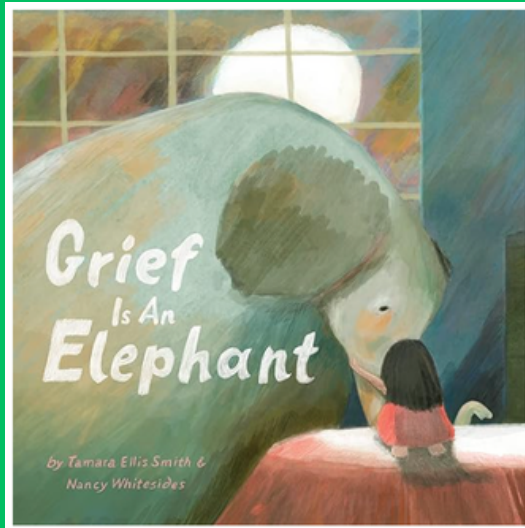


# Centering Connection & Belonging

## A Guide For Exploring: *Grief is an Elephant*



Tips For Strengthening  
Social & Emotional  
Literacies (SEL)

**Included.**



### **Including:**

Conversation Starters

&

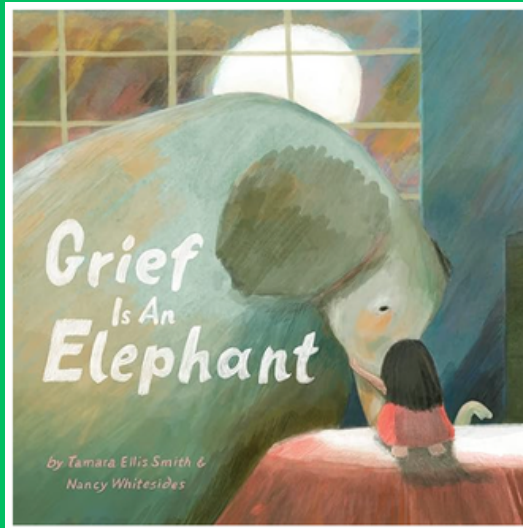
Ideas For Art & Language Based Activities

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*Grief is an Elephant* (Chronicle Books, 2023.) by Tamara Ellis Smith & Nancy Whitesides  
A Resource From The Picture Book Project

In this gentle story, Grief visits in the shape of increasingly lighter & smaller creatures – until, finally, Grief becomes a firefly and floats away. Then, together with all of the animals, the child stands under the moon, remembering.

**“Remember  
and...”**



Keeping our writings and or drawings – whether privately in a journal or more publicly – allows us to revisit our thoughts and to see change.

## **Create & Connect**

Write or draw about the things you do while remembering someone or something you loved. Consider putting together a public display of the many ways we hold who and what we have loved close, and also how we move forward as we remember.

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Care-filled sharing means being clear that all have the choice to participate in sharing their thoughts, feelings, and stories.

This picture book softly illustrates the way Grief transforms and also how Grief can stubbornly stay put. Encourage children/students to notice, is this true only with grief and sadness, or is this true with other emotions, too?



Having a variety of ways to express ourselves supports connection.

## Exploring Emotions

Use images of the animals in this book – the elephant, deer, fox, mouse, and firefly – to show how you are feeling.

“What animal is Grief today?”

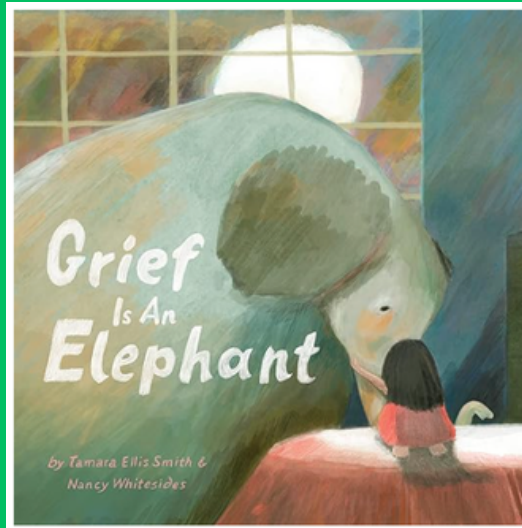
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**Imagine...**

What other animals could Grief be?

Draw them. Add them to images of the animals from this book.

# Starting Conversations...



You might start by asking, “What do you notice in this book?” Follow their lead.

## Telling Our Stories

When Grief is a fox, the girl asks, “What does she want?”  
Does it ever feel like Grief wants something from you? What is it?

“When have you let Grief come close?  
Was Grief small, or was Grief BIG?”

Where do you usually find  
Grief? Does Grief hide?

“When have you pushed away Grief?  
How did you push it away?”

When Grief visits, how do you feel?  
Do you always feel the same way?

**Try...** Adding the words, “I wonder”  
to the start of a question to soften it.

– Connection & Belonging –

Require Being Welcomed Exactly As One Is.

**This means our languages are welcomed, too. All of them.**

American Sign Language

Arabic

Cued Speech

Chinese

Spanish

Somali

Farsi

Lingala

Portugese

French

German

Swahili

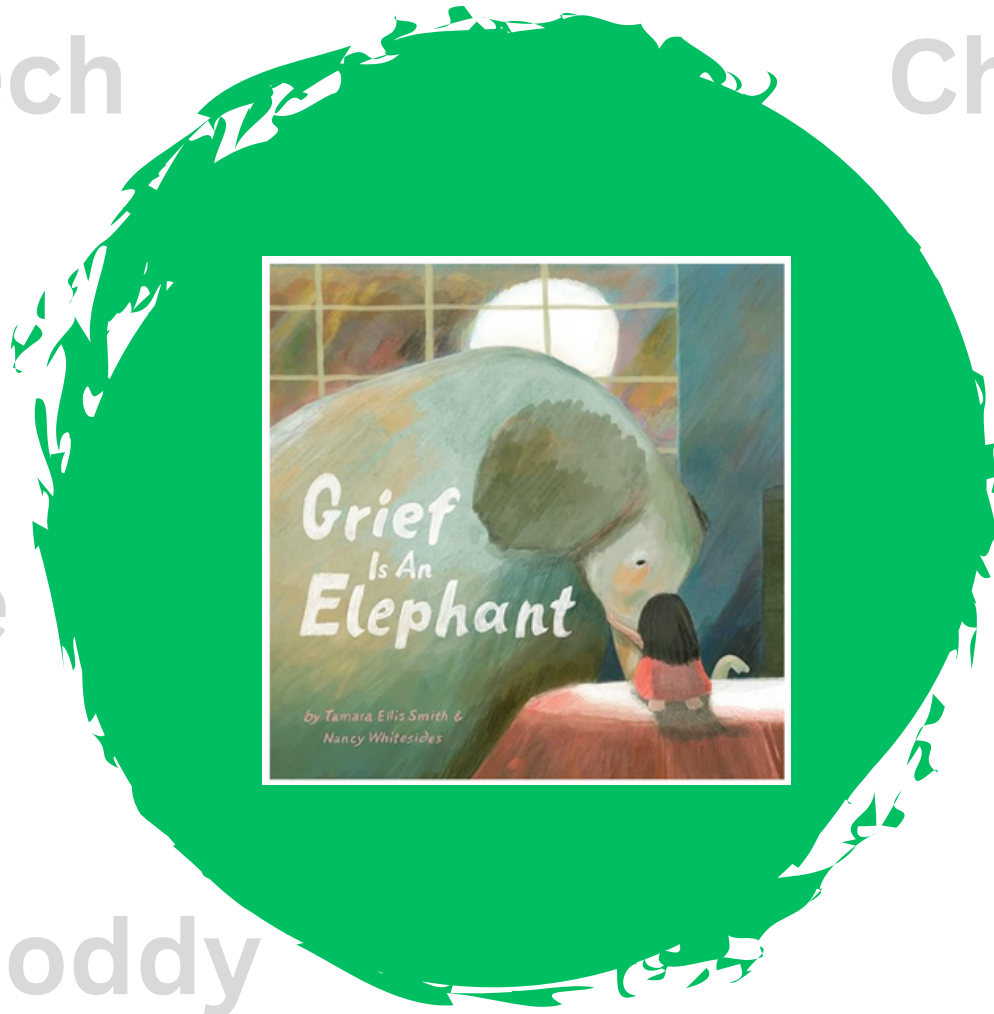
Passamaquoddy

Tagalog

**Some things are within our power.**



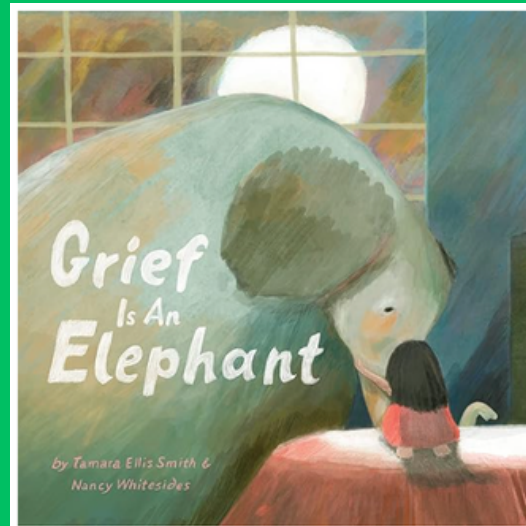
Welcome the language a child/student chooses to express themselves, as long as that language does not diminish the fullness of someone else's humanity.



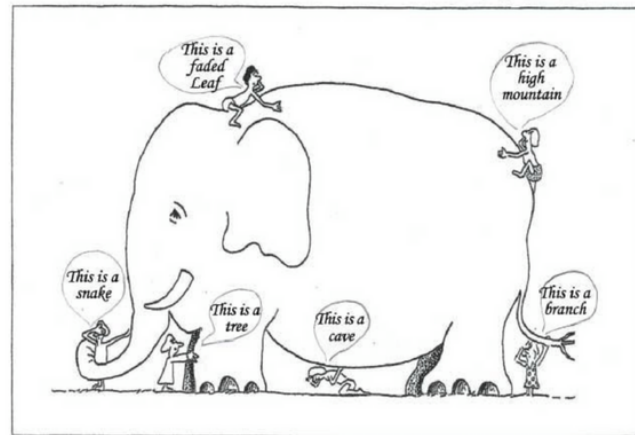
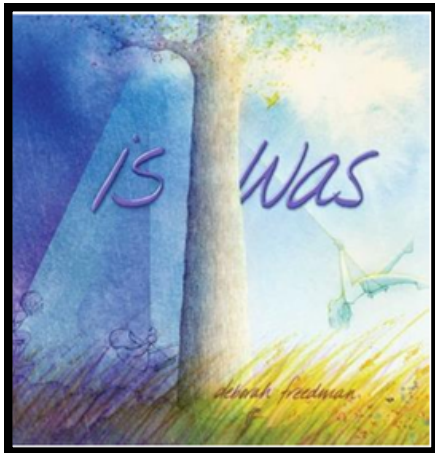
# A Text Pairing Suggestion



Pairing books with other forms of expression broadens & deepens conversations.



**What else might you pair with this book?**



Six blind men describe an elephant (old Indian fable). Source: <https://xebia.com/uk/blog/preparing-for-agile-maintenance-knowledgemanagement/>

You might share *Grief is an Elephant* and the parablē of the elephant and the blind men or Deborah Freedman's *is was* (Atheneum, 2021.) Ask, "How do these relate to each other?"

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## About This Guide



This guide was created and distributed—in collaboration with author Tamara Ellis Smith, and with support from the Erin Murphy Literary Agency & I'm Your Neighbor Books—by Sarah Norsworthy, educator and consultant as part of The Picture Book Project, a collection of free resources designed to celebrate and activate the power of picture books.

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