

the Purple Balloon

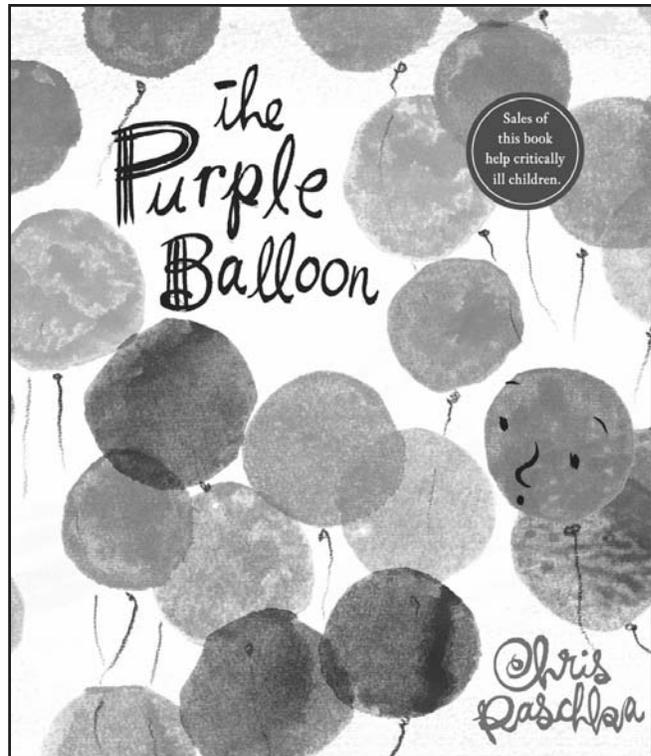
ALL GRADES

A guide for educators and guidance counselors to sharing an important book for seriously ill children and the people who love them.

about the book

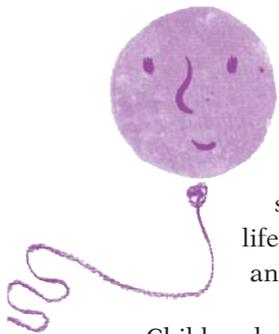
When a child becomes aware of his or her pending death and is given the opportunity to “draw your feelings,” he or she will often draw a blue or purple balloon, released and unencumbered, floating upward. Healthcare professionals have discovered that this is true regardless of a child’s cultural or religious background and researchers believe that it is symbolic of the child’s innate knowledge that a part of them will live forever. This anecdote from Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, author of *On Death and Dying*, has affected Ann Armstrong-Dailey, Founding Director and CEO, Children’s Hospice International, ever since she heard it.

In disarmingly simple and direct language, accompanied by evocative illustrations, Chris Raschka, in conjunction with Children’s Hospice International (CHI), has created a moving, sensitive book that is also a phenomenally useful tool to talk about death. The message of the book is clear: talking about dying is hard, dying is harder, but there are many people in your life who can help.



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in the classroom



The Purple Balloon can be shared in a classroom when a student or a student’s family member is facing a life-threatening condition or has died. It is an excellent book to stimulate discussion.

Children below the age of five or six do not completely understand that death is permanent unless they have had direct experience. They will have questions about where the dead go and generally understand death as a place.

At ages 8 to 10, children often have anxiety about death and the process of dying. Educators need to be prepared to respond to varying expressions of that anxiety. The goal is for children to have the tools to face their own fears while empathizing with the child facing grave illness or loss.

Children in grades 3 to 7, at or above grade level, may resist reading a picture book. Therefore, it is important to present the book as a subject for discussion that students can respond to.

discussion questions

I Wonder . . .

After reading *The Purple Balloon* and before beginning any lessons, encourage students to look at all the pictures again and then gather in a circle for a discussion. Using an overhead projector and the drawings in the book, ask the students the following questions based on their grade and developmental level.

For Grades K-7

Begin each question with “I wonder . . .” as the phrase invites children to speak:

- if you can tell me what this face is feeling? (Note: Show several of the balloon faces from old to young from sad to laughing.)
- if you have ever felt alone or sad?
- if you ever had a pet die?
- if you have known anyone who died?
- if you can name everyone who helped?
- who helps you the most when-ever you are feeling sad or alone?

For Grades 3-7

“I wonder . . .”

- what the purple balloon’s brothers and sisters are feeling? I wonder how would you feel if your brother or sister was sick or dying?
- what kind of hard work a dying person has to go through?
- if you remember the parents of the purple balloon crying? I wonder why they are crying? I wonder what is the hardest part for parents?
- if you remember the picture of the friends helping the purple balloon? I wonder what the purple balloon’s friends said?



Perspective

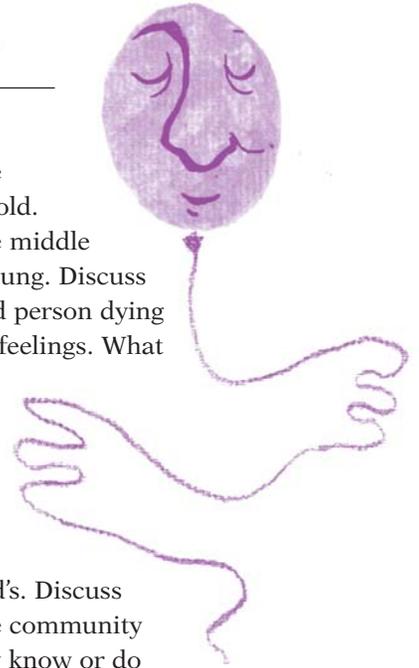
For Grades 4-8

The balloon shown in the beginning of the book is old.

The balloon shown in the middle and end of the book is young. Discuss how the feelings of an old person dying may differ from a child’s feelings. What might be the same?

What might be different? Discuss how the feelings of the purple balloon differ

from a family member’s or friend’s. Discuss how people in the community who only slightly know or do not know the child may feel different than the family or friends.



Death & Dying

For Grades 4-8

Think about how the balloon feels in different scenes. When have you felt alone? How do you think people in general in this society feel about dying? Are there cultural differences? What pictures do you connect with the most? How do you think another family or friend in your community or in other places in the world might feel about dying?

In the U.S., death and dying are not subjects that people talk about easily—even with close friends. How does this book cross age, gender, and cultural differences? How do you think the book can stimulate discussion?

curriculum connections

Language Arts/Art

For Grades K–3

After discussing *The Purple Balloon*, have students make up their own “book” about dying. Give them 4 to 10 blank pages stapled in a book-like fashion. Have them draw pictures and write in sentences (with help for the youngest children) that explain their pictures. If a child has difficulty with this assignment, help him or her get started. Assure all the children that anything that is drawn or written will be “just right.” Because this is a “feeling” book, one cannot grade the project, but can comment on the quality of words used and sentences written.

For Grades 4–7

Have students write a paragraph or more titled “Who Is the Purple Balloon?” They can write a story about the balloon’s life, including how she or he got sick and who helped her or him. Many students, by about age 8, are not comfortable drawing, but still love working with clay and other 3-dimensional materials. Work with students using potatoes to make their own potato print balloon images.

For Grades 5–7

Assign an essay on one or both of the following questions: “Where is the purple balloon going?” or “Good help makes dying easier.”

Social Studies/Art

For Grades K–5

Have the students draw a place or a journey the purple balloon takes as the purple balloon is leaving.

For Grades 3–7

Ask students if they have ever heard about people dying in their community. In their state? In the U.S.? In the world? Where did they see or hear about these people? Help the students find all the places named on a map of the world.

For Older Children

Have students work together to make a collage demonstrating human connection. They should include stories from newspapers and magazines where there has been an illness or a death and there are photos of people grieving and people comforting. Ask students to identify the people who helped those grieving in the articles. On the collage, add pictures of the ways people and organizations help those who are dying throughout the world.

Dramatic Arts/Poetry

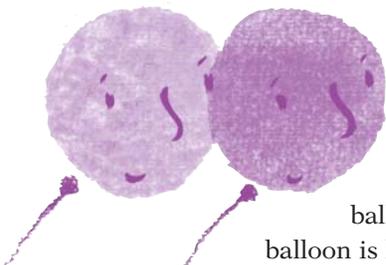
For Grades 4–8

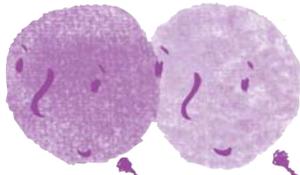
After reading and discussing the book, divide the children into groups of 2 to 4 and ask them to outline information about the purple balloon’s life, such as the balloon’s name, where he/she lives, goes to school, the members of the purple balloon’s family, and something about the purple balloon’s friends and their characteristics. Once the children have their outlines, have each group create a scene with dialogue about their story. Younger children will need adult direction with this assignment, but older children will be able to do this on their own. Have a box of hats and scarves for them to create their own costumes, or have them make masks for different characters. Once the scenes are completed, then have each group act out theirs. This assignment may take several days to complete.

As an alternative, encourage the students to select a picture from the book that particularly moves them. Then have them write a poem that expresses the content in the picture.

“This is an important book—simple, reassuring, and loving. It will be a perfect tool for opening discussion on a difficult subject for children, parents, teachers, students, and librarians.”

—Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu,
Nobel Peace Prize winner





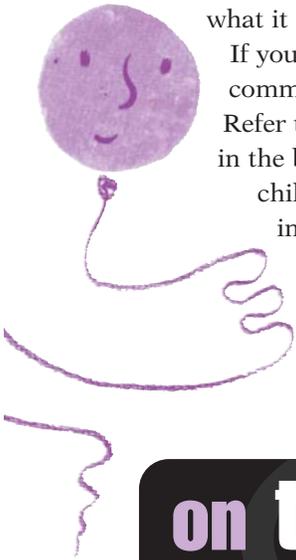
post-reading activity

Before students read *The Purple Balloon*, what did they think and feel about death and the sad reality of young children who are dying? How have they changed since reading and discussing the book? Upper elementary children are better served by a guided conversation that combines concepts of transformation along with the accompanying emotions people feel around illness and loss. From there, they could journal experiences and emotions too private to share. Give children the choice of whether to share it with their teacher.

beyond the book

Encourage the group to think about the book and what it says about helping someone who is dying.

If you read about someone dying in your community, what would you do now to help? Refer to the “What you can do to help” section in the back of the book and brainstorm with children what they might do as a class and individually to help a dying child during this passage in his/her life. The task is to help children to develop a vocabulary of compassion and actions to follow through with.



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about the author

Award-winning author and illustrator **Chris Raschka** was awarded the prestigious Caldecott Medal in 2006 for *The Hello, Goodbye Window*, written by Norton Juster. He has written more than 30 books for children, including *Mysterious Thelonus*, *Like Likes Like*, and *Waffle*, and received a 1993 Caldecott Honor for *Yo! Yes!*, which he wrote and illustrated. He is also the illustrator of *Good Sports: Rhymes about Running, Jumping, Throwing, and More*, by Jack Prelutsky. *Publishers Weekly* has called Raschka “one of the more original illustrators at work today.”



CHILDREN'S HOSPICE INTERNATIONAL

Children's Hospice International (CHI), a nonprofit organization founded in 1983, is paving the way for the establishment of children's hospice and related services worldwide.

www.CHOnline.org

This guide was developed in collaboration with Children's Hospice International (CHI) with John Golenski, EdD, Executive Director, George Mark Children's House; Rev. Judith Dunlop, M.A., M.Div., Program Director, George Mark Children's House; and Margaret Simpson, Volunteer, George Mark Children's House & Children's Books Director. For more information visit www.georgemark.org