



Teachers Guide: Grief Elementary K-5

“Defining and Discussing Death”

Teaching End-of-Life Issues in the Classroom

For many people death can be a difficult topic to discuss. The challenge for educators is to provide children with a variety of strategies that allow them to discuss openly the issues surrounding death and dying. To do so effectively requires sensitivity, courage, and the creation of a classroom climate where children feel comfortable discussing their feelings. These lessons were created to provide teachers with multiple entry points for dealing with children's experiences of death, dying and the afterlife. The following lessons will be useful in helping children deal with the death or illness of a family member, friend, or pet, as well as media-reported deaths, including those of celebrities and victims of mass tragedies. In this guide you'll also find some tips and strategies for using *With Eyes Open*--the program and its Web site--in your classroom. Teachers may tape *With Eyes Open* and use the videotape for educational purposes for up to ten days after the broadcast.

To purchase the tape, call Films for the Humanities & Sciences at 1-800-257-5126 or visit: www.films.com.

Introduction

The purpose of this lesson is to develop an awareness of the kinds of losses that one may experience as a human being, and the different ways in which one may deal with them. In this lesson, students will participate in an imaginary scenario that involves different ways to both confront and talk about issues surrounding death. The students will also write a letter expressing their emotions to a person or a pet that has died.

Materials:

- Multiple copies of the play
- Paper
- Pencils

Objectives:

Students will:

1. Define different aspects and outcomes of loss.
2. Discuss personal experiences with death and dying.

3. Read a play.
4. Write a letter concerning the emotions that surround death and dying.

Developing Background

1. Defining Loss

a. Discuss the following processes:

- How does a plant die?
- How does the rain forest die?
- How do cars die?
- How does a pet die?
- How does a river die?

b. Discuss the similarities and differences among the examples given.

c. Write the word loss in the center of a circle. Ask the students to brainstorm the possible meanings this word can have.

2. Discussing Loss

a. Break the class into groups of three. Give each group a copy of the following words:

Health	Game
Friendship	House
Money	Pet
Faith	Pride
Self confidence	

b. Discuss the result/impact of the loss of each of these items. Encourage the students to think of examples based on their own experiences.

c. Share the results of the small group discussion with the class. Discuss the different results of loss and share students' personal experiences.

Activity One

Duration: 50 minutes

In this activity children will have the opportunity to think about different reactions to death by acting out a brief play and discussing it.

1. Cast a student in each of the nine roles and act out the following short play with the class. For younger grades, you may read the play to the class, or team up with an older class and have them enact the play for the younger students.

The Open Heart

Scene One

Narrator: It is summer in the city. The squeal of brakes and the hot smell of asphalt fill the muggy air. The houses on this block are tired looking yet bright splashes of red geraniums and golden marigolds spill out of window boxes in cheerful disarray. The city street is bright and vibrant with the chaos of a summer day. Phil, the main character in the story, lives in the corner house in the upstairs apartment with his mom and sister, and his dog Shannon. Even though Shannon is a family pet, Phil is the one who loves her best. She sleeps at the foot of his bed every night, and every

time Phil goes out, Shannon tries to follow him out the door. As the scene opens, Phil's best friend arrives and rings the doorbell.

Jake: Phil, let's go. What are you doing?

Phil: I have to take Shannon out for a walk. She's been cooped up all morning.

Jake: Sharetha, Rachel and Win are waiting for us at the park. Can't you do it later? I want to play some ball.

Phil: I really shouldn't, my mom said to do it before twelve.

Jake: And you always do exactly what she says?

Phil: C'mon, Jake, give it a rest. I guess I can do it later. Let's go.

Narrator: Phil was out with his friends for most of the afternoon. His sister Juliana got home before he did and decided to take Shannon to the park. Shannon was full of energy after being inside for so long. She was the kind of dog who loved to run and needed to run. As soon as Juliana opened the door, Shannon bolted. Phil's friends Win, Rachel and Sharetha were on their way home from the park. They saw it happen.

Juliana: Look out! OH, I can't believe it! Shannon!

Win: Did you see that? I saw her fly right into the air!

Sharetha: Are you okay? It's okay girl.

Narrator: Win softly stroked her head.

Rachel: Where did that car come from?

Mrs. Juarez (a neighbor): Juliana, Juliana, I called the police.

Mr. Elmar (the driver): I didn't even see her, I am so sorry. So, so sorry.

Narrator: His eyes were filled with horror at what he had done. He was shaking so much he could barely stand.

Rachel: She was running out between the cars, it must have been really hard to see her.

Mr. Elmar: It was, oh, I can't believe I hit her.

Narrator: Shannon died.

Rachel: What are we going to tell Phil? Where is he anyway?

Scene Two

Narrator: It is getting dark. Rachel, Sharetha, Win and Juliana are sitting at the kitchen table. No one feels like saying much. Suddenly the phone rings.

Phil: Hey Jules, I'll be back in about a half an hour. Is Mom there yet?

Juliana: No.

Phil: What's wrong? You sound weird. What'd you just get up?

Juliana: I gotta go, Phil.

Phil: Whatever, just don't forget to tell Mom I called.

Narrator: Juliana hung up the phone.

Juliana: That was Phil. He'll be here soon. How are we going to tell him? He loves, no, loved, Shannon so much.

Win: Let's just tell him that Shannon got lost.

Rachel: Don't even mention it. Let your mom tell him later.

Win: When my dog died, my parents told me he went to pet heaven. They got me a new puppy before they even told me what happened.

Sharetha: No, don't do any of those things. Just say it right out. Say Phil,
I'm sorry- I saw Shannon get hit by a car and he's dead.
The End

1. Discuss the play. Focus on the different ways that Rachel, Win and Sharetha think Phil should be told the news about Shannon's death. Discuss the pros and cons of each of their ideas.
2. Reinforce the idea that Sharetha's opinion on how to tell Phil offers the best way to approach the situation as it confronts the reality of what happens in clear language.
3. Tell the students that when a pet dies, people have a variety of different strong feelings. Read the following to the class:
Phil had the following different reactions at different times after Shannon's death. Describe the emotion Phil was feeling when he made each of the following comments:
 - "I feel like crying. I really miss playing with Shannon."
 - "Why didn't that stupid guy watch where he was going!"
 - "Why did Shannon have to die and my friend still has his dumb cat?"
 - "I remember when we got Shannon. She was so tiny."
 - "She was old anyway. She probably would have died soon."
 - "If I had taken her out before I left with Jake this never would have happened."
 - "I wonder where Shannon is now?"
4. Discuss how each of these emotions may occur when a person confronts death.

Activity Two

Duration: 50 minutes

In this activity students will share personal experiences that they have had with death and dying.

1. Discuss famous people, and people in the news that have died both recently and in the more distant past.
2. Brainstorm and discuss various ways of remembering someone who has died. Some possibilities include planting a tree or shrub, writing a poem, or composing a song. Choose a famous or influential person who has died and create a class remembrance.
3. Ask students to think of a person who was close to them, or a pet that has died. Tell the students that they will write a letter to a person or a pet that has died. The following is a list of things you might have them include in the letter.
 - How you feel
 - What you miss
 - What you want them to know
 - What you might have wanted them to say to you when they were alive
 - How you will remember them
 - How they will stay a part of you
4. Tell students to indicate on the back of their letter if they are willing to have their letter read aloud to the class. Collect the letters, and choose some to share with the class.

The Authors

KQED Education Network (KQED EdNet) inspires learning through innovative understanding, use and creation of media that respects diverse perspectives. KQED EdNet is committed to the exchange of ideas and resources in partnership with the community. To this end, it provides an instructional television service, curriculum materials, projects for youth and professional development for teachers, child care providers and families; organizes public forums; and sponsors local events.

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