

Book Reviews



If all the world were ...

Written by Joseph Coelho
and illustrated by
Allison Colpoys

2019
Frances Lincoln Children's Books
32 pages
Paperback £6.99
ISBN 978-1786036513

This is a beautifully illustrated book about a little girl and her much-loved Grandad and the cover, as well as Allison Colpoys' wonderful illustrations inside, are instantly appealing. An adult or small child looking through would, I think, be immediately drawn in to the fabulous kaleidoscope world of kites, tigers, peacocks, flowers, butterflies and shooting stars, depicted in warm bright shades of blue, lavender, orange, pink, peach, yellow and brown. The text, written by the poet and playwright Joseph Coelho, is rhythmic and imaginative; birthdays are replanted, cars are sent into deep space, laughs are like shooting stars, feelings are mixed and painted. The gentle repetition of 'If all the world were ...' and the progression through the seasons of the year show the layers of the loving relationship between them and the wisdom and kindness of Grandad.

However, there is a crucial gap in the content of this story. We know Grandad is aging, we know he needs to be made better, we hear about his childhood in India and see what he teaches and shows his granddaughter and how he encourages her to show and write her feelings, but then ... there is silence. Why are they cleaning out his room? Why does she need to write her feelings? What are her feelings? We know (because the publisher's insert tells us so) that he has died, but the words 'death' or 'dying' are never mentioned.

It's such a shame because this is so often what happens to children. A missing piece of the jigsaw and children are left to wonder and imagine. A couple of extra pages could have dealt with this. Yes, memories are important, as are keeping links and bonds with the person who has died, but children need to know the simple truth as well. What the child's feelings are about this, we can only imagine. No

adults offer any help in understanding what has happened. It's a beautiful book but a missed opportunity. ■

Judy Debenham

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Everyday madness: On grief, anger, loss and love

Lisa Appignanesi

2018
London: Fourth Estate
261 pages
Hardback £14.99
ISBN: 978-0-00-830030-2

Lisa Appignanesi's short yet expansive new book is a welcome addition to the literature which chronicles a specific death, and in doing so scrutinises the complex and challenging emotions associated with loss. In a deeply intimate and at times confessional tone, Appignanesi writes of her responses to the death of her partner of 32 years, John Forrester, the historian and philosopher of science and medicine. She says 'I hadn't anticipated the shock, the anger of grief, the way it stirs you up and chokes you on the worst, disorients, turns you into a raging being, drives you mad.' In the book's three sections ('Grieving', 'Losing' and 'Loving') she charts this 'madness', from making sense of his painful last words to her, to the love of her grandson whom she says 'transforms me into someone other, someone I rarely am, perhaps the best of me.'

It's an engaging and accessible text, despite its numerous literary references. Woven into this personal narrative are the voices of Cicero, Darwin, Proust, and Seneca, alongside Bowlby, Freud, Lacan and many others. This is perhaps unsurprising, given Appignanesi is the current Chair of the Royal Society of Literature, as well as a prolific writer of both fiction and non-fiction. The tension between an intellectual and emotional response to loss runs through the book 'knowing, though it helps, often can't save you from feeling, and the contradiction between the two [...] can create a condition akin to madness.' What she terms 'everyday madness' also

seems a nod to one of Freud's most famous works, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, which she examines in her text. On the 'everyday', Appignanesi brilliantly describes what is sometimes called the 'administrative burden' of death, stating 'the bureaucracy of death seems to want to compete with death itself in the horror stakes'. Anyone who has contacted a call centre following a death will recognise her sardonic observation that 'everyone was transformed into a vicar.'

Those working with bereaved people will know how often guilt and anger feature in the work of grief, and how unexpected and difficult to handle these emotions can be. Appignanesi understands that she is afraid of her own anger yet comes to the painful understanding that 'anger and loss are kin'. She also sees her own anger 'reflected and augmented' in the current political turmoil in our 'incandescent' country, suggesting that we are collectively in need of mothering but 'only Theresa and Donald turned up'.

Yet, grief must necessarily be both culturally located and personally experienced. And it seems significant that she talks of grieving, not mourning, suggesting an altogether more personal reckoning with loss. The

book's value to those working with bereavement will be as an example of how the loss of a partner affected one person. As such, comparisons to Joan Didion's *The year of magical thinking* or even C. S. Lewis's classic *A grief observed*, might seem inevitable, yet the works are marked more by their differences than their similarities. This then mirrors what we tell our clients—that there is no such thing as 'normal' grieving, yet our attachments will powerfully inform our responses. As Appignanesi reminds us 'We may be rational creatures, deeply individual, but loss illuminates just how readily the ever-uncertain fortress of reason crumbles, and how fundamentally our individuality is made up of our attachments to others'. ■

Jonathan Jones

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Didion, J. (2005). *The year of magical thinking*. London: Fourth Estate.

Freud, S. (1966). 'The psychopathology of everyday life' published in *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume VI. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.

Lewis, C. S. (1961). *A grief observed*. London: Faber and Faber.