

Teacher Lesson Plans for Love Is Always Here

A trauma-informed literacy and SEL unit for grades 3-5

Unit Overview

These lesson plans are designed for use with *Love Is Always Here*, a story about Jameel, a fourth-grade student who experiences joy on his tenth birthday while also grieving the death of his mother from COVID-19. The lessons help students build reading comprehension, vocabulary, emotional literacy, empathy, and healthy coping strategies while honoring that students may have different experiences with grief, separation, illness, or loss.

Recommended Grade Band and Time

- Grade band: 3-5, with easy adjustments for grades 2 or 6.
- Suggested format: Five 35-45 minute lessons, plus an optional family/school extension activity.
- Instructional focus: Reading comprehension, character analysis, theme, narrative writing, SEL, grief awareness, and restorative classroom conversation.

Teacher Sensitivity Note

Because the story includes the death of a parent, COVID-19, crying, therapy, family memories, and grief, preview the text before reading. Offer students the option to pass during personal sharing, write privately instead of speaking, or speak with a trusted adult. Avoid asking students to publicly disclose personal losses. Use language such as, “Some people may connect to this story in different ways, and you are in control of what you share.”

Essential Questions

- How can a person feel joy and sadness at the same time?
- How do memories help people stay connected to someone they love?
- What can caring adults, family members, and professionals do to support a child who is grieving?
- What does the author want readers to understand about love, loss, and hope?

Key Vocabulary

- grief: deep sadness after losing someone or something important
- memory: something remembered from the past
- therapist: a trained person who helps people talk through feelings and challenges
- honor: to show respect or love for someone through words or actions
- cope: to handle a hard feeling or situation in a healthy way
- theme: the message or lesson the author wants readers to understand

Learning Standards Alignment

- Reading Literature: Ask and answer questions, describe characters, determine theme, summarize key details, and explain how parts of a story build meaning.
- Speaking and Listening: Participate in collaborative conversations, build on others’ ideas, and express ideas clearly and respectfully.
- Writing: Write personal, reflective, narrative, or explanatory responses connected to text evidence.
- SEL: Identify emotions, demonstrate empathy, use coping strategies, build supportive relationships, and seek help from trusted adults.

Lesson 1: Joy and Sadness Can Exist Together

Lesson Component	Teacher Plan
Focus	Introduction, emotional vocabulary, and character feelings.
Objectives	Students will identify Jameel's joyful and sad feelings, use text details to explain why he feels both, and discuss how people can have more than one feeling at the same time.
Materials	Book/text pages 1-4; feelings chart; sticky notes; "Two Feelings Can Be True" handout or notebook page.
Before Reading	Tell students: "Today we will read about a boy who has something wonderful happen and also feels sadness. We will talk about the character's feelings, not require anyone to share personal experiences." Review words: joy, sadness, proud, missing, grief.
During Reading	Read pages 1-4. Pause after the bus/birthday celebration and ask: What details show Jameel has reasons to celebrate? Then pause after the closet scene and ask: What changed in his feelings? What details help us understand why?
Student Task	Students create a two-column chart: "Reasons Jameel Feels Joy" and "Reasons Jameel Feels Sadness." Students must include at least two text details in each column.
Discussion Questions	Why might Jameel's birthday make him miss his mother more? Why is it important that the author shows both joy and sadness? What can classmates do when someone is having a hard day?
Assessment	Collect or review the two-column chart for accurate text evidence and understanding of mixed emotions.
Differentiation	Provide sentence frames: "Jameel feels ___ because ___." "One text detail that shows this is ___." Allow drawing plus labels for students who need writing support.

Lesson 2: Understanding Grief and Trusted Helpers

Lesson Component	Teacher Plan
Focus	Character behavior, grief, therapy, and support systems.
Objectives	Students will explain how grief can affect behavior, identify trusted helpers in the story, and describe healthy ways to seek support.
Materials	Book/text pages 5-6; chart paper labeled "Feelings, Behaviors, Support"; index cards.
Before Reading	Review that behavior can sometimes be a signal of a feeling or need. Emphasize that students are not diagnosing Jameel; they are using the text to understand the character.
During Reading	Read the section about Jameel's sadness, school difficulties, Grammy, and Dr. Grace. Stop to identify what Jameel felt, what he did, and who helped him.
Student Task	In small groups, students complete a three-part chart: Feeling: What might Jameel be feeling? Behavior: What did others see him do? Support: Who helped and how?
Discussion Questions	How did Grammy support Jameel and his dad? Why might talking to Dr. Grace help Jameel? What does the story teach about asking for help?
Assessment	Students write an exit ticket: "One trusted helper in Jameel's life is _____. This person helps by _____."
Differentiation	Offer a word bank: sad, confused, angry, lonely, scared, overwhelmed, safe, trusted, therapist, family, school. Allow partner dictation for students who need language support.

Lesson 3: Memories as Bridges to Love

Lesson Component	Teacher Plan
Focus	Theme, symbolism, and meaningful objects/places.
Objectives	Students will identify memory symbols in the story and explain how objects, places, traditions, and stories help Jameel remember his mother.
Materials	Book/text pages 3-14; Memory Map organizer; crayons/colored pencils; optional chart with symbols: perfume, closet, Christmas decorations, kitchen, quilt, Monkey, phone videos, photo albums.
Before Reading	Explain that a symbol is an object, place, or action that can stand for a bigger idea. In this story, many objects and places help Jameel remember love.
During Reading	Reread Dad's talk and the memory scenes: Christmas, kitchen, quilt/Monkey, phone videos, and Grammy's stories. Students listen for objects or traditions that hold memories.
Student Task	Students complete a Memory Map with the center phrase "Love Is Always Here." Around it, they list or draw at least five memory reminders from the story and explain what each one represents.
Discussion Questions	Why does Dad say there are signs of Mom's love all over the house? Which memory reminder seems most meaningful to Jameel? How do traditions help families remember people they love?
Assessment	Review Memory Maps for at least five accurate story details and an explanation of how each connects to love or memory.
Differentiation	Students may draw instead of write full sentences. Advanced students can add a sentence explaining how one symbol develops the theme.

Lesson 4: Author's Message and Text Evidence

Lesson Component	Teacher Plan
Focus	Theme, central message, and evidence-based responses.
Objectives	Students will determine the story's central message and support it with text evidence from at least two parts of the story.
Materials	Full text; theme statement strips; highlighters; constructed response organizer.
Before Reading	Review theme as a message the reader learns, not just a topic. Example: Topic = grief. Theme = Memories can help us feel connected to people we love.
During Reading	Reread the ending: "Nothing can take the love that has grown in us. That LOVE IS ALWAYS HERE!" Ask students how earlier scenes prepare readers for this message.
Student Task	Students write a short constructed response: "The theme of Love Is Always Here is _____. One part that supports this is _____. Another part that supports this is _____. This shows _____."
Discussion Questions	What does Dad want Jameel to understand? Does remembering take away all sadness? What hope does the ending offer readers?
Assessment	Use a 4-point rubric: clear theme, two accurate text details, explanation connecting evidence to theme, conventions/clarity.
Differentiation	Provide theme options for students to choose from. Challenge students to compare the title to the final line and explain why the title is meaningful.

Lesson 5: Writing Our Own “Love Is Always Here” Reflection

Lesson Component	Teacher Plan
Focus	Reflective writing, empathy, and healthy coping strategies.
Objectives	Students will write a reflective paragraph, poem, letter, or illustrated page about a positive memory, a trusted helper, a family tradition, or a way to show love and support.
Materials	Writing paper; optional templates: letter, poem, memory object drawing, coping card; pencils; coloring materials.
Before Writing	Give students safe choices. They may write about a person, pet, place, tradition, teacher, coach, family member, friend, or fictional character. They do not have to write about loss.
Mini-Lesson	Model a non-sensitive example: “A special tradition in my family is _____. It reminds me of _____ because _____.” Emphasize sensory details: what you see, hear, smell, taste, or feel.
Student Task	Students choose one product: a memory paragraph, a letter to a trusted helper, a “ways to remember love” poem, or an illustrated coping strategy card.
Sharing	Use voluntary sharing only. Students may share with a partner, place work in a gallery walk, or keep the writing private for teacher review.
Assessment	Evaluate for completion, connection to the story’s theme, appropriate details, and thoughtful reflection. Do not grade students on personal disclosure.
Differentiation	Offer sentence starters: “One memory I want to keep is _____.” “A trusted helper is _____ because _____.” “Love can show up as _____.”

Optional Family or School Extension

- Memory Quilt Page: Students design one paper quilt square showing a positive memory, family tradition, favorite place, or supportive person. Combine squares into a class display titled “Love and Support Are Always Here.”
- Trusted Helper Tree: Students create a private or general list of trusted helpers at home, school, and in the community. Avoid requiring public disclosure of family situations.
- Class Kindness Practice: Students brainstorm ways to support classmates who may be quiet, sad, frustrated, or overwhelmed without forcing them to talk.

Teacher Discussion Prompts

- What clues show Jameel is proud of himself at the beginning of the story?
- Why does Jameel hide in the closet? What does the closet represent?
- How does Dad help Jameel think about his mother’s love in a new way?
- What role does Grammy play in helping Jameel and Dad?
- Why is Dr. Grace important to Jameel’s healing?
- Which memory from the story do you think helps Jameel the most? Why?
- How does the author show that sadness does not erase love?
- What does the title Love Is Always Here mean by the end of the story?

Simple Rubric for Student Responses

Criteria	4 - Strong	3 - Developing	2 - Needs Support
Text Understanding	Accurately explains the story with specific details.	Explains the story with at least one detail.	Retells parts of the story with limited detail.
Theme	Clearly states a thoughtful theme.	States a general theme or lesson.	Needs support identifying the message.
Evidence	Uses two or more accurate examples from the text.	Uses one accurate example from the text.	Evidence is missing or unclear.
Reflection/SEL	Shows empathy and names healthy supports or coping strategies.	Shows some empathy or identifies one support.	Needs support connecting feelings to healthy choices.

Suggested Counselor/SEL Connection

Invite the school counselor, social worker, or behavior interventionist to co-facilitate Lesson 2 or Lesson 5. Reinforce that students can ask for help from trusted adults when feelings become too big to manage alone. Provide local school support procedures as appropriate.

Note About Source Text

These lessons were developed from the uploaded draft text, including scenes of Jameel celebrating his birthday and student recognition, grieving his mother, receiving support from Grammy, Dad, and Dr. Grace, and learning that love remains present through memories, traditions, objects, stories, and family connection.