

Patricia MacLachlan

Steven Kellogg

Snowflakes Fall

A guide to speaking with children about life,
renewal, grief, and memory



A snowflake. A child.

No two the same—All beautiful.



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*From Newbery Medalist Patricia MacLachlan
and Award-Winning Artist Steven Kellogg*



Ages 3-7
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About the Book

Longtime friends Patricia MacLachlan and Steven Kellogg were moved to create *Snowflakes Fall* as a gift for children everywhere and to the community of Sandy Hook and Newtown, Connecticut. Kellogg lived in Sandy Hook for 35 years with his family, where he was an active member of the community.

Newbery medalist MacLachlan's lyrical prose masterfully works on different levels. The text opens with a focus on the individual beauty of each snowflake and connects it to the uniqueness of every child. The book can be read as a celebration of change and growth in nature. It also has a deeper meaning, one that comforts with the reminder of nature's renewal.

Kellogg paints scenes of lively children playing in a snow-covered landscape filled with snow forts and snowmen. Kellogg tucked his own home into one of the spreads reminding us of the deeply personal nature of his work.

As the book progresses so do the seasons—snowflakes melt, rain falls, and flowers bloom again. Twenty snow angels take flight at the end of the book leaving us with a message of hope.

Our World

Just like each snowflake, each person is unique. *Snowflakes Fall* is a book that can introduce individuality, diversity, and acceptance to a very young audience. Below are activity ideas for celebrating the beauty of our world with the children in our lives.

Snowflakes

- Wilson Bentley discovered that “no two snowflakes are alike.” Introduce his life and work to children. The official website at SnowflakeBentley.com is a great place to get started.
- If you have access to falling snow, have children collect snowflakes on a black flannel board and look at them with a magnifying glass. After making observations, they can draw their snowflakes and classify them according to the seven basic shapes. If you do not have access to snow, assist children in cutting out paper snowflakes keeping the shapes in mind.
- Discuss the patterns and symmetry of snowflakes, which are a truly amazing part of nature. Have each child make his or her own unique snowflake either with paper and pencil, or folded paper and scissors.

Fingerprints

- Like snowflakes, no two fingerprints are exactly the same. Have children create animals, creatures, people, and more by making fingerprints on paper with stamp pads and embellishing them with a fine felt tip marker.
- Have children take a closer look at their own fingerprints under a magnifying glass. Encourage them to examine every line looking for patterns and variations of patterns. Then have them create line drawings on paper to represent the details of their fingerprint. These can be outlined in pencil and traced with black felt tip marker.

Animal Tracks

- Have children (ages 7–10) do an Internet search to learn about the different tracks of the animals named in *Snowflakes Fall* (birds, rabbit, and bobcat) as well as the tracks of local animals (snakes, deer, birds, cats, or fox). Compare different wildlife tracks and classify animals according to their tracks. Create a game where children (ages 3–7) are asked to match pictures of animals to their tracks.
- Take a leisurely walk with children to discover, observe, and investigate animal tracks in the snow, sand, or dirt based on local geography. They can record the animal tracks by taking photographs, drawing in observation journals, or creating molds using plaster of paris.

The Cycle of Life

Snowflakes Fall portrays nature's life cycle through images and descriptions that depict a series of beginnings and endings. Below are ideas to initiate the conversation about the cycle of life and death. Oftentimes looking at the life cycle in nature allows for a gentler introduction to the subject of death.

- Plant a garden with children. This will allow them to experience the life cycle of plants, and to comprehend the cycle of life and death. They will learn all about life from beginning to end—from seed to compost. Visit KidsGardening.org for ideas.
- Talk about the seasons in the sequence of the year. Have children describe, compare, and contrast each of the seasons. What are significant events in their lives in each season of the year? Check out the video about why we have seasons at BrainPop.com/science/weather/seasons.
- Investigate the four stages of the life of a butterfly: egg; caterpillar (larvae); chrysalis (pupa); and butterfly (imago). How does each stage serve a different purpose in the life of an insect? Visit KidsButterfly.org to get started.
- Explore the life cycle of a frog: tadpoles hatch from eggs and have the appearance of fish. As the tadpole grows it develops legs. After two to four months of development, the tadpole becomes a froglet. The legs are fully developed and the tail is still present. After four to six months, the adult frog no longer has a tail and is breathing with fully developed lungs.
- Research the cycle of water. The water on earth has been recycled for millions of years. It goes through processes of evaporation, precipitation, and percolation. Water may be found in liquid, solid, and gaseous states. It falls to the earth in the form of rain, snow, sleet, or hail. Eventually the water evaporates up to the clouds and falls again as rain or snow. The same water is used on the earth over and over again.

Helping Your Child Heal from Loss:

How to Use *Snowflakes Fall* to Talk with Your Child About Life and Death

There is nothing more tender, sacred, and vulnerable than a grieving child. Whether a child is grieving the death of a pet, grandparent, parent, or friend, this is an opportunity for a child to learn, to wonder, to question, and to feel. We can best support a grieving child by listening deeply and responding gently. We can learn so much about life and death from the deep intuitive wisdom of children. Reading *Snowflakes Fall* with a child could prompt questions and conversation about this difficult subject.

As a parent, it is important to explain the cycle of life to your child before your child is faced with the death of a pet, family member, friend, classmate, or a tragedy in the community. Parents often choose to shelter their children from tragedy and loss. However, the more children learn to view death as a natural part of life, the more prepared they are for facing loss when it hits closer to home. It's not a matter of creating fear that bad things may happen, but building resiliency so when bad things do happen, your child has the capacity to cope and manage his or her feelings.

An effective way to initiate such conversations is by reading quality children's literature about the cycles of life. Many children's books address the cycles of days, weather, seasons, plants, animals, and even people. There are children's stories that address natural and unnatural causes of death and tragic events. *Snowflakes Fall* addresses all of these topics by honoring the natural cycles and seasons of life.

Read *Snowflakes Fall* with your child, pausing to notice details in the illustrations and to ask thoughtful questions. Allow your child time to reflect and respond.

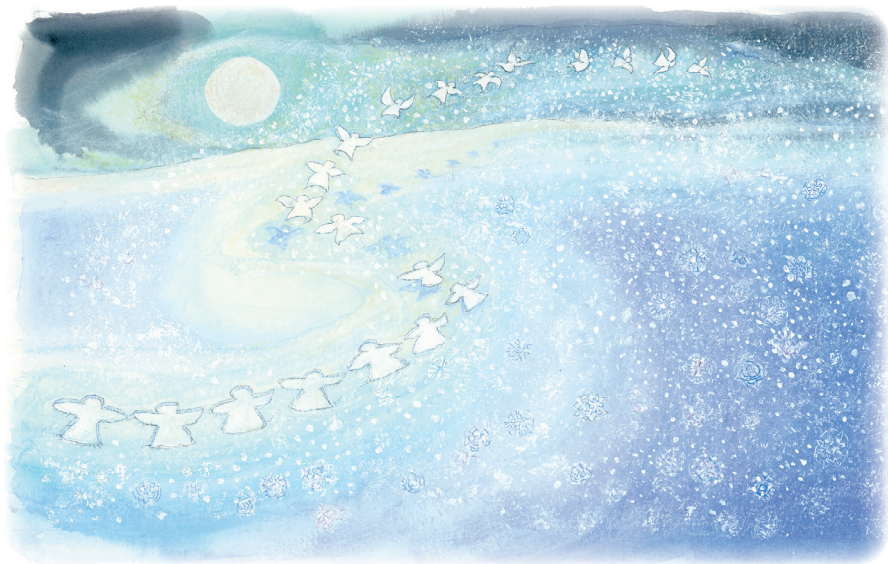
Suggested questions:

- What do you think this story is about?
- Are there other meanings behind the story?
- What did you notice about the illustrations?
- How did you feel when you read the story?
- Did the story remind you of someone or something?
- This is a story about change. It is often said that the only constant is change. From changing seasons to cycles of life, everything around us is constantly growing and changing. What is something in your life that has changed?

Nurturing Your Child During Times of Grief

During times of loss, sadness, and grief, adults need to be present and to create a safe and supportive environment for children to process their feelings. Grief is complicated. It is not just one emotion, it is many emotions sometimes felt at once. Ask open-ended questions and listen closely to your child's answers. This will help you to know your child's level of understanding and/or stage of grief. Often parents try to protect their children from the truth about a death or tragic event. Much like adults, children need honest and factual information. They need answers to their questions in order to make sense of the world. When you pay attention and listen deeply, you can meet your child where he is and give him the knowledge and emotional support he needs.

By asking and answering questions you are teaching your child about your religious, spiritual, and scientific beliefs about life and death. Your explanation of death can be as scientific or spiritual as you like. Sometimes parents have different beliefs from one another, and this should be viewed as an opportunity to guide children to form their own unique opinions. Sometimes children catch us off guard with questions that we cannot easily answer. It's okay to respond honestly by saying: "That's a great question. I need time to think about a great answer." Take time to answer thoughtfully rather than creating myths or lies to explain away something that is difficult to discuss.



Memories

And when the flowers bloom

The children remember snowflakes

And we remember the children—

No two the same—All beautiful.

As a family, you will find meaningful ways to honor the deceased by sharing memories of happy times together, retelling stories, and viewing photos. This is an important part of the grief process. Discuss and plan how to honor the memory of your loved one on anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, and other special family occasions when that person's absence is deeply felt. One way to honor the memory of your loved one is to create a memory book or a memory box. Make a scrapbook together of photos and stories to remember the loved one who died or collect reminders of the deceased (photos, mementos, poems, art, or personal belongings) in a special box. You may choose to honor the memory of your lost one by planting flowers, a tree, or a rosebush. You may have a special place or gravesite to visit to remember your loved one. As a family, you will develop your own unique rituals to honor the memory of your loved one.

Resources

Children's Grief Education Association
ChildGrief.org/childgrief.htm

The Compassionate Friends
CompassionateFriends.org

Dougy Center: The National Center for
Grieving Children and Families
Dougy.org

The Fred Rogers Company: Dealing with Death
FredRogers.org/FRC/par-death.html



★ “This is a graceful homage to the inevitable seasons of life and remembrances of loved ones and times past. . . . Children will feel the healing power of this hopeful, uplifting book.”—*Booklist*, Starred

★ “Adults can share this book to address tragic events, discuss grief and the recovery process, and remind children of the precious beauty of life.”
—*School Library Journal*, Starred

In honor of the community
of Sandy Hook and
Newtown, Connecticut,
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Prepared by Laura Barbour, M.A., a professional elementary school counselor
at Stafford Primary School in West Linn, Oregon.

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