

Grief and Remembering: a unit for K–3

One read-aloud, two short sessions, and how to handle the child who needs it most.

The Ladybug Who Lived on a Four Leaf Clover, by Emily Franke, illustrated by Haley Franke

Grade band K–3 · **Time** two sessions of 20–25 minutes · **Grouping** whole class

Frameworks addressed: Connecticut Components of Social, Emotional and Intellectual Habits (Components 1, 3, 4) · CASEL (self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills) · ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors (M 1, B-SS 3, B-SS 4) · AASL Shared Foundation II, Include · CCSS Speaking & Listening SL.K.1–SL.3.1

Connecticut school climate: supports instruction under a district school climate improvement plan, C.G.S. §§10-222aa–10-222jj (P.A. 23-167 and 24-45), in force from the 2025–26 school year.

WHY THIS TEXT

When Emily loses her grandmother, a ladybug named Sheila appears — the very name her grandmother had. Little by little Emily understands that her grandmother has come back to her, as Sheila, to comfort her and stay close.

Emily Franke wrote it after losing her own grandmother, who was also called Sheila. Her twin sister Haley illustrated it. That is worth telling children: the book was made by two sisters who were sad, which is a different fact from most of what they read.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, students can:

- Name a feeling that grief can include besides sadness.
- Describe one thing a person can do to remember someone who has died.
- Identify one adult they could talk to if they felt the way Emily felt.

BEFORE YOU TEACH IT

This unit breaks the usual rule. Most hard-topic read-alouds should be taught when nothing is happening. A grief book is often reached for precisely because something has. Either use is legitimate — but if a child in your room has recently lost someone, speak to them and their family before you read it, and give that child explicit permission to leave the room without explaining.

Read it yourself first and decide whether it fits your community. The book offers one specific, comforting idea: that the grandmother came back. Many families will find that exactly right. Some hold beliefs about death that make it a poor fit, and a few young children will take it literally in a way that needs a follow-up conversation. Tell families beforehand, not afterwards.

Avoid softening language when you read. “Died” is clearer to a young child than “passed away”, “lost” or “gone to sleep”, and the euphemisms are what produce the frightening misunderstandings.

SESSION 1 — READING IT

Open (2 min). “*This is about a girl whose grandmother died, and what happened afterwards.*” Saying it plainly at the start means no child is ambushed in the middle.

Read aloud (8–10 min). Straight through. Do not stop to check how anyone is doing; that draws the room’s attention to whoever you check on.

Discuss (10 min).

- What did Emily miss? Push past the big answers to the small ones — a smell, a phrase, who picked her up.
- Grief is not only sadness. What else might Emily have felt? Offer words if they stall: angry, confused, tired, worried, even relieved.
- Did anyone notice Emily was sad? What did noticing look like?
- Emily found something that reminded her of her grandmother. Is there something that reminds you of someone you don’t see any more?

■ CT SEL Component 3, Identify and understand emotions of self and others (Empathy progression) · CASEL Self-awareness and Social awareness · ASCA M 1, B-SS 4 · CCSS SL.K.1–SL.3.1

The second question is the one that does the most work. Children are usually taught that grief means crying; naming anger, boredom or relief as normal is the single most useful thing this unit gives them.

SESSION 2 — REMEMBERING TOGETHER

The remembering object (12 min). Each child draws or describes one small thing that reminds them of someone — a person, a pet, a grandparent they see rarely. It does not have to be about death, and saying so out loud keeps the activity open to every child in the room.

Pair this with the free *Remembering Together* family activity, which sends the same task home for families who want to continue it.

■ CT SEL Component 3 · CT SEL Component 4, Develop positive interpersonal relationships · CASEL Self-awareness

Who would you tell? (6 min). Each child privately names one adult they could talk to if they felt like Emily. Written, not shared aloud.

■ CT SEL Component 1, Develop a positive self-concept (trusting relationships with school-based adults) · ASCA B-SS 3, Positive relationships with adults to support success · CASEL Relationship skills

Collect these. A child who cannot name anyone is the most useful thing this unit surfaces, and it goes quietly to your school counselor or climate specialist — not back to the child.

HOW YOU’LL KNOW IT WORKED

Three look-fors, none of which need a rubric:

- **Children name feelings beyond sad.** Angry, confused, tired and relieved all appearing in one discussion is the result you want.
- **Every child names an adult** in session 2. The ones who cannot are your follow-up.
- **Remembering objects are specific** — a blue mug, a particular song — rather than general. Specificity is how children hold a memory.

DIFFERENTIATION

- **Kindergarten:** read and do the remembering object. Drop the feelings-beyond-sadness discussion, which is abstract at five.
- **Emerging English speakers:** the remembering object works entirely as a drawing. Pre-teach four feeling words before reading.
- **Third grade:** add a short written piece — what would you say to Emily if you could?
- **A recently bereaved child:** tell them privately before the lesson, give them the choice to be elsewhere, and do not ask them to contribute. Their presence is not a teaching opportunity.

FOR THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

- The strongest placement is a counselor referral shelf: a child can borrow it without announcing anything about themselves.
- Grandparents’ Day in September is a natural display moment, and a gentler one than a grief display.
- Useful to keep a copy accessible to staff — the request often comes suddenly, from a teacher who has just learned something about a family.
- Emily and Haley Franke are Connecticut sisters, which places it in a local-author display alongside the rest of the AcuteByDesign list.

■ AASL Shared Foundation II, Include · II.C.2

SENDING IT HOME

A short note to families, if you want one: *“We read a book about a girl whose grandmother died, and talked about ways people remember someone. If your child brings it up, you do not need the right words. ‘I miss them too’ and a shared memory does more than an explanation.”* Send this before the lesson, not after.

■ CT SEL Component 4 · CASEL Relationship skills · ASCA B-SS 3

FULL STANDARDS MAPPING

This mapping is AcuteByDesign’s own. It has not been reviewed or endorsed by the Connecticut State Department of Education, CASEL, ASCA or AASL. Check it against your district’s framework before citing it in a plan.

FRAMEWORK	STANDARD OR COMPONENT	WHERE IT SITS IN THE UNIT
Connecticut — Components of Social, Emotional and Intellectual Habits (K–3)	Component 1 — Develop a positive self-concept (trusting relationships with school-based adults)	Session 2, Who would you tell?
	Component 3 — Identify and understand emotions of self and others (Empathy progression)	Session 1 discussion; the remembering object
	Component 4 — Develop positive interpersonal relationships	Session 2; the family note
CASEL	Self-awareness — understanding one’s own emotions, thoughts and values and how they influence behavior across contexts	Session 1, question 2; the remembering object
	Social awareness — understanding the perspectives of and empathizing with others	Session 1, questions 1 and 3

FRAMEWORK	STANDARD OR COMPONENT	WHERE IT SITS IN THE UNIT
	Relationship skills — establishing and maintaining healthy and supportive relationships	Who would you tell?
ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors	M 1 — Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being	Naming grief as normal and varied
	B-SS 3 — Positive relationships with adults to support success	Who would you tell?
	B-SS 4 — Empathy	Session 1, questions 1 and 3
AASL National School Library Standards	Shared Foundation II, Include — demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community	Counselor referral shelf; staff access
	II.C.2 — Contributing to discussions in which multiple viewpoints on a topic are expressed	Session 1 discussion
CCSS Speaking & Listening (Connecticut Core Standards)	SL.K.1 / SL.1.1 / SL.2.1 / SL.3.1 — Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade-level topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups	Both sessions

The Ladybug Who Lived on a Four Leaf Clover is published by AcuteByDesign, an independent publisher in Marlborough, Connecticut, and is available through Ingram. This unit is free — copy it, print it, and send it to whoever it would help. acutebydesign.com