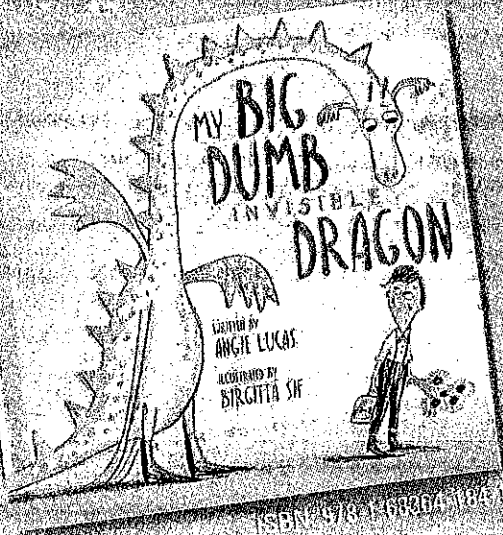


MY BIG DUMB INVISIBLE DRAGON

STORY TIME KIT

Host a story time in your library, bookstore, or grief support group—or use these activities to discuss the book at home

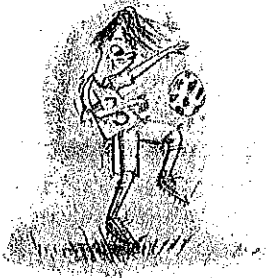
My Big, Dumb, Invisible Dragon is an illustrated story about grief, loss, and hope. When a young boy's mother dies unexpectedly, a giant, invisible dragon swoops in and won't go away. No one else can see the dragon, but the boy can feel its weight on his chest and see the shadow it casts over him. As the boy learns to live with this unwelcome guest, his relationship with the dragon changes in surprising ways.



Six activities to help children engage with the book's themes

WHATS IN A NAME?

You might have noticed that none of the characters have a name except for the main character's friend, Ollie. Here's your chance to guess the names—or make up some of your own.

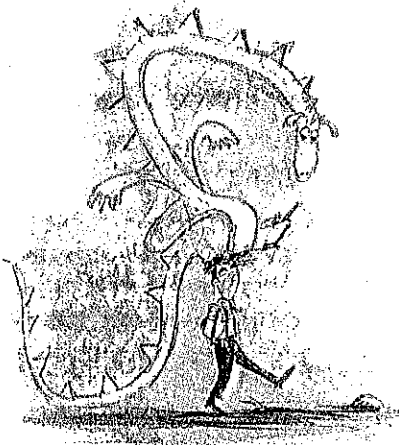


BOY (MAIN CHARACTER)

The red-haired boy is never mentioned by name because he's the one telling the story. But he does have a name. Do you want to guess what it is?

Write your guess here: _____

The Author's Answer: When I first wrote this story, I didn't have a name for the main character. Nothing felt right. Then one day, while researching my family history, I discovered the details of a story my Grandma Mona often told about her great-grandpa, Samuel Matthews. Samuel's mother had died unexpectedly while the family was crossing the Atlantic Ocean from England to America, and she was buried at sea. I realized that this tragedy happened when Samuel was the same age as my main character, and I knew he had to be "Sam"—and that his father and mother should be William and Elizabeth, just like the real Samuel's parents.



DRAGON

The dragon also has a name, although it's not mentioned in the book either. Do you want to guess what it is?

Write your guess here: _____

The Author's Answer: The dragon is named Sorg, which is the word for "grief" or "sorrow" in the Icelandic, Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish languages. Because the book's illustrator, Birgitta Sif, is originally from Iceland, I thought this would be the perfect name, and Birgitta agreed. "Sorg" has a very dragon-like sound to it, don't you think?

Here's how you say "grief" or "sorrow" in 12 other languages. Do you think any of these would make a better name for the dragon?

- **Czech:** smutek (SMOO-tech)
- **Dutch:** verdriet (ferr-DREET)
- **Finnish:** suru (SOO-roo)
- **French:** douleur (doo-LURR)
- **German:** trauer (TROW-er)
- **Greek:** penthos (PEN-thowss)
- **Italian:** dolore (doe-LORE-ay)
- **Latvian:** skumjas (SKOOM-yes)
- **Mandarin Chinese:** bei ai (bay-EYE)
- **Portuguese:** luto (LOO-toe)
- **Spanish:** dolor (doe-LORE)
- **Welsh:** galar (GAH-lergh)

OLLIE

The only name mentioned specifically in the book is Ollie, our main character's best friend. Ollie is short for "Oliver," a common name in America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany. Do you have a best friend?

Write your best friend's name here: _____

The Author's Answer: My best friend today is named Wendy, but I've had many best friends over the years. When I was in preschool and kindergarten, my best friend was Janessa. After my family moved away, my best friend at my new school was Tiffany. My best friends in my neighborhood were Robbie Ann and Kathy. Then Heidi moved in, and she was my new best friend through the rest of elementary school.



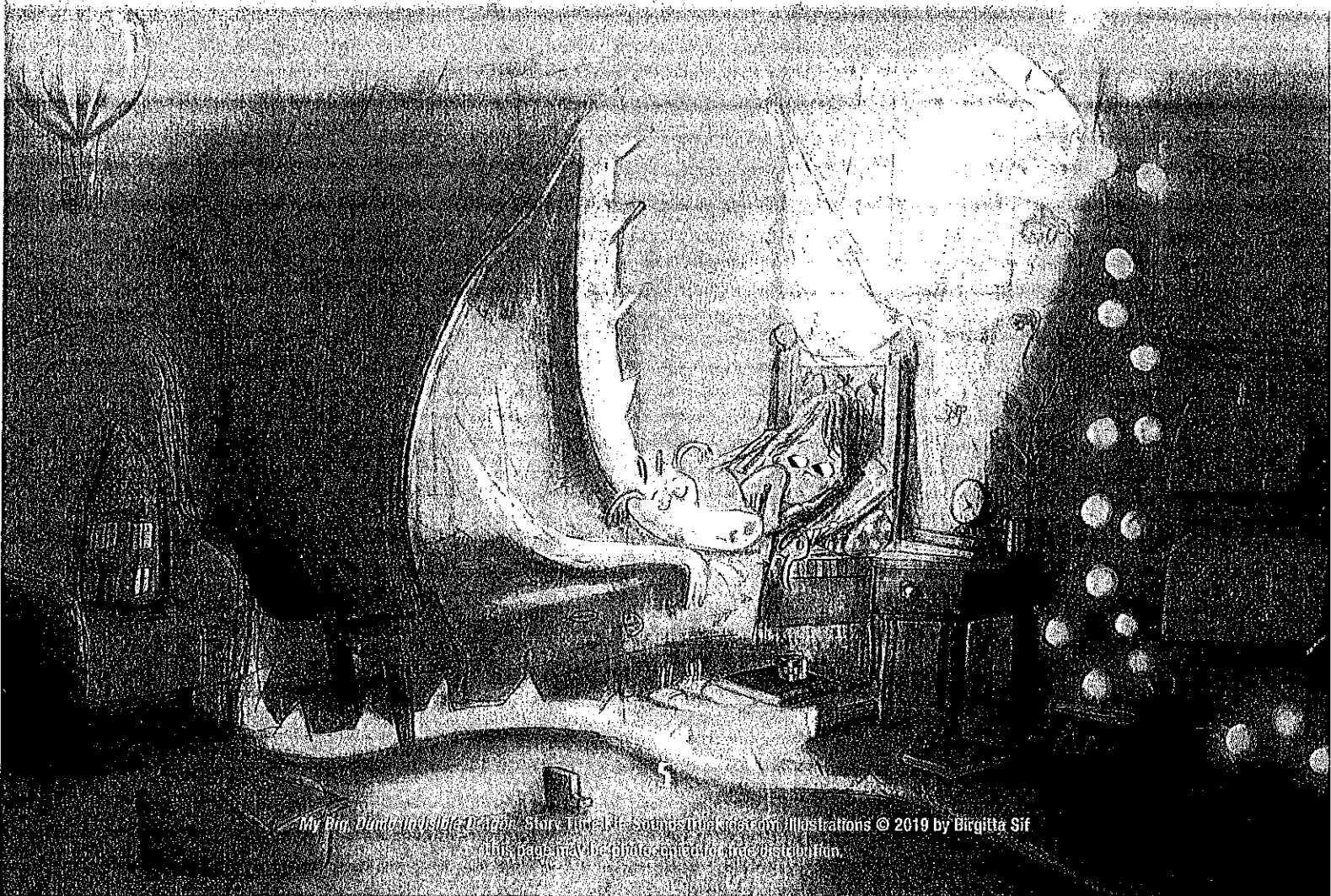
WHAT DOES SORROW FEEL LIKE?

Sometimes we think that there's just one way to feel sad. But different people experience sorrow and grief in different ways, and it doesn't always look like we expect—with a frowning mouth, flowing tears, or a faraway look in the eyes. And the same person can feel grief differently at different times.

Notice all the ways the main character in the book felt his sorrow:

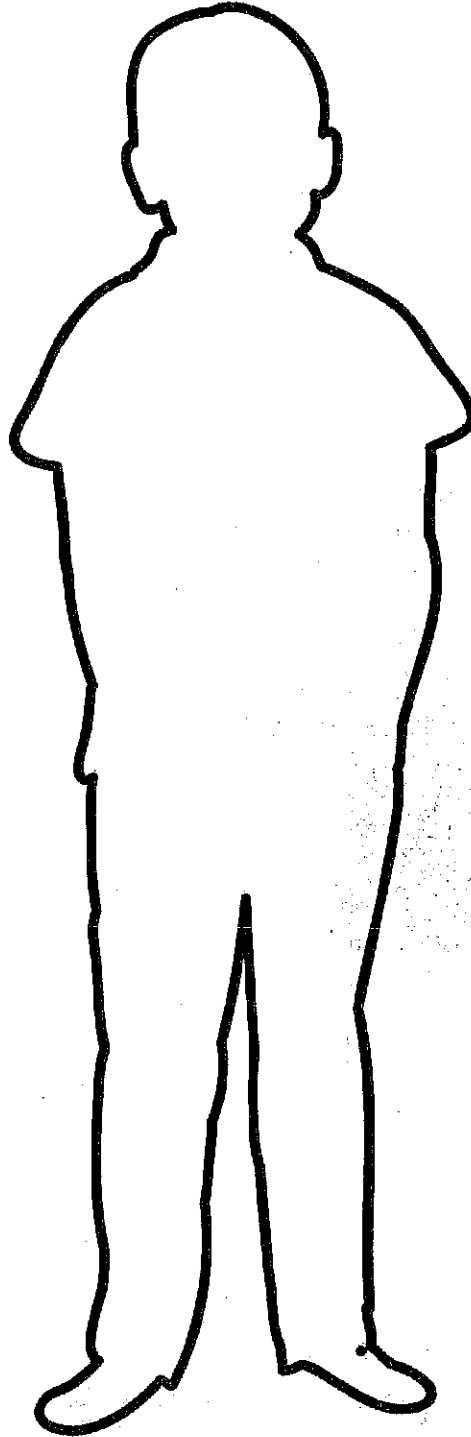
- Heaviness or pressure in his chest
- A weight pushing down on his shoulders
- A shadow he seemed to see all around him
- An angry feeling in his throat that made him yell and shout
- The itch to run, play, and laugh to escape his feelings for a while
- A need to curl up and hide away

Notice also that the main character's feelings came and went—and came back again—even at unexpected times like at a birthday party. His feelings would grow and they would shrink. That's true for all of us. When we learn to make friends with our feelings and stop fighting them or hiding from them, they are easier to live with, just like the dragon in the story.



WHERE DO YOU FEEL SORROW?

Think of a time you felt sorrow or sadness. Where did you feel it—in your heart, your stomach, your shoulders, your jaw? What colors match those emotions? Add colors, words, or doodles to the figure below to portray how your feelings show up in your body. You could even put a bandage over the body parts that feel grief and sadness.



DRAW YOUR OWN DRAGON

Did you notice there are two dragons in the story? One is mostly blue with a little bit of purple. But at the end of the book, a purple dragon shows up. Think about what your dragon might look like, and draw it below.

To help you draw your dragon, circle which features you'd like to include:

long neck / short neck

little arms / long arms

sharp teeth / flat teeth

spikes on spine / no spikes

wears boots / goes barefoot

giant wings / tiny wings

scaly skin / smooth skin

floppy ears / flat ears

claws / no claws

big eyes / beady eyes

long snout / short snout

horns / no horns

BEING A FRIEND

Did you notice all the different ways Ollie chooses to be a good friend to the main character?

- He reaches out and invites him back to the park
- He gives him a piggy-back ride
- He doesn't avoid him; he treats him the same as he always did
- They do "normal" things together, like swinging and having sleepovers
- He comes to his birthday party
- He helps him finish the go-cart they had started at the beginning of the book

What are some things you can do to be a friend to someone who is grieving?

Things to Say to a Grieving Friend

I'm so sorry.

I love you.

I can see how much you loved him/her.

Whatever you're feeling is OK.

Can I just sit with you for awhile?

Things Not to Say to a Grieving Friend

At least you got to say goodbye.

At least you had all that time together.

At least ... (don't start any sentence with "at least").

He/she wouldn't want you to be sad.

Everything happens for a reason.

You won't always feel this bad.

They're in a better place.



MAKE A CARD FOR A FRIEND

Making your own card for someone is a meaningful way to let him/her know how much you care and in your own way. If you do not know someone who needs the card right now, you can save it to have on hand when you do.

Instructions

1. The next page is intended to be folded in half—creating a card that is 5.5 x 8.5 inches. Print single-sided so that the back is blank.
2. Choose one of the sentiments below or come up with a phrase of your own. Cut and paste your chosen words—or write them by hand—on the inside of the card.
3. Decorate the card however you'd like.
4. Add a personal note and sign your name.

Note: You can use your own paper resources, plus write the sentiments on a white board or poster board for the children to copy from.

I'm Carrying You in My Heart

Big Huge Hugs to You

I WILL ALWAYS BE HERE FOR YOU

So Very Sorry

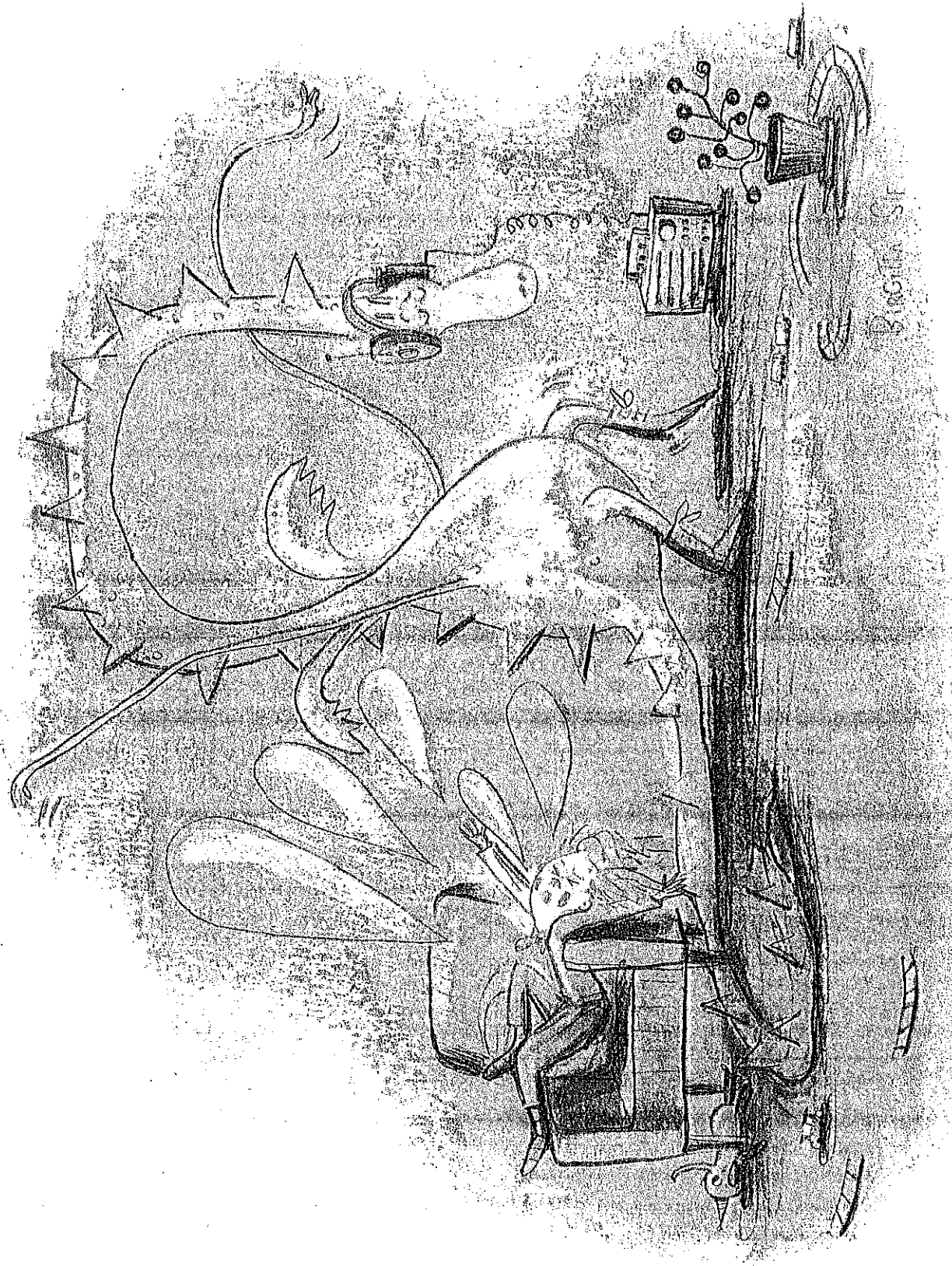
Thinking of You

I Love You

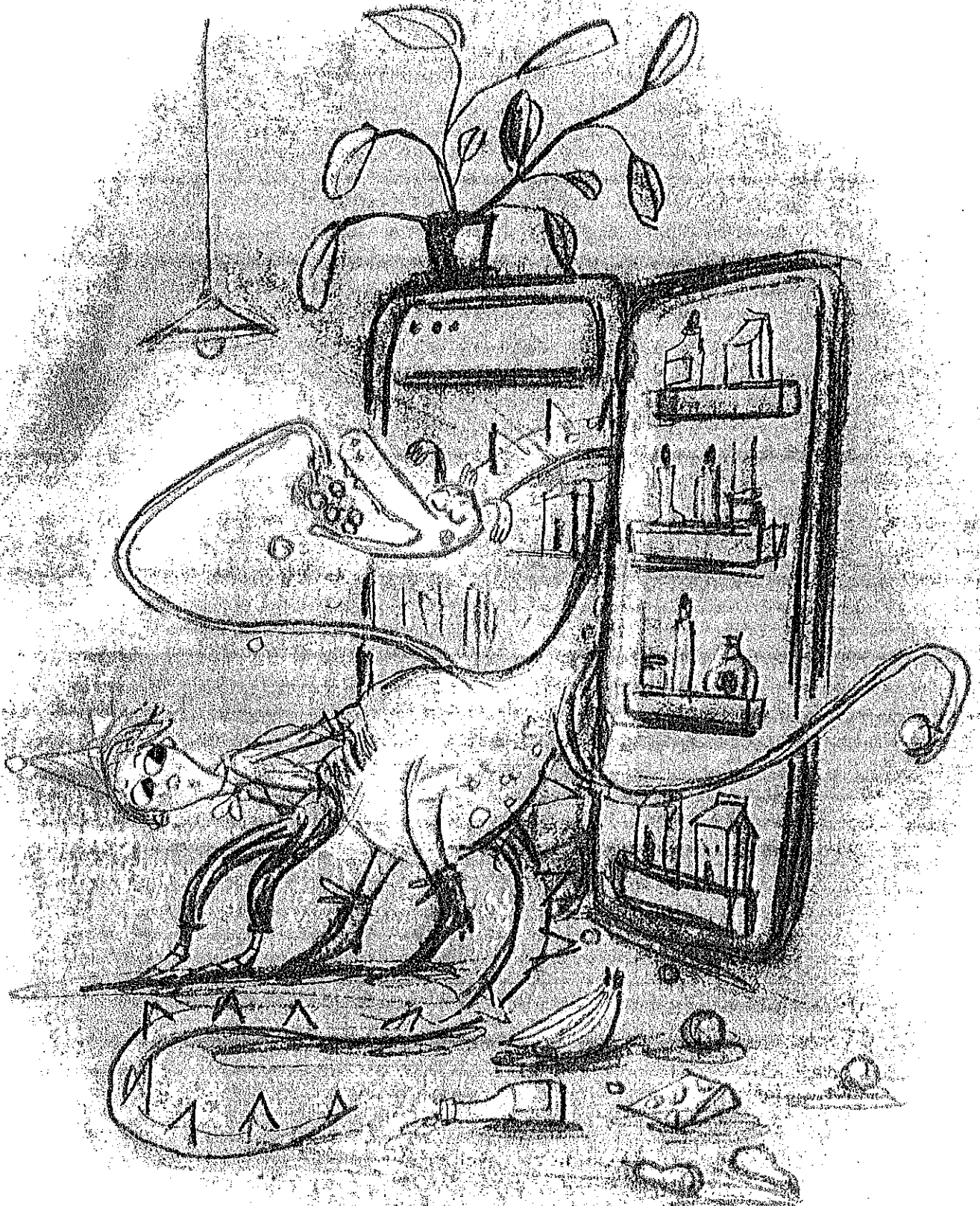
I Hope You Know How Much I Care

My Thoughts and Prayers Are with You

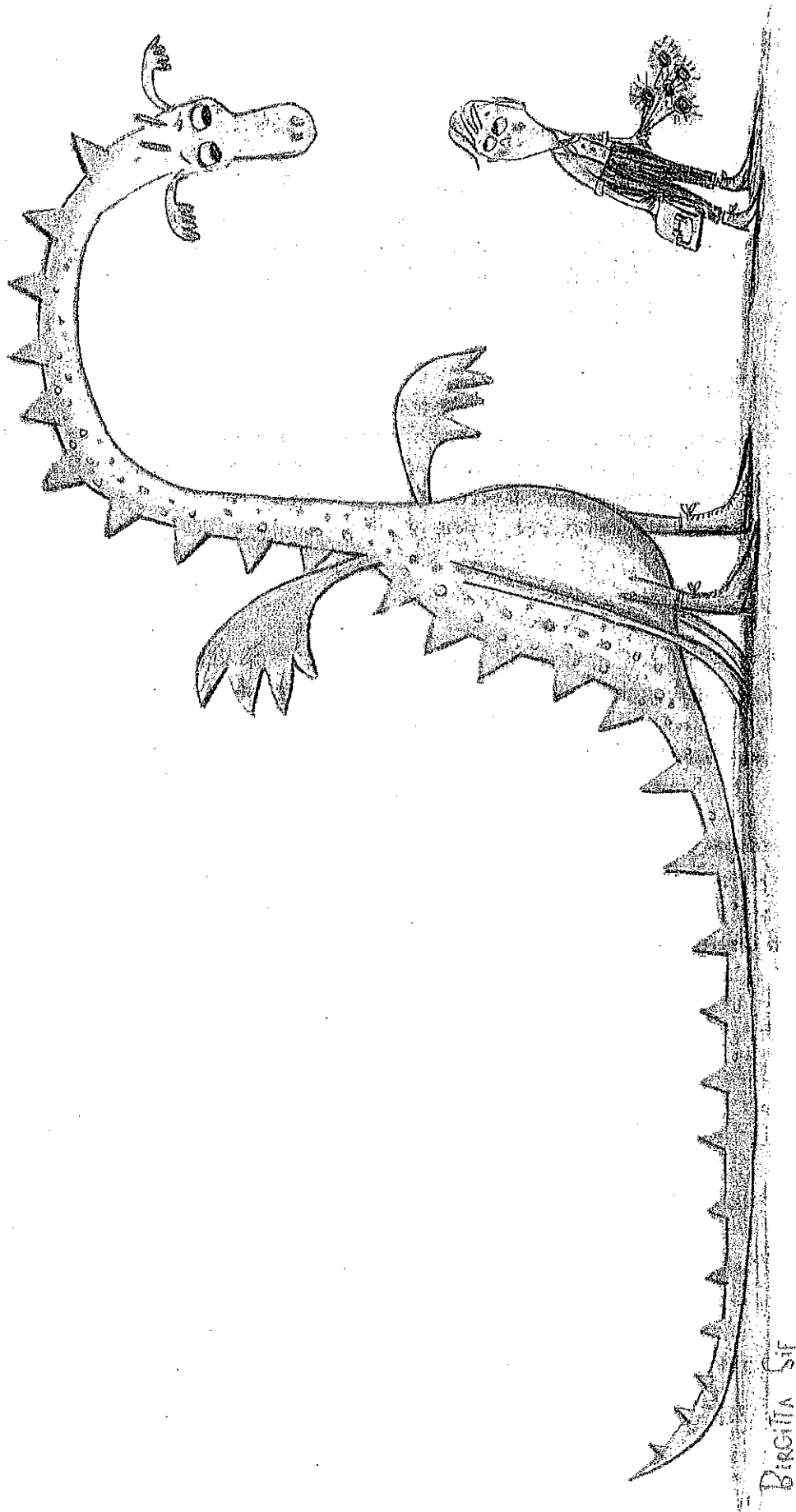




COLORING PAGES



BIRGITTA SIF



FOR AN ADULT CAREGIVER: HOW DO CHILDREN GRIEVE?

If you know and love a child who has experienced a tragic loss, such as the death of someone close to them, it's not always clear how much they understand about what has happened. Valerie Lambert, a licensed clinical social worker and board member of The Bradley Center for Grieving Children and Families in the Salt Lake City area, says children at any age are capable of grieving. "While a baby or small child may not understand that a death has occurred or what that means, even tiny ones sense that something is different, and this can be stressful for them," Lambert writes. She offers the following breakdown of common grief responses according to age.

BABIES AND TODDLERS

Changes in caregivers, excitement or sadness from those around them, and new or different people can all be signals to infants that something is wrong. During these times, a baby or small child may become irritable or have changes in sleep or eating patterns. These can be signals that a baby or small child is in need of more attention and soothing.

AGES 5-9

Children in this age group usually understand that death is final, but they may still believe that the dead person will come back. They may worry that death or a fatal illness is contagious. They may need reassurance that their angry or upset thoughts—or their behavior—did not cause the death. (For instance: "Mom wanted me to make my bed and I got mad, so she died.")

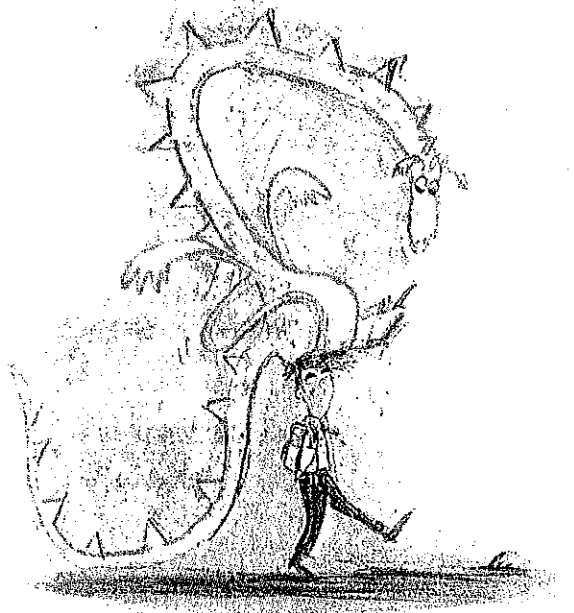
AGES 9-12

Older children have a better understanding of the finality of death. They are starting to understand their own mortality and vulnerability. They are also more likely to understand the financial and social impacts that a death can have on their family. This can cause additional worry and they may try to take on adult roles in an attempt to help.

TEENS

Teenagers have a good understanding of what death is, but may feel that the death of a family member sets them apart as different. They may feel that they need to take over adult roles or may want to act as if nothing has happened. While a teen may need to step up and take on more responsibility, remember that they are still teenagers and cannot become adults overnight.

Source: Valerie Lambert, LCSW, CT, bradleycentergrief.org



FOR AN ADULT CAREGIVER: 5 WAYS TO HELP A GRIEVING CHILD

1. Communicate Honestly and Openly

Discuss the tragic event with your child in a simple, direct, and age-appropriate manner. Be honest and share clear, accurate information about what happened. Children need to hear the truth from someone they love. At the same time, tell your child stories about your own life: times you were afraid, sad, or angry. Tell them how you dealt with these situations and what you learned. Children love to hear stories about the adults in their lives and when those adults were children. Sharing stories helps a child normalize what he or she is experiencing. —childrengrieve.org

2. Respect Differences in Grieving Styles

Several months after her dad died of a heart attack, 7-year-old Jenny told her peers in a grief support group, “I have lots of tears inside, but I can’t get them out as easily as my Mom.” Children often grieve differently from their parents and siblings. Some children want to talk about the death, while others want to be left alone. Some like to stay busy and others withdraw from all activities and stay home. Younger children may be clingy, whereas teens may prefer to spend time on their own or with peers. Recognizing and respecting that each child grieves in his or her own way is essential to the healing process for a family. Listen to children talk about their feelings and watch their behavior, and you will help clarify and affirm these natural differences. —[The Dougy Center](http://TheDougyCenter.org)

3. Share Your Own Feelings

Reassure your children that it is normal to have a variety of feelings, and that they may find times when they are not sad, and that’s all right, too. Don’t try to hide your tears. Instead, let the children know that tears are a normal response to the situation and that if they want to cry you will be accepting and supportive to them. This will help keep the door to communication open. At the same time, let your children know that you are still an adult they can rely on and that they don’t need to make you feel better. —[Valerie Lambert, LCSW, CT, bradleycentergrief.org](http://ValerieLambert.org)

4. Take a Break

Children grieve in cycles. For example, they may be more inclined to play and divert their focus from the death when the death is recent and parents are grieving intensely. More than adults, children need time to take a break from grief. It is important to know that it’s okay to take a break. Having fun or laughing is not disrespectful to the person who died; this is a vital part of grieving too. —[The Dougy Center](http://TheDougyCenter.org)

5. Create New Rituals and Family Traditions

Rituals can give your family tangible ways to acknowledge your grief and honor the memory of those who have died. Lighting candles, recognizing special occasions, sharing stories about those who have died, or volunteering with a local charity as a family are some of the ways you can incorporate new traditions or rituals. —childrengrieve.org

For additional tips, consult the following sources:

bradleycentergrief.org/grief-response-by-age-children-and-teens

dougy.org/grief-resources/how-to-help-a-grieving-child

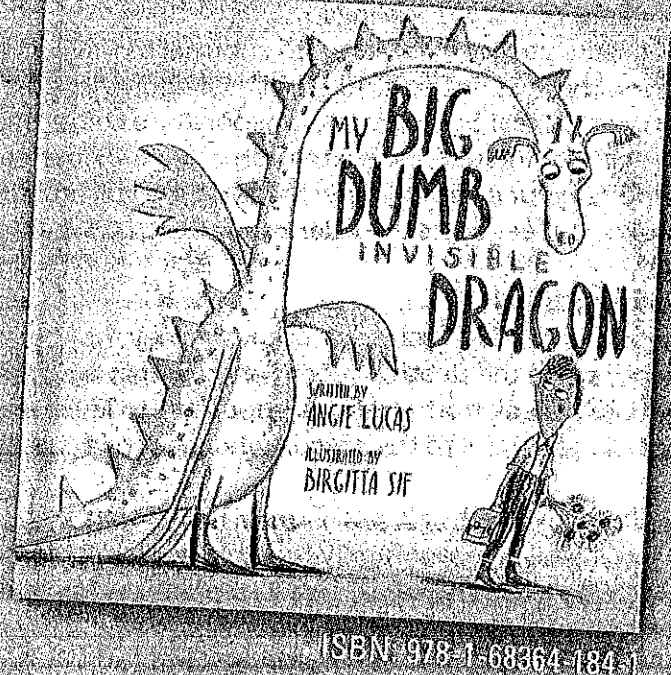
childrengrieve.org/resources/10-ways-to-help-a-grieving-child

JOIN US FOR A STORY TIME FEATURING

MY BIG DUMB DRAGON

DATE & TIME:

LOCATION:



Help children understand powerful feelings like sorrow and grief—in themselves and in others—through a heartwarming story and meaningful activities.