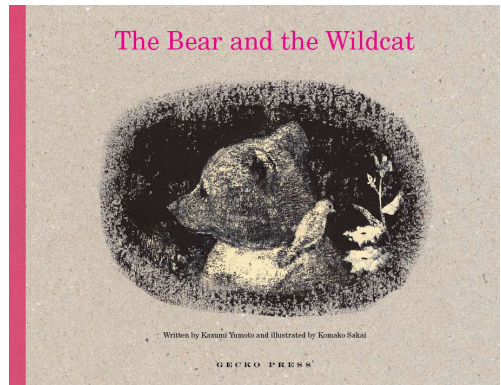


Teacher Notes

The Bear and the Wildcat

Kazumi Yumoto & Komako Sakai



Synopsis

When the little bird dies, his friend the bear is inconsolable. Full of grief, he locks himself in his house and ventures out again only when the smell of young spring grass blows through his window. He always carries a small box, which he opens for no one.

He meets a wildcat who understands his need to carry the box. As the cat plays on her violin, the bear remembers all the beauty he experienced with the little bird. Now he can bury his friend, keeping him alive in his memories and feelings.

Explaining the topic of grief and loss in a way that speaks to any age and with a quiet understanding of what it is like to lose someone you love, *The Bear and the Wildcat* shows a way through paralyzing grief and simultaneously tells the story of a hopeful new friendship.

Themes

This is a story about dealing with the death of a loved one. Bear finds healing by going through some of the stages of the grieving process: denial, anger, avoidance, depression, and finally acceptance.

It also shows how others react to grief. The animals don't acknowledge Bear's feelings, but Wildcat shows real empathy – he gives Bear time and space to reflect on the little bird. In the end the story demonstrates how friendship is vital in coping with death or other kinds of loss.

About the author and illustrator

Kazumi Yumoto has written several award-winning novels for older children, particularly on the theme of death. As a child she had a pet sparrow and when it died her mother gently explained death to her. Yumoto says, "Whenever I think of the power of words, I recall that night and cannot help but be grateful to my mother...Were it not for this incident, I might not have become a writer".

Illustrator Komako Sakai has also won international awards and is one of Japan's most popular children's illustrators. Her illustrations have also been used on CD covers and movie posters.

Resources for teachers
working with children
aged 5 to 10+ years

Curriculum areas:
English literature
Social & emotional learning

Themes:

- Death of a loved one
- Grief
- Friendship
- Loss
- Hope
- Emotions/feelings



GECKO
PRESS

FEELINGS

→ **ASK** As a class, discuss the following questions.

- How does Bear feel at the start?
- How does he show his feelings?
- Why does he say “If only I could go back to yesterday morning?”
- Why does Bear sit at home in the dark for days?
- How do his feelings change when he goes outside?
- Why?
- How do the memories of little bird help?
- What does “we’ll always be friends” mean?

→ **DO** Make an illustrated chart showing Bear’s changing feelings during the story. Talk about times when you have felt like Bear.

FRIENDS

→ **ASK** As a class, discuss the following questions.

- Why do the other animals frown when they see the little bird?
- Why do they tell Bear to forget the bird?
- What “surprising” thing does Wildcat say to Bear about the little bird?
- Why is it so helpful to Bear to feel understood?
- What kind of activities does he remember doing with the bird?

→ **DO** Make a poster showing the qualities of a best friend.

PETS

→ **ASK** In pairs, discuss the following questions and report back to the class.

- Have you ever had a pet die? Talk about how you felt at the time.
- What special ways do you have of remembering the pet? (eg. ceremonies, a grave, photos).

→ **DO** Write down any questions you have about death.

WRITING

→ **DO** The story jumps into the past as the Bear remembers the little bird. Try to recall your very first memory and write a description of the scene.

→ **DO** Write a short story about an adventure that Bear and Wildcat have after they team up.

ILLUSTRATIONS

→ **ASK** As a class, discuss the use of light and dark in the pictures.

- How does the black help set the mood?
- Which scenes use the most black background?
- When is color introduced, and what is the effect?
- Why do you think color is used in some scenes?
- How do you think these pictures were created?

→ **DO** Create your own illustrations using print-making techniques. For example, cardboard shapes and paint on coarse paper. Paint your own version of a scene you like.

MUSIC

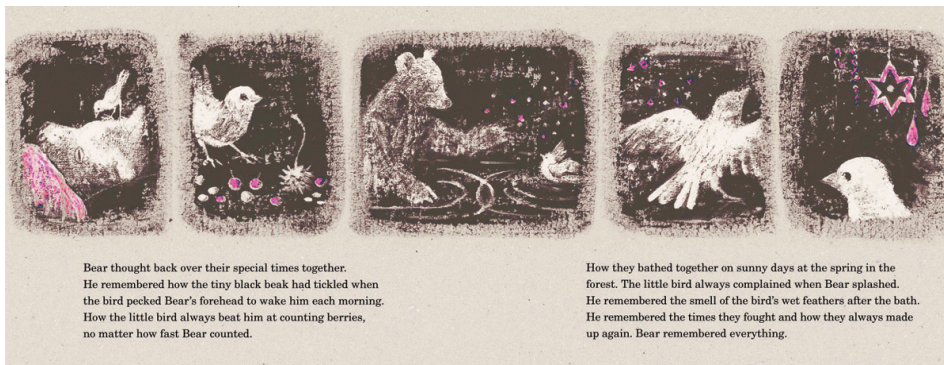
Music has an important place in this story: it helps Bear overcome his sadness and gives him something new to learn.

→ **DO** Use a tambourine and a stringed instrument to compose a short tune or rhythm for Bear and Wildcat.

→ **DO** Find a piece of music online that you think Bear and Wildcat would play.

What genres would they play?

This book was first written in Japanese. Can you find a piece of Japanese music that you think they would play?



For more information

United States contact: Kathleen Clarke, kclarke@lernerbooks.com
United Kingdom contact: Louise Corcoran, LCorcoran@bouncemarketing.co.uk
Australia contact: Walker Books Australia, educationwba@walkerbooks.com.au
New Zealand contact: Sandra Noakes, sandra.noakes@harpercollins.co.nz
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