



Teachers' Guide for
What is Goodbye?
written by Nikki Grimes
illustrated by Raúl Colón
Hyperion Books for Children, 2004
ISBN: 0-7868-0778-4

Discussion Guide:

1. Which poem is your favorite in the collection? Why?
2. Why do you think Jesse decides to act out in his grief?
3. How is your family like theirs? How is it different?
4. Which character do you most identify with in the story? Why?
5. Do you think the parents should have done anything differently? What specifically?
6. Jerilyn tries to talk about Jaron with her parents, but they don't want to mention him.
Who do you think is right? Why?
7. Why does Jesse write Jaron's name everywhere?
8. Have you had an experience like Jesse has in the poem "Rush"?
9. What do you think Jesse would have kept of his brothers if he would have been allowed?
What about Jerilyn?
10. How do Jesse and Jerilyn learn to work through their feelings? What tools do they use to express themselves?
11. What seems to be a turning point for this family? When do things start looking a bit better?
12. It is common to feel guilty when having fun after someone dies. When do Jesse and Jerilyn feel this way? When do you?
13. On the anniversary, both kids do something special. What would you like to do for that event? Do you think it will help?
14. How will this family be in six months? Six years?
15. Knowing what you do about Jerilyn and Jesse, who do you think, in the long term, will function best with their grief?
16. How do the parents finally start reconnecting with their surviving children?
17. How have Jesse and Jerilyn changed by the end of the book?
18. What will you take with you from reading *What Is Goodbye?*
19. In the author's note Nikki Grimes reminds us there is no one right way to feel after losing someone. Do most people agree with the author? With whom do you agree?
20. Which one of Raúl Colón's illustrations is your favorite? Why?

Projects and Activities:

The projects and activities listed here are ideas that should be given as a choice to children who are grieving. They are not meant to be assignments, but tools to help a child express his or her loss. Choice is the essential component to this process, as is privacy. Some children will want to share their creations; others will want to keep them to themselves. Both are appropriate.

For younger children:

- ❖ Create a memory book, poster, or box. Fill it with things that help you remember the good times you had with the person you lost. Decorate the outside with pictures that you make, cut out of magazines, or even copies of photographs.
- ❖ Like Jesse, every time you feel angry try drawing a picture instead. You could keep all the drawings in one notebook or post them in your room.
- ❖ With an adult, write a list of “I remember” about the person who died. Think about the special memories, your favorite things about them, and what you’ll miss most. You can even illustrate it, if you like. Then, roll it up and tie with a special ribbon, and keep inside your memory box. When you are missing the person you lost, untie the ribbon and read through your list.
- ❖ Take a large piece of paper and fold it in half. On one side, paint or draw a portrait of your family or yourself from before the death. Then, on the opposite side, draw a new picture. Talk to someone you trust to listen about the differences.
- ❖ Write a letter (or dictate to someone else if you can’t write yet) to the person you lost, telling them anything you need to say like Jerilyn does in the poem “Anniversary.”
- ❖ Angry box: Paint an old shoe box black both inside and out. Cut a hole in the top of the lid so that papers can be slipped through. Each time something happens that makes you angry, draw a picture of it, or write it down and put it in the angry box. Shake the box if you need to!

For older children:

- ❖ Write poems that focus on a single moment at a time. Try to capture one part of your own experience—like a snapshot does. You might consider writing on the same topics as each poem in the book. You might like experimenting with the powerful tool of simile and metaphor like Nikki Grimes’ does to help you express yourself. Some examples:

“Mommy also hid, / her eyes dull coins / peeking from the pockets/
of her lids.” from “Getting the News - Jerilyn”

“Their hurt is like a tunnel, / and all they can see / is the dark/”
from “The Funeral - Jerilyn”

“Folks wind my sadness / like a clock” from “Rush - Jesse”

- ❖ Write a poem through the eyes of both Jerilyn and Jesse that is five years into the future. How are things different? How are they the same? Again, try to capture a single moment from their lives. It could be a letter poem (like “Anniversary”) or a poem for two voices (like “Photograph”). Then, write a poem that looks five years into your own future. Keep the same format you chose for the previous poem, and compare them.

- ❖ Keep a journal. Here are some starters to help you begin:

The best day I ever had with _____

The hardest part has been...

At school, since the death, kids have...

If I could talk to _____ I would ask these questions:

If only...

Not only did I lose _____ but now...

What I need...

I feel guilty because...

I'm so mad that...

- ❖ Create a sculpture out of any type of material (clay, found objects, papier maché, etc.) let it speak for you. Don't feel obligated to make it look like anything “real.” It can be an abstract expression of your deepest feelings. Let your imagination and your emotions guide your work.
- ❖ Create a collage box. On the outside focus on how others see you and how you are perceived. On the inside, reveal the “real” you and explore what others cannot, or do not yet, understand. You can use images from magazines, the internet, your own photos (though you might want to make copies first) or create new art for this endeavor. Be deliberate in your choice of color as well as your images. In a brief paragraph, explain your piece—though you don't have to share it.
- ❖ Choreograph a dance sequence in honor of the person you lost. It can be in any style—ballet, hip-hop, jazz, or tap. It can be a solo performance, or an ensemble. You are the director of this dancing memorial. You decide how best to express it.

- ❖ Act out a scene with the person you lost (this can be written as a screenplay, or created ad-lib by the participants – both who should have known the deceased). It could be a real scene you had with them, or one you only wish you could.
- ❖ Begin a new exercise regime and keep detailed records of your progress. Exercise is a powerful tool for the body to heal and can help release important chemicals that help fight depression.
- ❖ Create a new sport in honor of the person you lost (perhaps a combination of their favorite activities) Example: Frisbee golf. Explain the game to a couple of your friends, and then get input on how to improve it. You could even name the game in honor of the person you lost.
- ❖ Turn your anger into action by helping a worthy cause that your friend or family-member believed in. If the loss was due to cancer or other disease, try raising money to support research for the cure. Hold a garage sale, bake sale, carnival, or even a fishing contest. You might choose a fundraiser based on something you liked to do together or a hobby of the deceased.
- ❖ Create a web page memorial to the person you lost. Include pictures, stories and letters about them, a biography, their hopes, dreams, even their likes and dislikes. Invite people to share their memories in a public blogger or bulletin board on the site, too.

Resources:

The Compassionate Friends, Inc.
 P. O. Box 3696
 Oak Brook IL
 60522-3696
 PH: 630-990-0010
 FAX: 630-990-0246
 Toll Free: 877-969-0010
www.compassionatefriends.org

The Center for Loss and Life Transition
 3735 Broken Bow Road
 Fort Collins, CO 80526
 (970) 226-6050
 Fax (970) 226-6051
www.centerforloss.com

The Dougy Center
 PO Box 86852
 Portland OR 97286 USA
 Phone: 503.775.5683
 Fax: 503.777.3097
 Email: help@dougy.org
www.grievingchild.org

Additional Reading:

Grollman, Earl A., *Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child*

Marta, Suzy Yehl, *Healing the Hurt, Restoring the Hope*

Schaefer, Dan Ph.D., & Lyons, Christine, *How Do We Tell the Children? A Step-by-Step Guide for Helping Children Two to Teen Cope When Someone Dies*