

Always Together

Educator's Guide



About the Book

Close companions through their daily adventures, two otters are always connected, always sharing, and always together—until suddenly, they are not. One is left behind, and nothing is the same. Debut author/illustrator Patricia Kreiser brilliantly showcases themes of loss, separation, and loneliness by combining soft, watercolor illustrations with minimal but powerful text in this gorgeous picture book.

About the Author/Illustrator



her studio-home just minutes from Philadelphia.

Patricia Kreiser is an author/illustrator and proud mom who absolutely loves creating picture stories! Some of her earliest and best childhood memories included endless hours with Breyer horses, drawing (not on the walls), and reading pretty much anything she could get her hands on. Patricia hopes her stories will one day be someone's favorite childhood memory. She resides with her supportive family in

Note to Educator:

Discussing stories of loss can trigger unexpected and intense emotions in children. Stories such as *Always Together* can offer students hope, and your thoughtful discussion of ways to cope with feelings of loss can offer them helpful tools. Please take caution when exploring memories and asking students to share, as their share may leave them exposed and vulnerable while in class. They may need to follow up with you, a school counselor, a parent, or another trusted caregiver.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

BEFORE READING

1. What do you think friendship means?
2. Think of someone special you like to spend time with. It could be a friend, parent, grandparent, or someone else who is important in your life. What do you enjoy doing together?
3. How do you feel when that person isn't around?
4. If you are feeling down, what do you do to feel better? Are there other things you could try?
5. Based on the title of this book, *Always Together*, what do you think this book will be about?



WHILE READING

1. What do you notice about the two otters on the book cover? How do they seem to feel in this moment?
2. How do the otters show that they are good friends, apart from simply being together all the time?
3. How do you think the otter feels when it is standing on the rock at night, alone, under the stars?
4. What do the other animal friends do to help this otter feel better? Why do you think this might help?
5. What do these otters teach us about missing someone important in our lives?



AFTER READING

1. This story started one way and had an unexpected ending. Did this story surprise you? What did you think was going to happen?
2. How did you feel reading about the otters' friendship? How did you feel when the friendship changed?
3. What are some reasons that people could feel a sense of loss or "apart" from a loved one? (*moving, divorce, deployment, hospital stay, loss of friendship, family pet ran away, etc.*)
4. What are some ways people can help their friends when they are sad or missing someone?
5. Can you think of a memory you shared with someone you love that makes you feel happy?
6. If you were the author of this story, would you have ended it differently?

ACTIVITY IDEAS

MEMORY BOX

Objective: To help students understand the notion of memories and how they can be used to connect with someone they care about whether still present, far away, or absent.

Materials: Shoeboxes or other small boxes with lids, supplies for decorating, index cards or paper.

Instructions:

1. Discussion (5 minutes)
Discuss how we keep moments alive after they've passed. Talk about the otters from the story and how the first otter connected to the second otter through memories.
2. Making the memory box (20 minutes)
Ask students to decorate their box using the provided supplies. Have them write or draw a memory of a favorite moment on the provided index card or paper. They can place the card/paper in the box, with instructions to bring it home and place other meaningful items connected to memories inside. The box can be person specific, event specific, or keepsakes from miscellaneous memories.
3. Sharing (10 minutes)
Allow students who are comfortable talking about their boxes/memories to share with the class (see Note to Educator).



MEMORY POEMS

Objective: To explore emotions around certain memories through creative expression.

Materials: Writing supplies

Instructions:

1. Discussion (5 minutes)
Discuss the emotions felt by the otters during the story and how they changed. Then discuss the emotions felt by the students during the story and how they changed. Talk about how writing can be a helpful way to express and deal with difficult feelings.
2. Poem Writing (15 minutes)
Ask students to pretend they are one of the otters and have them write a poem to the other otter. The poem should express how they feel. Provide prompts, if necessary, such as:
 To my Otter friend,
 When I think of your laugh, I . . .
 When I swim in the river, I . . .
 When I look up at night, I . . .
3. Sharing (10 minutes)
Sharing can be done in small groups or to the whole class, depending on the comfort and sensitivity level of the students. Discuss the emotions and different perspectives expressed in each poem—even though they are all about the same two otters.



FRIENDSHIP COLLAGE

Objective: Showcase the happy feelings of friendship shown in the story, rather than the loss. A collage allows students to create a visual of what friendship means to them.

Materials: Magazines, scissors, glue, paper, markers

Instructions:

1. Discussion (5 minutes)
Talk about friendship. What makes a good friend? Why are they important? Remind the students of how the otters showed their friendship.
2. Collage (25 minutes)
Ask students to cut out pictures or words that mean friendship to them. If they cannot find ones that represent their feelings, instruct them to write or draw on smaller pieces of paper.
3. Presentation (10 minutes)
Invite students who are comfortable to share their collage with the class and explain why they chose each image or word.



Guide prepared by Merriam Sarcia Saunders, LMFT, author of *Trouble with a Tiny t* (Capstone Editions, 2021), and a family therapist, trauma professional, and ADHD services provider specializing in parenting and neurodevelopmental disorders.