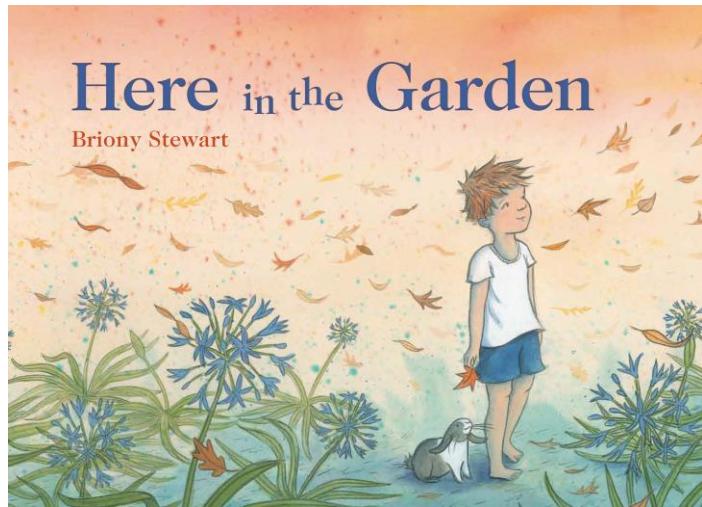


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HERE IN THE GARDEN

Briony Stewart



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

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SYNOPSIS

A young boy who is mourning the loss of his pet rabbit finds himself returning to the garden in which they shared so many precious times together. He begins to realise that being in the place that brings him closer to his memories helps him to feel better.

Here in the Garden is a tenderly written text that deals with the themes of loss, love and friendship. The passing of the seasons and the boy's reflections help readers understand that with time, the heart begins to heal and that memories are forever.

THEMES

Grief and Loss:

- The boy misses his pet rabbit. He mourns its death.
- Reflecting on happy times and visiting special places can help deal with grief.
- With time, healing occurs.

Love and Friendship:

- The boy and his rabbit share love and friendship.

Poetry:

- Poetic devices such as imagery, personification and similes are used in the text.

WRITING STYLE

Here in the Garden is written in first person, present tense and is appropriate for younger readers as well as those wishing to explore the themes of grief, love and friendship. It combines beautifully nuanced poetic language with a simple structure that explores the healing nature of time and happy memories.

STUDY NOTES

- Explore and discuss Briony Stewart's use of figurative language, such as imagery, personification, similes and alliteration. How do these add to the text? Examples include:
 - 'The wind is raking through the falling leaves'
 - 'We chatted and hummed like the birds'
 - 'My breath is making mist on the rain-dotted windows'
 - 'Watch the garden turn deep and dark and green'
 - 'Things were pushing their way up through the ground'
 - 'Flowers are bursting and the bees are buzzing'
 - 'The sun's streaming over my skin and under my feet'
 - 'The sky burned every shade of blue'
 - 'The sun sank down'

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- Examine the way in which the illustrations add another layer of meaning to the written text. Why is it important to ‘read pictures’ in conjunction with words in picture books?
- How does the author show the passing of time in *Here in the Garden*? What connection is there between time and the boy overcoming his feelings of loss and sadness?
- Why do you think the book begins and finishes with autumn?
- Discuss the symbolism of the dandelions on the end papers? Why use these flowers? What do they represent? Similarly, discuss the leaves on the title page and again at the end of the book. Why have the colours of the leaves changed?
- Devise your own figurative language to match each season of the year. What memories and images do you associate with summer, spring, autumn and winter?
- Track the emotions on the boy’s face as the text progresses. When do you first notice he is beginning to heal? What is it that brings a small smile to his face?
- Discuss that grief is something that takes time to process. Invite a counsellor to speak about handling grief and loss.
- Have you ever lost a pet or someone close to you? Write a reflection of how this felt. What strategies did you use to help deal with that loss? What advice would you give a friend dealing with grief?
- Use ideas from texts such as *The Grief Book: Strategies for Young People* by Elizabeth Vercoe and Kerry Abramowski to help explore the concept of grief.
- The colour yellow appears throughout the text, such as the watering can, the umbrella and the daffodils. Why has this colour been included on these pages? What does yellow represent? What do daffodils symbolise? How are these motifs used to tie the themes of the text together?
- *Here in the Garden* is as much about rebirth and new life as it is about the loss of life. Find examples in the text that show this notion of hope and rebirth. Why include these themes in a book about loss?
- Compare the two page openings in which the boy’s backyard is framed against a white background. Why are there leaves floating outside of the frame of the backyard on the second (‘In the memories, in the garden, in my heart’), but not on the first (‘We’d dash over puddles ...’)? Why has the author/illustrator chosen to illustrate these two pages like this? Discuss the way in which the boy’s grief is ‘locked up’ in the first image, but is ‘set free’ in the second.
- Write a reflection about the page opening in which the boy goes outside and finds his rabbit. What is happening on this page? What is the author

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telling us about the importance of happy memories and using these to help us heal? Why are the images translucent?

- Why is the boy looking upwards on the last page? What does this tell us about his personal journey?
- Briony Stewart has said that ‘you can always find your way back to a loved one through your heart and memories’. Discuss the way in which she has demonstrated this in *Here in the Garden*.
- View the book trailer for *Here in the Garden* – <http://youtu.be/zzehanW-q3c>. Discuss how simply the synopsis of the book has been presented in the trailer. Try writing your own simple synopses of one of Briony’s other books such as *The Red Wheelbarrow* or *Kumiko and the Dragon*.
- Visit Briony Stewart’s website www.brionystewart.com.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

Here in the Garden deals with the feeling of loss or longing for an absent loved one. It’s more about grief than death, though it’s a gentle introduction to the concept. In the book the garden is an allegory for life, with death and change being part of the natural order of things. It looks at the idea that a loved one is never really gone, when you can still find them in your heart, and remember them in the places that were special to them.

The book was inspired by one of my pets. Her name was Winston, or Winnie because it turned out she was a girl. She was a rabbit, my studio companion, the first pet my partner and I ever owned together. I would read my stories aloud to her, and sometimes I felt that she was already a character from a book, just like Peter Rabbit or the Velveteen Rabbit. Buying a baby rabbit changed my daily routine almost instantly; I spent more time in the garden for a start. I learned about plants, if they were poisonous to eat or not. I would find things to do in the garden to keep our rabbit company. I’d watch her watching the breeze blow and the leaves fall and responding instinctively to every sound and smell.

One day, Winston died. It hurt me terribly, and I didn’t want to go back to how life was before she was in it. I woke up one morning and opened the back door only to realize that I didn’t have to leave it open all day. There was no reason to be in the garden anymore except that she had taught me to love the garden, to love nature. As painful as it was, she also taught me one of the most important lessons of all – grief. It came late in life for me, and I knew I was lucky for that. It’s not the shock, the anger or the guilt that hurts the most, it’s not even the desire to be able to change things. Most of all its in the days and weeks and months afterwards, the simple act of missing somebody. That’s the voice you can’t silence.

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Though the book is open about who the narrator is, who they are missing, and where the loved one has gone, it seemed fitting to match the illustrations to my personal experience. The rabbit is my rabbit, the boy is my husband, and the sadness is my sadness. I hope though that the pictures are still open enough to be an allegory. This book is for anyone, anywhere, who is missing someone – especially if that someone liked gardens.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

The daughter of an artist and a biologist, Briony Stewart was always fascinated with the natural world and the magic in everyday life. Shortly after completing a double degree in Fine Art and Creative Writing at university, Briony published her first written and illustrated book, *Kumiko and the Dragon*. Briony was the 2012 winner of the Queensland Literary Awards Children's Book Awards for *Kumiko and the Shadow Catchers*, and has spent time working as a children's author in the UK. Briony currently writes and illustrates for children in Perth, Western Australia, alongside her biologist husband, their pets and a wild, rambling backyard.

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