

Finding Jingga and Other Stories: Creating Children’s Picture Books Exploring Disenfranchised Grief

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ABSTRACT

This paper revolves around disenfranchised grief in children. Disenfranchised grief refers to a loss that is not acknowledged, not socially accepted, and not discussed in public which makes people think that they have no right to grieve that loss. With children’s picture books as the chosen creative form and adventure as the chosen genre, this paper presents what causes children to grieve and how they process this grief. The stories depict Putra, Gwen, Daniel, Deborah, and Gabriel experiencing disenfranchised grief because their attachment to people or things they care about is broken, regardless of how trivial it is. Onward, they process grief by going through John Bowlby and Colin Murray Parkes’s four phases of grieving namely numbness, yearning and searching, disorganization, and re-organization to seize acceptance.

Keywords: acceptance, adventure, attachment, children’s picture book, disenfranchised grief, four phases of grieving, John Bowlby

INTRODUCTION

Disenfranchised grief refers to a loss that is not acknowledged, not socially accepted, and not discussed in public which makes people think that they have no right to grieve that loss (Doka, 2017). Some common forms of disenfranchised grief faced by children on a daily basis include losing a best friend due to a school transfer, losing security blankets or favorite toys, losing pets, etc. Those losses may seem trivial to adults but they are significant to children. “Children, like adults, form all sorts of attachments that are severed in all kinds of ways. When these attachments are broken, they feel grief” (Doka, 2017, p.294). The issue here, however, is not the loss or grief that children encounter, but rather society’s response to it—in this regard, the parents or primary caregivers (Doka, 2017; Lenhardt, 1997).

Adults see children as naive, unable to understand the loss, or as demonstrating grief in ways that are confusing such as stomach ache and thumb-sucking (Doka, 2017). Young children who are pretty much the mini version of adults whose capacity to grasp the grieving process is still developing cannot be the reason for parents or caregivers to dismiss a child’s sense of grief (Lenhardt, 1997). Because the disenfranchised loss and grief are real for kids even if it is not necessarily related to death. “For children, it takes courage to recognize and cope with uncomfortable feelings” (Doka, 2017, p.296). This topic of disenfranchised grief in children is chosen because it is important for children and adults alike to realize that no matter how small the children’s broken attachment is, it is still a big thing for them. Children are entitled to respond to it and receive help from others too.

This writing is interested in discovering what causes children to experience disenfranchised grief and how they process it. Story readers—kids and parents or caregivers—would hopefully be aware that grieving over little precious things is normal, and that expressing one’s grief is necessary as well.

Children's picture books are chosen as the form because they help children see their imagination come alive (Paul, 2018). Young children are known for their top-level imagination and when writers can be on the same level of imagination as they are, then it would be easy to keep children turning the pages or to make them read and reread the stories. Not only that, picture books are easy to read aloud (Paul, 2018). Since the vocabulary is on a basic level, the words are not difficult to pronounce and children can effortlessly complete the whole story without losing their attention (Paul, 2018). More importantly, picture books can give context for difficult subjects. The story and illustration delivered are mediums that help answer a certain question that children have, surely in an uncomplicated style (McMurdie, n.d.). By initiating the discussion, picture books can reduce awkwardness as well as offer emotional experiences between the caregiver and the child (McMurdie, n.d.).

These children's picture book stories are aimed at children aged 6-8 years old or school-age kids. At that age, children already have more access to the outside world other than their families, and Glass revealed in his research that children suffer a variety of losses that are not correlated to death (1991, as cited in Lendhardt, 1997). Ann Marie C. Lenhardt, a professor at Canisius College's School of Education and Human Services in Buffalo, New York, also argued that disenfranchised grief affects kids in schools at all degrees, from elementary to secondary (1997).

All children's stories featured in this work are under the adventure genre. It is a fiction genre that puts the main character on a journey with a special mission and hurdles that stand in the way (Malatesta, 2019). Because the whole idea in this creative work is around disenfranchised grief, it would be better not to put all the focus only on the feeling of grief itself but rather on how we combine the thrill and the disenfranchised grief in such a manner to construct stories that are compelling for children yet still able to transfer the meaning. In addition, the adventure genre is flexible enough to be matched up with other genres such as fantasy, science fiction, and action (Malatesta, 2019).

For the theoretical framework, John Bowlby's attachment theory is used to show why an individual grieves while the four phases of grief by John Bowlby and Colin Murray Parkes is used to understand how children process their disenfranchised grief.

John Bowlby, a British developmental psychologist and psychiatrist, suggested that human beings are inclined to construct intense affectionate bonds with others which will create strong emotional reactions when those bonds are broken or threatened (Worden, 2018). In other words, when there is a separation or loss of the attachment figures, it will result in grief (Fraley & Shaver, 2018; Harris, 2020). Bowlby's early project as a post-war advisor to the World Health Organization (WHO) revealed that young children need to form close emotional bonds with their parents or caregivers, especially mothers (Klass, 1988).

This condition then creates attachment behavior—a normal behavior in children since it stems from the need for safety and security and is as simple as what happens to someone when a particular behavioral system is initiated (Klass, 1988; Worden, 2018). Infants will feel secure—cheerfully playing and engaging with their surroundings—when their attachment figure is within their reach and reasonably responsive (Fraley & Shaver, 2018). On the other hand, they will encounter anxiety along with robust protest when the attachment figure seems to be unavailable and passive (Fraley & Shaver, 2018).

Children can also build attachments with inanimate items such as stuffed animals, dolls, blankets, or even toothbrushes (Gabillet, 2020; Yamaguchi & Moriguchi, 2020). These items are then referred to as attachment objects—things to which children attach themselves (Yamaguchi & Moriguchi, 2020). Although such items cannot bring support, direction, or affection, their

presence offers kids a sense of security and serves as a soother (Rutter, 1985 as cited in Fortuna et al., 2014; Yamaguchi & Moriguchi, 2020). As a result, broken or lost attachment objects which are designed to relieve anxiety can influence children to grieve.

Afterward, Bowlby's research with children and their mothers conveyed that separation, either temporary or permanent loss, would generate grief responses (Mallon, 2008; Martell, 2011). Based on that premise, Colin Murray Parkes, a colleague of John Bowlby, elaborated Bowlby's attachment theory into four phases of grieving (Bowlby & Parkes, 1970 as cited in Vasquez, 2021):

1. Numbness
This is the early stage of grief where one is overwhelmed by shock and denial. They do not want to believe that loss has taken place.
2. Yearning and searching
This is the stage where a child longs for the presence of the attached figure. The grief may come in the form of crying, sighing, anger, and anxiety.
3. Disorganization
In this phase, a child is full of hopelessness. There is not a single thing that is sensible anymore.
4. Re-organization
This is the phase where a child begins to restore hope and regenerate the sense of purpose in life.

This paper will design the story of Putra, Gwen, Daniel, Deborah, and Gabriel. All of these characters share a similarity in which they have just lost something valuable in their lives albeit seems trivial by others' standards. Then, it causes the five of them to experience disenfranchised grief. Wishing for the return of the lost one, they process their grief in order to cope with and rectify the situation. Finally, they either reconnect with the thing they lost or realize that they are strong enough to be where they are and accept the loss.

CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

Theme

The theme of these children's picture books is that grieving over simple things is normal because who or what children have lost holds a huge impact on their lives. To implement the theme, all five main characters will show the reasons why they are grieving and have to go through difficulties during their journeys to find what they lost where they also realize that their lives will never be the same.

Plot

Since the creative works come as a series of five books, five different plots are created.

I Am the Class Captain!

The story begins when Putra is replaced by Bella as the new class captain. He is shocked at first since the position meant a lot to him but then is eager to prove to himself and to others that he is a better class captain than Bella, which constitutes the rising action. First, Putra tries to take a roll call for his friends. However, Bella is faster than him and has done it already. Next, he wants to lead the singing in English class, but Bella already stands in front of the class. In art class, the teacher asks the class captain to stick the drawings onto the wall. It makes Putra

and Bella fight over who is more entitled to do the job. On a zoo visit, Putra refuses to listen to Bella and ends up putting his friends in danger as they get roared at by a bear. The climax is when Putra realizes that he has been selfish in wrongly trying to retain his former position. The story ends with Putra accepting that his role as a class captain is now over.

Finding Jingga

In the beginning, Gwen is having difficulty finding Jingga, her badminton racket from her *ah-kong* or grandpa. She tries to remember where she put it, including by tracing some places she and Pa visited a few days ago, commencing the rising action. First, Gwen goes to the electronic store. There Gwen sees an orange thing and assumes it is Jingga. Turns out, it is a portable speaker. Next, she visits the park. There she spots another orange thing in the bushes. Turns out, it is a curled-up snake. Gwen then goes to her favorite cafe and hopes to find Jingga there. She cannot find it inside and decides to check out the trash. She notices another orange thing in the trash. When she wants to reach it, a mouse jumps at her. That orange thing is not even Jingga but a waffle. The climax is when Gwen knows that she does not want a new racket her Pa is trying to offer as a replacement. It's either Jingga or nothing. The story ends with Gwen finding Jingga at the back of the car and being sheepishly grateful.

Daniel's Rooster Log

On Monday, Daniel's pet rooster, Bimo, suddenly disappears. Daniel waits for Bimo and is positive that he will be back. On Tuesday, Bimo's coop is still empty. Daniel does not feel like doing anything else other than waiting for Bimo to come home. On Wednesday, as the rising action picks up, Daniel begins his investigation but to no avail. On Thursday, Daniel notices a toddy cat's tracks near the coop. So, he starts following the tracks up the hill to the durian orchard. His brush with danger are when Daniel is chased by a furious mother duck and when he finds the toddy cat's hollow. Zero result. On Friday, Daniel feels lonely. On Saturday, he hears a rooster and thinks it must be Bimo. Yet it is just the sound from the television. The climax is when Daniel looks through a photo album and sees a photo of him holding Bimo in his arms, reminding himself of the deep bond of friendship between them. On Sunday, Daniel can accept his new reality without Bimo.

Deborah

The story starts with Deborah sulking when she and Emma, her fluffy shark doll, see her Mom and Dad on TV fighting villains. Deborah's parents are superheroes busy protecting the city, so they rarely spend quality time with their daughter. That is why Deborah creates Oscar, a virtual assistant to keep her and Emma company. Deborah longs to be a superhero so that she can always be with her parents. However, she has no superpowers. Then the rising action starts with her taking some steps to become a superhero. The first step is building a lair. So, she and Oscar sketch a lair and wish to show it to Dad. Yet he ignores it. The next day, Deborah, Emma, and Oscar go to the top of a skyscraper to build a lair there. When the lair is almost done, Mom comes. Yet she is there to fight the bad guys, not to see the lair, and the fighting ends up destroying Deborah's lair. Deborah almost gives up all her efforts until her parents need her help. The climax is when Deborah saves her parents from a grasshopper monster using her programming skill. The story ends with Deborah and her parents becoming a team to protect the city.

Gabriel's Game Boy

The beginning kicks in with a rising action when Gabriel arrives at the first antique shop searching for his Game Boy which his mom gave away, thinking the console is outdated for the year 2095 (exposition and point of attack). The Game Boy means a lot to him for all the fun he had playing with his father. However, he cannot find it there. He then teleports to the second antique shop but he encounters some danger when his device glitches and sends him to different places. So, he uses a jetpack instead. At the second antique shop, his Game Boy is not there as

well because the shop owner has sold it to a gentleman from far far away. Gabriel then loses all the hope he has been trying to retain and cries his heart out until his mom comes, apologizes, and takes him to an exhibition to cheer him up. The climax is when Gabriel learns that the latest addition to the World's Gaming Museum is his Game Boy. The story ends with Gabriel letting go of his Game Boy, knowing that, now it is in the museum, more people can benefit from it and that he can always visit it whenever he misses it.

Characters

Main Characters:

Putra, 7 years old, has fair skin and a mushroom blonde haircut. Putra is an only child. He is a former class captain too. Putra is a person who is passionate and really cares about what he does. However, he is selfish sometimes. Putra's goal is to prove to himself and to others that he is a better class captain than Bella.

Gwen, 6 years old, has fair skin, slanted eyes, and short dark brown hair. She was very close to her *ah-kong*. Before he passed away a year ago, he gave Gwen a badminton racket. Later, she became attached to it. So, when her racket is missing, she is grieving but determined to get it back. Gwen is the type of person who dares to take risks no matter how tricky the challenges are in front of her. She is inquisitive and solid in her choices. Her weaknesses are that she is forgetful and stubborn.

Daniel, 8 years old, has a honey skin tone and a mid-length black haircut. Daniel has a pet rooster named Bimo who has been with him since Daniel was little. When he loses Bimo, he tries everything he can to be able to see his pet rooster again. Daniel is an imaginative kid. An optimistic boy who does not easily panic. Even so, Daniel is clumsy.

Deborah, 8 years old, has long curly black hair and an almond skin tone. She has a fluffy shark doll named Emma and a virtual assistant called Oscar. Deborah's parents are superheroes who pay little attention to their only child. Thus, Deborah's goal is to be near her parents and feel their love again. Deborah is smart, technology-savvy, and brave but soft-hearted.

Gabriel, 7 years old, has fair skin and a quiff ginger haircut. Gabriel loves his Game Boy because Dad gave it to him and they usually play with it as well. That is why his mission is to find his Game Boy. Gabriel is confident and polite. However, he has a tendency to be avoidant when things are out of hand.

Supporting characters:

Bella, 7 years old, is Putra's classmate and the new class captain. She is reliable, disciplined, and compassionate.

Deborah's parents, superheroes. Her dad, 35 years old, is Captain Elemental who can control water, earth, fire, air, and metal. While her mom, 34 years old, is Bolt Girl who has incredible speed. Nevertheless, they are not living a balanced life. They are obsessed with being good superheroes for the community and even spend the majority of their time outside rather than with their daughter.

Gabriel's mom, 33 years old, is a humble woman. She is willing to admit her mistake and apologize to her son.

Conflict

The stories predominantly display internal conflict or Man versus Self. It is a conflict in which the main characters have to find answers for difficulties or struggles within themselves

(Paul, 2018). All of the main characters mainly have to confront their own feelings—as part of the grieving process—which prevent them from accomplishing their missions.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper is showing what causes the grief and how to process it through children's picture book stories. First, disenfranchised grief appears to have several causes, but all of those are essentially children's broken attachments towards people or things they care about. In the first story, Putra grieves because he cannot do what he loves doing as a class captain since someone else has taken over his position. In my second story, Gwen feels miserable because she lost *Jingga*, her badminton racket which reminds her of her badminton journey with her *ah-kong*. In the story titled "Daniel's Rooster Log," the main character, Daniel, becomes confused and upset when his pet rooster suddenly disappears one morning. Meanwhile, Deborah in the fourth story spends much of her time at home alone with her shark doll and virtual assistant. The fact that Deborah's parents are too preoccupied with protecting the city as superheroes has become the main reason their bonds are severed. In the fifth story, Gabriel longs for his Game Boy—after his mom has donated it to someone from an antique shop—which he and his dad usually play with.

Second, in order for children to accept their loss, they need to process grief through Bowlby and Parkes's four phases of grief as reflected in all five stories. For Putra, his grieving process starts from the first phase, numbness. Putra sits in silence all day because he cannot believe that Bella is the new class captain. As a result, in the yearning and searching phase, he attempts to outperform Bella but always fails. Then Putra enters the disorganization phase in which he believes that he will not become the next class captain after endangering his friends at the zoo. In the re-organization stage, Putra achieves acceptance when he finally realizes that he has been selfish the entire time trying to hold on to his former role.

Gwen begins grieving from the yearning and searching phase. In search of *Jingga*, Gwen returns to certain sites in the city she visited a few days earlier. However, she cannot find it in any of them. She also shows numbness when she denies *Jingga's* disappearance. Next, the disorganization occurs when Gwen feels hopeless and guilty for not taking good care of her *ah-kong's* gift. She eventually comes to the re-organization phase and gains acceptance as she discovers *Jingga* at the back of her car.

While for Daniel, he has a complete grieving phase. On the first and second days, Daniel is in a state of numbness. This is reflected in his flat feeling and lack of interest in the things he usually enjoys. Afterward, Daniel seeks his pet rooster, Bimo, around the neighborhood on the third and fourth days. This is the yearning and searching phase. The following stage is disorganization. Daniel has exhausted every option to figure out where Bimo is, but on the fifth and sixth days, he is tired already. The seventh day is re-organization where Daniel learns to live without Bimo by his side.

Next, Deborah's grieving journey starts with yearning and searching. She attempts to prove herself to Mom and Dad that she is a superhero. A hint of Deborah's numbness is the acknowledgment how the feeling of not being her parents' priority is something familiar although it still annoys her. After some setbacks, she comes to the disorganization stage in which she is ready to give up from convincing her parents. The re-organization takes place when Deborah becomes part of the superhero team after rescuing her parents from a monster.

Last, Gabriel's grief is depicted from stage two, yearning and searching. He looks through some antique shops for his lost Game Boy. Nevertheless, there is no outcome. Gabriel

becomes disorganized after he learns that he is too late. He has no chance since a gentleman from far far away has purchased his Game Boy. Gabriel also shares a glimpse of numbness as he told himself earlier that his Game Boy would soon be back to him, a hope that he now realizes has crumbled. In the re-organization phase, Gabriel makes peace with the fact that his Game Boy is no longer his and now belongs to a museum.

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