

Loss and Grief Lesson Plan for Grades K-3 for

The Dragonfly Door

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Focus on themes of loss and grief
Scriptures Included

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This beautiful children's book can be used to help teach children about natural responses and coping strategies in the face of loss of a loved one. It can also be used to address many K-4 National Science Education Standards relating to science content and processes as well as numerous literacy goals. A separate lesson plan is available for highlighting the science themes.

Teachers may find it useful to read the book through two or three times with their students, at least one time to highlight the deeper underlying themes of the book (living with loss and grief after the death of a loved one) and once to point out the science themes.

Suggested key words or "treasure words": dragonfly, dragonfly door, grieve/grieving, nymph, Lea, Nym, screamed, angry, breathing, slowly, still, quivered, cried/cry, answer, miss, follow, show, beautiful, body, died/die, shimmered, waiting, shadow, disappeared, sad, invited, feel better, remember/remembers, special place, smile/smiles

Note: The key words should be on a chart for children to refer to as they follow up the story with a writing assignment. The words will be most meaningful if they are written up as the children encounter them in the context of the story, rather than listed out ahead of time. It may be helpful to write the words up during the second reading of the book, so as to not interrupt the flow of the story. Many teachers find it useful to make an alphabetical "Word Bank" of the key words on chart paper. If you do, be sure to leave more than one line for words starting with common letters, especially "s"

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will learn about the life cycle of dragonflies
- Students will compare and contrast the dragonfly life cycle with the life cycle of people
- Students will learn that death is a sad but normal part of life
- Students will be reassured that when someone dies it is not because of something they have done, such as angry words or thoughts
- Students will learn that it is normal to be sad when a loved one dies
- Students will think about things that are helpful to a person who is grieving, such as spending time with other caring people

The Dragonfly Door – loss and grief lesson plan

Many teachers will find that this beautiful book is worth reading twice, once straight through so that students can feel the impact of the words and pictures as they are, and a second time going more slowly with questions and vocabulary words. Many teachers find it convenient to incorporate questions and key words from the lesson plan by writing them on Post-it notes, and placing those notes on the pages to be read. This eliminates moving back and forth from the book to the lesson plan. If you choose to read the book through twice in the first sitting, ignore the Post-its on the first reading and only stop if students have questions or show evidence of needing to process a page more carefully.

The book pages are not numbered, so for convenience this lesson plan will pretend that the dedication page is Page 1 and the rest of the pages continue sequentially from there. Words in *italics* can be asked “as is” or re-phrased according to your preference. Key words that students may find useful for writing responses are in **bold**.

Be sure to read the book through yourself at least once, before sharing it with the children. You may find it useful to read through the lesson plan a few times so that you can move more naturally between the story and the questions, and watch children’s faces for their responses.

Lesson Introduction:

Say: “*Children, today we are going to read a very special book called The Dragonfly Door. The book is written by John Adams and illustrated by Barbara Gibson.*”

1. Hold up the book so they all can see the cover. Ask the children to look at the cover and see what they can figure out about the book before beginning to read. *What kinds of animals and plants do you predict that the book will be about?*
2. *What do you think the “**dragonfly door**” might be?* Encourage many students to share their thoughts and predictions.
3. Read the dedication page. Point out to the children that there is a note by the author, J.A., and also a note by the illustrator, B.L.G. J.A.’s dedication mentions “hope to grieving families” and “Mom and Dad, who live in my heart” Ask the children if they know what **grieving** means. Webster defines “**to grieve**” as “to feel acute, deep sorrow or distress” and “**grief**” as “intense emotional suffering caused by loss”. For young children, this could be re-phrased as “to feel very, very sad because someone you love has **died** or gone away”.

What do you think it means when it says, “Mom and Dad live in my heart”? (It probably means that their bodies have died and they are

living in heaven, but that the author still loves them and thinks about them a lot.)

What does the illustrator mean when she says her family “have always sought to find answers in nature”? (God shows Himself through His beautiful creation. We can learn about Him by reading His Word and also by careful observation of the amazing world He has created.)

4. Turn the page and show the students the picture on the next two page spread (Pages 2-3).

*What kinds of animals do you see in the picture? (Insects, snails, fish) All of these animals live in the water. Which animals do you think will be the main characters in this story? Point out the **dragonflies**. These are young dragonflies called nymphs. This is what dragonflies look like when they are young. Because this book is called The Dragonfly Door, we can be pretty sure that the book is going to be about these animals. Singular and plural: **Dragonfly, dragonflies***

5. Read pages 4-5. *Are the nymphs the same age? (No – **Lea** is 3 and **Nym** is almost two.) If they were people, they would both be children, but dragonflies don’t live as long as people, so “3” is like a teenager in a dragonfly lifetime.*
6. Read pages 6-7 Key words: **screamed, leave** *(Do you ever get so frustrated you feel like screaming? Is that a good way to express your emotions? What is a better way?)*
7. Read pages 8-9. *Why does Nym run away? How is she feeling? (Very **angry** at Lea)*
8. Read pages 10-11. *Where does Lea go, and what does she do to be nice to Nym? What problem is she having? (She goes to get flowers for Nym, but she is tired and having a hard time **breathing**, and moving very **slowly**.) Point out the inset picture showing Lea’s tired face. *When animals or people are sick or getting old, they often feel very tired and can’t do everything they used to be able to do. This can be very frustrating for the people who live with them, who want things to be the way they used to be.**
9. Read pages 12-13. *What happens when Nym comes home to the nest? (Lea is not there). Do you think Nym regrets her angry words to Lea to “leave me alone”?) Key word: **still***
10. Read pages 14-15. Key word: **quivered** (Note: just for fun, if it meets other literacy goals, you could contrast a different use of the word “still”)
11. Read pages 16-17.

12. Read pages 18-19.
13. Read pages 20-21. Ask students why they think the picture is so dark. (The artist uses lack of light to communicate Nym's sadness as well as the fact that it is nighttime.) *Why is Nym sad?* Key word: **cried**
14. Read pages 22-23. *What happens the next morning?* (Saucer bugs come to the nest and Nym hopes it is Lea, but it is not.) Key words: **answer, miss**
15. Read pages 24-25. *What happens when Nym goes to sleep the next night?* Key words: **follow, show**
16. Read pages 26-27. Point out the trace of Nym still on the plant as she talks to Lea in her dream. *Is the picture dark or bright?* (Bright and colorful, and very beautiful.) *Why do you think this is?* (Lea is in a very happy place. If she were a person, we would say it looks like she is in Heaven.) *Did Lea go away because Nym yelled?* (No – she went away because it was her time to change from a water nymph body.) *Will Nym ever see Lea again?* (Yes, when she changes from a water nymph to a dragonfly.) Key word: **beautiful, body, die/died**

For Catholic/Christian Schools:

How is this like people? (We will see each other in Heaven, if we trust in Jesus.) How do we know this? The Bible talks about Heaven in LOTS of places. Here are just a few:

A few of the many Scripture passages that talk about Heaven:

Psalm 73:24-25

John 14:1-4

Psalm 16: 10-11

Philippians 1:21-22

Acts 1:9-11

Matthew 6: 9-10

Luke 23:43

A few of the many Scripture passages that talk about our resurrected bodies:

I Corinthians 15:35-44 (or all of I Corinthians)

Job 19:25-27

John 11:25-26

Luke 24

17. Turn the page. Say, "Wow, what a big picture is on the next page. *Who is that?* (Lea) *What is different about her?* (She has wings, and she is not tired any more.) Read the pages 28-29. *How does Nym feel inside?* (She feels the love from her friend's hug.) *Is Lea there when Nym wakes up?* (No) Key words: **wings, shimmered**

How does the dream help Nym? (It lets her see her good friend again, and she is happy to talk with her. It also tells Nym that she will see Lea again in a wonderful new way when she (Nym) becomes an adult dragonfly.)

How does this relate to people, when they have lost someone they love? (Seeing pictures of the loved ones and sharing memories of them can help them not feel so far away. So can dreams.)

18. Examine the picture on the next pages, 30-31. *What do you see?* (A shadow of a dragonfly.) Read the text on the pages. *What does Nym remember Lea saying?* (I'll be waiting for you.) *How does that make Nym feel?*

How does this relate to people? If the people still living know that they will see their loved one again in Heaven, it gives them hope for the future. Key word: **waiting, shadow, disappeared**

19. Read pages 32-33. *Is Nym happy now?* (No, she is still sad for many days, but she begins to feel happier.) *What does she do that is helpful?* (She goes to live with the beetle family.) *Does she have anything to remember Lea by?* (Yes, a soft leaf that Lea gave her.) *What makes Nym smile?* (Knowing that Lea is a dragonfly in a special place beyond the marsh and that she will see her again.) **Key words: sad, feel better, invited, special place, remember/remembers, smile/smiles**

20. *How does this relate to people?* (Accept student responses, and then add: *It tells us that it is okay and normal to be sad when we lose someone that we love. And sometimes we just feel like being by ourselves. After awhile, though, it is important to do things with other people. Those people will never take the place of the loved one. Remember, J.A. said his Mom and Dad live on in his heart. But other people can help bring back the joy of living for those who are still on Earth, even while we miss the loved one.*)

21. Show the children the picture on the last page and ask them to describe what the picture is showing. (Two adult dragonflies, possibly Lea and Nym together.) *What is this page showing, and how is a hopeful ending to the story?* (Lea and Nym will be together again when Nym's body changes like Lea's did before her.)

22. *Now that we have read the book, what do you think the Dragonfly Door is?* (Answers will vary)

Please continue to the next page of the lesson plan for some possible writing prompts.

As time and children's ability levels permit, have the children draw or write a response to the book. If you have additional adults in the room, you can also interview students to find out their responses to the following questions, particularly students known to have suffered losses.

Possible writing prompts include:

- Kindergarten or older children – draw a picture of your favorite part of the Dragonfly Door. Be sure to include Lea or Nym and write their names underneath the picture. (Be sure that the names are written up for the children to copy, stressing the beginning letters L and N and their sounds.)
- Kindergarten or older children - Have you ever had someone go away like Lea does in the book? Maybe someone you love died or moved away. Draw a picture or write about how that felt. What things helped you to feel happy again? How do you remember that person?
- Did Lea die because Nym got angry and yelled at her? (NO!) What can you tell Nym about why Lea died? Draw a picture or write some sentences to Nym to help her understand that Lea's nymph body dying was not caused by anything Nym did.
- Draw a picture of what you think Heaven looks like. What makes it a good place to go when your earthly body dies? Write words underneath your picture or ask someone to help you write words to tell why you drew the things you did.
- If someone you know has lost a loved one, what lesson can you learn from the beetle family at the end of the book? What kind things can you do for the grieving person to help him or her begin to feel better?
- Older children – Write a few sentences describing what is happening in the final picture of The Dragonfly Door. What do you suppose Lea and Nym are saying to one another?
- Older children – if you had a friend who had someone special go away, what would you say to that person to help them? What lessons from The Dragonfly Door would you share with that person? Write a letter to your friend telling them what you have learned.
- Older children – if you have experienced losses or changes in your life like Nym did, such as death or divorce, write about your experience and how it made you feel. What things helped you to feel better? Hopefully nobody has said things to you that made you feel worse, but if they did and you are comfortable sharing those too, please do.
- Have you ever been sad like Nym was when she slept alone for the first time? What did you do? What things helped you feel better?

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