

ADDRESSING DEATH AND GRIEF THROUGH CONTEMPORARY INDIAN PICTUREBOOKS

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"...all of their words for a thousand years could not fill the hole left by his mother, but they could raise a loving fence around it so he didn't keep falling in."

- Jerry Spinelli (2007)

ABSTRACT

Picturebooks¹ highlight the most fundamental emotions of life (Short, 2011), which enable children to consider their feelings and responses about an issue portrayed therein. Hence, reading picturebooks depicting children's lived reality enables them to engage with experiences that matter to them (Sipe, 2008). This paper explores how death has been represented in contemporary picturebooks in India. The picturebooks under consideration move beyond the idea of death as enigmatic, and death is not limited only to the elderly; it includes parent, siblings, friends and adults who are more a friend. The study looks at potential clues that the children may pick up independently or could be taught to decode by educators while discussing or developing perspectives around loss.

Keywords: Death, Grief, Loss, Picturebooks

1. INTRODUCTION

Death, and subsequently grief, is an unavoidable part of life. Though death is experienced by people of all ages, children find it most difficult to understand, grieve, and accept death. It is therefore necessary to establish a mechanism for coping with a loss, particularly, at an early age. However, what makes it immensely challenging for adults/educators, to open up a conversation with young children regarding death is that death is considered a sensitive subject and that children should be shielded from it. Children may encounter the death of their parents, grandparents, and/or pets, and they may demonstrate a range of grief reactions (Corr, 2010). As they negotiate distress, they may experience physical discomfort in addition to sadness or anxiety (Slaughter and Griffiths, 2007; Willis, 2002). Therefore, how children grieve would depend on the adults' recognition and response to the complex feelings of the bereaved children (Holland, 2008). Lowe (2009) emphasised the significance of addressing a situation of loss within a classroom setting. It has also been argued that it is indeed unsympathetic while dealing with a topic such as death to pretend that nothing is wrong, particularly with children (Keith and Martin 2005). If they are given incomplete information about such painful situations and are left alone to draw their inferences, it may affect their confidence and ability to cope. As children perceive the pain of adults around them, it is reassuring for them when educators are willing to converse with them. Studies have shown that very often elementary school teachers find it difficult to deal with the subject of death and dying in an organised manner in their classes (Schonfeld, 1992). There could be several reasons why death may not be discussed in the classroom. It could be because it is excluded from the school curriculum or teacher's job description, or, teachers are inadequately trained to address such topics. Rowling and Holland (2000) observed that increasingly, society has expectations from schools beyond the textbooks and the structured academic content and from teachers who can take up the responsibility of discussing difficult issues that their students might face daily. Teachers now have the responsibility of educating children appropriately about death, and they must know and have access to suitable resources that are available for children and are developmentally appropriate.

This paper aims to explore how contemporary Indian picturebooks are addressing and representing death through texts and visuals and the role that such picturebooks play in supporting children's experiences of grieving due to the death of a loved one (Wiseman, 2012).

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¹In this article, I have borrowed from Larry Sipe's way of spelling 'picturebook'—as one word—since it emphasises 'the unity of words and pictures that is the most important hallmark of this type of book'.

It also attempts to fill in the gap in existing literature regarding the potential of such picturebooks as an effective pedagogical tool in Indian classrooms, where children come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

The books discussed in this paper are simple and are meant for young children (5–10 years old). The primary purpose of these books is to help children understand death and the associated feelings. The young protagonists could be seen as models who portray how bereaved children may react. The books have been chosen based on ease of access, low price, age, and reading levels. All the picturebooks, barring one, were selected after an online search using the words 'death', 'loss', and 'grief' on the digital platform "Storyweaver," an open-access collection of multilingual storybooks for children in India. This repository was particularly identified to select the primary sources because it is free/open access and low-priced print editions of the same stories are also published by Pratham Books, a popular children's book publisher in India. Since I aimed to look for stories where the deceased is not only a grandparent and because "Storyweaver" did not contain any story that dealt with the death of a sibling, an online search was conducted for the second time using the criteria 'death of sibling' which led to *Boo! When my Sister Died*.

The list of books does not include all picturebooks published in India about dying and death; hence, it is not comprehensive. However, they offer an insight into how contemporary Indian picturebooks for young children address death. This research was primarily done to collect information about the portrayal of dying and death in picturebooks published in India, which teachers can also use as a teaching tool in their classrooms.

As mentioned, this article focuses on verbal and visual representations of death in its various manifestations, instances, and effects. As a literary form, picturebooks inextricably connect the verbal and the visual, whereby illustrations contribute much towards meaning-making. In picturebooks, there is an immense possibility of multiple interpretations since images are "polysemous" (Barthes 1977), and as analysed in this article, it is through various visual techniques that an abstract concept like death achieves a concrete form. Here, Sipe's recognition of the transactional connection between texts and pictures becomes significant (Sipe, 1996, 1998; Sipe and Brightman, 2005, 2008; Sipe and McGuire, 2006). Besides emphasising that text and illustrations in picturebooks are "incomplete without each other," Sipe argued that children are drawn towards images because they offer ideas that influence their perspectives about a narrative (Sipe, 1998, 2008). For a deeper understanding of the text, picturebooks employ visual and literal features that are engaged in a symbiotic relationship throughout the narrative (Nodelman, 1988; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000; Mitchell, 2003). Picturebooks are undoubtedly more appealing for children, and if integrated into the school curriculum, they can become a valuable pedagogical tool since important topics are dealt with in detail (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 2000). Therefore, one of the two frameworks that form part of this article's endeavour to establish that picturebooks can support a bereaved child is drawn from Sipe's insights that i) pictures and texts influence children's literary understanding; ii) children respond to artistic elements from an early age; and iii) it is illustrations and not words that enable children to interpret the meaning of the picturebook (Sipe, 2007, 2008, 2011).

For this study, a content analysis approach was used. Content analysis is a qualitative or quantitative literacy research method to analyse, interpret, and draw inferences from the explicit or implicit messages conveyed through recurring themes or words and their relationship in a text. Since this article is an attempt to examine children's picturebooks of death and the recurring messages therein, content analysis, which "reveals the more subtle messages embedded in a text read by a child in a classroom or by a classroom teacher consulting a manual in preparation for teaching a lesson" (Hoffman et al., 2011), was the most suitable tool.

While considering both emotional and visual elements of contemporary Indian picturebooks to assess how they can support children experiencing grief and death, I used Sadler's (1991) research on how death is portrayed in texts and Sipe's interventions on picturebook illustrations (1998, 2008, 2011). Though Sadler (1991) focused only on the portrayal of dying grandparents in picturebooks, I extend his analysis of four distinct stages to the deaths of other loved ones too.

- i. The relationship between the child and the loved one.
- ii. The illness of the loved one.
- iii. The death of a loved one.
- iv. The mourning and recovery of the child

Sipe's observations enabled me to understand how the artistic, literary, and semiotic elements merge in the selected picturebooks to influence the interpretation of the illustrations, and meaning-making in the minds of the young readers.

2. LOSS, GRIEF, AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

One of the most powerful ways to cope with the loss of a loved one is through reading (Dutro, 2008). Children's literature since its inception has repeatedly proved that death is a "social construct" (Aries, 1977–1991) and provided clues to understanding society's shifting attitude towards death. In the early children's books, death for children was fearful—if rebellious, death would be the ultimate punishment, and if virtuous, it would be a 'well-earned reward'. However, contemporary children's literature challenges such visualisation and helps children transcend fear and develop empathy as they encounter death.

To help a grieving child, children's literature could be used to validate her emotions (Corr, 2003–2004). As the child realises that she is not alone or the only one experiencing loss, it gives her a sense of relief and eases her suffering. To support children through their difficult times, Dreyer (1985) identified three characteristics associated with the use of literature: universalisation—reinforcing the fact that other children have experienced similar trauma; *catharsis*—connecting the reader to the characters in the story; and *insight*—a stage when self-reflection and knowledge and experiences are applied to others in a similar situation. Thus, while stimulating the creativity of children, stories allow the two levels of consciousness to operate simultaneously: "At the conscious level, the child is focused on the content of the actual narrative, while at the unconscious level, a search is performed for the child's experiences that parallel the narrative." (Levine, 1999).

Picturebooks highlight the most fundamental emotions of life (Short, 2011), which enable children to consider their feelings and responses about an issue portrayed therein. Hence, reading picturebooks depicting children's lived reality enables them to engage with experiences that matter to them (Sipe, 2008). Since books allow children to activate prior experiences and relate to characters or events in the story, which can help them cope with their complex emotions and feelings, counsellors, educators, and parents may resort to bibliotherapy or 'therapeutic reading' (Galen and Johns, 1979; Lowe, 2009). Studies have confirmed that death-themed picturebooks for children elicit responses like shock, sadness, denial, and longing (Poling and Hupp, 2008).

The picturebooks I focus on move beyond the idea of death as enigmatic, and death is not limited only to the elderly; it includes a parent, sibling, friend, and adult who is more of a friend. Thus, the paper looks at potential clues that the children may pick up independently or could be taught to decode by educators while discussing or developing perspectives around loss.

3. ANALYSIS

Piku's Little World

Piku's Little World is the touching story of a little boy, Piku, who loses his mother. There's minimal use of text, and the pages are filled with Piku's activities in vibrant colours till the day 'mummy was gone'. The vibrant yellow, green, and browns reflect the lively and joyful afternoons of little Piku among his animal friends and in the warm and comforting company of his mother. Like any other child, he is afraid of the dark and the unknown and often 'sees faces' when his mother falls asleep (in the picture, he hides behind her). His dreams and wishes are similar to any child's fantasies. His favourite moments were the hours when his mother read stories to him. The day his 'mummy was gone', Piku appears alone in one corner of the page, which is now mostly white. The remaining pages have more white spaces with minimum text and colour and smaller illustrations, all of which add to the emptiness of Piku's life. When he looks around for his mother, his friends are unable to respond

except for his cat, who purrs and tries to comfort Piku. Neither does his father share with Piku the real reason for his mummy's absence except that she has 'gone far away'. From now on, Piku's days are gloomy, even though he plays with his friends and doesn't dream of candies, ice cream, and all that is beautiful. His nightmares are full of scary creatures. The use of sharp claws and jarring images of the creepy insects indicate the intense threat he experiences and also confirm that one 'feels more scared looking at pointed shapes' (Bang, 1991). As he struggles to hide from them, the frightening shadows engulf him in his mother's absence, and his partially visible face appears confused (Fig.1).

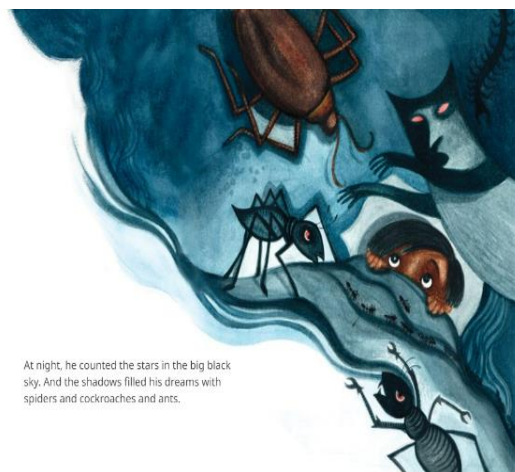


Fig.1

Piku's story is an instance of a child's inability to grasp the overwhelming emotions while experiencing grief. His restlessness, loneliness, and longing for his mother are natural and universal responses. Children reading this picturebook would be able to realise the possible emotions that the loss of a parent might generate. The illustrations and the white spaces reflect the unexpected and unusual shift that occurs in Piku's life once his mother is gone. Children who may not have experienced loss or death directly are bound to notice the reduced size of illustrations emphasising Piku's vulnerability, Piku's droopy eyes, gloomy face, and his animal friends sharing his sorrow, particularly, the cat; all these would enable them to feel, participate, and internalise the intensity of possible grief. Those children who have encountered the death of a parent would not only be able to feel at one with Piku but also empathise and understand that there are ways to cope with grief and learn about ways to connect with the one who is no longer there, just like Piku does. Piku's turning the page of a book on a lonely afternoon transforms him; after a long time, there is a faint smile on his face. He finds solace as he begins reading; the words fill him with laughter, and his dreams are now warm and soft. The kings, queens, witches, and fairies all come alive, and their wide, open eyes speak of hope. His cat too is seen smiling; the grasshopper on the fairy's fingers emerges as a harbinger of good fortune, as if announcing a new stage in Piku's life. Piku, with a book in his hand and surrounded by his animal friends, once again shifts to the middle of the page from the edges. As all sleep peacefully for the first time, since 'mummy was gone', the white space around him also appears tender, dissipating the earlier tensions in the visuals. In his act of reading, Piku can connect with his mother which encourages him to move forward. This short and simple story about Piku's loss and grief is a window to the 'little world' where all children would encounter joy, loss, sorrow, and eventually acceptance and hope.

Appapa is with the Dinosaurs

This is a moving tale of Adu's gloom and gradual acceptance of reality after losing his dear old Appapa (grandfather). The tension that besets Adu's family due to his Appapa's unexpected illness is displayed in the visuals at the very outset, where his parents appear on the edges of the page and Adu is bewildered by the sudden rush. The momentum is sustained through images of his father constantly looking at the phone, Adu's mother explaining to him the cause of Appapa's sickness, Appapa's being on a ventilator, and his eventual passing away. Even though Adu finds it difficult to come to terms with such swift changes, this is one picturebook where the cause of the death is not only mentioned and explained (in text), but the visuals are also well synchronised to give a glimpse of the possible medical interventions that are necessary to revive an ailing individual who is at the last stage of his life (Fig.2).

Ma says, "Appapa's lungs have become very weak. So the doctor has put him on a ventilator. It's a machine that will help Appapa breathe."

This makes Adu sad.



Fig.2

The novelty of this story certainly lies in the fact that Adu's parents, from the beginning, do not shield him from the imminent reality of death. They not only take Adu into confidence by giving him detailed

updates about the condition of his Appapa but also try to explain death in the most scientific terms and in a vocabulary that Adu, as a little boy, is familiar with—that of ‘extinction’ of living creatures like the dinosaurs.

Adu’s love, admiration, and longing for his Appapa are presented in circles and cool hues of blue, green, and ochre; they also convey a sense of security despite Appapa’s absence. Such (floating) bubble-like shapes have the power to provide emotional protection and comfort to young readers (Bang, 1991). A kind of dynamism and excitement are noted in the pale green vertical lines in the background and the squares when Adu begins to ask rhetorical questions about who would accompany him to the nearby stream, who would listen to his stories from school, or who would protect him from his mother’s rage when he would play cricket inside the house. His memories are almost photographic, and the children looking at the visuals would immediately recognise similar moments with their grandparents. Most of the pages have a white background except the one where Appapa appears in Adu’s dreams; the dark purple shade expresses the turmoil that Adu may be experiencing due to his inability to comprehend the nature and immensity of the loss. The dream perturbs him so much that he goes out looking for Appapa the next morning. As his father senses Adu’s restlessness, he provides a concrete explanation: the dream was an opportunity for Appapa to bid a final goodbye to Adu. The sensitivity that Adu’s father (earlier his mother) demonstrates to address Adu’s confusion is a lesson for adults engaging in educating children about death. After seeing Appapa in his dreams, Adu gradually copes with his loss. He misses his Appapa when he notices his clothes and spectacles when he visits his grandparents’ house, but the next page has Adu smiling and looking out of the window. The window, a metaphor for hope and change, indicates the transformation within Adu. Adu not only accepts Appapa’s permanent absence but also fondly imagines the fun that Appapa must be having while ‘singing funny songs with the dinosaurs.’

For the young readers, death here has been portrayed as a stage towards reunion with ‘eternal nature’ in the hereafter (in this case, the land of the dinosaurs). As age and decay have been depicted as natural phases of human life, children would find death more of an inevitable condition, thereby making mourning less complex and stressful. This is one such picturebook where the death of a grandparent is pictured as justifiable and integrated into the lifecycle.

Boo! When My Sister Died

Richa Jha's “Boo! When My Sister Died” delves into the profound impact of sibling loss, focusing on Noorie's struggle to come to terms with her sister Zoya's death. Noorie's intense grief and inability to accept Zoya's absence are vividly portrayed throughout the narrative. Despite her mother’s attempts to reassure her, Noorie remains desolate, angry, and haunted by loneliness.

The moving imagery in the book, such as the dark background symbolising Noorie’s inner turmoil, effectively conveys the depth of her sorrow. Noorie's longing for her sister is palpable, illustrated by poignant moments like setting the table for Zoya and her, only to realise the void left by Zoya's absence. Even Noorie’s pet dog, Bruno, mirrors her despair, emphasising the deep impact of Zoya's death on her world.

As the story unfolds, Noorie's journey towards healing is marked by moments of anguish and eventual acceptance. The symbolic encounters with Zoya through dreams and memories, culminating in a spiritual connection represented by the moon and the window, signify a shift towards hope and healing for Noorie. Her eventual laughter and smile, depicted through brighter colours and joyful scenes, reflect her gradual triumph over grief and fear.

The narrative reaches a poignant resolution as Noorie finds solace and companionship in Dhara, Zoya's friend, highlighting the power of shared sorrow in overcoming loss. Their bond, symbolised by playing and floating together in a white cloth reminiscent of Zoya's love, signifies a journey towards healing and connection amidst grief.

This picturebook is suitable for young readers as it deals with the less-discussed subject of loss and longing for a sibling. However, children may find it tough to analyse Noorie's complex reactions and outbursts, though adults would recognise them as justified as she is undergoing the trauma of separation. This is one aspect that *Boo!* has not been able to address, though the illustrations are brilliant and capture all the emotions of Noorie and those around her. The arrangement of illustrations in square panels makes the text or expressions prescriptive, restricting the child readers from participating freely in meaning-making. The few pages where the panels disappear and freedom is made possible are the ones in which Noorie is happy and at peace in Zoya's warm shadow (when they roll on the rainbow or float around wrapped in a white sheet) [Fig.3].



Fig.3

In the story, Noorie's emotions effectively show children that anger and sadness are common feelings. It also gently reminds children that engaging in activities they used to do with a loved one may be painful after their loss, but eventually, they will find joy and healing in those same activities.

Chuchu Manthu's Jar of Toffees

In Aditi Rao's poignant narrative, the relationship between Preet and Chuchu Manthu serves as a powerful testimony to the enduring nature of kindness and compassion. Through the tender portrayal of Preet's bond with her beloved uncle, the author illustrates how the essence of a person can continue to resonate even after their passing on. The evocative imagery captures the intimacy shared between Preet and Chuchu Manthu, highlighting the influence of their connection on Preet's upbringing.

As Chuchu Manthu's passing looms on the horizon, the narrative delicately navigates the emotions of separation and loss. Preet's painful search for her uncle's essence in his belongings underscores the depth of her grief and the emptiness left by his absence. Central to Preet's sorrow is the irreplaceable kindness that Chuchu Manthu embodied, a quality that defined his character and touched those around him.

A particularly touching moment emerges as Preet discovers Chuchu's jar of toffees, a symbol of his hidden acts of generosity towards the children passing by his window (Fig.4). Despite leading a modest life, Chuchu's selfless gesture of dropping toffees for the school children reveals the depth of his compassion and the impact of his actions, known only to Preet. In a tender tribute to her uncle's spirit, Preet takes on the mantle of kindness, continuing his tradition by secretly sharing the toffees when the school bell tolls.

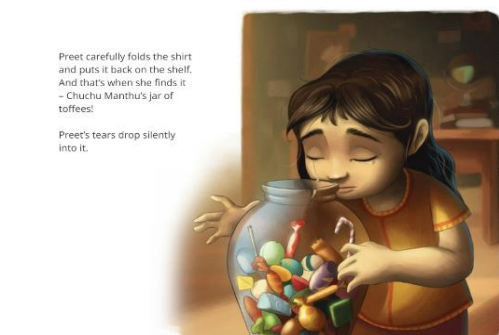


Fig.4

In the wake of her Chuchu's passing, Preet finds solace in engaging in activities that evoke memories of the joyful moments they shared. This emotive response serves as a valuable lesson for young readers, emphasising the potential for healing through the continuation of practices learned from or shared with the departed. Similar to Noorie in "Boo! When My Sister Died," Preet navigates her grief by forging a link with her loving Chuchu Manthu. Despite her tender age, Preet's selflessness shines through as she opts to preserve Chuchu's legacy by sharing rather than hoarding the toffees. Her actions reflect the lasting influence of Chuchu's kindness and generosity, traits she absorbed through observation and emulation. Through Preet's example, young readers are reminded of the transformative power of honouring cherished memories and embodying the virtues imparted by loved ones who have passed on.

4. DISCUSSION

The content analysis revealed that male and female characters were portrayed in equal numbers in the selection. Both genders were shown to experience death in equal numbers, with an equal number of

boys and girls experiencing the death of a loved one. This equality in portrayal is significant as it treats boys and girls equally in terms of being caring, sensitive, and compassionate.

Timmerman (1989) notes that identification with characters allows child readers to relate to a book's content. Therefore, teachers must choose books with characters that the majority of children in the classroom can identify with. In these stories, the protagonists are children, making it easier for young readers to relate to them based on their developmental age, culture, and life experiences.

While the death of a grandparent due to old age is a common first experience with death for children (Bowen, 1966), the selection also includes portrayals of deaths due to other factors. The books show that death can occur at any age and for various reasons, not just old age. While illness is not emphasised in the narratives about death, they do depict death as a painful and complicated process, with a prolonged period of grieving and gradual recovery.

The reactions to loss depicted in the books include crying, loneliness, feeling lost, anger, and fright. The bereaved children go through stages of grief, but ultimately come to terms with reality and find a new identity to move on with their lives. Teachers and caring adults need to help young readers understand that while it is natural to grieve and cry, continual crying is not a solution to overcoming grief. The books show that the characters ultimately navigate through their emotions and find a sense of wholeness again. There is a need to tell children about what helped the characters to move on with life without ever forgetting their dear ones.

The study reveals that the interpretation of death is one of the most interesting characteristics of the picturebooks analysed. They portray death as a physical state - as the absence of life, and notions of an afterlife are totally absent. If at all there is any sign of the dead having any existence, it is as memory or the idea that the dead live on in us. The focus therefore is solely on the 'biological aspects' (Poling and Hupp, 2008) which gets reflected in the direct mention of the fact of death without any use of euphemism. What emerges from the analysis is a secular view of death where there is a complete absence of the conventional views of death.

The findings suggest that bibliotherapy can be an effective tool in educating children about death, making it a more acceptable subject for discussion. Death has always been an integral part of children's literature; however, death has 'moved from the margins of society to the mainstream' (Berridge, 2002) only recently. Thus, the stories discussed present death more as an acceptable subject of conversation with children and establish death as something real but not frightening.

All the picturebooks mentioned are rich in metaphorical language which evokes vivid images of the emotions and complex feelings of losing a loved one. The flashbacks in the stories emphasise that memories are important as one adjusts to the loss of someone close. They also reveal the fact that death has moved out of home and community and now occurs in hospitals, nursing homes and hospices. The stories signal a shift from the earlier "pedagogy of fear" in fairytales which celebrated "docility and conformity while discouraging curiosity and willfulness" (Tatar, 1992). In all these stories death is no longer a plot device or ultimate punishment, it is rather a legitimate subject matter, as death here is not the traditionally taboo subject but a physical reality.

5. CONCLUSION

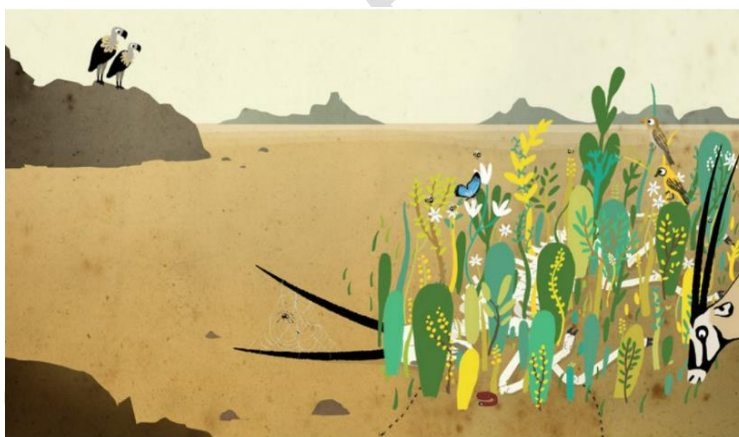
In the realm of education, the integration of death education and bibliotherapy in elementary classrooms remains a significant absence in India. At a time when children are increasingly exposed to loss and grief due to various societal challenges like the pandemic, wars, and displacement, the absence of structured guidance on coping with death is a glaring issue.

Recognising death as a key stressor, it becomes imperative for parents and educators to equip children with the necessary tools to navigate such difficult emotions. By formalising death education within the curriculum, children can develop a foundation for understanding and processing grief in a more detached manner, sheltering them from the overwhelming impact of real-life experiences of loss. Picturebooks not only demystify death but also provide words for emotions that are often difficult to articulate. By incorporating such books into the classroom, educators can create a space where

mourning and grief are welcomed, allowing students to explore and process their emotions. This is better than learning how to cope with grief in the face of an immediate crisis (Adams et al., 1999).

Teachers, play a pivotal role in guiding students through the grieving process. Especially in the wake of the recent global pandemic, schools in India (like anywhere else in the world) have a unique opportunity to foster a compassionate and empathetic environment to support students dealing with loss. As the pandemic has compounded losses, it is difficult for children to negotiate their changed circumstances. It is not unlikely that with every new loss, they are reminded of the earlier trauma and are gripped by fresh fears. While educators may not be trained grief counsellors, their encouragement of open expression of emotions and active engagement in the grieving journey can significantly aid students in coping with their grief.

In the Indian educational landscape, adopting grief-responsive teaching practices that integrate scientific knowledge and narratives of grief into actionable strategies can provide valuable support to students during times of communal mourning. By incorporating picturebooks that explore themes of death and grief into the curriculum, educators can create a safe space for children to process their emotions and find solace in shared experiences. For instance, in EVS (Environmental Studies) while discussing health, children may explore and discuss feelings through picturebooks like, *Piku's Little World or Chuchu Manthu's Jar of Toffees* where the protagonists indulge in activities which remind them of their loved ones and make them feel safe. Similarly, since children study life cycles where death is already a part of the conversation, a story like *Circles* could be useful, as it offers the children an opportunity to look at how the death of one creature is also the beginning of a new cycle for others (Fig.5). Rather than waiting for a bereaved child to seek out a book, integrating discussions on loss into subjects like Environmental Studies can offer a proactive approach to addressing grief within a classroom setting.



And the week after that, they saw a young gemsbok nibbling the tasty shoots.

Fig.5

Through thoughtful integration of literature and pedagogy, educators can empower children to confront and navigate the complexities of loss with resilience and understanding. By embracing a holistic approach to death education, schools in India can cultivate a culture of emotional intelligence and support for students facing the challenges of grief and loss.

Overall, introducing picturebooks like the ones discussed above not only unravel the mystery and invisibility of death, but also give words to emotions that often feel unnamable. These books have the potential to allow educators to welcome mourning and grief into their classrooms thereby recognising the depth of human emotions and fostering resilience. Such picturebooks would go a long way in building loving fences in the Indian classrooms.

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