

Badger's Parting Gifts - Reading Guide

Author/Illustrator: Susan Varley

Themes: grief (elder's death)

Lesson/Notes: This story is most appropriate for helping children process an older person's (e.g. grandparent) death. It defines death as going down the Long Tunnel (Badger does this in a dream, feeling free) and leaving the body behind. His friends process their sadness and talk with each other about positive memories; experiencing this can normalize children's grief process.

When someone you love dies, it can be difficult to talk about. You may have lots of different feelings - sadness, anger, fear - or it may seem like you don't feel anything. Many people find it helpful to talk (or draw) about their feelings or what they miss about the person who has passed away. It can also help to listen to others' feelings and stories.

Discussion Questions

- What does Badger mean "going down the Long Tunnel"? (die, leave his body behind)
- How did Badger's friends feel when they learned he had died?
- Did the animals ever feel less sad?
- What are some of the parting gifts Badger left behind? (the memories/skills they can pass on to others)

Activity: Collect Stories

Suggested Supplies: audio recording device (tape recorder, smart phone); or notepad, pen

- Think of other people you could contact who knew the person well.
- Help the child set up interviews with these contacts, or host a get-together with family to provide the child an opportunity to hear stories about the loved one who has died.
- Encourage the child to plan a list of questions to ask. For example,
 - What do you remember most about my grandpa?
 - If you could pick three words to describe my grandma, what would they be?
 - Do you have any funny stories about him?
 - What did you learn from her?
- Practice recording a brief conversation on a device or taking notes.
- Invite the child to interview those who knew the person.
 - Collect the recordings and save them onto a disc or device for the child to keep, or help them write out some of their favorite answers in a memory book.
- Some children may feel more comfortable listening to *your* conversations rather than initiating interviews. (Of course, the child may not want to do this activity at all, or you may not have other contacts to interview. If this is the case, consider the activity below.)

Alternate Activity: Thank You Note

- Encourage the child to think about what parting gifts they have been given.
- Suggest the child write a thank-you note to their loved one who has died.
 - What did they learn from that person?
 - What are some of their favorite memories together?
 - What will they miss most?
- You may want to bury the note with the person's body, keep it in a memory box with photos, or release it into the sky with a balloon.