



An introduction to *The Night Crossing* – a therapeutic fairy tale

A Lullaby For Children On Life's Last Journey

The Night Crossing is part of Speechmark's *Therapeutic Fairy Tales* series, designed to support children at the end of life in saying their goodbyes. It has been especially written to help families engage with themes and feelings around this highly emotive and difficult life event. It goes without saying that any therapeutic work with this storybook needs to be handled with high levels of sensitivity and care.

Children grow up with storybooks. Their familiarity can help children feel safe. In presenting resonant themes and feelings through story and image, therapeutic storybooks can provide some much-needed distance in a time of crisis. By exploring other characters' similar yet not the same situations, children may feel safer to engage with their own feelings and life story. For children at the end of life, who will not have much energy, *being read to* can help facilitate an exploration of themes and feelings in a gentle, reflective way.

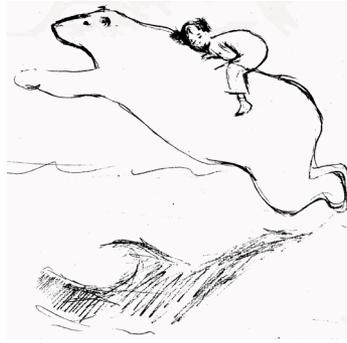
Sometimes important and necessary conversations do not happen in times of loss and crisis, as children attempt to manage strong feelings and/or feel that they must behave in a certain way. Some children may not be sure how to express emotions, and some feelings may just be far too big. Adult caregivers will also be suffering, often trying to hold their own emotions to protect their children and themselves. Yet, not having an opportunity to voice real feelings, fears and worries, can block children and families from connecting with inner resources, to help process life changes going on. Children and siblings need a safe space to make sense of difficult life experiences.

To help practitioners who are not familiar with using storybooks in a therapeutic and/or creative setting, we've included a page of therapeutic prompts relevant to *The Night Crossing's* subject matter and themes, as well as two example taster creative exercises. These activities can be adapted for siblings and families.

Upfront, three core principles to remember when working with children are the following:

- Create the right conditions for a safe, trusting relationship to be built;
- Pace the work appropriately so children don't feel overwhelmed or overtired;
- Model a creatively free mindset so any potential story and/or creative activities are process-based rather than about technical skill and end products.

For more specific details on how to work with story and image, please go to the *Storybook Manual: An Introduction To Working With Storybooks Therapeutically And Creatively*.



Gentle therapeutic prompts for working with *The Night Crossing* storybook

The Night Crossing is a therapeutic fairy tale created to support children in saying their goodbyes to life and family at the end of life. It is best read softly aloud as if a lullaby. Practitioners will need to think carefully about timing, and when it might be most useful to offer children *The Night Crossing* as a resource.

To keep in mind:

- 1) Given the highly sensitive nature of this subject, any storybook work needs to be handled gently and slowly, attuning to the age and energy levels of the child patient.
- 2) Responses may be non-verbal; follow the child to see if they want to engage verbally.
- 3) Stay in the metaphor of the story unless the child themselves guides you out. It's often useful to keep the books open so the pictures themselves do the talking.

Examples of gentle therapeutic prompts around *The Night Crossing* storybook

Below are suggestions for potential areas of interaction with the story and/or possibly conversation, depending on energy levels. Wherever possible, it's best to follow the lead of the child that you are working with, and where their natural interest lies in the story.

1) *Looking at the pictures of the Boy and Bear in the story*

- Can you point to any pictures, colours or images that stay with you through this story?
 - Any words also that stand out?
- If you could choose any page/s to look at again, which would it be?
- Invite children to run their fingers over any images in the book they'd like to

2) *Let's look at the Boy and the Bear's friendship through this story*

- Let's look at the different pictures of the Boy and Bear through the story
- I wonder how the Boy feels being with the Bear as they journey together?

- What other questions might the Boy ask the Bear? What answers might he get?
 - Any fears, any worries the Boy feels are unanswered?

3) *In The Night Crossing, the Boy realises he will take stories with him, and also leave stories behind for his family*

- What kinds of stories and memories do you imagine he'll take or leave behind?
- If a child is willing, explore the stories and memories that are important for them
- Depending on the family's context, there may be an opportunity here to facilitate conversations about coming to an end, and the stories and memories family members would like to each take with them

TASTER ACTIVITY worksheet for process-orientated story activities



Taking A Journey

Aim: To help children enter their imagination in a state of relaxation, exploring themes of surrender and letting go.

Creative media: Guided visualisation (can be expanded to other creative materials such as drawing, depending on a child's energy levels).

STEPS and INSTRUCTIONS

Turn to the page in *The Night Crossing* where the Boy is being carried on the Bear's back – now it's your turn to imagine that you are being carried on a magical creature

- Choose a creature to carry you, it might be a bear, but it might be something else
- I'd like you to imagine this creature is carrying you for a journey anywhere you'd like
 - Let this creature take all your weight, any concerns or worries
 - The creature is here to make sure that you feel safe
- Now, you can direct this creature to take you wherever you want to go
 - A trip to a special place, or a place anywhere in the world ...
 - Wherever you'd like to go ... you're in charge

Imagine this journey as you are carried on the back of this creature

- This creature has your best interests at heart, and is carrying you carefully
- How are you travelling? On land, through the air, or through the sea?
 - Your creature may run, or fly or swim ...
- What is the journey like – are there parts that are rough or smooth?

This creature takes you to your destination – a special place of your choosing – a place where you feel safe and happy

- What's this place like – take some time enjoying being here
- You can leave behind here anything you'd like to
 - Empty out any worries, fears, concerns ...
- Before leaving, you can take one thing, something with you – what is this?

Gentle reflections

- Together, discuss what happened during this journey, reflections, and any surprises

TASTER ACTIVITY worksheet for process-orientated creative art-making activities



A Memory Nest

Aim: To support children in gathering stories and memories about loved ones in a special place. This can also be an activity for siblings and the family.

Creative materials: To be scaled up and down in accordance with the energy of the child and equally what resources are permissible in a hospice or hospital environment. Family members and the practitioner can also help in the making process.

Recycled materials for the container: Shoe box, other boxes, empty biscuit tin.

Natural materials: Shells, leaves, wool, felt.

Arts materials: Paper, card, pens, fabrics, ribbons, tissue paper, cotton wool, plastic jewellery, special objects and/or special photographs to the child.

STEPS and INSTRUCTIONS

- We are going to make a Memory Nest today to hold our stories and memories of loved ones

For the MEMORY NEST

- How would you like to decorate the outside of this Memory Nest?
- How would you like to make the inside of the Memory Nest feel special and safe?
 - Tissue paper, or cotton wool, or fabric can help create a safe space
- Some children, if they have the energy, can weave material or wools into plaits
- If children don't have the energy, siblings/practitioner can help

For the STORIES inside

- What do you want to remember about you and special people in your life together?
 - Any stories and memories about what you've done together

- Any messages that you'd like to give to this loved one, or each other
- A practitioner or other family member can write down messages or stories on strips of paper, which can be rolled up as scrolls, tied up with a ribbon

Keeping the MEMORY NEST close by and safe

- The Memory Nest can be an ongoing project
- Stories and memories can be taken out and read
- For siblings, this can be something for them to take out and share on special anniversaries