

grieve with me

A CHILDREN'S GRIEF LIBRARY _____





allie canavan

MLIS 2024

educator, science communicator, & future school librarian

donna l. schuurman

sponsor

director of advocacy & education at Dougy Center,
The National Grief Center for Children & Families



"once upon a time, there was a girl and her dad"

-from *The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise*

CONTEXT

In January 2018, my dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer. On October 29, 2023, he passed away at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas. In those six years, I thought a *lot* about grief. I read grief fiction & wrote my own, connecting with other writers & readers over our experiences of loss. In doing so, I learned new ways to conceptualize, process, & talk about my grief. It was healing — while nothing I read or wrote could change the fact that my dad was dying, I felt less alone.

Grieve with Me became a way for me to bring this experience into my professional practice with children and youth.

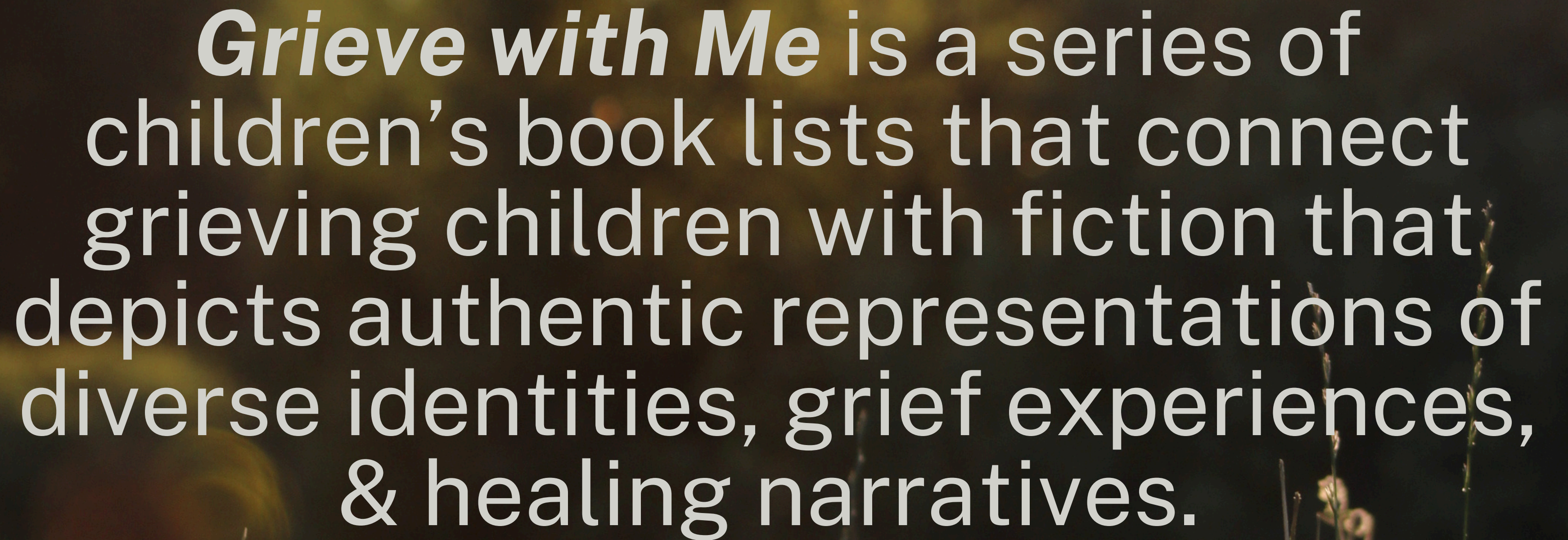


grief, bibliotherapy, & children's fiction

Grief is a unifying human experience that is notoriously hard to quantify and express. It is highly contextual, shaped by our environments, identities, & relationships to the object of our grief.

Bibliotherapy supports grieving children's ability to express emotion, develop positive coping skills, make meaning, & heal.

Grief in children's fiction is inconsistently categorized, making it difficult to find resources.



Grieve with Me is a series of children's book lists that connect grieving children with fiction that depicts authentic representations of diverse identities, grief experiences, & healing narratives.



I developed a set of guidelines for book selection, including:

approach

accessability

Is the book available at the public library? Is it available in multiple formats?

publication date

Is the book contemporary? Will it be relatable to its intended audience?

representation

Does the book depict authentic representations of diverse identities and experiences? Is there a lived lens?



grief vocabulary

Does the book acknowledge death? If the book is intended for young children, does it explore the biological processes of death? Is there a diverse grief vocabulary? Are connections made between emotional and somatic experiences of grief?

grief narrative

Are there rituals of remembering? Are adult characters accountable for their own emotions? Is healing central to the plot? Is there an element of hope?

“I want to see how life ends as proof that it does”

- from *Rana Joon*
and *the One & Only Now*

approach



as of May 13th,
2024...



106

books read

42 picture books

grief emotions
death of a friend
death of a grandparent
death of a parent
death of a pet
recommended for grief storytime

72

books added

10 middle grades

anticipated death
unexpected death

13

differentiated lists

20 young adult

anticipated death
unexpected death

outcomes

2 primary deliverables

Each *Grieve with Me* recommendation includes metadata intended to help grieving children & families find resources that fit their specific needs & grief experiences. Recommendations are shared through two primary deliverables:

SEATTLE PUBLIC LIBRARY COMMUNITY LISTS

Grieve with Me will be posted as a series of community lists accessible through Seattle Public Library's bibliocommons.

BOOK RECOMMENDATION CARDS

Grieve with Me book lists will be shared as two resources: a link to a curated Google Sheet containing all 13 lists & associated metadata & a deck of book recommendation cards color coded by developmental age range. Book recommendation cards are useful for addressing direct asks, such as, "do you have a recommendation for a 4-year-old whose mother just died?"

the following slides show 3 examples of the book recommendation cards →

"grief is suffering, tailored"

- from *Bloodmarked*

death of a friend

Missing Violet

Author: Kelly Swemba

Illustrator: Fabian's Faiallo

Publisher: Beaming Books

Publication Date: 2023

Genre: fiction

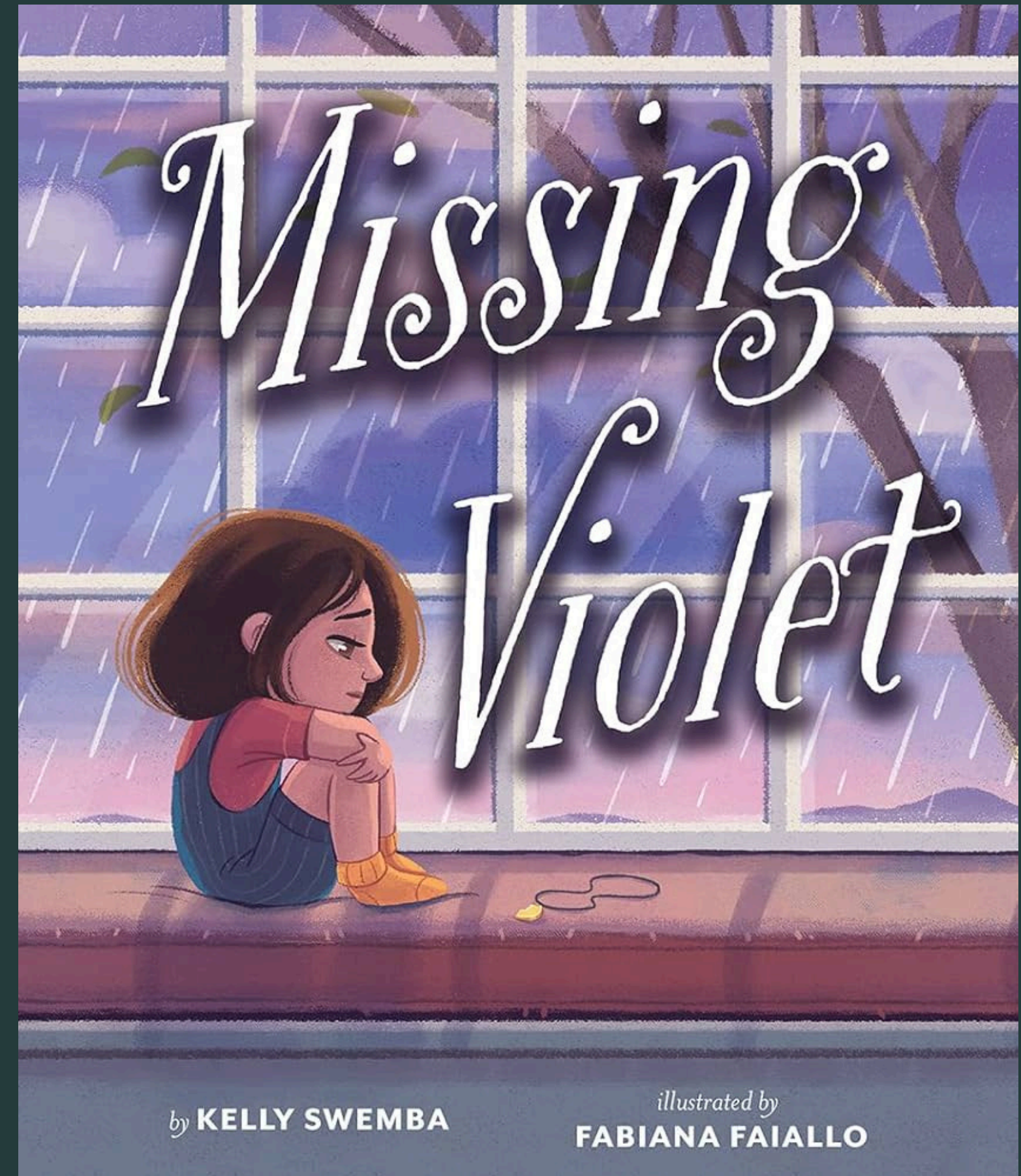
Cause of death: illness

Does death occur in-text? yes

Recommended for grief storytime? yes

Summary: When Mia's Best friend Violet gets sick and dies, Mia navigates her grief and learns to heal alongside her family and new friends.

K-Gr3



Dear Mothman

Author: Robin Gow

Publisher: Amulet Books

Publication Date: 2023

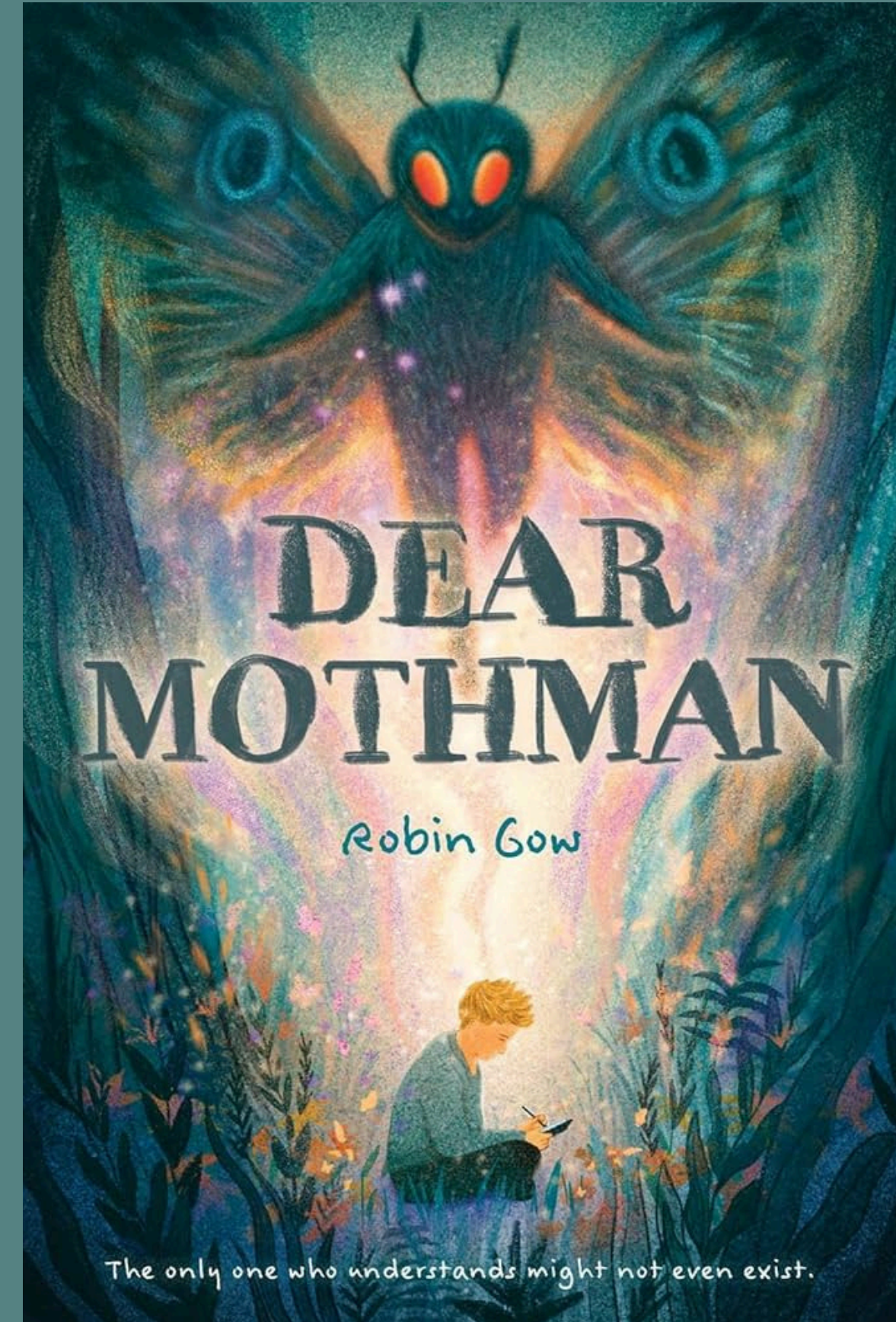
Format: novel in verse

Genre: fiction

Cause of death: illness

Does death occur in-text? no

Summary: After the death of his best friend — and the only other trans boy at school — Noah starts writing letters expressing his feelings to the Mothman, a humanoid creature Noah is determined to prove exists.



The Atlas of Us

Author: Kristin Dwyer

Publisher: HarperTeen

Publication Date: 2024

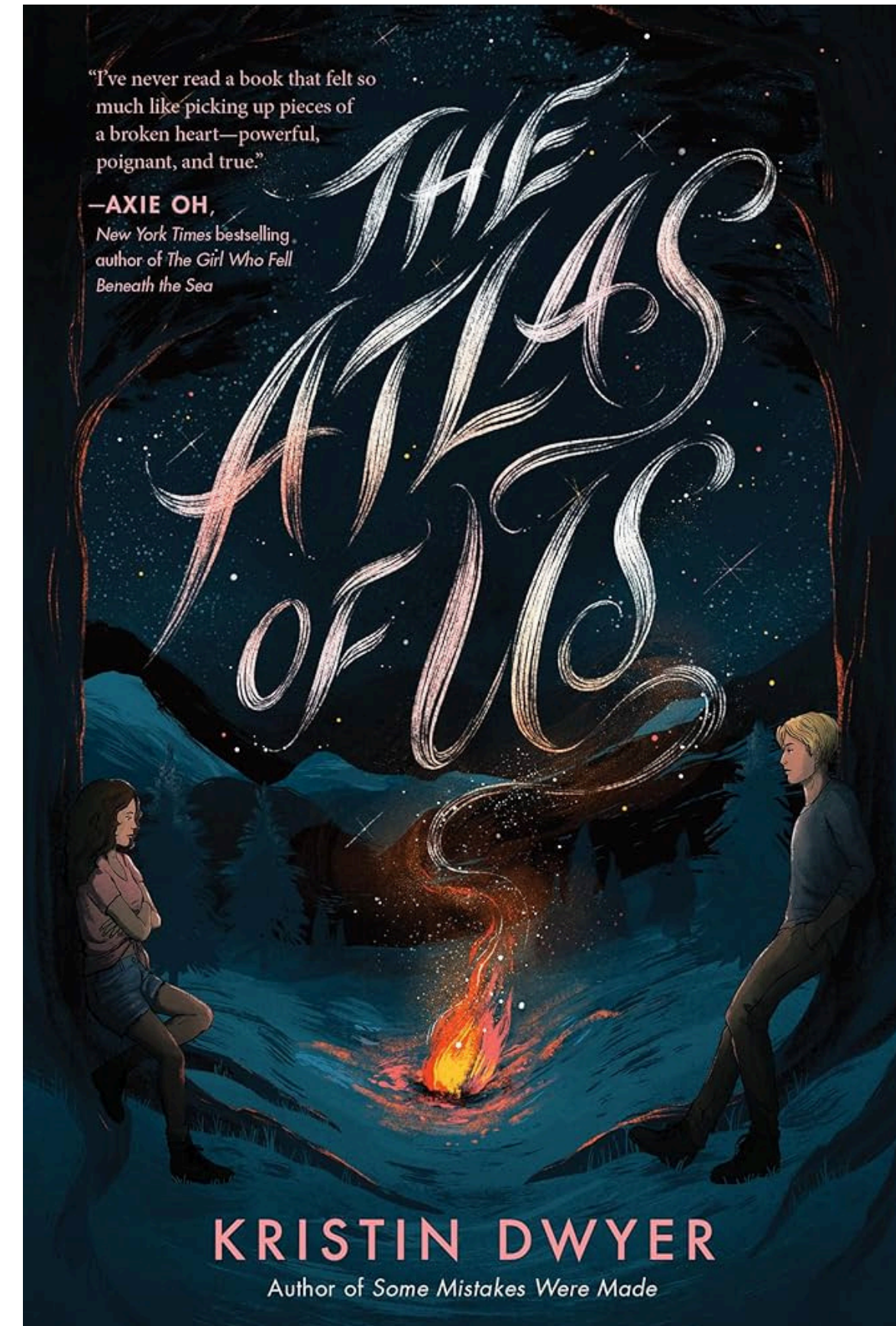
Format: novel

Genre: fiction

Cause of Death: illness

Does death occur in-text? no

Summary: After her dad dies of cancer, Atlas heads into the mountains with a group of teens working to restore a hiking trail her dad once loved. Atlas struggles with her grief, insecurities, and vulnerability, and, over time, learns to let new people know her exactly as she is.





Grieve with Me
will be shared
with:

dougy center

The National Grief Center for Children & Families

community organizations

Grievers Library & A Resting Place

public libraries

community book lists & grief story times

educators & schools

public & private schools in Washington & New Mexico

cancer centers

MD Anderson Cancer Center & Seattle Cancer Care Alliance

ONWARD

Dougy Center & other organizations will receive guidelines for selection & card templates so that they can expand this resource for years to come.

There are additional opportunities to expand *Grieve with Me* through the addition of books & the creation of new lists, & by developing a dedicated website & social media pages.

“the nice (?) part of having a parent die of cancer is that, once they’re dead, they can never die again. The pain of losing my mom would never go away, but the pain of seeing her sick was OVER”

-from *Dancing at the Pity Party*



As much as we'd like to protect them from the reality of being, children experience heartbreak too, and are just starting to practice navigating the big feelings that torment and feed us over the course of our lifetimes.

My hope is that this resource helps them find fiction that holds them in their grief — fiction that says, “this happened. It was real because it was real to you. Wherever you are, whatever you're feeling, you are not alone.”



thank you

to Lily Jones, Martha Rayburn, & Cheryce Rutkai, my co-researchers during the initial phase of this project.

& to Mandi Harris, who believed in this project from the very beginning.