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The Next Great Adventure: A Child's Literary Journey through Death and Grief

by

Joelle M. Grifa

A thesis submitted to the Department of English of the State University of New York

College at Brockport, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

April 24, 2008

The Next Great Adventure: A Child's Literary Journey through Death and Grief

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Dedication:

First, to my nephews:

Daniel: *You mean the world to me. Hold tight to your memories and your strength, for those are what keep you special.*

Joey: *I feel blessed every day that you chose our family, if only for a short while. In 16 days you were able to convey the true and innocent love that asks for everything, yet demands nothing. You are my inspiration during this project and always.*

Christopher: *You have shown me once more what it is like to approach life without trepidation or fear. Your sweetness and laughter help me realize that it's okay to eat something besides Tear Soup.*

To the rest of my family, friends, Professor Norcia, Professor Busch and Professor Grinnan: *Thank you for never giving up on me and for shaping this thesis every step of the way.*

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Abstract

The Next Great Adventure: a Child's Literary Journey through Death and Grief

Literature is often a direct glimpse into another world, conveying messages from characters to help readers shape and define their own futures. Parents and guardians of children are often left searching for a way to use literature to explain the more difficult parts of life to child readers. Grief literature offers models of different grieving processes. Critic Mary Rycik was the first to coin the term “bibliotherapy” when she discussed the healing role that children’s literature played for the traumatized child or young adult.

When faced with loss and sorrow, characters will either heal and move on, or succumb to the grief they feel when a loved one dies. The novels in the following thesis: Hans Wilhelm’s *I’ll Always Love You* (1990), Robert Munsch’s *Love You Forever* (1999), Dwight Daniels’ *Grieving at Christmastime* (2005), Ralph L. Klicker’s *Kolie and the Funeral* (2002); S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* (1997), Rodman Philbrick’s *Freak the Mighty* (1993) Robert Cormier’s *The Chocolate War* (1974), and William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954) all showcase characters making both healthy and unhealthy choices regarding grief.

Progression plays a pivotal role, for as novels advance in intricacy, readers are presumably advancing in age. Young characters evolve from a reliance on their parents, to friends, and then ultimately decide alone how they want grief to affect them. Grief literature attempts to ready readers of all ages for death and the emotions associated with it. Grief literature offers answers during the tragic times when

answers seem scarce. Ultimately death will not be something to be afraid of, but is seen as the great adventure touted by Peter Pan in J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911) and Professor Dumbledore in J.K. Rowling's novel, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (1997). This is the very goal of grief literature; to turn sorrow into a story, and to turn that story into life.

The Next Great Adventure: a Child's Literary Journey through Death and Grief

Chapter One: Introduction

Children face a series of losses growing up, ranging from the loss of a pet, to the passing of family members. The terrorist attacks on September 11th placed death at the forefront of daily life, forcing parents and educators to consider how to explain death and loss to children. Despite the fact that children are not strangers to death, September 11th served as a reminder that children still need adult assistance in processing loss. In the *Kids Book on Death and Dying* (1993), the authors state that they actually prefer that literature tell children the facts associated with death, “straight out” (Kubler-Ross 10). For example, the authors feel that texts should state that the deceased cannot come back to life. Once someone is dead, he or she is gone. Beloved children's advocate, Mr. Fred Rogers, was quoted after the September 11th tragedy as saying, “The least and best we adults can do is to let our children know that we'll take good care of them no matter what” (Carney 315). Caretakers can take the advice of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and Mr. Rogers by using children's literature to explain death to the children that are left behind. By reading age-appropriate stories such as Hans Wilhelm's *I'll Always Love You* (1990), Robert Munsch's *Love You Forever* (1999), Dwight Daniels' *Grieving at Christmastime* (2005), and Ralph L. Klicker's *Kolie and the Funeral* (2002); S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1997), Rodman Philbrick's *Freak the Mighty* (1993) for middle-grade readers; Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974), and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1988) for young

adult readers, the characters show that healing involves different choices and that life can continue after a loved one dies.

Critics and scholars, such as Janice Nicholson and Quinn Pearson, have focused on many

aspects of grief literature, such as the stages and ages of those people in the process of grieving. The literature involved is tailored to the needs and comprehension level of particular age groups.¹ Incidentally, in recent and more violent years, elementary to early adolescents have begun to fear shootings, drugs, gangs and war. In her book, *Talking to Children about Death*, critic Marilyn Sargent states that the literature needs to be developmentally appropriate. To illustrate, the young child needs literal, concrete images since he or she will understand those references with the most ease.² A “bibliotherapy” study using *The Outsiders*, can demystify those fears (16). Critic Mary Rycik was the first to coin the term “bibliotherapy” when she discussed the healing role that children’s literature played for the traumatized child or young adult. Like Sargent, writer J. Mark Ammerman points out that after a death children feel the need for love towards the deceased to continue. Children cannot express their love to the deceased any longer. The notion that “nothing is concrete or absolute,” when *this*

¹ In infancy and early childhood, children fear strangers, separation from parents, and large animals/mystical creatures... (this could be one reason why children’s books have such animals as friendly characters such as *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak). At early school age, children fear being alone... (this could be why novels focus on the importance of having strong friendships such as *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton).

² Between the ages of five and nine, Sargent feels that children still find death reversible, temporary and impersonal. For the young child, death might still be personified as a monster or other being. The need for concrete thinking that children possess, or end up reverting to, comes from a childlike yearning to control the uncontrollable. Around the age of nine or ten, however, children begin to realize that they are capable of dying as well, and this can be frightening (Sargent 5).

is what they rely on, is a shock to the system (76). Elisabeth Kubler-Ross focused her study on the ability of children to comprehend death and where a loved one is after dying.³ Peter Stillman, a specialist in youth grief, discusses the actual layout and physical appearance of children's books in particular. By

focusing on a picture book environment, Stillman helps younger children process grief.⁴ Some critics see school as an ideal place to experience grief literature because school is a concrete institution that is familiar enough to lend comfort to a child. Kubler-Ross states that "death should be dealt with in schools, not 'unduly glamorized' in entertainment forms" (12). On the other hand, despite resisting glamorization, I feel that there are characters who become iconic: Ponyboy, Max, and maybe even Piggy— but the teacher is the person stepping in to make sure the line between empathy and copying does not get crossed.⁵

As a teacher I have seen students trying to survive daily without any support or guidance, other than what they receive at school. Critic Mary Rycik agrees that, "reading books as a form of therapy gave children an opportunity to identify with

³ In her book, *On Death and Dying*, critic Elisabeth Kubler-Ross relates a story from *The Fugitive*, Part II XXI:

"The father came back from the funeral rites. His boy of seven stood at the window, with eyes wide open...full of thoughts too difficult for his age...the boy asked him, 'Where is mother?' 'In Heaven,' answered his father, pointing to the sky. The boy raised his eyes to the sky and long gazed in silence. His bewildered mind sent abroad into the night the question, 'Where is Heaven?'"

Children's literature offers a place to go for answers to questions like these. That little boy might not feel that his questions can be voiced, so a character that loses his or her mother as well, can answer it for him.

⁴ For instance, books for the pre-school aged child are often published using bold black and white outlines for the very reason that the color choice, or lack thereof, symbolizes how the child views his or her world. The shapes and characters in the story are now as concrete as the thoughts of the child (Stillman 3). In the literature for the very young, authors also use simply constructed sentences and little plot development with pictures that can be colored in with activities. This helps the younger reader not to be distracted, but to receive the answers and comfort he or she needs quickly.

others undergoing the same problem— and helped to realize they weren't alone—gave catharsis—facilitated the process of sharing problems with others. Children will be able to realize that there are alternative solutions and that individuals have choices” (145). The novels in this thesis will portray both healthy and unhealthy choices in reference to grief. I will analyze Rycik's theory of “bibliotherapy,” to examine the features that certain texts exhibit and the choices they offer to help grieving children.

The progression of novels in the thesis will show that the age-appropriate structure of children's literature correlates with the different stages of grief. The texts model the grief process

by showing child characters who depend on their parents, and then relying on friends, only to finally make their own decisions independently about how grief affects them. In the children's books: *I'll Always Love You* by Hans Wilhelm (1990) and *Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch (1999), the family of the main character helps the child to process grief and learn to live with it. In middle-grade books such as *Freak the Mighty* and *The Outsiders*, friends are the people who give main characters a reason to survive. Lastly, texts aimed at young adult readership, *The Chocolate War* and *Lord of the Flies*, show protagonists thinking independently while weighing the advice or actions of family or peers. After the death of his mother, Jerry Renault's father becomes distant, and Jerry is left to grieve alone while also surviving the extreme group mentality of high school. After losing his support system through the

⁵ In *The Outsiders* Dallas Winston taunts the police into shooting him to death after he is unable to deal with the death of his

death of friends like Piggy, Ralph must use the memory of such friends to inspire him with the strength to keep living.

Each literary work is able to teach coping strategies, lessons about loss, and responses to death based on the history and memories that the young reader is bringing with him or her. The texts aimed at the youngest audience deal with the death of the family dog and then an elderly parent respectively. Losing a pet is usually different enough from losing a person that it is safe to deal with first. Children have often seen animal deaths already through hunting, nature, or even those hit by cars. The exposure to the deaths of animals is important because it allows a child to be slightly more prepared for the more emotional and difficult losses of family and friends. As the texts “age,” characters begin to lose parents and also best friends, siblings, and

acquaintances. The authors are writing for what the intended audiences are ready to handle. Authors are using their work to expose and instruct children in grief using age-appropriate strategies.⁶ The thesis will evaluate the strategies and grieving processes that the texts’ child/young adult characters model, in light of the work that has been done on grief in the educational and psychological community.

All in all, the intent that I have for this thesis is best made clear by a quote regarding Katherine Paterson’s *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977); “... a special world can

friend Johnny Cade. A child might have feelings of violence regarding himself or others when he is angry over a death as well. This novel allows the child a safe place to “act it out” without hurting himself.

be transformed from a place of sorrow and pain into a source of healing [that] completes this powerful story” (Fry 184). Each student and each child has a grief, sorrow, or loss inside of him or herself to tell. A current high school junior once told me that when he was in seventh grade, S.E. Hinton’s novel was the first book he’d ever read completely. I later found out that a few years prior to this junior entering my class, his brother had died in a hunting accident. I don’t think that such connections are a coincidence. I feel that this research is important because more educators and other caretakers need to realize the power that grief literature has to help students.

Books model how to express grief in a healthy and productive way. Using a child’s prior knowledge will either allow him or her to see that they are “normal” in what they are experiencing, or the characters will become references on how to deal with loss when it does occur. The novels also show that while grief can never go away completely, it becomes a part of the character as he or she continues on with his or her own life.

The second chapter of the thesis will begin using the literature intended for very young children, roughly ages five to ten. Children who are younger than the kindergarten age group would also benefit from this literature. These are the books and stories through which children first learn to express grief and loss. These texts are

⁶ Please see the prior reference to the work of Marilyn Sargent.

important to start with because it is often more difficult to explain death to a child this young; these could, in fact, be books that the parents/ guardians themselves are familiar with thus making communication easier. Grief literature advises parents on issues such as the attachment a child feels toward something or someone he or she loves, and what to do when that person or object is no longer present. After all, these are connections that do not go away when that attachment is severed. Writers of grief literature maintain that child readers will find help processing these feelings by reading books. They will see that grief can become a part of someone without causing that person to lose his or her identity. Pre-school aged children will need more therapeutic methods and texts to be read at home if they do not yet attend school, where a guided reading of such texts is more available.

The first book selected for this chapter and age group was Hans Wilhelm's *I'll Always Love You* (1990). I chose this text first because the loss of the family dog is one that will be familiar to readers, even if they have never had a dog. I grew up without this type of pet, but the love and dependence of this relationship carried through the pages. This chapter will discuss the ways in which the illustrations and structure of the text support its message and goals. Told through the perspective of a young child, the story teaches children to strengthen their relationships while people or pets are alive, because the love will be comfort when death occurs.

For example the font is large and dark. Both sentences and paragraphs remain clear and concise. At a glance, a reader can quickly gauge that there is no need to hurry in the reading of this text, and also no need to fear concepts or vocabulary too large to understand. The syntax evokes a sense of calm. Likewise, the colors used are mainly pastels therefore the soft tone of the book remains present.

The next selected text is Robert Munsch's similarly titled *Love You Forever* (1999). The message that love never goes away—it simply changes form—was consistent in both texts. After all, that is what Mr. Rogers meant when he said that children needed to know someone would always be there to take care of them. My six year old nephew has always loved this book. Here was a child that was three years old when his newborn baby brother died, and this was a book that was read to him. This book has more of a repetitious, sing-song quality as well as soft illustrations that look like crayon was lightly brushed on the page. The facial expressions drawn onto the characters are subtle, and the smiles are not outrageous or overtly “toothy.” This helps the text exemplify calming characteristics. The plot itself reflects the cycle of life. Love is the key to the world of the novel's continuance. The inferred death of the main character's mother is not something he fears necessarily, because he knows that his mother's love for him is reflected in the love he has for his own child. The main character had the love of his mother reinforced as the book follows him from infancy to adulthood. The ritual within the picture book is something that cannot be taken away, and is therefore a comfort. The text is using repetition to emphasize the continuing life cycle and the process of birth and death.

Some children are analytical and want someone to spell a process out for them. Dwight Daniels' *Grieving at Christmastime* (2005) was selected for this reason.

It reads like a manual:

Your loved one has died.

Perhaps this is your first Christmas since the death.

Even if more time has passed, the grief and sadness can return

At this time of year with a special force (Daniels 2).

The language is slightly advanced compared to the other texts, but lends itself easily to use as a source of advice. Unlike later books which encourage a reliance on friends, these early books encourage grieving children to rely on their families. *Grieving at Christmastime* is a neutral forum where readers learn to accept what they are feeling and discover that their experiences are normal.

Ralph L. Klicker's *Kolie and the Funeral* (2002) is an interactive coloring book that annotates the funeral process. Children are encouraged to color in the bold black and white pictures while having the text explain plainly facts such as who Funeral Directors are and then what they will do with the deceased loved one. The inside front cover also tells "grown-ups" that their helpful hints are in the back of the book. The book is offering separate places to absorb support and then to take ownership of it. The ultimate message of this book is that memories might be one of

the most important tools a child reader has during the grieving process, because they give the love and energy a new outlet.

The third chapter of my thesis will focus on middle-level readers. At this stage, grief literature emphasizes the importance of relying on peers for solace and strength. Rodman

Philbrick's *Freak the Mighty* (1993) and S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1997) share many of the same attributes. The characters are roughly the same age as the children that would be reading the novels. Characters that are not physically or mentally perfect find friendship. Here, alternative support systems beyond the traditional family are revealed as assets. Non-traditional families are one way that the texts lend alternative support systems. Siblings, grandparents, educators and messages left behind from the deceased push characters to see that healing is possible. Characters in these literary works often try hard to recapture the familial structure they had before death so tragically altered it. The books are modeling that there are different relationships to give strength, and that will help children live amidst the sadness they are feeling.

In picture books structure, such as color and brushstroke, allow writers to communicate with their readers. These same methods remain true for circumstances such as cover art. However, authors have also used tools like narrative voice, pacing, and brief description to guide readers through decisions regarding grief. For example, both novels can read a bit rushed or choppy at times; the way a young person might

talk or write. These techniques replace the visual illustrations of the early books with narrative versions of what the characters are feeling. Emotion is an important way to foster connections between the reader and the novel. Ultimately, both novels carry a message of continuance and hope, like the books from the first level. Though rather than outwardly expressing feelings of grief as young children are encouraged to do, the middle level material encourages characters and readers to be constructive and work using the loss of a loved one. The main characters speak at the end of both novels and urge others to learn through their hope and experiences. It is with an empty journal given to Max by Kevin and a

school composition written by Ponyboy, that dead loved ones are able to live on. Through the act of writing and sharing, relief and a sense of enlightenment can be reached. This could encourage readers to write their memories as well. These middle-level novels are all about choice and the positive and negative repercussions that inevitably follow.

The last chapter of the thesis will argue that while young adult characters still need support and the novels show them ultimately making their own interpretations. By reading Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974) and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1988), young adults learn that difficult decisions will be imminent and they may have to go through painful experiences for life to go on. Independent decision-making is a trait that this age group will be utilizing on many levels. This

level of reader will be independently driving, voting, making career decisions, or leaving for college.

Like the previous novels in the thesis, *The Chocolate War* contains strong group dependence and any attempt to live independently is almost too difficult to be worthwhile. Jerry Renault's mother dies at a crucial age in his life. Jerry is just like any other young adult starting out in the world. His mother is no longer going to be a support to him and his father. His father is so pained by his own loss, that he distances himself from Jerry in hopes of avoiding being hurt more in the future. Jerry's alternative to loneliness is a secret society called the Vigils. The Vigils imitate an orderly world, full of controlled situations. It is the presence of control that is so appealing to the Vigil members and even to Jerry, who attempts belonging for a short while. Control is the heart of a group formation and the group ensures survival for its members. When a character is floundering, this might seem the only type of survival imaginable. On the other hand,

Jerry is a character who saw death up close when his mother became sick and died. Jerry has already experienced what the Vigils surely fear, being left alone and vulnerable. Therefore the group lifestyle that the Vigils have constructed loses its appeal to Jerry. There is no need to hide behind the group façade of strength—Jerry has seen death and he can see that he has been painstakingly surviving it alone. Jerry is able to realize that perfection is an unnatural way of living and his rebellion against the Vigils will be symbolic of that fact. The group mentality versus the individual

will be a key facet to both novels as characters must rely on him or herself, rather than become lost among the crowd.

Lord of the Flies depicts children who are forced to act like adults in order to survive. After a school plane crashes on a deserted island, the children quickly notice that no adults have survived to tell them what to do next. Older children must step into these roles and impose duties and rules for the younger children. Students in high school learn to empathize with this dilemma. They too will be forced into an adult role after graduation, perhaps before they are ready. The absence of adults also harkens back to the fact the older children are when they experience loss, the more likely they are to use non-traditional support systems, such as the friendships and extended family previously mentioned to get through the experience. The children on the island, like Jerry and the Vigils, tried to make their own “families” and create a sense of order. These instant families were made in the hopes that this manufactured adult world could save them and reorganize the chaos caused by grief. Further connections between the two novels are found in dark and unapologetic prose and imagery. The reader experiences the raw pain of the protagonist, Ralph, as he witnesses and must come to terms with the deaths of other boys on the island. The separation of the boys into the group led by Ralph and the group led by Jack represents the moment when Ralph must discover and uphold his own ideals and beliefs.

As the thesis comes to a close, this last chapter shows the culmination of grief literature. From relying on the help of older family members in learning how to process grief, young adults take charge of the grieving process and assume a more active role. At the close of this chapter, characters will be shown experiencing death while displaying an unwavering belief in themselves; likewise readers will be able to experience new found belief while experiencing future grief from a stronger position. In children's books from years past, such as J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (2004), the character of Peter illustrates that death is not necessarily an end to be feared, "Next moment he was standing erect on the rock again, with that smile on his face and a drum beating within him. His heartbeat was saying, 'To die will be an awfully big adventure'" (84). Here is a character that has thrived on the next challenge and on never losing that childlike zest for life, regardless of the existence of death. This theme also exists clearly in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (1997); Dumbledore sagely explains to young Harry that the memory of his parents will stay alive in him and that death is not something to be afraid of; to Dumbledore, death is simply an inevitable, final ascent into the next stage. He says to Harry, "To one as young as you, I'm sure it seems incredible...to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure" (297). Ultimately, the knowledge that a person has in himself or herself will be greater after reading studies of grief literature in correlation with the actual texts. Readers will view death in new ways and see characters who made their own decisions involving grief, and that yes, there were those who were able to live through loss.

Chapter Two: ‘Old Enough to Love, Old Enough to Grieve’¹: The Theme of Loss in Children’s Picture Books

It is a daunting task to teach a young child about death and loss; after all, these are concepts and emotions that even the most seasoned adult struggles with. Indeed, in the book *Help During Loss*, J. Mark Ammerman writes “that children learn much about loss from television, movies and books...but that these sources are also full of misinformation... This cannot help but give children a false reality of life...” (85-6). Four books that will help children truthfully assess and learn lessons in death and grief are *I’ll Always Love You* (1990) by Hans Wilhelm, *Love You Forever* (1999) by Robert Munsch, *Kolie and the Funeral* (2002) by Ralph Klicker, and *Grieving at Christmastime* (2005) by Dwight Daniels. These texts acknowledge the normal range of emotional responses to death. Literary tools such as font, page structure, repetition, color choice and illustration show that these authors wrote for children, to help children. “The writers writing *about* children are looking back. The writers writing *for* children are feeling back into childhood” (Zolotow 185). I will analyze how each text teaches child readers to deal with loss. I will utilize literary criticism of children’s books such as Perry Nodelman’s, *Words About Pictures* (1988), to examine how the structure of the book reinforces its lessons about how child readers can manage grief.

Grief literature helps readers decide which voice to use when addressing their own experiences. Grief literature addresses the emotional needs identified by child development experts. Eric Rofes writes in *The Kids Book about Death and Dying*

¹ Ammerman, J. Mark. *Help During Loss*. Washington: Winepress Publishing, 1982.

(1985), that “if people are taught that death is mysterious or something to be afraid of, then that’s what they’ll tell their kids...Adults want to shield (protect) kids or don’t think their age/experience is high enough to process death” (9). Grief literature counsels parents who do not fully understand that the instant a child feels joy from an attachment, that same child will feel sadness when that object is lost. Writers of grief literature maintain that child readers will find help processing these feelings by reading books. They will see that grief can become a part of someone without causing that person to lose his or her identity.

The aspect of fear is also important to note. In infancy and early childhood children tend to fear “strangers, separation from parents, dark rooms, changes in appearance, large animals and mystical creatures” (Nicholson 16). Often children’s grief literature will address these fears, or even use the fear as a major part of the story. For instance, in *I’ll Always Love You* by Hans Wilhelm the young boy must deal with the changing appearance of his aging dog, while in *Kolie and the Funeral* the main character is a giant koala bear. While the type of animal itself might not suggest fear and danger, sheer size can create fear to a child. A typical and major fear for young children has become a main character that thinks and feels like the readers. What was feared once is now relied on. By showing these so-called dark parts of life in a friendly and approachable way, grief literature picture books show that readers’ fears may not be as horrible as they initially appeared.

The most successful grief literature includes themes that are both approachable and relatable. Emotions and ways of life should be wide in their scope

in order to reach the highest number of readers; issues such as the loss of a pet are often where picture book grief therapy finds a start (Wan 142). *I'll Always Love You* (1990) by Hans Wilhelm is a book that teaches lessons in grief using the loss of the family dog. Most children will be able to identify with this instance because in the child's first decade of life, the loss most often experienced is that of a pet (Mercurio 153). The style of this book, both illustrative and textual (narrative), helps children to better understand themselves and their worlds.

When a book uses familiar feelings, it furthers the connection a child has with a book and characters on an intimate level. Wilhelm keeps his narrative voice simple and clear when he uses an emotional foundation to reach every child that reads his book. As in *Help During Loss*, J. Mark Ammerman writes that, "if children are old enough to love, then they're old enough to grieve" (87). Wilhelm shows the iconic motifs of love and a family dog in the opening line, "This story is about Elfie—the best dog in the whole world" (Wilhelm 1). The lines of communication between characters and readers have been opened using the love of what is familiar. Some children might experience love for those around them almost from the start, but might not be able to recognize that they are feeling love. The book clarifies what love is and puts this concept into words. When the reader and/or child begin to read a book and then make the words of the text his or her own, they gain the ability to "possess the world" (Nodelman 19). In his book, *Words About Pictures* (1988), Perry Nodelman states that a goal of picture books for children is to incorporate literature as an active

part of life. Children should be allowed to use literature to see what is around them personally.

As a genre, grief literature emphasizes the importance and healing qualities found in friendship and love. The book presents the relationship between Elfie and his owner as a friendship of the highest quality. Friends like Elfie are the confidants that children seek out. "A friend will be the most helpful to you, will be the good listener who is nonjudgmental, accepting, able to hear the bad as well as the good, and not be afraid of anger" (Ammerman 35). The story of Elfie shows her as a dog that always listens to the boy; they even lie down and dream together. This type of love and friendship is a lifeline and while children rejoice in it, there can be tragic repercussions when that lifeline is taken away. Grief literature contends that the memories of such friends can be an important tool for a child to use when grief does occur. The stories and the memories will help take the empty place of the friend, after he or she has died. A goal that grief literature sets for affected children is to let memories help, rather than hurt, as most do when a loss is fresh.

The narrator is also talking to the reader in the first person, which makes the story seem to come from a friend who simply wants to share a memory. The narrator quietly recounts times of playing, getting in trouble, and growing up. As the child narrator grows up, the cherished best friend in Elfie is growing old. At this point the illustrator portrays the boy carrying a much larger dog up a very steep staircase. The picture and text express reluctance for change. The loss of a tradition is always

difficult. Elfie has to sleep in the boys' room because that is what she has always done.

The narrator then describes a more important tradition than the room where Elfie sleeps. The boy has also made a tradition out of expressing his love for Elfie. "I gave Elfie a soft pillow to sleep on, and before we went to sleep I would say to her, 'I'll always love you.' I know she understood" (Wilhelm 20). When Elfie ends up dying during the night, the boy is able to feel comfort in the fact that every night he told his best friend, Elfie, that he loved her. This lesson through Wilhelm's book is one that children can use, not only in grieving, but in living. By reading together, the adult could help the child see the incredible importance of that bedtime ritual.² While facing the prospect of loss can be frightening, the ultimate lesson offered through the literature is worth facing that fear. The ability to have a life with few to no regrets is something to be valued and it is a wonderful gift to give to a child; for when that child does grieve he or she will be able to do with some comfort.

The words in Wilhelm's book are printed in a large and dark font. There are no sentences or paragraphs that are overly long; the reader can look at the pages quickly and not worry about being rushed to read it, or that there will be too many "big words" that will be hard to understand. The words themselves are consistently calm. When reading this book out loud there is not a lot of room for extremes. The

² The reading of picture books is unlike other literacy, because like a performance, there is both a reader and an audience. The actual strategy of reading out loud adds a key ingredient missing from other forms of mass media, the presence and warmth of the caring adult that is reading the book to the child (Rycik 145). The media is not able to tailor its program to fit the needs of each child that it encounters. The information that an adult gives to a child, or when it is given, can be altered depending on the age of the child and any experiences he or she may have had up to this point (Sargent 1). It is at this stage that parents and other caretakers can fill in the gaps or the "misinformation" that can arise when talking about death and grief, and help the child gain comfort from the book.

narrator is not screaming with delight, nor is he whispering in tones of secrecy. The tone remains even except for two instances in the text where emphasis is shown by italics. The first time is when the narrator is stressing ownership, “My brother and sister loved Elfie very much, but she was *my* dog” (Wilhelm 4). The second time is when the narrator is being stubborn and refusing to submit to change, “It soon became too difficult for Elfie to climb the stairs. But she *had* to sleep in my room” (Wilhelm 18-19). In both cases, the italics focus on what the narrator has ownership of and the world that centers immediately on the narrator. Other members of the family love Elfie and life is changing, but the narrator remains reluctant to accept change. In *Children Writing Grief*, Rebecca McClanahan writes that, “children are notoriously egocentric...the story needs to connect to them” (137). Grief literature for children is written to appeal to child audiences and connect to their concerns. In addition to connecting to the readers, the story attempts to broaden the readers’ awareness of others. Child development experts state that the shift from “I” to “we” or “I” to “they” is actually one of the most important changes. Wilhelm still makes an effort to include the family of the narrator as well as friends and neighbors, perhaps in an effort to help the reader look beyond such narrow viewpoints.

With the death of Elfie, the tone shifts in a subtle way. After the narrator recounted the touching nighttime ritual of telling Elfie every night that he would always love her, he goes to sleep and dreams of fun memories the two have shared. A turn of the page brings a crushing dose of reality. “One morning I woke up and discovered that Elfie had died during the night” (Wilhelm 22). The story pauses here

as the narrator tries to absorb the loss of Elfie. The boy was unprepared for the death of his beloved pet; Elfie had not displayed any behaviors that would have been particularly alarming before bedtime that night. The reader can feel this tragic surprise because the death is suddenly stated and is not obviously led up to in the story. The book invites readers to share in the shock of the discovery. For the boy, learning to live with the loss of Elfie comes from the bedtime routine. When the boy said goodnight to his beloved dog, it was in a way, a goodbye, until the next day began. The close of each day gave closure to the friendship. The use of recurring lines, or refrains, is appealing to the young reader (Nicholson 17). Refrains lend safety and predictability to times when it seems impossible to know what will come next.

The shapes, intensity and focus all work in conjunction with the text to point the attention of the reader in a certain direction. The text in a book might cause a reader to react with sadness on a basic level. Yet when the colors are dark and the forms are chaotic, the illustrations can increase a readers' anxiety or fear. However, the illustrations in *I'll Always Love You*, for example, are dreamy and soft. The eyes of the characters are very small dots and it is virtually impossible to read meaning in them. The illustrator wants the reader to look at the bigger picture and interpret emotion in a broader sense, moreso than from just looking at a face. There is also a painting in the background of a scene in which Elfie is stealing dinner and breaking plates, and the face in the portrait is completely cut off (Wilhelm 9). Perhaps the illustrator wants the faces of characters to have anonymity so that readers can picture themselves in the story. On the other hand, the eyebrows, though almost as

nonexistent as the eyes, allow emotion and mood to come through. The arches of each tiny line show elation and sorrow. Detail is presented as being important here and the effect is that readers will “read” both illustrations and text. There is a general lack of focus, along with an absence of sharp angles, which affects the landscape of the setting as a whole.³

The choices of color in *I'll Always Love You* are a return to soft, grainy and dream-like images. This is a contrast from other children's books that use “big bold strokes, bright clear colors and sharp contrasts to state a purpose or message to the reader” (Nodelman 27). In correlation to the lack of facial focus, the illustrations do not need to grab the attention of the reader. The quiet force of the pictures command respect and attention.

In the illustrations that depict happy memories, there is an abundance of bright yellow and green. Elfie herself is an orange color that pops off the page in comparison to the muted shades around her. Yellow hues are typically associated with warmth and cheer, while green is more of an earth tone and symbolizes growth (Nodelman 60). The dominant bright colors convey the lesson that recalling happy memories will help in the healing process. The colors of red or orange usually convey intensity, warmth, anger, or love (Nodelman 60). The fact that Elfie is a combination of these colors makes the love she both gives and receives a central image that will be remembered.

³ The story remains hopeful because of this lack of shadow and darkness. Perry Nodelman writes about the use of light in picture books, saying, the presence of light is a common trait in books for children, especially for babies (26).

These illustrations are almost completely unframed on the page. By utilizing this device, the illustrator encourages the mind of the viewer to feel free to add his or her own imagination to pictures already present. However, there are two places where borders and lines are imposed. The first is when the narrator describes growing up with Elfie and five squares squeeze up years of friendship into tidy little boxes. The illustrated boxes at this point in the book provide a type of visual scrapbook of the boy's memories arranged into neat, organized snapshots. The rest of the book is fairly free of such limitation and this represents when a child is taken from this realm of safety to a place where grief can affect him or her. The box no longer protects them. The child is growing up.

The second place that uses a "box" or border is when the family has taken Elfie to the doctor, because she has become tired and walks around less and less. The parents and the narrator are enclosed with the doctor and Elfie. Compared to the boy and the dog, the doctor is larger than anything else in the picture and he swallows up the frame. The large illustration suggests that this is a person of power and that the news is intense and cannot be taken back. The bad news that there is nothing to be done and Elfie is simply aging, is suffocating to the narrator, and the box has closed him in.

At the end of Wilhelm's book, the narrator has a neighbor who offers the boy a new puppy from a recent litter. The reader expects the boy to accept a new dog and continue living his life with a replacement, which in a sense "erases" the death. However, the narrator does not take a new dog, but instead gives away the basket that

Elfie slept in thinking, “He needed it more than I did” (Wilhelm 27). The young boy realizes that his grief is not about substitution, but is about the acceptance of what cannot be changed and a hope for the future. This is a great difference from when the narrator that felt Elfie was *his* dog and had to sleep in *his* room. He is a character who has gained perspective and can now think of someone else before himself.

This story shows that when death does happen, it is not the world ending, but is simply a shift in what already exists. Literary critics and child development experts, Mia Lynn Mercurio and Abigail McNamee, isolated the way certain ages reacted to death in their article, “Healing Words, Healing Hearts: Using Children’s Literature to Cope with the Loss of a Pet.” They stated that the ages of three to five were when death was seen as reversible and it was from six to eight that death seemed to happen to other people and became irreversible (154). This is a piece of grief literature that subtly teaches children to affirm the people or pets in their lives, so that when those loved ones are gone, and the permanence of death is truly felt, there will be comfort.

Another children’s picture book that guides children through grief is the similarly titled and themed, *Love You Forever* (1999), by Robert Munsch. Like the boy narrator in Wilhelm’s book, the young boy in this story uses tradition to help him through an upcoming, inevitable change. As this boy grows up and becomes a married man with a child of his own, he must face the fact that his mother is aging and that there is nothing to be done. Death is not mentioned, but its presence can be felt. As one fourth grade girl wrote in Rebecca McClanahan’s article, “Children Writing Grief” (1998), “seeing my grandfather staggering with old age through the

tall grassy field, seeing him walking wobbly without his cane, makes me want to cry knowing someday I'll never see him again" (McClanahan 138). To this young girl death is there, even when it has not occurred, and it is so permanent in her mind that she feels she will never see her grandfather physically ever again. In contrast, while the son in the story can see death approaching he still lives knowing the bedtime ritual will bring the life of his mother full circle with comfort. Through the formation and practice of ritual, the book offers yet another type of tool to help prepare children for loss.

Munsch uses repetition to let readers feel like everything will be alright in the end. The effect of the song refrain is like the reader being able to predict that the sun will rise in the morning. Each character in the book illustrates the immortality of love. In the book, just as the sun rises, each character always shows love for someone else. In return, love is a part of the character's lives that cannot die. The continuation of the song and what it represents reinforces that life will continue in the book, so long as characters can feel emotion and remember how to show love. The story begins with a mother rocking her new baby to sleep and singing, "I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, As long as I'm living my baby you'll be" (Munsch 1). When the baby is two years old, the mother repeats the song as she lifts him from his bed and rocks him in his sleep. The act is repeated when the boy has turned nine, a teenager and then as a man in his own home. When the mother becomes too old and sick to finish the song over the phone, the son travels to her and carries her in his arms as he sings the song, "I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, As long as I'm living my Mommy

you'll be" (Munsch 23). That night after he leaves his mother, he goes to the bedroom of his new baby daughter and sings the song his mother always sang to him.

The chorus refrains and sing-song qualities in this book are conveyed with clarity and strength. The book is designed so that readers can anticipate the refrain and will be reassured that the tradition will be there, and the child might even say it along with the characters. The literal reading of the book can become a tradition and therefore all of the lessons within the book, such as the repeated demonstration of feelings to gain comfort, will be shown to the reader as well. The type of tradition in this book also portrays the message that even though love changes form, it does not have to go away. The death of a person or pet does not mean that that love has to stop; there can be another outlet. The son shows this when he sings of his love for his daughter, as his mother did for him.

This book contains more text and more sentences per page than *I'll Always Love You*. However, the font is still large and there are no pictures or additional colors to take up space. The text stands alone and the illustrations are independent on the opposite page. Words combined with text on a page, especially at the top, can cause tension because the reader wants to look from the top down, but the picture draws the attention first (Nodelman 55). This separation of the text from the pictures frees the reader from having to decide which to look at first, text or illustration. If the book is read in order, then the text comes before the corresponding picture.

This text also uses italics in order to make several points clearly. A different function of the italics in this text versus *I'll Always Love You* is that here they do not

show ownership. In Munsch's text, the italics express high emotion or even frustration. When the baby turned two years old, he made amazing messes around the house, "He pulled all the books off shelves. He pulled all the food out of the refrigerator and he took his mother's watch and flushed it down the toilet. Sometimes his mother would say, '*This kid is driving me CRAZY!*'" (Munsch 3). When the boy turned into a teenager the mother felt that there were times she wanted to get rid of him altogether, "Sometimes his mother wanted to sell him to the zoo!" (Munsch 7). The pictures are strong enough that such exclamations are not completely necessary, yet the punch in the text makes it appropriate for reading aloud. The italics give the reader cues for how to read, experience and hear the story. Despite all of the times that frustration comes through in the story, the illustrations and the repeated messages of love and belonging keep this text positive.

As for illustrations, they are drawn as though a crayon or colored pencil outlined firmly, but shaded the color in lightly. The pastel color choice along with this shading creates a soothing environment. There are many pinks, blues and yellows. Blue especially is a color that promotes serenity and healing (Nodelman 60). There are no borders present in the drawings and the pictures completely fill up the page. This allows the reader to fully absorb the image before them. A consistent theme across the texts is that throughout the illustrations there is a clever use of shadow and light. The rooms around characters might be dark, but wherever there is darkness, a light is on somewhere in the scene that shines on the characters involved. The light symbolizes the presence of hope. The message in the refrain, "I'll always love you,"

is an auditory comfort; the light in scenes of darkness is a visual comfort. For example, on the very first page the mother is rocking her new baby and a lamp in the corner illuminates the pair as she smiles down lovingly. The same occurs when the mother sneaks into the room of her two year old son and peers over the bed to check if he is sleeping; the light from the hallway shows the mother checking on the safety of her child. When the boy is nine and then a teenager, the nighttime bed check happens again, and always with light shining on the pair of mother and son.

The book begins with the mother and her infant, a caregiver and her charge. Then life fills the pages and both characters grow older. Eventually, the book shows the son being the caregiver for both his mother and his own child at the same time. “The son went up to the mother. He picked her up and rocked her back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And he sang this song...” (Munsch 23). There has been a role reversal and the son is now acting as the parent to his mother. Her life is seen as coming full circle, while the son is midway through his time. The book ends with a scene of the son as a father and he is rocking his baby daughter and singing the special song for the second time in one night. As one character ages, another is newborn and the love that parents and children share is seen as continuous and forever.

In this instance, the book attempts to demonstrate to child readers the difficult concept that two opposing emotions can be felt at the same time (Lewis 60). This strain of conflicting emotion is seen when the son leaves his mother the night after rocking her and pauses at the top of his stairs at home, deep in thought. This pause

after seeing his sick mother leads the reader to believe that he is feeling profound sadness. Then he picks up his new baby and there is joy in his gift of the traditional song to her. Knowing that the character is feeling grief at the impending loss of his mother and joy in the new life of his daughter helps the book express the acceptance of conflicting emotions. When one life ends, another is beginning.

In her book, *On Death and Dying* (1993), Elisabeth Kubler-Ross wrote that through grief literature, "...we weave ourselves into the fabric of human history" (247). Readers become linked to the characters and the history of both lives are played out together, with the book functioning as a safe, comforting place to see what would happen next. The previous theme of a grown child giving back to his young child the same kind of love that was given to him, is a comfort that will remain long after a generation is gone and those left behind are trying to find a way to heal.

Love You Forever is a part of grief literature that indirectly lets child readers know that change will happen. The death of the mother in the story can be implied as a new pair takes over, the father and daughter. Books like this are important because the facts of death are not always clearly stated to a child. "Even when they do not completely understand what has happened, children notice changes in the lives of those around them" (Corr 340).

A third children's book handles grief literature with a different methodology. The book, *Grieving at Christmastime* (2005) by Dwight Daniels, is self-described as being a gentle and practical guide to handling grief during the holidays. This is the first book written explicitly for a reader who has experienced a death. The book

directly addresses the reader and his or her grief experience. There are no characters, no special story and there is no color other than the front cover. The size of the book is small, as if it were designed to fit into a pocket or purse and pulled out when needed. The reader is essential in order to make this book into a story, for it will end up being the story of his or her own experience. The message of this book is simply that acknowledging, respecting and responding to grief is always important and it is alright to do this, even when everyone else is happy and celebrating. This type of narrative sounds like the advice of someone who has truly experienced the situation at hand and this “string of decisions, reactions and consequences ingrains the possible outcomes to the reader” (Armstrong 193). Everything is placed in front of him or her and then that person can select what fits the moment.

Within the pages of this book the font and the feel of the pages are reminiscent of a church missal. The pages are thin and the font is not basic, but is more like a gothic script that has swirled edges to the letters. The page numbers appear at the top, center of the page and therefore appear like a chapter number instead. This could be a way of saying that the message on each page is a chapter in the grief process and it can be opened and closed, read together or separately. There can be multiple ways of looking at grief feelings with this set-up. There is a lot of text on each page, but the sentences themselves are short and choppy, “Christmas is coming. The signs of rejoicing are everywhere. People smiling, people laughing—but not you...Your heart is heavy. You are grieving” (Daniels 1). The author uses direct address to communicate interactively with the reader without the filter of characters

or a narrative. The message of the book remains optimistic and while being clear on the death of a loved one, it also lets the reader know that it is alright when happiness is felt again. From the start of the book and the sentence, “You are grieving,” to the last page, “One day, peace and happiness will return to your troubled heart. Just as surely as day follows night, a new dawn awaits you, beyond the grief and the pain” (Daniels 38). The “story” lets the reader know what to expect and that whatever it is, the feelings are normal. The book imposes a grand narrative of grief onto the experience of the reader; the reader is invited to understand his or her story within this context. “Books can reassure [us] that [our] reactions and responses are normal and natural. They can provide advice and suggestions for resolving problems. And they can also offer hope that one can live beyond loss” (Doka 19).

The illustrations look like pencil sketches and there are no colors. A lack of color and the use of black and white can convey feelings of separation and isolation (Nodelman 48). For the grieving child reading this book, these are feelings that will seem familiar. The use of black and white in the book could also reflect the need a child has to see his or her world in a concrete manner. The “characters” in each scene also appear a little elf-like and create thoughts of innocence and magic. This is especially true in a Christmas-themed text because the reader will be able to look at them and go back to a time before death touched his or her life. Even a child could think of what it was like at Christmas before someone was missing and everyone around him or her changed the way such a holiday felt.

A guide to grief can make the reader feel that loss is something that can be understood, even if it cannot always be expressed. This knowledge that understanding can be achieved makes people feel a little less alone (Doka 2). It is also reassuring to know that relapsing back into grief will happen and that that too is healthy and normal, “the little things that catch your attention for a brief moment, but open up a floodgate of hurt” (Ammerman 64). Grief texts such as these tell the “story” of the grieving process, and will assure readers that even with “floodgate moments” they will heal. Those will be some of the moments when children need reassurance the most. *Grieving at Christmastime* is unique because it will address grief at any age, “for when it comes to death, most of [us] are still kids” (Fry 4). Children might want to rely on books because they will see their parents and other family members at a loss and maybe even crying. *Grieving at Christmastime* offers readers a place free from extreme emotion. The book functions as a neutral zone to safely process the emotions associated with grief.

The last book in this chapter, Ralph Klicker’s *Kolie and the Funeral* (2002), is short and sparse, but is able to answer some difficult questions because it is activity based. Like *Grieving at Christmastime*, this text is interactive and directly addresses the reader’s experience. The book urges grieving children to “do activities that soothe [them]” (Gootman 6). The act of coloring is one such activity. *Grieving at Christmastime* offered comfort through clear-cut advice and neutral black and white colors. *Kolie and the Funeral*, through black and white pages that could be colored in,

offers that same comfort, but also allows readers to participate by manipulating the environment.

This coloring book tells the story of Kolie, a young koala bear whose grandpa has just died, as he follows the steps a family takes immediately after a death. As far as content, the first words are printed on the back of the front cover and are boxed in and bold. They state, “Grownups, see the inside back cover for helpful hints” (Klicker). This is not to say that children cannot read that section or that grownups cannot read the story of Kolie; it is just allowing separate places for grief to play out so that individuals can take ownership of their own feelings. The boy owner of Elfie in *I’ll Always Love You*, is an example of a character who was also able to own the emotions that he felt. In the section for adults, they are encouraged to let children participate in all funeral activities, but never to force them. The book also suggests that visiting the grave every so often can initiate conversation and let a child speak out about any change in how he or she is feeling. As many children feel anxious and afraid about expressing their feelings about personal deaths (Rycik 145), tips from the book for helping parents approach that issue are beneficial.

The first line of the story utilizes the safe and familiar language of fairy tales, “Once upon a time there was a happy little koala named Kolie” (Klicker 1). What follows is what happens when reality breaks the illusion of permanent joy. Through the mind of Kolie children learn that someone who has died no longer hears, sees, thinks, or feels. These are questions that children may form, but be too afraid of upsetting someone to ask. Since children feel so concretely, the child will benefit

from receiving confirmation that the body and mind of the deceased no longer work. This is a scary concept for children, because if people can no longer do those functions, then what do they do? Who are they? For Kolie, is that man still his grandpa?

Children have been described as experiencing the same adult emotion, but “without the protective coating” (Zolotow 185). It is explained to Kolie that there are people called Funeral Directors that take care of the body inside a Funeral Home. There would be a ceremony held to remember and talk about his grandpa’s life (Klicker 3). Kolie sees the body in a casket and the Hearse brings his grandpa’s body to a cemetery (Klicker 4). The author capitalizes words such as “Funeral Director” and “Hearse,” throughout the book in order to stress their importance; both words possess negative connotation during times of emotional stress. By capitalizing these words the author is recognizing that a Hearse or Funeral Director can be intimidating, but that both also have important roles that deserve to be acknowledged. The gravestone is then explained as being a place that Kolie can go to and remember special times he had with his grandpa. The idea of memory remains important because the love that children have for the deceased does not just stop because life has; this concept was also seen in *Love You Forever*.

The very last page that is designated for children says at the top, “Write down what you remember about a special person who died” (Klicker 8). As Chapter Three will show using the novel, *The Outsiders*, the act of keeping a journal or even just writing a page, can contain fears about death and help a person to stay hopeful (Fry

113). The book is completely interactive in that it not only exposes children to strategies, but that it also has them try strategies out. Books for young and traumatized children usually have such spaces designated so that the responses of the child can begin a dialogue (Rycik 147).

Each illustration is a study in bold, dark lines with an immense amount of white space. The characters can be colored in by a reader, using any color he or she chooses. Since colors have such emotional significance, noting the colors a child uses in a blank picture could alert adults about how a child was feeling. A lack of cheerful yellows or light blues could be a sign that the child has used the book as a method of reaching out. Readers can also fill the white space around each character with pictures drawn themselves, thus manipulating the scene into something else entirely. In an article by Karen Carney, Piaget is quoted as saying, “play is a child’s work” (308). Coloring or writing a creative story is seen as a playtime activity, and one might think a grieving child would want no part of it, when this is not the case. The type of “play” that appears in the book, *Kolie and the Funeral*, is the type that is most important. Carney also writes that by doing something natural, like coloring, children would begin to feel more comfortable with a situation again (310). *Kolie and the Funeral* truly has a therapeutic space that can be filled by the child.

In closing, the book *Tear Soup* (2001) by Pat Schwiebert and Chuck DeKlyen sums up the messages that every book in this chapter has delivered. *Tear Soup* states that this type of soup, like grief, takes time and will not contain a quick fix like instant soup. It states that grief is messy and takes longer to cook than anyone wants it

too. The main character in the book, Grandy, knows that there are some parts that require help from friends in making the soup, and other parts that need to be done alone. Ultimately, the message of *Tear Soup*, and the grief-literature picture books is this, “You just hope a better day comes along soon. And then comes one of the hardest parts of making tear soup—it’s when you decide it may be okay to eat something instead of soup all the time” (Schwiebert 42). The books included in this chapter: *I’ll Always Love You, Love You Forever, Grieving at Christmastime*, and *Kolie and the Funeral*, impart that while a reader will see characters forever changed by their losses, the same characters continuing to live, however changed they may be.

Older children will have different needs when they process grief. The literature that children learn from will change along with them and offer age-appropriate tools to allow the older, more experienced child to process loss. Chapter Three will highlight an absence of illustrations in the text and a lack of the therapeutic workbooks within the pages of middle-grade novels focusing on grief and loss. The child that falls into this chapter of grief found at the middle-level will be able to make such tools in his or her mind, based solely on what is read. The novels of the next level will offer a stage, but the reader must supply the actors.

Chapter Three: Dwelling on Dreams: Seeking the Healing Truth in Young Adult Fiction

At the middle level, readers are ready for different strategies and approaches in utilizing grief literature. Author Eric Rofes wrote that “kids can also learn about death by reading good nonfiction books that give complete information, or by reading good fiction... This can give a clearer idea before it [death] happens to him” (13).

Chapter Three emphasizes the necessity of outside help and the independent choice to rely upon it.

The characters that emerge from S.E. Hinton’s novel *The Outsiders* (1967) and Rodman Philbrick’s *Freak the Mighty* (1993) are identifiable and memorable. Maxwell Kane and Ponyboy Curtis, along with other characters, negotiate the tumultuous road of survival after the deaths of dear friends. In the midst of it all, Ponyboy and Max choose to reject violent choices, including associations with gang violence, while processing their grief. The process of each grieving boy offers alternatives and choices regarding grief, thus giving a reader the chance to internalize the information offered and choose what best fits his or her personal needs.

Non-traditional families provide the opportunity for each novel to showcase a variety of alternative support systems. Brothers, grandparents, teachers and even messages left behind by the friends who died all help Ponyboy and Max to heal. Literature plays a key role for both main characters in each novel as well. Ponyboy turns to the poetry of Robert Frost to help him cope with death, while Max finds comfort in the King Arthur legends that Kevin loved so much. This tactic shows

readers that books actually can help grief and they can also offer hope that one can live beyond loss” (Doka 19).

In another departure from the picture books in Chapter Two, the middle level novels are differentiated by gender. The main characters in each novel are young boys, the oldest being around 18. This chapter correlates that “boys and grandfathers were not left out” of young adult fiction (Johnson 299), and are indeed a vital audience for this type of literature. Boys are often seen as being overlooked in the literary culture, and are seen as reluctant readers. These novels forge and foster emotional connections that will better foster literary connections. The novels also merge using the first person narration of an adolescent boy. The boy narrators stylistically maneuver darker plot points without shying away from realistic portrayals of grief.

It is important for novels to address the male gender separately because gender can affect the way a reader grieves along with a book. “Anger is a part of grieving, and girls may tend to turn their anger inward, while boys...demonstrate outwardly the intensity of these feelings” (Mercurio 154). The novels in this chapter are appealing to both genders, but speak especially to the angst-filled young adult boy.

The authors utilize narrative voice, pacing, brief description and the art of quotation in *The Outsiders* and *Freak the Mighty*, respectively, which fosters a connection between the two novels. The mind is shown to be a more powerful tool in handling grief in areas where violent, physical outbursts are unsuccessful. For

instance, Ponyboy and Max “write” the novels by turning the events of their lives into a story leading up to the deaths of their friends. This writing format uses memory and legacy to cope with death: The story of each novel is the memorial that allows lost characters to in a sense to live forever. Alternatively, Ponyboy’s other friend Dallas succumbs to physical violence during grief and ends his own life. The novel allows the reader to choose which option should be termed a success.

In S.E. Hinton’s novel *The Outsiders* (1967), Ponyboy Curtis was the youngest of three boys. His oldest brother Darry and the middle boy Soda Pop tried hard to stay together after the death of their parents a year or so prior to the beginning of the book. The Curtis boys rely upon their friends because often after a loss occurs, particularly that of parents, those left behind search out similar security (Ammerman 72). The novel focuses on the Curtis brothers as they deal with the remnants of their personal tragedy in a lifestyle that only leads to more hardship and loss.

The first introduction a reader has to the novel is the cover art. The cover of *The Outsiders* 1967 Puffin Books edition is surrounded in shadow. Due to this amount of darkness, the illuminated faces of four boys, a scene from their town, and the title stand out in hues of yellow and red. While one of the faces on the cover portrays arrogance and attitude by looking behind himself as if he cannot let go of his troubled past, two of the boys appear to be more dreamy and thoughtful. Their eyes seem to shine a little more than the others and their gazes are raised, looking off to the distance. The largest face can be assumed to be Ponyboy himself. His gaze is the only one that looks straight out from the cover of the book. His eyes are covered partly in

shadow and appear tired, yet resilient. Each gaze on the cover reveals the hint of a story to be found within the pages of the book; each gaze is a hint at the lives that have been lived. Red illuminates the boys from behind and underlines the title of the novel. In the novel there is violence and passion. In *Words About Pictures*, Perry Nodelman writes that the color red is associated most often with intensity, warmth, anger or love (60). These are boys that lived and died hard. The connotations of the color red strengthen this fact. Red can be the color of anger and the color of intense love. The scene of a small town is drawn beneath the pictures of the boy's faces. The town glows with reddish orange as well. This could be a reference to the ways that the social gang violence of the area is ripping the town apart. It is the characters such as Ponyboy, who are left behind, that will guide other survivors to a life amongst grief.

The narrative voice in *The Outsiders* is the main character Ponyboy. In Marilyn Gootman's book, *When a Friend Dies* (1994), she addresses the fact that having a personal narrative voice is important. In her own experience she felt that up to a point this was not being addressed in young adult grief literature: "When my teenaged daughter's friend died...I realized that most books written about death and dying don't speak directly to teenagers, they speak about them (Gootman 1). Both *Freak the Mighty* and *The Outsiders* remedy that previous absence.

As a narrator Ponyboy is fairly "wordy." This is a personality difference from the main character Max, in *Freak the Mighty*. Max started his novel as an introverted boy with learning disabilities and Ponyboy was proud of being "school" smart and

had a key role to play in his tightly knit group of friends. The prose used by Ponyboy is honest, as is that of Max, from the very start. He does not hide anything from the readers. When describing his life and the rivalry that he and his friends have with the upper class Ponyboy explains simply, "We're poorer than the Socs and the middle class. I reckon we're wilder too...I'm not saying that either Socs or greasers are better; that's just the way things are" (Hinton 3). Ponyboy's tone will speak to readers and let them know that even the imperfect life deserves a shot. Ponyboy as a character appears to talk quickly, based on the close proximity his internal and external dialogue have to one another. Ponyboy does this while explaining the tiniest detail of his surroundings. Ponyboy does this more towards the beginning of the novel and as he is exposed to more life experiences and grows up even more, he begins to observe and use fewer words that count more. Ponyboy is a narrator that realistically portrays his world and his home to readers. Ultimately, the factor regarding narrative voice that is perhaps the most effective is Ponyboy's direct address to the reader. This direct acknowledgement is crucial in a text that is attempting to foster relationships to promote healing connections. Ideally a reader will be receptive and open to such techniques offered by the novel to deal with grief. It is this direct, honest and simple narrative that will accomplish the task.

Instead of involving situations that *show* what characters are like, S.E. Hinton uses Ponyboy's voice to *tell* what a character is like. The most powerful moments in the novel are those that the reader is able to picture in his or her mind. For example, Ponyboy describes each member of his Greaser gang, including physical and

behavioral characteristics. When introducing Dallas 'Dally' Winston he says, "his eyes were blue, blazing ice, cold with a hatred of the whole world. He was tougher than the rest of us-tougher, colder, meaner" (Hinton 19). His descriptions were further proven when Dally and Ponyboy rushed to see Johnny Cade in the hospital with news of a victorious rumble and Dally refuses to be denied access to his friend. "We gotta see him," Dally said, and flicked out Two-Bit's switchblade. His voice was shaking. 'We're gonna see him and if you give me any static you'll end up on your own operatin' table'" (Hinton 147). Dally is a character on the edge and a young man of action; Hinton is attempting to craft a realistic character to hook readers. S.E. Hinton has professed to shaping her characters from her own experience and the experiences of her male friends: "Ponyboy is how I felt at 14... There are millions of Ponyboy's out there, soulfully dreaming, sentimental, cool" (Malone 280). It is not a stretch to find a real-life basis for Dallas Winston.

Dally is the character that a reader cannot look away from; he represents what other characters are afraid of, but also what they want to be like. As Christine M. Moore states in her 1989 article, "Teaching about Loss and Death to Junior High School Students," the third section of a Grief Literature Unit was designed to address such risk-taking behavior (5). The reader that watches Dally closely will be able to act out his or her most dangerous aggressions, whether a reader admits to such behaviors or not, without real harm to him or herself.

Usually a few characters at the core of a story can be seen as infallible and will survive until the end. In the case of *The Outsiders*, even those most important

characters are vulnerable. Here the narrative is attempting to dispel the myth of invincibility that young people so strongly believe in. "Some people think that when a friend dies, this reduces the chances...bad will happen to them. It's as if one death in a group of friends somehow "protects" the others from harm" (Gootman.66). A reader will gain relationships only to experience the loss that touches each character's story. Indeed, the Curtis brothers had parents who were killed in a car accident, and then had two of their best friends die in one week. The myth of invincibility continues by using characters in the novel who appear to be unafraid of death. These boys carry around weapons and get into fights on an almost daily basis, although this could be a way of daring their fears to come closer. The fears of children have evolved from the oversize animals of their youth. Young teenagers, who these middle level novels are geared towards, tend to fear shootings, drugs, gangs and war (Nicholson 16). Each character in *The Outsiders* deals with those fears, excluding war. Gang violence in particular is a fear that permeates *The Outsiders*. Consequently the later novel, *Freak the Mighty*, also has a youth gang who terrorize Max and Kevin, albeit in a far milder manner. Death and violence are displayed in Ponyboy's life during a time when Johnny Cade was beaten badly by a gang of Socs,

...And Johnny, who was the most law-abiding of us, now carried in his back pocket a six-inch switchblade. He'd use it, too, if he ever got jumped again. They had scared him that much. He would kill the next person who jumped him. Nobody was ever going to beat him like that again. Not over his dead body (Hinton 34).

Even the mildest character let pain affect him to the point that he changed. Johnny shows that it is alright to be afraid, but he also foreshadows the ominous consequence that his grim resolution will have.

Much like *Freak the Mighty*, the novel *The Outsiders* contains quotes that articulate the most difficult and heart-wrenching moments of life and death. Using quotes to express personal emotion lets the novel assist in the grief process through, “The words of those we consider more eloquent than ourselves” (McClanahan 136). When someone else is putting raw emotion into words, the true speaker is less vulnerable. There is less in risk when a character speaks, than when a reader does so. The characters were created for the most part by adults with more experience in processing their emotions; this is an exception for S.E. Hinton who was indeed a young teen herself when she wrote *The Outsiders*, which lends a different type of literary insight. For instance, Ponyboy is adept at believing what suits himself at the time. When life is unpleasant he can avoid it by retreating into his mind, letting it play tricks on him. However, Ponyboy knows that he has to face reality sometime, “But I was still lying and I knew it. I lie to myself all the time. But I never believe me” (Hinton 18). Ponyboy is illustrating that part of being a complete person is experiencing feelings of conflict and of being unsure. Ponyboy is also showing that there are times when honesty is hard to come by.

The characters also use literature to help them process their grief. When Ponyboy and Johnny are hiding in an abandoned church following Johnny’s murder of the Soc, Ponyboy is struck by a Robert Frost poem he had learned in school. At the

time he is not sure why the poem seems to apply to his life and the situations involving his friends, but he recites the poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay.” After Ponyboy had finished Johnny was astounded, “Where’d you learn that? That was what I meant” (Hinton 77). These boys were experiencing emotions that they were unfamiliar with and the poem captured the essence of their feelings when they could not find words of their own.

Johnny’s last words to Ponyboy echoed the poem as his own life faded, “‘Stay gold, Ponyboy. Stay gold...’ The pillow seemed to sink a little, and Johnny died” (Hinton 148). Like the light of Kevin’s stars in *Freak the Mighty*, as I will discuss in the second half of the chapter, Ponyboy looks at Johnny and thinks, “Johnny just looked dead. Like a candle with the flame gone” (Hinton 148-49). Ponyboy is left staring at his friend who died before his eyes, and gives words to readers who may either relate to this moment, or who may fear seeing a dead loved one for the first time. The poem helps Ponyboy deal with the reality of what just happened.

As stated in J. Mark Ammerman’s *Help During Grief* (1997), “the experience of facing death is the first step toward handling grief. You have to hurt first to begin healing” (19). Ponyboy has unknowingly begun the grieving process as soon as he makes the decision not to turn away from Johnny. This is an important step, but also a dangerous one, for once that image has been imprinted on the mind, it will exist there forever (Ammerman *Help During Loss* 19). Facing the body of someone who has died forces the reality of the death to be accepted, “To see the immovable face of death, to touch the absolute stillness of a body, to hear no heartbeat...these are

sensory experiences that give us all a concrete knowledge of death” (Fry 31). As much as Ponyboy wants the situation with Johnny to have ended any other way, he cannot change or deny the way Johnny’s life ended. This is in contrast to Dallas, who kills himself because he cannot deal with the enormity of not being able to change such a permanent situation. Likewise, the reader begins to heal through literature by allowing the novel to give him or her the words in which to start the process.

It will ultimately be Ponyboy’s strong mind that pulls him through and helps him survive the death of Johnny. It is Dallas, who possesses a strong physical self and lacks such mental strength, who will fall victim to a grief he cannot survive. It is the death of the one person Dallas had dared allow past his icy exterior, that will expose the weak spot in Dally’s armor. Ponyboy wondered aloud to the other gang members how he could be handling it better than someone as “worldly” as Dallas; then the words come to him, “And then I knew. Johnny was the only thing Dally loved. And now Johnny was gone” (Hinton 152). The novel is showing that even the toughest character is able to hurt, as well as acknowledging that each boy is handling the death of Johnny differently. After all, “there is no single right way to respond to death. Grief takes many different forms. Each person’s grief is unique” (Gootman 14). Here the novel does not shy away from the choices a person can make after experiencing grief.

Dallas Winston is a perfect example of this. Dallas puts this scenario into words perfectly in the moments following the death of Johnny in the hospital,

...that's what you get for tryin' to help people, you little punk, that's what you get'...Whirling suddenly, he slammed back against the wall. His face contracted in agony, and sweat streamed down his face. 'Damn it, Johnny...' he begged, slamming one fist against the wall, hammering it to make it obey his will. 'Oh, damn it, Johnny, don't die, please don't die... (Hinton 149).

Throughout the novel, Dallas had been the one with street smarts and experience living rough. He was the boy with the eyes hardened by his hatred for the world, the boy who was tougher than the rest, holding in his emotions and letting them out only in violence. Dallas did not take time to allow himself to grieve for Johnny and when that time does not occur, the person can experience anger and often explode at other situations and other people (Gootman 73).

While some characters, like Max Kane in *Freak the Mighty*, choose to survive, there are others, such as Dallas Winston who choose to self destruct. In *Help During Grief* (1997) J. Mark Ammerman acknowledges that it is normal to have so-called "stupid" thoughts or suicidal feelings following a death. Like the character Dallas, this person can go to extremes to cover up any glitches that occur in the grief cycle (73). The grief cycle, as outlined by Eric Rofes in *The Kids Book about Death and Dying* (1985), states that there is first denial and isolation followed by anger (113). Dallas represents someone who cannot get past the anger stage. Dallas illustrates someone getting to the point when the hurt is so great that death is the only way to not feel it anymore. As his friends and readers watch helplessly Dallas made his choice,

He was dead before he hit the ground. But I knew that was what he wanted, even as the lot echoed with the cracks of shots, even as I begged silently— Please, not him...not him and Johnny both—I knew he would be dead, because Dally Winston wanted to be dead and he always got what he wanted (Hinton 154).

Dallas kills himself by raising an unloaded gun to pursuing police. Rather than turning readers off and making them afraid with a moment like this, “scary” or tense books that contain negative behaviors provide “vicarious opportunities for exploring and mastering fears” (Nicholson 17). It is important that Dallas makes this decision. Readers of this age are old enough to know that life does not always end up full of happiness and personal growth. The novel understands this fact and addresses grief as a tumultuous ride. The novel acknowledges that not everyone will make positive decisions, because sometimes the loss is just too great to conquer. There are times when a character feels powerless, but admitting so, is too scary to overcome (Gootman 28). One of the most important opportunities that *The Outsiders* offers a reader is allowing him or her to see two different models of coping with grief played out.

Once more a character is presented with a choice that he needs to make. Ponyboy has lost his parents and two boys that were like brothers to him. Ponyboy can either follow Dallas, or he can find the strength to continue on. At school Ponyboy is offered a last chance to pass his English class by writing a theme paper on a topic of his choice. *Life Beyond Loss* (2002) by Kenneth Doka reveals, during times

of grief “work at home or school can suffer” (5). Ponyboy’s teacher understands this and thus offered him a chance to save his academic year in light of his personal tragedies. As Ponyboy sits alone in his room, pondering the assignment, the words of someone else end up saving his life, literally. A letter from Johnny Cade falls out from the pages of the *Gone with the Wind* novel they had read when hiding in the church. His letter urges Ponyboy to tell Dally that there is still good in the world because Johnny does not think that he knows. Ponyboy is suddenly hit with the realization that even though this message arrived too late to save Dallas, it is not too late to save other boys,

I could picture hundreds and hundreds of boys living on the wrong sides of cities...hundreds of boys who...ached for something better. I could see boys going down under street lights because they were mean and tough and hated the world...It was too vast a problem to be just a personal thing. There should be some help, someone should tell them before it was too late (Hinton 179).

Ponyboy makes the decision to write his story, to write the stories of Johnny, Dallas and the murdered Soc named Bob. His path through grief will be supported by his friends and family. He will heal through the sharing of experiences and from the knowledge that he might save someone else from the same pain he felt. The novel is revealed as his theme paper, and the story written by Ponyboy himself. As Ponyboy thinks of what to write he is forced to remember those who have died, “Remembering—and this time it didn’t hurt—One week had taken all three of them. And I decided *I* could tell people” (Hinton 180). Often times the “end” of grief is not

the absence of it completely, but is instead the “end of memory with great pain” (Doka 15). Ponyboy and Max illustrate through the composition of their stories, that the intensity of the pain diminishes. The stories were written to help other people from the kind of hurt that they felt.

The novel, *Freak the Mighty*, by Rodman Philbrick (1993) is an echo of *The Outsiders*, heard by readers 26 years later. The novel, like *The Outsiders*, is a frame novel in which the main character writes the story of the events leading to the death of a friend. The main character, Max, is faced with a momentous life choice at a tender age when he must decide how to deal with the grief he feels after his friend, Kevin, passes away.

It takes Max a year to think about moving forward. He does not realize he is ready until a character named Loretta Lee meets Max walking on the street about a year after Kevin died. Loretta asked him what he had been up to in the time that had passed, and Max replied that he had done nothing. Loretta had thought about this and replied, “Nothing is a drag, kid. Think about it” (Philbrick 160). That night Max takes the empty book, a Christmas gift from Kevin, out once more and wonders who he is kidding, he does not have the brain to write anything. Once Max realized he *could* fulfill the wish that Kevin had for him he found that the words and memories had been waiting to spill out,

So I wrote the unvanquished truth stuff down and then kept going, for months and months, until it was spring again, and the world was really and truly green all over. By the time we got here, which I guess should be the end; I’m feeling

okay about remembering things. And now that I've written a book who knows, I might even read a few. No big deal (Philbrick 160).

Max, like Ponyboy, had needed to make his own decision regarding his future from the moment that Kevin gave him an empty journal, "...when I open it, all the pages are blank. 'That's for you,' he says, 'I want you to fill it up with our adventures'" (Philbrick 150). At the time it was not clear whether Kevin would be unable to help Max write because he would need to concentrate on a recovery, or because he would be dead. Regardless, Max was faced with deciding to give up and revert back to the moody, isolated boy he was before, or to move forward through his grief and use his emotions to become stronger. Either way the grief or the loss had changed him forever. Writing in the journal helped Max heal, but it also gave a sense of peace to Kevin before he died. "Dying patients need to feel a sense that their communications might be important, might be meaningful...at least to others...they are able to live on borrowed time" (Kubler-Ross 231). Kevin and Max give readers the sense that they can make a difference in their lives and in the world around them (Rycik 147). Kevin will live on, not because he heroically slayed imaginary dragons as a knight in one of their adventures, but because he helped to make the life of a friend that much better.

In the end, Max made the decision to realize that while his family and memories would be there for him, he needed to heal independently. The reader discovers that the novel *is* the now-filled book of Freak the Mighty and the adventures Max and Kevin shared. The novel becomes tangible in a way it was not

before and it becomes more than just a book; it is direct advice from a young adult character to his peers. It is advice from someone who has been through grief and who has been able to survive. The cathartic writings of Max directly illustrate that healing can come from distance, objectiveness, and from sharing. Therapeutic writing will once more help the deceased live on, and to be remembered, even if it is by one life that was touched. It will inspire others, like Max, to live life to the fullest extent; the story of *Freak the Mighty* as written by Kevin offers readers a model that could motivate others to help in a similar way.

The writing of experiences can be therapeutic. Keeping a journal or other writings can allow someone to play out his or her fears or to explore what might happen to him or her in the future. Writing can help someone stay hopeful (Fry 113). From the level of children and picture/activity books like, *Kolie and the Funeral*, to older characters “ghost-writing” an entire novel, both methods illustrate the healing power of shared experiences and of helping others. By writing their stories the characters have gained the control that was previously lost. Situations that formerly took life can now save it instead. Memoirs such as those written in both *Freak the Mighty* and *The Outsiders* strongly prove that the loved one who passed away does not need to be forgotten in order for healing to take place. Once more as found in Ammerman’s *Help During Loss*, the advice points out that the “loved one will assume a place in your life that will fit” (63). The memories and the stories of those who have lived make a new place in the lives of those who survive the loss.

Moving into the area of images other than those derived from the written word, the cover art for Rodman Philbrick's *Freak the Mighty* (1993) speaks volumes. Just as the cover of *The Outsiders* hinted at the tumultuous story inside, *Freak the Mighty* strikes the legendary pose of the classic, triumphant hero that hints at legend as well. On the cover there are no hard angles, only soft edges. There is overwhelming darkness, illuminated by a spotlight shining on the main characters, Max (Mighty) and Kevin (Freak). Lastly, size comes into play, just as in *I'll Always Love You* the doctor loomed over the family as he delivered the ill-fated news about Elfie to the boy narrator. On the cover of *Freak the Mighty* Max is illustrated as being extremely large; this fits him as a character who is very self-conscious of his body mass. Other characters in the novel are consistently shown as being afraid of Max because of his size, and he assumes the people around him are frightened even if they are not. For example when Kevin and Max are found playing together for the first time, Kevin's mother Gwen can't seem to get Kevin away fast enough. Kevin gazed back at Max in confusion, but Max gets it, "he doesn't understand what got into the Fair Gwen, but I know. It's pretty simple, really. She's scared of me" (Philbrick 20). In addition, the first time that Kevin climbs onto Max's shoulders in English class and introduces *Freak the Mighty*, the teacher cowers with her inability to handle the massive situation, "I can see Mrs. Donelli's eyes getting bigger and bigger. Mrs. Donelli has no idea what's going on, she's definitely flipped out and is more or less hiding behind her desk" (Philbrick 77-8).

The size of Max is reminiscent of the childhood fear of oversized animals; this fear has changed and developmentally grown to match the reader, transforming the fear of large animals into a fear of larger children, or bullies. Characters like Gwen and Max's grandmother see him as a potential bully due to his size and the prior violent behavior of his father. Kenny "Killer" Kane, also looms ominously. Kane came to take Max away from home on Christmas Eve. As Max was rushed away from home by Kenny, in the shadow of night he looked at his father and thought, "and he doesn't need a horse, or a lance, or a pledge to the king, or the love of a fair lady. He doesn't need anything except what he is. He's everything all rolled into one, and no one can ever beat him, not even the brave Lancelot" (Philbrick 103). To Max in this moment his father is invincible, like death, and no one can help or stop what is happening. It is as if he always knew this moment would come. The passage of Max's thoughts put into words that even when death is expected, or when death is acknowledged as a reality of life, it does not make it any easier. It is an overwhelming, massive reality to learn that some facets of life can never be avoided.

Yet, Max is the character with each large foot planted firmly on the ground. This shows stability and is a reassurance that this character is not going anywhere; his strength, both inside and out, will pull him through his hardships. Kevin, on the other hand, is illustrated as being incredibly tiny and barely any larger than Max's head. Kevin's diminutive size presents him as a character that needs to be taken care of. Kevin is not connected to the ground at all and is instead perched on Max's shoulders.

This illustrative placement could mean that Kevin is the brain to Max's brawn, that as a character Kevin has less permanence and that ultimately Kevin is closer to Heaven.

The cover art on this 1993 edition of the novel establishes that the friendship between the two different boys is so strong; they appear together as one unit. The placement of the characters on the cover show both Max and Kevin facing away from the "audience" and the gaze of readers. The fates of Kevin and Max concern only each other and it is their respective futures that they look towards; neither boy is looking back or at anyone else.

Maxwell Kane is the narrative voice in *Freak the Mighty*. He speaks clearly and without pretense. In creating a voice for Max, Rodman Philbrick uses teen vernacular, abandoning formal writing in favor of short, colorful sentences. He does not act like the world is perfect or wonderful; in fact Max goes out of his way to express how poorly his world is constructed. For instance the first line of the novel is, "I never had a brain until Freak came along and let me borrow his for awhile, and that's the truth, the whole truth" (Philbrick 1). Interjections are used throughout the narrative and punctuate the story line. These devices catch and hold interest, while fostering emotional connections. For example, at one point Maxwell sees the "robot boy" Freak (Kevin) and says to himself, "I think whoa! Because I'd forgotten all about him, day care was a blank place in my head" (Philbrick 3). A second time Max is explaining that he and Freak became a unit of friendship called Freak the Mighty and that Freak called his mother the "Fair Gwen of Air," when Max suddenly exclaims, "Only a falling-down goon would think that was her real name, right? Like

I said. Are you paying attention here? Because you don't even know yet how we got to be Freak the Mighty" (Philbrick 4). The voice of Max is flippant and rebellious, but is identifiable. The book is essentially "talking" like a friend; the narrator addresses the concerns and needs of a reader on a peer to peer level.

The pacing of the novel does not allow time for the reader to think too much or to become overwhelmed. The essential characters are introduced and then the world is seen through their eyes. There are no flowery descriptions. The moment that Max and Kevin become friends appears to be a chance occurrence. Kevin had been playing with a wind-up bird called an ornithopter when it became caught in a tree too high for him to reach. Max then leaves the comfort of his own backyard and thus made a decision, "So I go over there to his backyard...He wants to say something, you can tell that he's mad, he's all huffed up... What I do, I keep out of range of that crutch and just reach up and pick the paper thing right out of the tree." When Max comments, "You want this back or what?" (Philbrick 12), the boys begin talking, and the friendship has begun.

In this sense, *Freak the Mighty* is like Dwight Daniels' *Grieving at Christmastime*, since both books present information in a straightforward manner. One example that reflects the fast pace of the novel is the fact that each chapter in the novel has about four or five pages. Readers will not be intimidated or bored by too much text. The novel both appears, and is, an easy read, but nonetheless teaches powerful lessons in grief. The novel correctly assumes that grieving readers are ready to relate to the intense issues that appear in life, even if the reader is a child. Just as in

the book by Dwight Daniels, *Freak the Mighty* gives readers credit for not being shocked easily, because Max's father is in prison for the murder of his mother and he is being raised by his maternal grandparents. The novel portrays a far from idyllic lifestyle complete with pain and suffering.

The pages of a novel contain direct thoughts, feelings and events regarding characters and the grief they feel. Quotes from the novel are used during the moments when grief is all-consuming and words do not seem up to the task of describing it. "If you have trouble putting your feelings into words, this book can speak for you" (Gootman 2). The narrative voice in a young adult novel invites ownership of the text. At the picture book level, readers could draw and color to share in the emotion of a story. A key difference here is that at the middle level the reader buys into vernacular and literary technique. A deeper emotional commitment is required to fully use the words of the characters. In the novel, *Freak the Mighty*, readers could draw on passages from the novel as illustrations of their own feelings. There are just times when someone else can say it better or when the same sadness hurts less coming from an outside source. "For some survivors, even ad copy and singsong Hallmark clichés seem to offer relief, a safe holding pen for otherwise unrestrained emotion" (McClanahan 136). It can be less risky to put the emotions of someone else, a character for instance, out in the open for others to see and experience.

Max calls to mind something Kevin had told him one dark, starry night that put the entire cycle of life and death into a few succinct lines. Max was gazing out of

his open doorway when he remembered the way that Kevin explained the lives of stars to him:

Some people think the stars look close enough to touch, but Freak says the sky is like a photograph from a billion years ago, it's just some old movie they're showing up there and lots of stars have switched off by now. They're already dead, and what we're seeing is the rerun... Someday the rerun will come to an end and you'll see all the stars start to flick off, like a billion little flames blown out by the wind (Philbrick 102).

This lesson has taught Max that life itself can be an illusion. Death is not something that has to be feared, because it is something that could have been gazed upon already, without even realizing it. Max saw his mother killed when he was a toddler, so he is no stranger to death. Yet, the death of stars, as tiny lights flickering out, is a much softer explanation that makes death a quiet, inevitable event rather than a violent interruption. The reader is both prepared for death and counseled for its occurrence simultaneously by this passage. When the novel is finished, the reader will see that this portion was included to ready him or her for the death of Kevin.

However, the memory is also a metaphor for the novel itself. Just as stars are a rerun of themselves and their light is from a life already extinguished, the novel is a rerun of the lives of Kevin and Max. Kevin as a character will live forever in the pages of *Freak the Mighty*, the pages of the friendship shared by Max and Kevin. Through this quote the novel shows readers that they can watch the lives of lost loved ones again and again, as many times as is needed. In a sense a loved one can live

again, albeit only through the fading light of a memory. This moment in the novel is also as brief as the flickering light of a star; it is not until a reader looks back or has experienced loss, that he or she can realize the monumental message contained in that passage. This genre at this particular level draws strongly upon both memories and legacies of those lost in order to survive grief.

In the novel, Kevin teaches a second lesson to readers in a memorable instance from the novel, regarding the tricks a mind can play (during the healing process). In this moment, Kevin could either be realizing how serious his physical condition is or want to make sure that Max is ready for a world without him; it could be chance that Kevin lets Max in on his tricks for surviving life. Kevin is quoted as saying, "Remembering is just an invention of the mind... It means that if you want to, you can remember anything, whether it happened or not" (Philbrick 141-42). A reader could see these lines from Kevin as an effort to manipulate his reality. It is one thing to play in the world of "what if" and a future that includes the deceased, yet true life and death must ultimately be acknowledged. In this quote, Kevin seems to recognize that remembering the way he wants is okay, but that that method itself is just a trick of the mind and is not real. Kevin reiterates a similar notion another time when Max asked him if the bionic operation to give him a new body would hurt. Kevin sagely replies, "Sure it will hurt. But so what? Pain is just a state of mind. You can think your way out of anything, even pain" (Philbrick 53). This quote offers a sense of control. The novel offers power that a reader experiencing loss might not realize he or she has. While it may appear that fantasy and denial are examples of Max and Kevin

not coping with tragedy, it is in fact an important step in the grieving process. The characters are showing that it is both normal and okay not to accept sickness and death, right away, because in the end, Max does leave denial behind and face and accept that Kevin died.

Kevin developed his ability to twist his perception of his life when he was diagnosed with a medical condition as a very young child. The adults in his life allowed Kevin to cope with his serious condition by forming the story of a bionic operation. The story helped Kevin process in his own way why he needed scans, measurements, or to give samples at the hospital. Kevin even came to believe that he would eventually undergo surgery to get a new body. A situation such as that can be difficult to find words for, especially when the adults in the story try to explain to a young child something that they have trouble coming to terms with. When Kevin is placed in ICU after a particularly serious spell, Max asks him when he will be able to come home, "...he sort of shakes his eyes instead of his head. 'I'm not coming home,' he says. 'Not in my present manifestation'" (Philbrick 149). This is a remarkable way to voice that Kevin will not be leaving the hospital the way he entered it. Whether this is a new robotic body or a metaphor for Kevin passing on into a different stage of life, the idea that Kevin will never return in the same manifestation is a strong one. The concept of a person physically coming home is a concrete ideal that young adults revert and cling to in times of crisis and the words of Philbrick's novel address that. Yet, this quote also addresses that no matter what

happens Kevin will be alright. He says that he will be coming home; the novel leaves it up to the reader to interpret what or where that home is.

When Kevin dies, Max displays the raw emotion and effects that grief can have on a young adult. When the nurses of the ICU are unable to look Max in the eye and when they do pity-stares back at him, he simply states, "I just go nuts" (Philbrick 155). Here the novel shows that when the unreal becomes real, the reaction can be shocking. Max screams and breaks things; he runs away from people and pushes them away. Through writing this memory, Max proves to the reader that he has healed and evolved past this type of behavior. Violence and lashing out will not heal him in a permanent sense. Max will not make the irreversible decision through violence that Dallas Winston did in *The Outsiders*. Through writing, Max will establish Kevin's memory and be able to come to terms with his loss. He wants answers to the most difficult question, "Why?" When Kevin's doctor is able to talk to Max calmly he asks the doctor mutinously, "So he was lying about getting a robot body?" The doctor replies, "...I think he needed something to hope for and so he invented this rather remarkable fantasy you describe. Everybody needs something to hope for. Kevin wasn't a liar." There were no lies surrounding Kevin's life or his death. There were simply stories told in an attempt to understand the incomprehensible. Max no longer had need of the robot story; the experience of Kevin's death awoke him to its falsehood. Max is now ready for the unyielding truth. He is ready for the scientific fact that cannot and will not lie to him; it is this that the doctor offers up next. When Max still is not satisfied the doctor says, "But what finally happened is his heart just

got too big for his body” (Philbrick 157). Additionally, Max also demonstrates to readers that it is acceptable to decline help from others, or to refuse to talk until he is ready.

During the car ride home from the hospital, Max’s grandfather asks him if wants to talk about what happened that day. Max replies that he just wants to be left alone and his grandfather says, “You got it” (Philbrick 157). By respecting Max’s privacy, his grandfather is subtly showing that he will be there for him no matter what, even if it is only to leave him alone. This is very different than the level of counsel depicted in children’s picture books. The picture books showed adults guiding children through each step of the grief process. The picture books did not allow much time, if any, for grieving children to process on their own. In contrast, Max epitomizes the middle level novel and the very nature of middle level grief because his wavering between needing answers from adults, and needing privacy to experience his emotions.

The progression of grief evolves from Chapter Two in children’s picture books, to Chapter Three and the therapeutic qualities of writing personal memoirs. Ultimately, dealing with grief becomes an almost completely internal healing. Strong and imperfect characters provided positive role models for life (Sotto 40). Chapter Four will use more advanced novels such as *The Lord of the Flies* (1988) by William Golding and Robert Cormier’s *The Chocolate War* (1974) to argue that young adult readers are ready to interpret what is around them and to handle grief independently.

The fourth chapter focuses on novels addressing teenage readers who are already aware of their identities, and are able to express themselves. The final chapter illustrates that while a person is permanently changed once he or she has experienced a loss, that person can control the way in which they change (Doka 17). While family and friends played a crucial role in the second and third chapters, in Chapter Four it is the individual who is in charge of the change within him or herself. The next chapter will truly prove that grief is never really gone; it simply becomes a part of life.

Chapter Four: “That’s What Grown-Ups Would Do...”¹: Influence and Perception of Young Adult Grief Literature

Literature has served multiple purposes in children’s and young adult’s grieving processes up to this point. Picture books serve as guideposts for the very young. Middle level literature show representations of characters who waver between looking to adults for answers and needing privacy to experience intense emotion. Now, the fourth chapter introduces protagonists who are completely isolated from adult assistance in the grieving process; the adults in their lives are unavailable either because of physical isolation or because they are mired in grief of their own. While characters might still want and need support from an outside source, necessity and circumstance will show them making independent choices regarding grief. Most of these upper level readers need books to transfer experiences to a “real-life” format and appear realistic (Cress 594). This is an appropriate need as the novels here deliver literature that does not hold back or seem overly imagined. Characters will be able to draw upon past experiences in order to survive their darkest moments. Research has successfully shown that “children in a study focused more on successful resolution of the fearful situation rather than scary aspects of the story” (Nicholson 17). The dark material could be a worry to parents and guardians; however, these are the very children that can best identify with the tortured characters and then use the actions of the story to heal.

¹ Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies*. New York: Perigee, 1954.

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) and Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974) bear striking similarities despite a 20 year gap in publication dates. Both authors seemed to utilize a response to society within their work. William Golding was influenced by his role in education as a headmaster in an all-boys school. A world of uniforms and rules was shattered, when Golding's fictional students are left on an island after their plane crashes and no adults survive. Some of the boys flounder while others step into adult roles and try in vain to emulate the world they knew. The result is a dark glimpse into what happens when the rules of society crumble and people are left to their own devices. Golding seems to be saying that when society is left on its own it will collapse. His publication date of 1954 was on the heels of a shifting society as minorities, like women, began to emerge with more strength.

Cormier published in the early seventies, fresh from a tumultuous decade. The 1960's era contained events such as Vietnam and Woodstock. Protests against the government and other elite institutions dominated daily life. It became accepted to question what was demanded and the individual stood out amongst the crowd.

Robert Cormier illustrated the remnants of these challenges in *The Chocolate War*. Jerry Renault is a student at Trinity, an elite private institution. The rules at Trinity are relatively simple; blend in and listen to the call of the Vigils. The Vigils are the elite of the elite. Archie Costello, the Vigil leader, controls everyone around him using the subtle finesse of social norms. People respond to him because it seems to be the thing to do. When the annual chocolate sale for Trinity comes around the

Vigils decide to support it fully. If Jerry wants to remain accepted, or at least not harassed, by his fellow Trinity students, then he must accept the Vigil's dare and not sell any chocolates. When the dare takes on a life of its own, and Jerry breaks free of Vigil [societal] control, Archie and the Vigils come down with a vengeance. Cormier character in Jerry is representative of anyone that refused the norms of Cormier's contemporary society.

A secret society in *The Chocolate War* is a thinly masked version of the tribal allegiance in *Lord of the Flies*. In both instances groups were formed to emulate a world of order and to take control of that world. The need for survival was at the heart of both group formations. "Groups of people, from street gangs to nations, may use their group identity to express their fear of being destroyed (by attacking/destroying others)" (Kubler-Ross 11). Often, characters that take part in gang activity embrace destructive behaviors and experience more personal damage in the long run. As support systems disintegrate, the self becomes the only trustworthy symbol. As the group of boys split between Ralph and Jack on the island, other characters indeed become more difficult to trust, "I'm not going to play any longer. Not with you...I'm going off by myself" (Golding 118).² Here, Ralph is able to identify the unhealthy

² As violence builds, the individual versus the group becomes an even larger focus in each novel. Characters do not know exactly who to trust. Ralph talks to Piggy and states, "I'm frightened. Of us. I want to go home. Oh God, I want to go home" (Golding 145). With all of the actual physical occurrences on the island, it speaks volumes that Ralph is most of afraid of other human beings. These are characters that feel similarly and live similarly to him and they are proving the most problematic as he tries to survive. It is important that these are novels that can be read by both young adults and adults, because adults tend to "underestimate" how much children experience the same fears that they do. This unintentional denial often increases the fear that

community involvement and ultimately choose the more positive environment of his independence.

Both Cormier and Golding created characters that are foils for each other and set up situations where the weak were taken advantage of. For every Jack, Ralph, Archie or Jerry there will be a Bailey or a Piggy. The weak characters of the two novels strike a chord of familiarity, as the reader could recognize such vulnerability. For instance, both Bailey in *The Chocolate War* and Piggy in *Lord of the Flies* wear glasses. Like an easy target, Piggy is left behind by the other boys, “Jack and Simon pretended to notice nothing. They walked on. ‘You can’t come.’ Piggy’s glasses were misted again—this time with humiliation.” (Golding 21). Jack chooses Piggy as a target and dashes his glasses against rocks and calls him ‘fatty’ (Golding 65). Archie also targets the characters that he feels to be inferior to him, although it is usually in an intellectual matter.

Both William Golding and Robert Cormier wrote novels following decades in which people became more aware that the strong ruled the weak and people were being controlled. The Vigil leader, Archie Costello, is a very different character from Piggy. Archie preyed upon people like Piggy because they served to illustrate that intelligence and greatness deserved recognition. Archie is unable to trust anyone around himself, while Piggy is guilty of trusting too much.

the child is feeling (Nicholson 16). The unification of the literature will open doors into the insights of a grieving and traumatized child and the adult(s) in his or her life can then be a better support system.

In response, in the *Lord of the Flies*, Ralph has the urge to explain this concept to Piggy, who cannot understand why more children are not helping to keep a fire burning.

From beyond the platform came the shouting of the hunters in the swimming pool. On the end of the platform Piggy was lying flat, looking down into the brilliant water. "People don't help much."

He [Ralph] wanted to explain how people were never quite what you thought they were (Golding 49).

There must have been events in Ralph's life leading up to this point that taught him about the illusion that other people, perhaps even adults, hide behind. It is interesting that Piggy has remained so naïve, even after the death of his father and maybe his mother as well. His grief has not appeared to change him, unless he clings to his innocence even more because of it.

Brother Leon, a faculty member at Trinity school continues to show how Cormier picked up on Golding's theme and showed people, even adults, who were polar opposites from boys like Piggy. Like Archie, a teacher named Brother Leon, illustrates to readers the shocking reality, that there are some people [adults] who do not care or want to help. Brother Leon uses his classroom to expose and isolate those who are weak. He is an exercise in the psychological torture that exists at this higher level of literature.

The brother's glance went slowly around the room, like the ray of a lighthouse sweeping a familiar coast, searching for hidden defects...Leon *would* pick

Bailey: one of the weak kids...shy, introverted, always reading, his eyes red-rimmed behind the glasses (Cormier 40).

Brother Leon and Archie are prime examples of the strong mentally controlling the weak, but they are by far not the only characters with the urge to manipulate their surroundings.

In Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* support systems crumble in the absence of more traditional adult role models. As Charles A. Corr writes in his article addressing child bereavement, "Sadly, some children are left to be on their own in death-related situations, and didn't get help in their coping from the adults around them" (348). In the novels parents are killed off or absorbed in careers and so children form "families" and alliances of their own. Child characters model their behavior based on their perception of adults. This causes the characters to feel tired and world-weary well before their years should allow. Even though there are 20 years between the publication dates of each novel, each offers the same dark, unapologetic prose and imagery. Readers will experience raw violence and pain while witnessing death firsthand. Without adults and their influence, the well-ordered school environment cannot stand on its own. The children do not have the abilities to be in charge of each other or themselves at this point, because they lack the life experiences that would allow them to rule in a just and civil manner. Jack Merridew states to the other children that in the absence of adults—they will have to lead themselves.

The inevitable realization that there are parts of life that cannot be controlled can prove difficult to admit. Most often the feelings associated with loss of control are “Why did you let this happen?” (Gootman 39). However, there are also times when a character blames himself and angrily asks “How could I let this happen?” The character of Jerry Renault in *The Chocolate War* learns this through experiencing the death of his mother. He is ashamed of his weakness and longs to control and mask his grief the way his father appears to be.

And then she got sick. And died. Watching her ebb away, seeing her beauty diminish, witnessing the awful alteration of her face and body was too much for Jerry to bear and he sometimes fled her bedroom, ashamed of his weakness, avoiding his father (Cormier 58).

To be weak in any way was not an ideal trait in novels of this level. Jerry is looking to his father as a model of handling grief and his father is teaching him nothing, other than lessons in closing out the world and keeping everything inside.

The thoughts of his mother surrounded Jerry almost constantly, as is clear when he cannot sleep due to thoughts of her cries for help. Jerry pictures her body in the coffin, a perfectly normal part of the grieving process, “it is a final picture that will be burned into your mind forever” (Ammerman 19). Golding follows Cormier in placing a similar scene in *Lord of the Flies*. After the death of Piggy, an innocent and kind boy amongst the darker characters created by Golding, Ralph keeps imagining the death scene. “The only whiteness here was the slow spilt milk, luminous round the rock forty feet below, where Piggy had fallen. Piggy was everywhere, was on this

neck, was become terrible in darkness and death” (Golding 176). Despite his imagined visions of Piggy, Ralph is terrified at the thought that Piggy actually will reappear, misshapen by his death. Ralph both longs for and fears the desire to have Piggy return. The deceased in both cases seem real as both Jerry and Ralph use their presence to deal with the grief, albeit putting it off in the process. Additionally, neither boy can actually look at death head on.

Death, like grief, is interpreted in a multitude of ways. For example, Jerry saw death firsthand with the passing of his mother. When a character sees death so close, there are no mysteries or analogies to hide behind. The raw portrayal of death is an honest one that readers can learn from as well. After his mother died,

Jerry was overcome with rage, a fiery anger...He was angry at the way the disease had ravaged her. He was angry at his inability to do anything about saving her...He did nothing except lie awake in the dark, thinking of her body there in the funeral home, not her anymore, but a *thing* suddenly, cold and pale (Cormier 59).

Texts for children about death which have been discussed up to this point have either focused on violent deaths or kept illness at a distance. For the first time, the reader is able to see death alongside a character. The reader could identify with the feelings of anger, or the longing for control. The hard facts of death are combined with the prevalent “irrational” fears of childhood. After all, as Virginia Fry writes in *Part of Me Died, Too*, “when it comes to death, most of (us) are still kids” (4).

Here, as Jerry ponders the burial process, he reverts back to a child-like need for concrete thought.

Now they remove all your blood and pumped in chemicals and stuff. To make certain you were dead. But suppose, let's just suppose that some small spark in your brain remained alive, and knew what was going on. His mother.

Himself, someday (Cormier 120).

Jerry needs to rely on scientific fact to know that his mother will not be screaming for someone to help her in order for him to even sleep through the night. No matter how old the reader or the characters might be, when tragedy strikes both go back to the feelings of a young child (Manifold 21). As Jerry's life continues, the safety of his normal routine and childhood feelings are threatened, when a small trigger opened up the past.

Without warning, the anguish of her loss returned, like a blow to his stomach, and he was afraid he would faint...and for a moment the echo of all her sweetness was there and he had to go through all the horror of visualizing her in the coffin again (Cormier 62).

Part of grief is realizing that moments like this will happen: "The little things that catch [your] attention for a brief moment, but open up a floodgate of hurt" (Ammerman 64). Memories can help healing, but the loss and grief never really go away, they will never vanish. Readers can come across a quote like this and see that to some extent allowing the grief to remain is what happens in the continuance of life.

Jerry also allows thoughts of his own mortality to come through as he admits that this will be him someday, buried and having become a cold, pale thing. In a continued dialogue between the two novels, the boys of Golding's island also have their mortality become clear with the tragic deaths of Simon and Piggy. Killing animals had desensitized these characters to a point. In a gloomy foreshadowing, Piggy despairs over returning home; "His lips quivered and the spectacles were dimmed with mist. 'We may stay here till we die'" (Golding 12). In a sense, both Jerry and Ralph have been the closest to death out of all the characters, in their respective novels. Jerry's mother died and Ralph experiences the deaths of the only friends he had on the island. It could be the intensity of these experiences that allowed Jerry and Ralph to choose a different grief path than the other characters.

However, Piggy is a character that would be able to identify with Jerry through the loss of a parent. Piggy's mother has mysterious whereabouts that could be inferred by the reader and his father is stated as dead. "'My dad's dead,' he said quickly, 'and my mum'—He took off his glasses and looked vainly for something with which to clean them" (Golding 11). As seen with middle-level literature, adult figures are conveniently misplaced by the author as young protagonists find their own way through life, independently. The characters are experiencing grief alone, due to the inability of their support systems to be there for them. Moments like this that occurs in literature cause many of these struggling characters to yearn for home and simpler times in their minds.

Those simple times have disappeared in each novel as the world of adult supervision is left behind; just as in grief; there are moments when the character suffering has to face reality alone. In 20 years the fact that adults, or other people of experience, will not always be present for every moment of the healing process has not changed. There is a moment when Ralph fully realizes that he is the only one that can make sure he conquers the trials of the boy tribes and the island. “He knelt among the shadows and felt his isolation bitterly. He could not relax and fall into a well of sleep for fear of the tribe” (Golding 171). He longs for the days when he and the others had all been school boys together that could laugh and called adults ‘Sir’ while wearing uniformed caps. Ralph has discovered the realism of his situation and that no matter how much he longs for the past and times that were lighthearted and easy, he cannot get them back. The *Lord of the Flies* exhibits a common trait, “the desire to leave home is a sentiment with which most teens can empathize, but few are given so graphic an opportunity to do so” (Malone 276). Ralph wants the innocence back that other teens so readily want to get rid of. By interacting with the novel, readers can see the tragic outcomes that can occur when home and structure are removed. On the other hand, the memories of these happy times are often what make the unbearable parts of life surmountable. Like a light at the end of a dark tunnel, memories of civilization offer comfort to the boys in *Lord of the Flies*, “the books—they stood on the shelf by the bed...everything was all right; everything was good-humored and friendly” (Golding 104).

In *The Chocolate War* death has taken parents out of the scene, but so has a lack of adult supervision, since Jerry's dad stops functioning due to the death of his wife. Jerry Renault's father is a pharmacist and the sometimes unconventional hours act as a barrier between the two men. There are moments when Jerry simply needs his father to be there, but then the moments pass and Jerry is left to heal alone. "That was his father's favorite word—fine. He hated to think of his own life stretching ahead of him that way, a long succession of days and nights that were fine...not anything" (Cormier 62-3). Jerry's father is existing, but perhaps because it hurts too much to do much else. Mr. Renault has suffered the death of a spouse and it could very well be that holding Jerry at a distance is his way of protecting himself from future tragedy, at least as much as possible. "But isolating (yourself) from other people because you're afraid of losing them will only make pain worse" (Gootman 50). Jerry feels intense frustration at the "fine" days of his father, and like the "hippie" boy at the bus stop he feels the need for something more. This could even be one of the reasons that the Vigils construct themselves the way they do, as a way to escape the mundane.

The characters in the novels look to adults, or memories of adults to shape the way they live without them. Ralph worries to Piggy about what their fate would be if they stopped caring and lived recklessly like the other boys on the island. In response, Piggy says, "I dunno, Ralph. We just got to go on, that's all. That's what grownups would do" (Golding 129). The impact as role models that adults had for these characters, however distant, is clearly of tremendous importance as characters try and

absorb the adult ability to just keep on.³ For the reader, the novels could have the same impact, and give grieving readers a model to look forward to. When children read literature there are two levels of consciousness at work. The conscious is absorbing the content of the narrative, or the actual story. Then the unconscious is searching for any prior experiences that the reader has had that could parallel those in the book (Nicholson 17). The prior experience will bond a reader to a book and more readily allow the absorbance of messages.

In William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* the child characters are left alone when no adults survive the plane crash near a remote island. Death and perhaps fate left the children to fend for themselves. When Piggy and Ralph find each other after the crash it is Piggy that realizes the freedom associated with their circumstances,

'Aren't there any grownups at all?'

'I don't think so.'

... 'No grownups!' (Golding 6).

This is an excitement that will ultimately vanish as the young characters try to rule a "society" based on experiences they have seen, but not lived through themselves.

Conversely, both Cormier and Golding teach readers how to experience grief from a position of strength. Scenes from each novel put into words both concepts of death and elusive primal emotions. *Lord of the Flies* (1954) and *The Chocolate War*

³ "A ten year old boy was told innumerable times at his father's wake, 'Guess you're the man of the house now.' Three months after his father's death he started having nightmares. When his mother finally got him to talk about what was bothering him, he reluctantly admitted that he didn't know where he was going to find a job that would support his family after he quit the fourth grade to go to work. He was consumed with guilt over it" (Ammerman "Help During Loss" 68).

(1974) employ incredible, pulsing climactic scenes followed by sudden, sharp endings. There is a lack of closure after both novels are finished. This is a genuine reflection of life and grief where closure is not always granted and when it is it might not be the way expected. Even the return of adult authority in both novels is unable to erase the memories and hardships brought by the grief and violent behaviors inflicted by peers.

At this level of grief literature the theme of violence emerges in an undeniable manner. It is often violence that is oppressed by the thin rules of a civilized and genteel society. It is violence held inside the neat borders of rules, but destined to break free. As the morals and rules of civilization eventually crumble around the characters in these novels, some realize that there had to be more to life than what they had been taught. The grumbling sounds of disunity were clear when the actual image of the conch is threatened. "Things are breaking up. I don't understand why. We began well; we were happy. And then..." (Golding 75). The characters are at a loss to understand why something that appears to be working so easily could fail. After all, they are acting like their parents and other grownups, so it should have been an obvious solution. There can be no utopian community for these characters. There will always be a flaw that ruins the perfect order of a literary world and the rules of society are simply a grander version of Jack's mask. The true behaviors of the characters are hidden behind how they are supposed to act, until the mask is removed and the genuine nature of each boy is revealed.

The above example is a revision via Golding, in *The Chocolate War*, because Jerry also felt an urge to break free of his containment long before violence ripped down hypothetical walls. The boys who followed Jack into the violence of the island also shattered the restraints of order and rules. A “hippie” or a “dropout,” confronted Jerry one afternoon after school and stated with contempt in response to Jerry’s stare,

‘You know who’s sub-human man? You. You are. Going to school everyday. And back home on the bus. And do your homework.’ The guy’s voice was contemptuous. ‘Square boy. Middle-aged at 14, 15. Already caught in a routine. Wow...Don’t miss the bus boy... You’re missing a lot of things in the world, better not miss that bus’ (Cormier 20-1).

Jerry is becoming aware that his well-organized community has flaws. He is recognizing that perfection in life is an unnatural way of getting on. The uninhibited lives of other characters, characters who live by their own rules, makes him want to model their behavior and escape into a world of rebellion. The Vigils are both attractive and frightening to Jerry in this respect, a combination which will prove disastrous.

Jerry lives in a world where propriety is set up against a violent and uncivilized subculture. The Vigils, a secret school society, run the world of high school from behind the scenes. In the absence of individual strength, the rigid social structure of a group unites. Again, like Jack’s mask, the Vigils thrive behind thinly veiled secrecy and anonymity. Structure equals survival. Even amongst the most base

tribal behaviors in *Lord of the Flies* there are characters like Ralph that cannot give order up, when it is the only reminder of home and of happier times,

‘The rules!’ shouted Ralph. ‘You’re breaking the rules!’

‘Who cares?’

Ralph summoned his wits.

‘Because the rules are the only thing we’ve got!’ (Golding 84).

During times of immense trauma or grief the rules or the daily routine can be the anchor that keeps a character grounded. Without something to hold to, or beliefs to rely on the character could be lost in the enormity of the trauma. The character of Piggy in *Lord of the Flies* exemplifies the need for simple, concrete rules, when he explains to Jack and the others the difference between fantasy and reality. “Life, said Piggy expansively, is scientific, that’s what it is” (Golding 77). All of the uncertainty and all fear of the unknown can be explained away rationally in Piggy’s mind. He felt that the fantasy tale of a beast in the woods was scaring the other characters unnecessarily. Science is factual and Piggy clings to it because science has never left him, or let him down before.

The preservation of daily routines equals a sense of security (Ammerman “Help During Loss” 89). Although in the words of grief specialist and author, Mark Ammerman, “to try and make yourself think right or differently is an impossibility at this point” (30). “This point” is when grief is at its climax and the enormity of a loss is most overwhelming.

The characters thrive using order to keep them grounded and to give them a sense of belonging. The quest of wanting to belong to a group and conforming to standards might not always be healthy. However, a group can also serve as protection. This is especially true for Piggy in Golding's novel. Piggy is a character that society protected because he followed each rule in order to survive; he was not endowed with gifts to buy societal survival, such as athleticism. When Piggy sees the order of the island jeopardized he immediately calls for its preservation, "I got the conch! Just you listen. How can you expect to be rescued if you don't put first things first and act proper?" (Golding 40). These young adult characters have tried to assume the roles of grownups in order to fix the chaos around them. Readers experiencing grief might also identify with this lesson from the novel and notice that they too model the behavior of grieving adults.

One of the key methods to harnessing adulthood was the essence of control. Archie Costello had a penchant to control his world using psychological strength, rather than the physical: "Archie disliked violence—most of his assignments were exercises in the psychological rather than the physical. That's why he got away with so much...peace at any price...no broken bones" (Cormier 12). Archie thrived on being able to control any situation around him. Power and control are crucial elements at Trinity School and Archie was not the only character to harness them. While Piggy is a character who yearned for external control with the conch, Archie followed a path similar to Jack and used aggression and fear to keep his role as a leader. Archie created the violence that other characters ultimately executed.

Thinly controlled and veiled violence is thrown aside during one of the bloodiest and most physically violent moments in *Lord of the Flies*.

All at once, Robert was screaming and struggling with the strength of frenzy.

Jack

had him by the hair and was brandishing his knife... The chant rose ritually, as

at

the last moment of a dance or a hunt. 'Kill the pig! Cut his throat! Kill the pig!

Bash him in!' Ralph too was fighting to get near, to get a handful of that

brown,

vulnerable flesh. The desire to squeeze and hurt was over-mastering (Golding 106).

The reader is witness to everyday, normal characters suddenly transforming into primal, violent animals. The traumas that the characters have gone through let them lose control. The moment when control is abandoned is mirrored and the high school boys of Trinity act startlingly similar to a scene in *Lord of the Flies*. In Cormier's novel, a Vigil named Obie, answers the need for a fighting match to begin with Archie himself possibly joining: "Because there are 400 kids out there yelling for blood. And they don't care whose blood it is anymore" (Cormier 243). The Trinity boys have become a faceless mob demanding some kind of retribution, some type of result. The power to hurt others replaces the softness of allowing (yourself) to be hurt. Grief and madness have the power to transform as Goober witnesses during the final fight scene of *The Chocolate War*,

Goober looked around. These fellows in the stands were known to him, they were his classmates, but suddenly they'd become strangers. They stared feverishly down at the platform. Some of them were yelling. 'Kill 'em, kill 'em...' The Goober shivered in the night (Cormier 248).

The children in *The Chocolate War* and *Lord of the Flies*, "may feel shame, unworthy, unlovable, mortified or humiliated" (Ammerman "Help During Loss" 89). The heart of the problem is that the hurt is disguised as rebellion. Therefore, as in chapter three and the suicide of Dallas Winston, the reader can witness a virtual mess as a result of grief without succumbing to such acts personally. A reader can witness a transformation, or become a part of it via the novel. Either way the characters are taking the risk.

The imagery in both novels conveys simplicity in an un-simple time.

Cormier's narrative voice is dark and unapologetic. After all, the most important aspect to a grief novel is for the literature to honestly focus on whatever issue is at hand (Rycik 151). The third person narration allows the reader to see the action of the novel for him or herself. During a moment when the authority of the Vigils is called into question, a member defends it with a display of physical power. It is written as the first battle, the first taste of blood: "a muffled roar of approval rose from the Vigils. At last, action, physical action, something you could see with your own eyes" (Cormier 181). When the narration is taken outside the usual characters of Archie, or Jerry, the reader is able to absorb a complete image. Golding also holds nothing back as he strips his characters literally and figuratively: "He became

conscious of the weight of his clothes...stood there...with green shadows from the palms and the forest sliding over his skin” (Golding 8). Nothing is held back and the moment that Ralph sheds his clothes, the audience is invited into the most personal parts of his world. Ralph’s hardships will be shared with the reader, and so will his grief. Golding actually uses third person narration in the opening pages of his novel, “The boy with the fair hair lowered himself down the last few feet of rock and began to pick his way toward the lagoon” (5). The stage of the novel is being set and the reader is allowed to distance him or herself and absorb the story and ultimately the lessons being offered. Like all grief literature of this caliber, excuses are not being made because they are not supposed to be.

Such connections draw the reader to images of water. When Jerry’s mother is slowly dying, Jerry describes her sickness as “watching her ebb away” (Cormier 58). The reader can imagine this fading character as sand that is gradually diminished with each flow of water; water that both fosters and takes life. The tide also brings the death of Piggy and the ocean is personified in the scene of his death, “Piggy fell forty feet and landed on his back across that square red rock in the sea...Piggy’s arms and legs twitched a bit...Then the sea breathed again in a long, slow sigh...sucking back again, the body of Piggy was gone” (Golding 167). The power of the ocean can be connected to the power of death. Both entities wipe a slate clean to begin a new chapter. Death took Mrs. Renault and Piggy and then the cycle of life continued with the characters left behind.

All in all, there are two images that serve as representations for each novel. There is the conch. There are the chocolates. Ralph begins to use the shell when all the boys on the island are talking at once. “Most obscurely, yet most powerfully, there was the conch” (Golding 19). At the very beginning of the boy’s society the conch represented who was able to speak and when. The conch was the order of the island and gathered everyone together. “The group of boys looked at the white shell with affectionate respect... (he) turned toward the platform, feeling the need for ritual” (Golding 131). Just as the conch focused the *Lord of the Flies* so did the image of the chocolates in *The Chocolate War* as Jerry was called to meet with the Vigils. “The table was covered with a scarf of purple and gold—the school colors. In the exact center of the table: a box of chocolates” (Cormier 166-7). It is the simplicity of this image, matching with a simplistic text, which allows the truthful lessons of each novel come through to readers. Both the conch and the lone box of chocolates represented control. The conch allowed one character to talk as others listened and the chocolates allowed one boy the power of refusal.

Jack Merridew of *Lord of the Flies* seems to survive his grief and loss of society using a defense mechanism. At one point in the novel he literally hides his face behind a crude mask; however, here Jack could also be seen as hiding his grief, his fear and his doubts behind a wall of false manhood.

He looked in astonishment, no longer at himself but at an awesome stranger.

He

split the water and leapt to his feet, laughing excitedly...He began to dance and his laughter became a bloodthirsty snarling...the mask was a thing on its own, behind which Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness (Golding 58).

Jack is ultimately freed from his trauma, when he is in reality the most hidden. Here the novel illustrates to readers that it is not only acceptable to be private and hide during difficult times, but it can actually offer a reprieve. On the other hand the *Lord of the Flies* also shows characters that let their grief out and release the tears that had built up inside as they tried to sustain their own brave facades. Although more in touch with “littluns” as Golding termed the very young children of the novel, the crying was healthy regardless of age.

Percival Wemys Madison would not shut up. A spring had been tapped, far beyond the reach of authority...The crying went on, breath after breath, and seemed to sustain him...littluns were no longer silent...reminded of their personal sorrows; and perhaps felt themselves to share in a sorrow that was universal (Golding 80).

It is important that a reader, like Percival, allow him or her self, to cry when he or she feels the need (Klicker “Grief and the Holidays” 7). The reader will also be able to see the contrast of Jack hiding behind his mask and of those like Percival who found tears for himself and the sorrows of those people who shared a grief larger than themselves. Neither character is superior to the other; their grief is just handled differently. Jack is alright with hiding his feelings, while Percival accepts his tears. In

the end, readers identify with the “needs, wishes and frustrations” of the main characters. By doing this the reader is able to glimpse how his or her own problems could be addressed through identification of the character’s coping strategies (Nicholson 17). Whether is it crying or hiding behind a “virtual mask” the reader can choose the strategy that benefits him or her most. This choice was also seen in the previous chapter using the contrasting grief behaviors of Dallas and Ponyboy.

Golding allows a unique viewpoint of death to occur. In the *Lord of the Flies* power is associated with the taking of a life. With the death of the first hunted pig on the island, Jack thinks about how it felt as the animal gave in to his will: “His mind was crowded with memories...when they closed in on the struggling pig, knowledge that they had outwitted a living thing, imposed their will upon it, taken away its life like a long satisfying drink” (Golding 64). Victory is present when the boys conquer the life of a living creature. The unexpected satisfaction of this moment leads the boys down a road full of misused authority and violent domination. The novel is shocking in its claim that death can feel good, but since grief touches each reader differently there is a place for such a claim as well. This is potentially a new realization, but not necessarily an unwelcome one.

The fear of death in these upper level novels echoes the fear of animals that the readers of picture books had in the second chapter. For example, the boys in *Lord of the Flies* are terrified to actually hunt in the woods at first, because of a mysterious beast that the character, Simon, claims to have seen there. “‘This’ll be a real hunt! Who’ll come?’ Ralph moved impatiently...Jack sneered at him. ‘Frightened?’

‘Course I’m frightened. Who wouldn’t be?’” (Golding 93). At first readers are left wondering if an animal that exists or not. Then later the truth is revealed as Simon encounters a pig head on a stick as he wanders in and out of hallucinogenic haze. “After a while these flies found Simon...They were black and iridescent green and without number...and in front of Simon, the Lord of the Flies hung on his stick and grinned” (Golding 128). The “beast” that the boys were so afraid of is the titled Lord of the Flies that Simon collapses in front of. The beast could have taken the manifestation of an animal, made from fear. The picture book fear of large, cartoon animals has evolved to match an older reader with more sophisticated levels of terror. Most often it is a “monster” that is characterized as the universal symbol of feeling afraid or “bullied” (Pearson 50). The beast correlates with this fact by speaking to Simon through his mind, “Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill... You knew didn’t you? I’m part of you?” (Golding 133). Here, Golding reveals to the reader that every character has a beast within him or herself. When characters are exposed to extreme instances the character who succumbs to the beast also chooses the outcome consumed the most by violence and aggression.

Although written and published years apart, both *The Chocolate War* and *Lord of the Flies* possess plot points that are startlingly similar. For example, there is a pervasive lack of adult presence and the adult interaction that does occur is both limited and “stand-offish.” Therefore both novels showcase groups of children and young adults that are in charge of their world. These are young boys that have

psychologically aged decades and are weary from a life lived beyond their short years.

Similarly to the novels of a middle level, books at the young adult level allow the words of characters and outside narrators to convey the feelings, which seem beyond words. Quotations not only give a voice or shape ideas; quotations allow the narrative voice of a novel to be concisely put forth to readers. The methods for handling grief are voiced by characters in this way. Jerry Renault had already experienced frustration and anger regarding the death of his mother and his inability to truly help her. Ultimately Jerry is able to express that those intense emotions turn to an empty space; that sometimes the “nothingness” that exists where a loved one used to be can hurt just as much. “The fiery knot of anger had come undone, unraveled, and Jerry realized as they drove back from the cemetery that something worse had taken its place—emptiness, a yawning cavity like a hole in his chest” (Cormier 60). Jerry describes his emptiness as the last moment of “intimacy” that he and his father shared, which leads to the fact that this type of feeling following a death is by no means limited to one person. People can come together in order to heal, but it is also okay to realize that the bonds formed do not always last.

The remnants of grief and tragedy in the lives of the characters in both novels cause them to feel older, tired, aged before their fairly young years. For instance, at the bus stop as Jerry Renault was leaving school, a boy had called Jerry “middle-aged at 14, 15” (Cormier 20-1). On the surface this could have been because Jerry is stuck in a routine, yet the label could refer to Jerry’s experiences. He *is* tired. At a young

age he is surviving the loss of a parent and it is excruciating. As life on the island wears on, Ralph too finds himself overcome with the burden of a lifetime of experiences.

Ralph chose the firm strip as a path because he needed to think, and only here could he allow his feet to move without having to watch them. Suddenly, pacing by the water, he was overcome with astonishment. He found himself understanding the wearisomeness of this life, where every path was an improvisation and a considerable part of one's waking life was spent watching one's feet (Golding 70).

Both Ralph and Jerry encompass a point that William Shakespeare pointed out long before Cormier or Golding utilized it themselves. In *Romeo and Juliet* as Romeo speaks before drinking the poison that ends his life he ponders himself, Juliet and their existence. "Will I set upon my everlasting rest/And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars/ From this world-wearied flesh!" (Shakespeare 227). It is remarkable that characters so young can be seen and feel themselves to be "world-wearied." The childhood has been lost and it can never return in the same way again. Grief has changed these young people forever and the characters shown cannot always survive such an alteration. These characters must also live with the complex burden of trying to imitate adult behavior.

Sacrifice is also an image that is clear in both novels. Each story is woven into a frenzy until a climactic episode of violence explodes. When Jerry accepts the challenge of the Vigils and enters a fighting match he is essentially sacrificed like the

hunted pig in *Lord of the Flies*; slowly coming to an end as the masses drown him in a sea of screaming chants. Goober cries out as a voice of reason,

Stop it, stop it...But nobody heard. His voice was lost in the thunder of screaming voices, voices calling for the kill...Jerry finally sank to the stage, bloody, opened mouth sucking for air, unfocused, flesh swollen. His body was poised for a moment like some wounded animal and then he collapsed (Cormier 254).

Jerry is encompassed by the violent surge for his life and the audience in Cormier's novel chants and calls for the kill, just as the boys of the island did as each closed in and took the life of the pig. In both novels "groups of people...may use their group identity to express their fear of being destroyed by attacking and destroying others" (Kubler-Ross 11). The uses of unified, fast chants are an effective pacing tool in each novel. The reader is a witness as the words, story and indeed lives of the characters spiral swiftly and any type of ending to the madness seems preferable to the current state of chaos.

Yet, with all of this occurring, *Lord of the Flies* still illustrates a type of rhythm and predictability. No matter how dark the night is that surrounds the characters, there will still be a sunrise to look forward to. "The first rhythm that they became used to was the slow swing from dawn to quick dusk. They accepted the pleasures of morning...as a time when play was good and life so full of hope" (Golding 53). The end of each novel comes at a point when it appears that nothing will ever get better. There is constant violence and tragic deaths and the characters

seem as if they cannot go on any longer—when help arrives and adult authority is reinstated. In their darkest moments the novels just stop. At first, this seems an interruption, but when closely examined it is exactly right. In *The Chocolate War* the reader never gets confirmation about Jerry's condition after the fight, but the novel shows instead the normal, comfortable scene of Archie looking for chocolate to eat. The novel ends with no end at all,

Archie barely listened. He wasn't interested. He was hungry. "You sure all the chocolates are gone, Obie?"

"I'm sure, Archie."

"You got a Hershey or anything?"

"No."

The lights went off again. Archie and Obie sat there awhile not saying anything

and then made their way out of the place in darkness (Cormier 263).

There is ultimately the reassurance that such life will always continue. The two Vigils leave the darkness together, perhaps also leaving their dark lives behind, to emerge in the light with a new beginning ahead of them; albeit to invent new ways to harass society. Despite the chance for a fresh start and the reappearance of adult authority, the dark events of their past cannot be erased. "With recovery comes the need of a strengthened self-esteem...resolution comes with the resolve that [you] have to come to terms...at least there are glimpses of hope" (Ammerman 65).

The *Lord of the Flies* presents its end as the death of pretense, of innocence, and of loved ones. The characters can never go back to a lost youth and prevent the way in which they have grown up. As rescue workers come to the stranded boys Ralph struggles to absorb the changes that have taken over his life.

And in the middle of them, with filthy body, matted hair, and unwiped nose, Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy" (Golding 186-7).

Here, Ralph is able to surmise what the novels of this young adult level stand for. These works of grief literature honestly expose that through death and through loss innocence is irretrievably broken and can never return in the same way. Characters show that the heart and nature of man is not always kind and cannot always be relied upon as a support system. There will be times when adults or other role models leave characters to feel and absorb all alone. For even when adults are physically present for the young characters, they may be emotional unavailable, manipulative, or concerned with their own agenda. Good, kind characters will die and readers will see that death is inevitable for everyone regardless of the exact scenario. Yet, while the lives of those who remain are permanently altered, their eyes look toward the future. For those who grieve and for those who love the grieving, a grief novel "can be a light in a very dark place, an instrument for creative survival" (Fry xiii). These novels can show a reader a way to hope once more and to picture a life with loss as a part of it. Lastly, Mark Ammerman wrote of his own loss, "Once I realized that the loss is a part of me-I could live again, but now, more knowledgeable

and with more understanding” (68). Just as Archie and Obie leave the darkness for the light outside, the rescue workers that came for Ralph and the boys look to the ships that dot the horizon, in order to lead the boys back home.

Grief literature has been described as “a celebration of the wisdom of the young in matters of heart, their crazily sane methods of survival, and the imaginative ways they move from grief toward healing” (McClanahan 143). However unorthodox a story might seem, there is a character or an action that will reach out to a reader and hold on. An alternative world will open up and allow healing amidst a changed way of life.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Dylan Thomas once wrote that “after the first death, there is no other” (McClanahan 134). The same could be said for grief literature. There is one story, one character, one decision on how or when to move on. However, this is a story that can be told many ways and many times over. Every time a reader opens *Freak the Mighty* he or she may yearn for Kevin to actually get a robot body, and when he does not, that reader might look at the stars to see memories replayed. Readers will be unable to turn away from Dallas Winston as he crumples beneath the light of a lone street lamp in *The Outsiders*. Jerry Renault will go down in a vicious, needless act of violence and Piggy too will fall. In novels like these and the circumstances that surround them, readers are not looking for easy answers. Readers are using grief literature in order to see how others grapple with their own sorrows.

In a different young adult novel titled, *Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life* by Wendy Mass, Jeremy muses on an idea much like Dylan Thomas; “Once you’ve had a real surprise, one that knocks the wind out of you and changes your life, all the little surprises remind you of that big one” (26). Grief literature aims to prepare readers of all ages for death and the emotions associated with it. The raw honesty associated with novels in this category will take away some of the “little surprises” and ease the pain of the “big one.” This is literature that will not hide death from a reader, and whether it is the first death or the tenth will be inconsequential. While some readers might engage in novels such as *Freak the Mighty*, *The Outsiders*, *Lord*

of the Flies and *The Chocolate War* without having experienced a personal loss, they will lose these same characters who are dear to them.

Grief literature is a safe place to find comfort and a place to find answers, which will never go away. These books and the stories within their pages may rest upon a shelf, but the lessons they teach will be available whenever a reader is in need. Typical support systems are not always available and grief literature can be what keeps a reader absorbed and present in the world around him or her. Future research might focus on the incredible surge of grief literature that is taking over young adult literature. What has happened, for example, when a “Battle of the Books” quiz show competition at Naples Central School where I teach, has featured back-to-back novels of hardship and loss, both with a protagonist who overcomes his tragedies? In cases like this readers must have a gap in their life that authors are more than able to fill; but what is missing that has caused readers to take notice of the answers found in books? Additional study could also yield results more specific to the availability of grief literature to address the different experiences of various social classes and ethnic identities, as well as separate genders and sexual orientations.

Overall, this thesis shows the use of fiction as a tool. Grief literature is simply meant to show readers that they are not alone in any emotion they are feeling, because here is a character that is feeling it too and this is the outcome. It is meant to open a floodgate, like Percival’s tears, so that readers do not need to hide any part of their grief experience. Lastly, this thesis is meant to show that the memories of those lost,

albeit in a novel, will be there forever. As Dumbledore teaches Harry Potter in the *Prisoner of Azkaban*,

You think the dead we loved ever truly leave us? You think that we don't recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble? Your father is alive in you, Harry, and shows himself most plainly when you have need of him (Rowling 427-8).

Death does not have to be the end of life. The love and connections felt between characters is able to transcend such a permanent goodbye. Beloved characters are not able to return to life in the physical sense, but the novels do not promise such a feat. As Jeremy Fink learns, "Some things aren't meant to be known. Maybe they're just meant to be accepted" (Mass 276). In light of this study, there lie the hopes that readers will come away with more strength and sense of self to realize that while they cannot change life, they can continue to live it.

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