

STORM IN A JAR

by Samuel Langley-Swain and Katie Cottle

Discussion Guide

Before sharing

Before sharing, if you are working with a class of children, it is really important that you consider the children's own lived experiences, maturity levels and emotional responses to the themes in the story.

The title of this book is STORM IN A JAR.

What do you think the story will be about?

Can you think of any words, themes and ideas linked to the word 'grief'? You could also do the same activity for the word 'anger'.

With the children, talk about the idea of 'bottling things up' and the metaphor of a 'storm in a jar'. What might it mean?

All of the poems mentioned in this resource pack can be found for FREE here:

<https://childrens.poetryarchive.org/>

Cover image

Based on the cover, what do you think STORM IN A JAR is about? Has your prediction changed?

Who is the author? Who is the illustrator?

What colours can you see on the front cover?

What do these colours usually symbolise?

How do you think the child is feeling? How do you know this?

Where and when do you think the story might be set?



About the story

When Arlo finds out that Nana has passed away, he keeps her sweetie jar with him to feel safe and closer to his Nana. As his sadness turns to anger, a storm builds inside the jar until Arlo has enough and smashes it open! After the storm washes him out to sea, Arlo spots Nana sailing off into the moonlight. He knows she will be happy and safe, wherever she is headed.

Have you ever lost someone special to you? How did you feel?

Have you ever experienced your own sadness turn to anger? Why? What happened?

Where do you think Nana is headed?

Pages 1 and 2

How often does Arlo visit Nana? Can you describe Nana's house?

What can you infer about Arlo's relationship with his Nana?

Spend some time looking at the photographs hanging in Nana's home – what can you see?

Perhaps you could write about one of them!

What colours does the illustrator use on these pages? How do they make you feel?

Writing opportunity: Imagine you are Arlo and write a diary about a Sunday spent with Nana. What kind of things might you do together?

Cross-curricular activity: Spend some time looking at old family photographs with someone special.

Pages 3 and 4

What does it mean if someone has 'passed away'?

How do the colours change on these pages? What might this symbolise?

What do you notice about Nana's vase of flowers?

What might the characters be thinking and feeling? How do you know?

Cross-curricular activity: Spend some time exploring the poem 'Going Through the Old Photos' by Michael Rosen. Perhaps you could perform it in small groups, thinking about your expression! How does the poem make you feel? How does the poem link to this story?

Pages 5 and 6

What does the verb 'tossed' suggest about Arlo's uncle?

Why does Arlo grab the jar and hold it tightly?

What might the dusty little clouds in the jar symbolise?

Write a definition of the word 'dull'. Can you use it in a sentence of your own?

Why might keeping the jar make Arlo feel safe?

Do you have any special objects which make you feel safe? Why?

Writing opportunity: Write about some of Arlo's memories of Nana's house focusing on the senses. What can Arlo remember about the smells? What can he remember about what he could touch there and taste?

Pages 7 and 8

How has the illustrator made the waves and storm look angry? What sort of

Weeks passed. Arlo often felt sad as he thought of all the questions he wished he'd asked Nana when she was alive.
His sadness turned to anger.



The jar felt heavy and filled with a moody sea, swirling underneath the gloomy grey clouds.

brushstrokes do you think they've used?

How are 'sadness' and 'anger' similar? How are they different?

Writing opportunity: What sort of questions might Arlo liked to have asked Nana? Perhaps you could make a list!

Cross-curricular activity: Read the poem 'Albatross' by Laura Mucha. Discuss the themes in the poem and how they link with Arlo's feelings of anger.

Try using different colours and types of brushstrokes to paint your own stormy scene.

Pages 9 and 10

How has the illustrator made the children look frightening?

Why do the children tease Arlo? Is teasing the same as bullying?

What advice would you give to Arlo?

What do you think the verb 'clenched' tells us about Arlo?

Why do you think some of the words are written in capital letters? How should they be read?

Writing opportunity: Write a playscript describing the scene when the children are being mean Arlo. Perhaps you could act it out in small groups too!

Draw an outline of the jar. Fill it with synonyms and words associated with anger. Now, design some jars to hold other emotions!

Pages 11 and 12

Why do you think the jar feels heavier?

Can you find an example of alliteration on these pages? What effect does it have?

What might Mum be thinking and feeling?

How else could Mum help Arlo feel better?

What do you notice about how some of the words are written on these pages? What effect might they have?

Writing opportunity: Look at the poem 'Anger' by John Foster. Can you write a poem about Arlo's anger, comparing it to the wild storm?

Pages 13 and 14

Why can't Arlo sleep?

Are any words repeated on these pages? Why might this be?

Trying saying 'I've had enough!' out loud. How can you capture Arlo's feelings through your expression?

What do you think Arlo is going to do with the jar?

What do you notice about the illustration on the right-hand side of the page? How has the illustrator made Arlo seem trapped and confined?

Pages 15 and 16

Do you think this is really happening? Could it be a dream? Why? Why not?

How are the words set out on these pages? What effect might this have?

What might the shattered glass represent? Can Arlo hold his feelings in anymore?

Imagine you are Arlo. What might you be able to see, smell, taste, hear and touch?

How does the author make you want to read on? Is it successful?

... smashed it onto the ground.

The glass

SHATTERED.



**LIGHTNING
CRACKED.
THUNDER
BELLOWED.**

The storm escaped, shaking the the whole house!

And the swirling sea took Arlo, his bed, the broken boats

and all of the black jellyfish

out of his bedroom window

and into the dark ocean beyond.

Until ...

Cross-curricular activity: Work in small groups to create a stormy soundscape to accompany these pages. Use your voices, body percussion and instruments to bring your musical composition to life!

Pages 17 and 18

What do you notice about the colours used on these pages?

What do you notice about the water and the storm? What might the calm waters symbolise?

What is Nana sailing away on?
How might Arlo feel seeing Nana sail away?
Where is Nana headed do you think?
How did these pages make you feel? Why?

Pages 19 and 20

Have you ever had a scary dream? What happened in it? Can you remember how you felt when you woke up?

Why do you think Mum whispers on page 19?

How do you think Arlo feels when he lets out a sigh of relief?

What might the opening of the jar represent and symbolise?

What do you think Arlo has learnt?

Do you think Arlo will continue to keep his feelings bottled up?

Pages 21 and 24

What does the verb 'skipped' tell you about how Arlo is feeling?

Read up to page 22. Why do you think Dad throws the lid away? What might they use the jar for?

How does Arlo and his family choose to remember Nana?

Do you have anyone special in your life who you remember and celebrate? How important are happy memories in this story?

How have Arlo's feelings changed now?

What might the flowers in the jar symbolise?

Throughout the story, Arlo is accompanied by Nana's tortoise. How does this develop the story? Why do you think the illustrator chose to add this detail?

Writing opportunity: Spend some time reading 'Granny Is' by Valerie Bloom. Imagine you are Arlo and write a poem in the same style about Nana. If you wish, you could write a poem about someone special too!

Create a role-on-the-wall for Arlo. Draw an outline of Arlo. On the inside of your drawing write down everything you learn about him in this story. On the outside, record any questions you might like to ask him.

Cross-curricular activity: Create an Emotions Graph for Arlo, plotting his changing and developing emotions throughout the story at each key point.

After reading

Spend some time exploring the endpapers – how do they develop the story?

How would you describe Arlo's character?

Do you think this story has a message? If so, what?

What was your favourite page? Why?

Who do you think the main character(s) in the story is? Why?

Do you know anyone like the characters in real life?

What do you think might happen next?

Which character do you think has changed the most over the course of the story?

Summarise the story in six sentences, picking out the main events.

Key themes and topics

How important do you think these themes in the story are? Can you order them from least to most important?

- Anger
- Sadness
- Memories
- Life/death
- Grandparents
- Family
- Happiness
- Sweets
- Trauma
- The Senses

Discussion

During a class reading of the story, use a Book Talk Grid (Aidan Chambers) to discuss what you like and dislike about it, anything that puzzles you and what the story reminds you of. It might remind you of a song, a film, a painting or even another book!

FURTHER QUESTIONS:

What other major life events might cause you to 'bottle up' your feelings and emotions? Which emotion do you think is more powerful? Anger or sadness?

Compare and contrast this story with 'Nen and the Lonely Fisherman' by Ian Eagleton and James Mayhew. How are the stories similar and different? You could use a Venn Diagram to help! You could focus particularly on the character of Pelagios and his feelings of frustration and anger and the sea storm he causes.



... the water calmed. Arlo was alone in his bed, sailing on a smooth moonlit ocean. He saw something in the light of the moon ... It was Nana, sailing away on a boat made of sweets and flowers.

She smiled at Arlo and blew him a kiss. Arlo waved back. At that moment, he knew that Nana would be safe and happy wherever she was headed.