

Busting Dementia Stigma – One Children's Book at a Time

Are you a parent, teacher or librarian who wants to help build dementia awareness and challenge stigma? Children's books can be a great tool! The criteria below can help you evaluate children's books and select ones that carry a respectful, stigma-busting message. Below are five categories on what to look for or avoid, along with a related quote from a person with memory loss. On the back you'll find book recommendations and a list of related resources.

Identity and Personhood

"I'M STILL HERE." "I'M A PERSON FIRST."

Is the person with dementia portrayed as a complex character alongside others in the book, with thoughts, feelings and desires? Or is the person portrayed as someone "gone" or "faded away," without a meaningful role?

Respect and Kindness

"UNDERSTAND WE'RE NO DIFFERENT FROM ANYBODY ELSE."

Are dementia symptoms presented in a context of affection for the person, inviting understanding and compassion? Or are symptoms presented in a way that invites ridicule or scorn? Do images convey respect and dignity? Or do images make a person look foolish or strange?

Person in Relationship

"WE STILL HAVE THE CAPACITY TO CHERISH AND LOVE OUR FAMILIES."

Is the person with dementia portrayed as being in relationship with others – as grandparent, neighbor, friend? Or is the person portrayed as not able to relate to others, or not worth relating to?

Valued Contributor

"I HAVE A LOT TO GIVE."

Is the person with dementia portrayed as someone with gifts to offer his/her family, friends, or community? Or is the person portrayed as a victim or burden, or someone to be "taken care of" or pitied?

Life Beyond Diagnosis

"IT'S HARD, BUT WE'LL GET THROUGH IT."

"I HAVE FUN, FRIENDS, AND FAMILY, AND THAT GIVES ME JOY."

Does the story show ways that persons with dementia can maintain a meaningful life, in the midst of challenges? Or does it reinforce the idea that meaningful life with dementia is not possible?



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Book Recommendations:

Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge, by Mem Fox (GRADE LEVELS: Preschool – 3)

A small boy tries to discover the meaning of “memory” so he can restore that of an elderly friend.

What A Beautiful Morning, by Arthur A. Levine (GRADE LEVELS: Preschool – 2)

When his grandpa seems to have forgotten how to do the things that they love, Noah's grandma steps in, while Noah tries to find something he can share with his grandpa.

Tip-Tap Pop, by Sarah Lynn (GRADE LEVELS: Preschool – 1)

Emma finds a way to communicate with her grandpa, Pop, through their shared love of dancing, when he starts forgetting things.

Striped Shirts and Flowered Pants, by Barbara Schnurbush (GRADE LEVELS: Preschool – 2)

Libby is concerned when her grandmother begins to forget certain things and wears clothes that do not match, so her parents help her understand that her Nana is in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease and what that means.

Little Mamá Forgets, by Robin Cruise (GRADE LEVELS: Kindergarten – 3)

Although her Mexican American grandmother now forgets many things, Luciana finds that she still remembers the things that are important to the two of them.

Newspaper Hats, by Phil Cummings (GRADE LEVELS: Kindergarten – 2)

A little girl, Georgie, goes to a nursing home to visit her grandfather, who is experiencing memory loss, and reconnects with him when they make newspaper hats for everyone.

Remember, Grandma?, by Laura Langston (also under title, ***Mile-High Apple Pie***) (GRADE LEVELS: Kindergarten – 3)

Lately Grandma has trouble remembering, and it makes Margaret sad until she learns about family love that endures even when memory does not. Includes recipe for Mile-High Apple Pie.

Grandfather's Story Cloth, by Linda Gerdner and Sarah Langford (also under title, ***Yawg Daim Paj Ntaub Dab Neeg***) (GRADE LEVELS: 2 – 4)

Ten-year-old Chersheng helps his beloved grandfather cope with his failing memory, brought on by Alzheimer's disease, by showing him the story quilt Grandfather made after fleeing his homeland, Laos, during wartime.

Remembering for Both of Us: A Child Learns about Alzheimer's, by Charlotte Wood (GRADE LEVELS: 3 – 7)

Tasha loves her grandfather, and she knows that PaPa loves her. Lately PaPa has begun to forget things. Tasha's grandmother can help her see that while PaPa is changing, his love for her has not.

Resources:

- Learn more about talking with kids about dementia:
www.alz.org/media/Documents/alzheimers-dementia-parent-guide-children-teens-b.pdf
- View local advocacy projects by persons with dementia – the source of the quotes in this document:
 - Film: phinneycenter.org/memoryloss-film • Flyer: tinyurl.com/FacesOfMemoryLoss
- Take a quick online “Dementia Friends” training and discover how to be supportive of persons with dementia in your community: dementiafriendsusa.org
- Recommend a favorite children's book about dementia or sign up to receive updates:
dementiafriendlywa@gmail.com