

All the Blues in the Sky

ACTIVITY GUIDE

CREATED BY CHERYL DENISE BAKER AND RENÉE WATSON

ABOUT THE BOOK



Sage's thirteenth birthday was supposed to be about movies and treats, staying up late with her best friend and watching the sunrise together. Instead, it was the day her best friend died. Without the person she had to hold her secrets and dream with, Sage is lost. In a counseling group with other girls who have lost someone close to them, she learns that not all losses are the same, and healing isn't predictable. There is sadness, loneliness, anxiety, guilt, pain, love. And even as Sage grieves, new, good things enter her life-and she just may find a way to know that she can feel it all.

In accessible, engaging verse and prose, this is a story of a girl's journey to heal, grow, and forgive herself. To read it is to see how many shades there are in grief, and to know that someone understands.

RENÉE WATSON WRITES in the acknowledgements of *All the Blues in the Sky*, "I hope this book gives every reader permission to feel real emotions, to admit when life is hard. I hope this book reminds every reader that in the midst of sadness and grief, there can be joy and goodness." In that spirit, *All the Blues in the Sky* is for every person who has experienced change or loss, whether it be death of a loved one, moving to a new city, starting over at a new school, being impacted by a natural disaster, or growing apart from a dear friend.

This story also celebrates friendship and amplifies having gratitude for the simple things: walks in the park, meeting new friends, trying new hobbies. Readers journey with Sage as she experiences new friendship, loss, and life with grief. This guide offers writing and art-making activities for the classroom and the home that help young readers and families delve deeper into the themes of the book, while practicing literary skills and engaging in their own storytelling.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

celebrating friendship & showing gratitude

- 1 *All the Blues in the Sky* begins and ends with Sage listing the things she would tell a child once she is older. Write an advice poem that lists the things you wish someone would have told you. Some possible topics include surviving 6th grade, what every parent should know, advice for teachers, and advice for owning a pet.

- 2 Write a list poem that shows gratitude to someone. Read Angel's letter to Sage on pages 148-150. Notice how Angel uses metaphors (you are a rainbow . . . you are a sunrise) to describe Sage. What metaphors can you use to describe your special person? How can you use specific adjectives and details to show the relationship you have with your loved one?

- 3 Pick a character from the book and consider what it would be like to walk in their shoes. Write a letter to the character or make a list of things you would say to them if you met in real life.

- 4 Aunt Ini teaches Sage that there will be a lot of tears and laughter in life. There are all kinds of memories to hold and make (pages 40-42).
 - Brainstorm a list of memories you have that brought you joy or sadness—a family outing, hanging out with friends, a road trip, the death of a pet, moving, being teased.
 - Read the scene on pages 82-85. Notice the sensory details that are evoked in the scene. What images can you see vividly? Smell? Hear? Taste?
 - Choose one of the memories from your list and write about the experience using sensory details and dialogue to bring your personal narrative to life. (Keep your brainstorm list to use for later writing and artmaking ideas.)

MORE ACTIVITIES

using color to express emotions

- 1 Read page 9 and pages 130-131. Identify some of the metaphors that stand out to you. Think about the different shades of blue that exist and what they could represent. What shade of blue are you feeling today? Make a list of the emotions you are having and create a collage or watercolor painting that represents these words and feelings.
- 2 Choose a color and use it to describe your favorite person, place, or thing. Some examples follow.

Grandma Rosa [excerpt]

by K.S., 6th grade, Portland

Purple is my grandmother's kitchen table,
is her recipes and love passed down generation to generation.
Purple is the warmth of her hug,
is her lavender perfume that lingers and lingers.

Summertime with Mom [excerpt]

by D.C., 8th grade, New York

Yellow is my mother's smile
and all the giggles that pour out of us
when we make up dances in the living room.
Yellow is spotting the ice cream truck
and my mother buying me whatever I want.
Yellow is walking into the bodega and the cook saying hello,
knowing our order before we tell him.
Yellow is walking the long way home just so we can stay outside longer.

- 3 Write an emotion poem using the five senses.

Title [choose an emotion]

Sight [choose a color that evokes this emotion]

Sound

Smell

Taste

Touch

EXAMPLES:

Frustration

by S.M., 7th grade, New York

Frustration is charcoal gray.
It sounds like a car alarm that won't turn off.
It smells like burnt toast.
It tastes like stale potato chips.
It feels like the wiggle of a throbbing loose tooth.

Excitement

By T.S., 7th grade, Boston

Excitement is yellow.
It sounds like a chorus of birds chirping, chirping, chirping.
It smells like chocolate chip cookies baking in the oven.
It tastes like fresh snow falling on the tip of your tongue.
It feels like an unexpected gust of wind tickling your skin.

PROCESSING GRIEF

If you are grieving a loved one . . .

- 1 Write a letter to your loved one. You can update them on what's happening in your life or tell them what you miss most about them.
- 2 Share stories about your loved one. Feeling love for someone and not sharing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it. Telling others is spreading joy. It's okay to bring up a memory and talk about your loved one even though they are gone. Sharing stories will help you hold on to their memory and also invite your friends to get to know your special person. [Refer to pages 105-106]
- 3 Embrace some of your loved one's favorite things. Wear their favorite color, a piece of their clothing or jewelry. Learn the recipe of their favorite meal. Watch one of their favorite movies or TV shows.
- 4 Create a memory book or special memorial. Include written memories, photos (or copies of photos), art, poems, recipes, meaningful quotes, etc. Decorate the pages with your loved one's favorite colors or colors that bring you joy. [pages 156-161]
- 5 Make a playlist. Choose your loved one's favorite songs and/or songs that make you think of them. Play it for yourself and share it with your family and friends.

If you are supporting a loved one who is grieving . . .

- 1 Make a card for your friend. Write a personal message to your friend to let them know you care.
- 2 Ask about the person who died. Read how Sage's heart is lifted after sharing about her best friend to Kofi [page 105]. Do not ask how the person died, rather ask about the person and how they lived: Tell me something about your loved one. What do you miss about your loved one? What's a favorite memory you have about your loved one?
- 3 Listen with compassion [pages 6 and 119-121]. Do not tell someone "it's time to get over it." Grief is not something to "get over" and there is no end date for missing someone. It will always be something "to tend to," like hunger.
- 4 Invite your friend to do something fun. Continue to include your friend in outings and be sure to spend quality time with them.
- 5 Remember everyone grieves differently. Instead of saying, "I know how you feel," try saying: "I don't know how you feel, but I care about you and I am here to listen."

About the creators of this guide:



Renée Watson is a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author. Her novel, *Piecing Me Together*, received a Newbery Honor and Coretta Scott King Award. Her books include the Ryan Hart series, *Some Places More Than Others*, *This Side of Home*, *What Momma Left Me*, *Betty Before X*, cowritten with Ilyasah Shabazz, *Watch Us Rise*, cowritten with Ellen Hagan, and *Love Is a Revolution*, as well as acclaimed picture books: *Summer Is Here*, *Maya's Song*, *The 1619 Project: Born on the Water*, written with Nikole Hannah-Jones, *A Place Where Hurricanes Happen*, and *Harlem's Little Blackbird*, which was nominated for an NAACP Image Award. Renée splits her time between Portland, Oregon and New York City.
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Cheryl Denise Baker is a compassionate, trauma informed consultant and workshop facilitator who is gifted in walking alongside those who are hurting, grieving and celebrating all of the avenues of life. She has facilitated workshops with Youth Family Services and Multnomah County in Oregon, the International Student Program at Multnomah University and Oregon Futures Lab. For more information visit www.cheryldenise.org.

For further reading and listening:

National Alliance for Children's Grief: <https://nacg.org/>
Grief Out Loud podcast (The Dougy Center): www.dougy.org/news-media/podcasts

What to do when you're feeling blue

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| read a book | go for a walk in the park | journal | eat your favorite dessert | meditate |
| spend time outdoors | draw or paint | listen to music | cuddle a pet | write a letter to a friend |
| learn a new skill | volunteer |  | do a small act of kindness | tend to a plant |
| meet up with a friend | get fresh air | do a craft | call someone on the phone | try a new recipe |
| dance around your kitchen | take a shower or bath | plan a meal with a friend | watch a movie | get out in the sun |

Pick the activities that feel right for you!