

The Goodbye Poems

Poems of grief and loss help children who are suffering “goodbyes” in their lives by giving them words for their feelings, and helping them to realize they are not alone with their grief.

All children need to develop empathy and compassion for the problems of this world, and poetry can help them to see the inner struggles of their classmates and friends.

A poem can take less than a minute to read, and have a huge impact on the inner life of a child.

Sharing Poems

Educators can begin by telling children that life is filled with goodbyes and that poetry can help them to be faced with courage. Here are some examples of goodbyes:

- * a friend moves away
- * parents have a divorce and one parent moves out of the house
- * a beloved pet dies
- * someone the child knows dies

If a teacher has a goodbye in her life, she could share this as well. It would be extremely helpful if she wrote a poem.

When my little dog,
Zoe, died,
I thought I would
Drown in all my tears.

But somehow,
I swam out of all that sadness,
And now,

Whenever I remember
The first dog I ever loved,

I smile.

Crying in the Bathroom

We've ALL cried in the bathroom at one time or another – even teachers! In fact, the bathroom of an elementary school carries some of the saddest stories of all. It is the one place where children can go to be alone.

Divorce leads to grief and trauma for so many children in our society, and its effects are often underestimated.

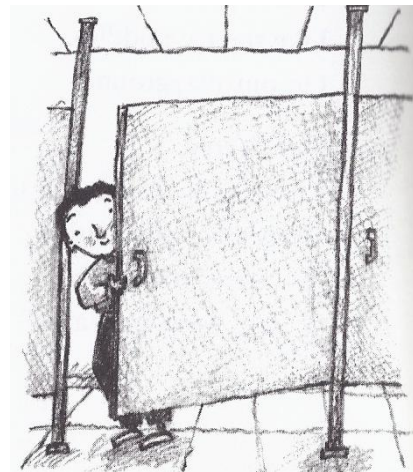
This type of poem helps the child who is suffering through the breakup of a family, but it also helps children from intact homes to develop compassion and understanding for the struggles other children face.

Crying in the Bathroom

I'm crying in the bathroom
and need to take a break,
from a heart that is too heavy,
and a head that always aches.

I'm crying in the bathroom,
for a life that lost its glue--
Mommy's house,
Daddy's place,
pulled apart in two.

I'm crying in the bathroom,
where I can be alone,
away from kids and teachers,
and the sadness of my home.



Stress Relief

I visited a school in Virginia where the children all had stress balls in their desks. The teachers were amazed at how this simple toy helped so many children to cope with anxiety, worry and grief.

Ode to My Stress Ball

This spelling test I have to take,
I'll squish you in an ugly shape.

I'm tired of math and feeling blue,
I'll poke a hundred holes in you.

My father's moved; my parents split,
You're one thing it's okay to hit.



My hands are bored; what will they do?
They'll make a monster out of you.

Oh, gushy, mushy glob of dough,
There's something that you need to know,

In school,
I don't know what I'd do,
If I couldn't play with you.

Saying Goodbye

There are so many goodbyes that even young children face. We can begin the subject gently with poems about aging pencils.

Your Resting Place

Once you were bright, fiery and sleek,
But a million numbers made you weak.

A zillion letters on the page
Were enough to make you age.

I lay you in this inch of space,
Forever more your resting place.



Here Lies a Pencil

Here lies a pencil
Who did its best,

Wrote my stories,
Passed my tests.

Here lies a pencil
Who did its best.

One of the first goodbyes many children face is the loss of a friend who moves away.

When a Friend Moves Away

You stop smiling,
You stop laughing,
Nothing's funny anymore.

You keep looking,
You keep hoping,
That you'll see him once more.

You keep wishing,
You keep dreaming,
He'll walk through the classroom door.

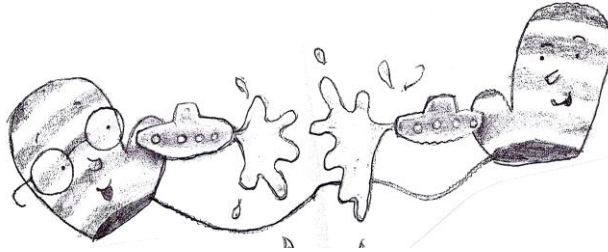


My Best Friend Moved So Far Away

My best friend
Moved soo
Far away,

I miss her
 Every
 Single
 Day.

Children love ghost poems. In this poem, one ghost is the child who has moved away and the other ghost is the child who remembers him.



Sometimes I *Am* a Ghost

Ms. Roys says
That every school
Is filled with ghosts.

"These are not the ghosts
Of dead children,"
She says,
"But the ghosts of children
Who have moved away
Or grown up."

I saw the ghost
Of my best friend, Joey,
When I peeked into the
Kindergarten class today
And remembered when
We were five-years-old.

Back then
We were like
Twin mittens,
Joined together
By a long string --
He was the right mitten,

And I was the left.

I could see us giggling
And squirting missiles
From toy submarines
At the water table.

Joey moved away
After first grade.

It was the
Worst goodbye
In my entire life.
I've missed him
Every single day.

But whenever I peek
Into the kindergarten,
I see Joey,
And my five-year-old self,
And for a few moments,
I AM a ghost,
Playing at the water table,
With my best friend.

Squirt!
Gotcha Joey!

Put Your Eyes Up Here and Other School Poems
Picture by Brian Karas

Many children have heavy hearts because of the loss of a dear grandparent, aunt or uncle. Poetry is the place where these feelings are honored and given recognition.

Goodbye Grandpa

I won't see you ever again.
I won't talk with you ever again.
I won't giggle with you ever again.
I won't eat pizza with you ever again.



But I will miss you,
For the rest of my life,
Again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again.

Help from Pets and Teddy Bears

One little boy told me that his mother works long hours and he often doesn't have anyone who can listen to his problems. So he talks to his dog. Pets and teddy bears can help children with grief.

My poem, "If You Have to Say Goodbye," was written for the children who lost loved ones in 9/11.

If You Have to Say Goodbye

If you have to say goodbye,
Get a teddy bear
That you can talk to,
And make sure
It is the most
Squeezable teddy bear
In the whole world.

When the sad goodbye
Hurts too much,
You'll need
To wrap your arms
Around that

Teddy
Bear,
And squeeze
And squeeze,
And hug,
And hug,
And cry,
And cry,
Until it stops hurting
So much,
And you feel
Better.



The Teddy Bear in the Library

I'm a teddy bear
You can tell anything to.
I'll never peep
Or tell on you.



Crying is Okay

Sometimes it takes courage to cry. Children need to be told that crying is not only okay, but part of the healing process.

One of the first losses for many children is the death of a beloved pet.

The Cry Guy

Like falling rain,
The tears streamed down
Upon his face.

THE CRY GUY
Didn't hide
A single tear.

Mary called,
"Crybaby! Crybaby!"

He said,
"Not crybaby,
But THE CRY GUY.
I'm strong and brave
Enough to cry,
To touch my tears,
To breathe a sign,
To feel the storm
That's passing by,
Like the tall oak
In a rainy sky."

The children laughed,
"Sissy! Sissy!"

He said,
"Not sissy, sissy,
But THE CRY GUY.
I'm strong and brave
Enough to cry,
To touch my tears,



To breathe a sign,
To feel the storm
That's passing by,
Like the tall oak
In a rainy sky."

The teacher said,
"The tears must fall
For all,
Even the mighty oak
Bends and quivers
In the rain."

THE CRY GUY
Held a picture

Tightly in his hands
Of a boy
And a speckled
Black and white
Puppy,
And said,
"It's so hard
To say goodbye.
I remember him
When I cry."

The rain fell gently
On his cheeks
Until he felt
Better.

If You're Not Here, Please Raise Your Hand, Poems About School
Picture by Brian Karas

On the Day My Dog Died

On the day
My dog died
I cried
And cried
And cried.

This is my
Whole poem.
There's nothing
More to say.

I cried
And cried
And cried
On the day
My dog died.



Poem by Kalli Dakos

This is probably the saddest poem I have ever written. In my second year of teaching, a precious little boy came to school on Monday and died on Wednesday from an illness. My editor at Simon and Schuster, Cindy Kane, wanted the poem to go in my first book of poems, *If You're Not Here, Please Raise your Hand*. I wasn't sure if we should include such a sad poem, but I am thankful that we did.

It surprised me when children told me, *over and over again*, that this poem was one of their favorites. It helped me to realize that even young children know they are bound by life and death, and they want to talk about life's mysteries.

J. T. Never Will Be Ten

J.T.'s only nine years old.
He never will be ten.

J.T. died today.

They say he had
A very rare disease
That only one person
In a million
Ever gets.

From the beginning
Of J.T.'s life
His parents knew
He had it.
But I didn't know.

I know I will miss J.T.,
My friend,
Since grade one.

I'll miss the way he made paper airplanes
And threw them so they flew the highest.
I'll miss the way his glasses
Fell down on his nose.
I'll miss how his ears stuck out
From under his baseball cap,

J.T.'s parents gave me

And how he was a fast and a clean player.

I'll miss his phone calls.
"Ben, I can't get those arithmetic Problems
again,
Can you come and *help*?"

And
"Ben,
Wanna go camping in my backyard?
We could use my tent
With the big hole in it
So we can see the stars."

Even when I'm ninety-four
I'll still remember him,
J.T.,
My friend
Who never will be ten.

Why J.T.?"
It's not fair to die
When you're only
Nine years old.

But if someone had to die,
Why not me
Or Jessie or Sally
Or Rick or Sue or John?
Why J.T.?

As special box from his room.
He always kept it
On the highest shelf
And the treasures inside
Were *our* secret.

I will put
All my memories
Of J.T.
In that box,
And every time
I open it . . .

I will see
The freckles on his nose,
Hear his yells
As he slid into home base,
And remember
How his laughter
Filled the night air
Till I broke down
And giggled too.

I will feel
As if my best friend
Is sitting beside me,
And I will not be sad,
Even for one second,
Until I close the box.

Goodbye J.T.

No matter what happens
In my whole life
I will take good care
Of your treasure box,
And as long as there are stars
In the night sky
I will hear you laughing.



In this final poem, a class decides to have a funeral for their pet who has just died.

A Funeral in the Bathroom

Tears in the bathroom,
time to say goodbye
to a chubby little fish--
we called him Pudgy Pie.

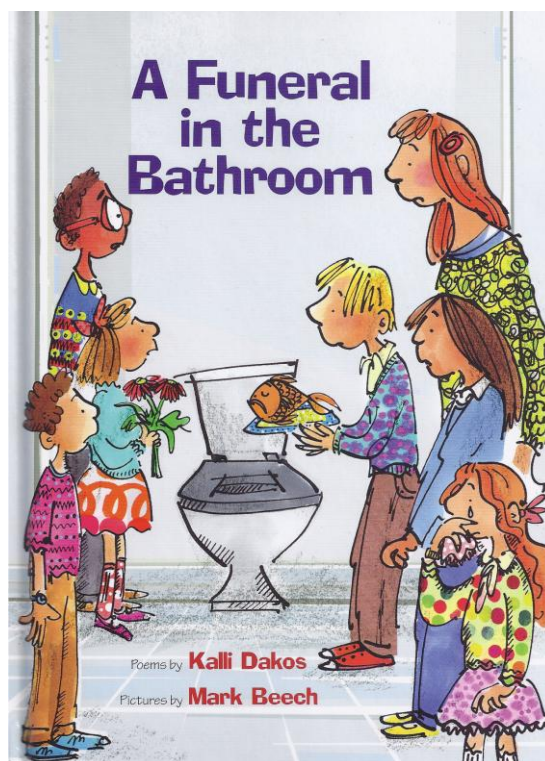
We could almost hear him say,
"This fish food is so good!
It's *my* ice cream and pizza pie!"
Oh how he loved his food!

But here beside the toilet,
we try to decide,
Did Pudgy eat too much?
Is this why he died?

We place him on the water,
amid a gentle hush,
Then we push the handle,
and the toilet starts to flush.

Pudgy's back in water,
Oh, how he loved to swim!
And here in the toilet,
he takes his final spin.

One last exciting whirl,
before he must move on.
And then in one giant gulp,
Our little fish is gone.



One Final Note

I sincerely hope these poems will inspire teachers, parents and children to talk about the “goodbyes” in their own lives, and perhaps to write poems of their own. The beautiful, rhythmic words of poetry come with healing powers, and inspire us all to face our “goodbyes” with courage, and to go on to lead healthy lives.

A poem can change a child and a child can change the world.

Kalli Dakos