



**Classroom Guide for
GRANDMA'S PURPLE FLOWERS**
written and illustrated by
Adjoa J. Burrowes

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grade 2
Interest Level: Grades 1–4
Guided Reading Level: M
Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.1/.5
Lexile™ Measure: AD510

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Intergenerational Relationships, Grandparents, Coping with Death, Seasons, African American Interest

Synopsis

Grandma's house has always been the narrator's favorite place. On her way to visit Grandma, she plucks daisies and sunflowers, and best of all, purple flowers—Grandma's favorites. Whenever Grandma sees the purple flowers, her smile grows wide—like the Mississippi River.

One winter day Grandma is too tired to bake, but she rubs her grandchild's back gently and braids her hair that has come undone. Later that night, Grandma passes away, and all winter long, the young girl is sad, missing her grandmother terribly. When spring finally arrives and flowers begin to shoot up from the ground, the girl discovers that purple flowers are still growing in Grandma's backyard. Seeing the flowers helps the girl accept her grandmother's death, and purple flowers become the girl's personal symbol for keeping her memories of Grandma with her always.

Background

For many children, a grandparent's death is often their first encounter with death and their first real brush with mortality. Children may struggle with an array of emotions, questions, and confusion. Dealing with the death of a grandparent can be difficult, but at the same time a child can grow in maturity and understanding through the experience. Every child dealing with death needs the support of understanding adults.

Adjoa J. Burrowes, the author/illustrator of *Grandma's Purple Flowers*, drew inspiration from her own childhood experiences with the death of a loved one as she wrote this story. She says: "The grandma in my story is loosely based on my paternal grandma, Annie Kate, who was born and reared in the South. She actually had the sun and moon design that I write about in the story, engraved in her teeth. After my mother died, my grandmother came up from Georgia . . . to help my Dad raise us. I was one of five kids. The youngest one of us was just five years old. The child in the book is based on my daughter, Hyacinth, who [at the time I wrote this story was] nine years old. Hyacinth is a very independent child, very loving and eager to help."

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

Before introducing the book to students, you may wish to develop background information, tap prior knowledge, and promote anticipation with questions such as the following:

1. Do you have a grandparent or a family member you feel very close to? What is special about your relationship? Is there a special memory or object that reminds you of them?
2. In northern parts of the United States, what is the weather like in the winter? What happens to trees and plants in winter? What happens to trees and plants in the fall? In the spring? In the summer?
3. How do people behave when they're not feeling well? How do you help take care of the people you live with when they're feeling sick?

Exploring the Book

Display the book and read the title aloud. Ask students what they think the title means.

Discuss the front cover illustration with students. Then ask them what they think the story is about.

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, copyright page, dedication, and illustrations.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to find out:

- why purple flowers are special in the story
- about the relationship between the girl and her grandmother

Vocabulary

The story contains several descriptive words and phrases and regionally specific terms with which students may not be familiar. Have students work with the words, phrases, and terms below. Talk about the vocabulary, and then ask students to write their own definitions for each word, phrase, and term.

pluck	Hyacinth	carnival colors	Mississippi
pecan	corn muffin	twirling	crunching
pecan pie	dozes off	sassafras tea	cottony
root beer	okra	collard greens	plod

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop understanding of the content. Encourage students to refer back to the text and photographs in the book to support their responses.

Literal Comprehension

1. What season is it at the very beginning of the story? How do you know?
2. Where does the girl's grandma live? How does the girl feel about visiting her grandmother?
3. Why does the girl pick purple flowers? How do the flowers make Grandma feel? How do you know?
4. What are some special things the girl and her grandma do together?
5. How does the girl describe the winter snow *before* Grandma passes away? How does the girl describe the winter snow *after* Grandma passes away? How have the girl's feelings about winter changed? Why?
6. What does the girl see at the end of the story that helps her feel a little better? Why/How does that help her remember Grandma?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

7. What are some clues the author gives to let you know that the girl is very special to her grandmother?
8. What clues does the author give with her words to let you know that time has gone by? What clues does she give in the illustrations?
9. Turn to the page in the story where the girl is raking leaves for Grandma. Reread the text on that page. Why do you think the author chose to include this discussion in the story? How is the author using foreshadowing to help tell the story?
10. How are the trees in winter described? What juicy details does the author give you about the trees? Pick your favorite description from the story and share it with the class.

11. How does the story show you that Grandma is not feeling well? What does Grandma do? What does she say?
12. When you read that Grandma was not feeling well, and before you read further, what did you think was going to happen in the story?
13. How does the story show you how the girl feels after her grandma passes away? What does the girl do? What does she say?
14. How do the changing of the seasons help the girl feel better after Grandma passed away?

Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to the ones in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for lines in the story that show how the girl's feelings change from the beginning to the end.
- The **Illustrator** might create a poster or bulletin board of spring and summer flowers, especially purple ones.
- The **Connector** might find other stories to share with the group in which a grandparent passes away, and make connections among the stories focusing on how each child experiences this event.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might look for information about what causes changes in plants and flowers as the seasons and temperature change in different parts of the country.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: GETTING STARTED WITH LITERATURE CIRCLES by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), LITERATURE CIRCLES: VOICE AND CHOICE IN BOOK CLUBS AND READING GROUPS by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and LITERATURE CIRCLES RESOURCE GUIDE by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work, if they wish to.

1. What kind of person was the girl? How would you describe her? What about her grandmother, what kind of person was she? How would you describe her?
2. Which parts of the story did you connect to the most?

3. In the story, the girl smiles when she sees purple flowers and remembers her grandma. What are some ways you remember people in your life who you love the most, even if they are not with you all the time?
4. Sometimes an author uses the setting of a story as a metaphor. Think about what you know about winter. What happens to plants and trees in winter? What happens in the story during winter? Think about what you know about spring. What happens to plants and trees in spring? What happens in the story in the spring? How did the author use the seasons as a metaphor for what was happening to the girl and Grandma?
5. Ask students to write about a memory they have of a time spent with an adult or a family member who is special to them. Review with students the rich, descriptive details used in the story. Ask students to include at least three details of this kind in their writing.
6. Have students write a book recommendation explaining why they would or would not recommend this story to other students.

ESL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners.

1. Assign ELL students to read the story aloud with strong English readers/speakers.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
 - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they admire about a character or central figure in the story.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas.

Social Studies

Have students use a map of the United States to locate the Mississippi River. Then use one or more of the activities on [The Mighty Mississippi page](#) of the Education World website to deepen students' knowledge of this important river.

Language Arts

Ask students to interview a parent or an older adult friend about someone he or she loved very much who has passed away. Have students prepare a list of questions they wish to ask, and then record the answers during the interview in writing or on a recording device. Students may then write up their interviews and create an oral history scrapbook of their reports. Students may also wish to take pictures of the people they interview to include in the scrapbook.

Science

Have students study the life cycle of flowers and trees during the four seasons. Students may wish to draw flowers or trees during each season, and upper level students may wish to research the effects that changes in temperature and amount of sunlight have on the flowers and trees being studied.

Science/Cooking

1. The girl and her grandma in the story enjoy baking and eating corn muffins. If there are baking facilities available, you might wish to make corn muffins with students, either from scratch or from a mix. There are many corn muffin recipes to choose from on the allrecipes.com website.
2. If you do not have baking facilities, you might brew some sassafras tea with students. Sassafras tea is available in health food stores, natural grocery stores, and online. After drinking the tea, have students discuss what it tastes like and whether or not such tea appeals to them.

Art

Adjoa J. Burrowes used cut paper collage and paints to create the illustrations for *Grandma's Purple Flowers*. Students may wish to try this illustration technique to create additional images for the story. For example, they could imagine some other activities the girl and Grandma do together, and illustrate those. Or they could imagine some scenes for the girl during the winter after Grandma dies.

About the Author and Illustrator

Adjoa J. Burrowes made her debut as an author with *Grandma's Purple Flowers*. She has also illustrated several trade and educational books for children, including *My Steps* and *Destiny's Gift*, both published by Lee & Low Books. Burrowes received her Fine Arts degree from Howard University. In addition to illustrating books, Burrowes works as a graphic designer. She and her family live in the Washington, D.C., area.

Book Information

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about *Grandma's Purple Flowers* at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/58/pb/grandma_s_purple_flowers?oos=hc&is=pb

Order Information

On the Web:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/order> (general order information)

By Phone:

212-779-4400 ext. 25

212-683-1894

By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, NY NY 10016

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