jumping, licking etc.) and jot them down in the journal. You could then categorise these words into positive or negative feelings by circling the words with a blue or orange pen.

Return to this list whilst reading, to see if Merlin exhibits any of the behaviours the children noted down.



Pages 6 & 7

When reading the next page, pause over the words **'heaves'** and **'plods'**.

What is Merlin trying to tell his owner, or us as readers, about how he is feeling?

We have learnt on this page that Hobbs has a bed near Merlin, from which the children can most probably elicit that Hobbs is, or was, a dog. Again, pose the question to the children where is Hobbs? Where has he gone?

Read the following page, which shows Merlin coming down the stairs.

Ask the children to focus on Merlin's owner for a minute. What does their body position, gaze and facial expression tell us about them and how they feel about Merlin?

Although Merlin did not want to get up, he has come downstairs. What does this tell us about their relationship?

Some children may notice the photographs on the wall, showing pictures of Hobbs and Merlin. Look closely at them together, and then ask them to share what more it tells us about Merlin, his owner and what has happened. The children may relate this to any pictures of people or places in their own homes that are special or significant to them or their family.



Pages 8 & 9

Turn to the next double page spread and ask the children to look at the illustration without revealing the text.

Discuss what first strikes them about this image and then invite the children to look more closely at the details in the spread.

Now read aloud the text, **'Rain on head'**, and gather the children's immediate responses. Is this what you expected it to say? How does or doesn't it relate to the illustration and this scene? What does it tell us about Merlin's interaction with his surroundings?

How might Merlin be thinking or feeling about the walk? What tells you this? Have you ever felt like this? Why do you think the author has chosen rain rather than sunshine?

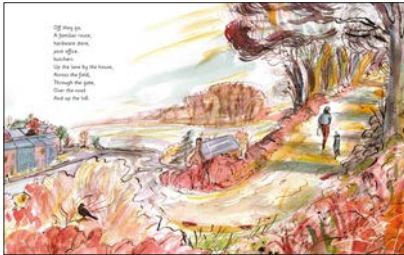
In pairs, ask the children to create a freeze frame as if they were Merlin and his owner on their walk.

Considering what we know about his owner and their relationship, how would she be reacting to his reluctance? How might she be feeling herself?

Encourage the children playing Merlin to brace themselves as he does.

Once you have completed the freeze frame, focus for a minute on Merlin's tail. What do you know about dog's tails and what they tell us about how dogs are feeling?

Ask the children if they have heard of the saying 'tail between their legs' and ask them what they think it means, in this context.



Pages 10 & 11

Turn over to the next double page spread, inviting the children to share what first strikes them about this spread in contrast to the last. What is similar? What is different?

The children may comment on the shift in weather conditions from wet to dry but blustery; the natural surroundings; the bright oranges as opposed to blue greys; the winding path; and looking more closely, that Merlin is now off the lead and walking side-by-side his owner rather than being pulled by the lead.

What effect does this have on you as a reader? How might it make Merlin feel in comparison to the being on the pavement? How might it being a familiar route affect him?

Ask the children what the word '**familiar**' means to them. What, where or who in their lives are familiar to them? When do they most want things to be familiar?

Share personal stories of what emotions familiarity might provoke; perhaps a sense of comfort, in most cases.

How might this 'familiar route' bring Merlin comfort despite experiencing the absence of Hobbs? What might his owner want him to experience along the way?



Pages 12 & 13

Read the next two double page spreads, allowing the children plenty of time to explore the illustration on the woodland spread with Merlin before looking closely at the photographs of Hobbs and Merlin together on the page turn.

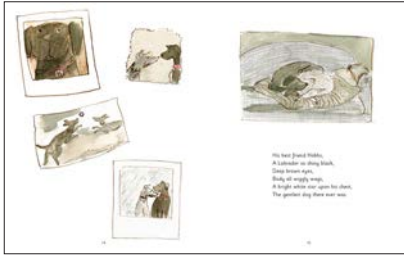
What is the effect of the illustrations on this spread? What does it make us feel or think about and why?

Some children may have spotted the pictures on the walls earlier and know what sort of dog they were looking for.

What more does this tell us how Merlin is feeling and what he understands about losing Hobbs.

Re-read the description of Hobbs slowly to the children. How do you feel when you hear this description of Hobbs? What kind of friend was he to Merlin?

Ask the children to think of other adjectives, besides gentlest, to describe Hobbs.



Pages 14 & 15

Turn to the next page and, before reading, ask the children what difference they can see in Merlin's body language now. Why is he turning around? Who is he turning towards?

Ask the children to look closely at the picture, drawing attention to the outline of Hobbs in the sky, if they don't spot it. Why has the illustrator drawn this in the sky? How does it make you feel? Does it remind you of any other stories in films or books?

You might reference *The Lion King* film in which Mufasa appears to Simba or *Grandad's Island* by Benji Davies in which Grandad's facial profile is the shape of the island.



Pages 16 - 21

Read up to page 21.

Do you think Merlin has seen or smelt the real Hobbs?

Discuss with the children whether they think Merlin uses his eyes, ears or nose most when trying to find or look for Hobbs. How is this the same or different for humans?

Ask the children to consider what they know about dogs and their sense of smell, and why this is so important to Merlin.



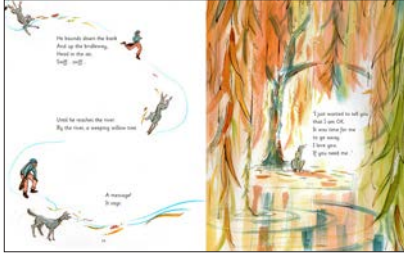
Pages 22 & 23

Pause over the phrase, 'A message!'.

Close the book and ask the children to imagine what message Hobbs might have left Merlin. Ask them to think about it for a moment on their own, and then share their message with the class in what they imagine Hobb's voice would be.

Read Hobb's message to the children and then follow Merlin to the next page.

Pages 24 & 25



Read the next page and pause at the bottom of page 24. **'He bounds down the bank'**.

How is this Merlin already different to the Merlin we met at the beginning of the story? Who has helped him find his energy again?

Look at the picture of his owner, what do you think she is feeling and experiencing herself at this moment?

Read page 25 to the children and ask them to consider why the illustrator draws Merlin alone in this picture and the one on the previous page, when he is listening to Hobbs' message.

Why do you think these places are special or significant?

Pause over **'I just wanted to tell you that I am ok / It was time for me to go away.'** How does this make the children feel? How do they think Merlin feels?

Discuss with the children why it may have been Hobbs' time to go away and be aware that this may be a sensitive topic for children who have lost a loved one.

Create a space where children feel able to share how and why they may have lost people they loved, depending on the size and temperament of the group.

Why is it important for Merlin to know that Hobbs' is ok? This is a huge question and one in which you might want to explore further, in addition to sharing this story together.



Pages 26 & 27

Read on to **'Big sniff'** on the following page.

What might Merlin be preparing for? What and where might this next message be and what could it involve.

Encourage the children to revisit what Merlin's experiences have been so far and the kinds of memories that he shared with Hobbs.



Pages 28 & 29

Read the following double page spread and pause at the end.

Flip back to pages 6 and 7 and, with the children, discuss the changes we see in Merlin.

How has the llustrator shown that something about Merlin has changed? How have they used colour and movement in their drawings to show this?

Write the word **'urgent'** in the group journal and ask the children what they understand about the meaning of this word and the contexts in which they have heard or seen it used.

Reflect on its meaning and how the children think it applies to Merlin's movement now. Why might he have an **'urgent'** need to follow the scent? What does he want to gain from finding it as quickly as possible?

Read the whole story from beginning to end and invite the children to choose one word to describe Merlin as they see him now at the end of the book. Jot them down in the journal and compare these words to their words from earlier in the book.

Now consider what we can learn from Merlin's experience of loss and how he is learning to manage it.



Endpapers

Share the blue and orange endpapers with the children, either using the book itself or by photocopying the pages and placing them on the table in front of the children.

How has the illustrator used colour and movement to depict how Merlin has changed over the course of the story? Why do you think the illustrator chose blue at the beginning, and orange at the end? How else are the endpapers different?

The children may comment on the emptiness of the blue one in comparison to the energy of the final one and how this relates to Merlin's emotional state.

Flick through the book and explore how else the colour palette has changed from spread to spread and how this relates to the mood created by the text and Merlin's emotional journey. In what other ways do the illustrations add meaning to the text?

Reflect with the children what impact the autumnal weather had on key scenes and the story as a whole.

What impact did the rain have on the mood of the street scene? What effect did the movement created by the wind have on the following scenes? Could it have worked if it rained throughout? Why? Why not?

Why has Autumn been chosen as the season in which to tell a story about loss? Do you think the story could have been set just as well in Summer? Why? Why not?

End by engaging the children in book talk in which they share what they liked and disliked about the story and book as a whole, any connections they make to their experience of real life or other stories and anything that might still puzzle them.

You might want to record these responses in the class reading journey.

Consider what motivated the author to write this book, drawing attention to the dedication and what this tells us. Think about how writing this book and sharing memories of her own, real life and 'beloved Hobbs' may have helped her and how this connects with Merlin.

Invite the children to think about ways in which writing or drawing might help them manage their own emotions or make sense of things that happen. You might want to give the children a free writing journal so that they can use it to express themselves in writing and drawing as needed.

After reading

Reflect on what the author might hope to achieve through publishing this story; what message she wants to share about loss and bereavement to her readers.

Share a range of stories and poems that might help us to understand difficult emotions or situations that we might encounter, like loss, frustration, loneliness, jealousy, etc.

Invite the children to think about how they might turn their personal experiences into stories that they can publish for a new audience of readers.

Children could write to Emma Bettridge, sharing what they enjoyed about her story and what it has made them feel or think about and perhaps how they think it has or would help children in understanding or managing grief.

The children could choose some other places in the story (the hardware store, the butchers, the horse field) where Hobbs may have left messages and imagine what he may have said and how Merlin responds. The children could note these down on postcards and create a display out of them.

The story might inspire the children to write a note, message or email to someone that they are missing in their own lives or to write or draw a picture about someone special, in memory of them and the relationship they shared.

You could use the story to begin a discussion around whether they think animals have similar feelings to humans and whether they too experience grief and loss.

Consider sharing stories which demonstrate remarkable pet loyalty, such as *Greyfriars Bobby* from Scotland or *Hachiko* from Japan.

Consider why the author chose to tell the story from the viewpoint of Merlin rather than from the owner's perspective.

Merlin uses his sense of smell to locate messages from Hobbs. Although he can no longer see him, he still has a very clear memory of him through this sense. You could explore much loved memories with the children by asking them to describe what they could smell, hear, taste or feel, but without describing what they can see. Does this change the way they remember the memory, or a person in it?

The description of Hobbs from page 15 reads like a poem. Children might be inspired to write and illustrate a poem about a person, pet or favourite toy or item they may have lost, to support them to express their emotions or to capture a special memory.

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OTHER TITLES ILLUSTRATED BY JOSEPHINE BIRCH, OR TO SUPPORT EXPLORATION OF THEMES FROM THE BOOK:

- *Selkie*, Josephine Birch (Starfish Bay Children's Books)
- *Badger's Parting Gifts*, Susan Varlet (Andersen Press Ltd)
- *The Heart and the Bottle*, Oliver Jeffers (Harper Collins)
- *Grandad's Island*, Benji Davis (Simon & Schuster)
- *If all the World Were*, Joseph Coelho and Allison Colpoys (Frances Lincoln)
- *The Proudest Blue*, btihaj Muhammad, S.K. Ali and Hatem Aly (Anderson)
- *Between Tick and Tock*, Louise Greig and Ashling Lindsay (Egmont)

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