

*Ida, Always*  
Activity & Discussion Guide



By Caron Levis  
Illustrated by Charles Santoso

“The red part of your heart is the love part.  
I think it’s good that we have hearts, and the hearts beat,  
so we can remember the people we miss.”  
—S., age 5.

A very thoughtful kindergarten student, who had recently lost a beloved relative, once said this to me as the thump-thump of her classmates bouncing red rubber balls echoed around us. It was one of the first of many times that I’ve been struck by the curiosity, wonder, and creativity of young children bravely exploring, and seeking, to make sense of death, loss, grief, and love.

Like bears, friendship, love, and loss come in different shapes, sizes, and ages. Children, just like adults, will encounter different losses in their lives, whether through death, separation, or other changes, and they’ll observe others around them experience losses too.

Whether a child is just starting to learn about the lifecycle, friendship, and emotions, or if they are currently anticipating, experiencing, or noticing a loss, the grown-ups in their lives can provide much comfort and guidance—but this is not an easy job. As adults, we naturally want to protect children from matters that might be scary or sad. However, our commitment to communicating with children about both joyful and challenging events can increase their resiliency, strengthen their relationships, and allow them to remain curious and creative creatures. An appropriate discussion of the lifecycle, death, and loss, aided by a supportive caregiver, can provide kids with language, awareness, and ideas they can refer to and utilize when they encounter loss in the future.

This guide offers some activities, discussion prompts, and information to help you use *Ida, Always* to explore the themes of love, loss, and grief with children. I still recall pages of the books my mother turned to when I was young and asking tough questions. It is my hope that *Ida, Always* might become a part of your communication toolbox so that, rather than finding yourself at a loss for words in the face of an unexpected event or question, you and the kids in your life will have a language of loss already there for you—a conversation already in progress.

Thank you for sharing this story with someone you love.

Always,

Caron

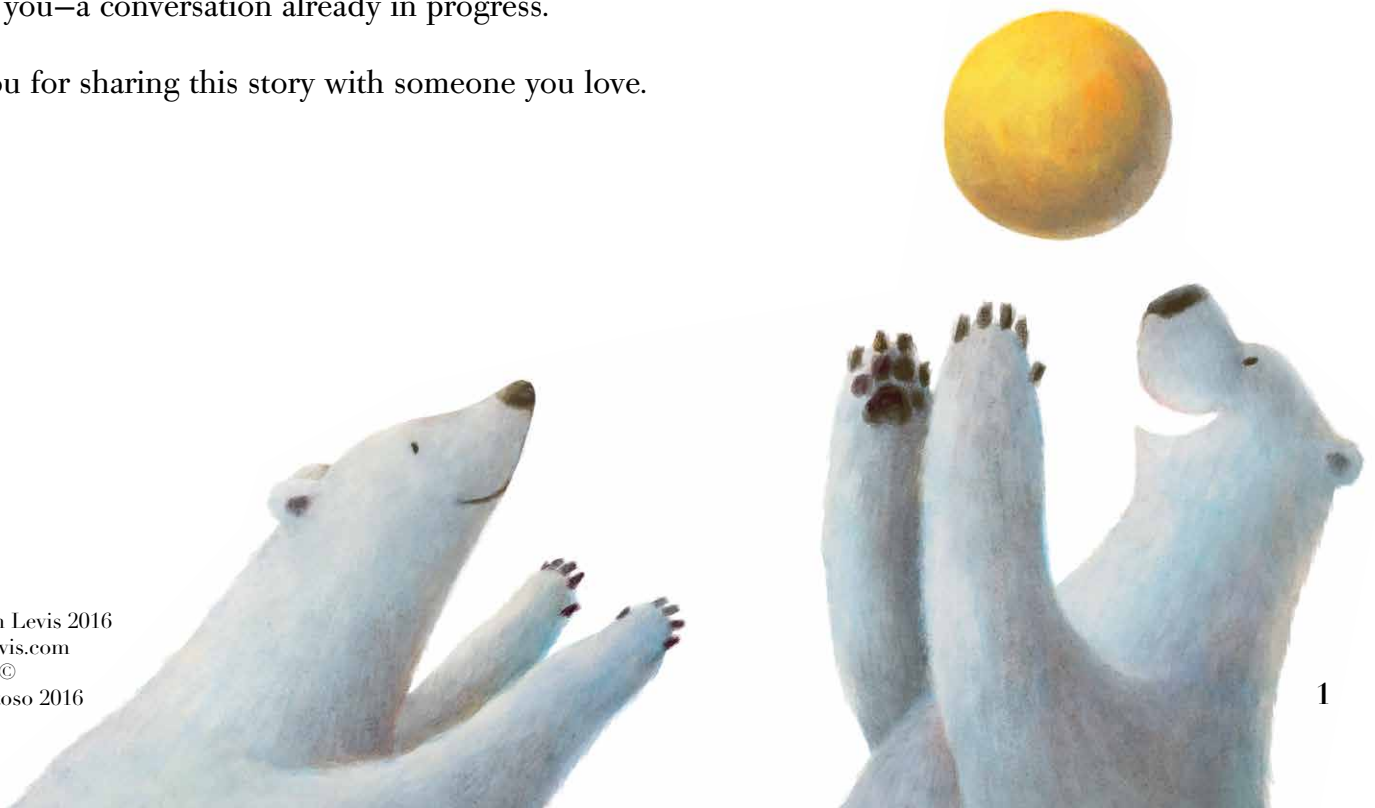
*Ida, Always*

Text © Caron Levis 2016

[www.caronlevis.com](http://www.caronlevis.com)

Illustrations ©

Charles Santoso 2016





# How to Use This Guide/Table of Contents

You can use this guide however makes sense for you and your child reader. Read it through, skip around, and find what feels useful and appropriate at the time; come back to other things later. Or use this as inspiration for your own ideas. You and your young reader may simply want to enjoy reading *Ida, Always* together. The most important element for exploring friendship, love, and loss with a child is *you*, the supportive caregiver.

*Note: This guide is a conversation aid, not a therapeutic manual. If your child has experienced a loss and you have any concerns/questions about how they are reacting to and processing this loss, be sure to get in touch with your school counselor or another mental health professional for advice.*

## Table of Contents

Introduction: A Note from Caron	1
Before Reading <i>Ida, Always</i> : Tips & Activities	3
After Reading <i>Ida, Always</i> : Tips & Activities	4
Information & Tip Sheets	
• Sonya’s Self-Care Tips for Caretakers	6
• Grounding and Relaxation Techniques to Do Together	7
• Communicating with Children about Loss and Death	8
• Gus’s Glossary	9
• How Children Grieve	10
• Sonya’s Suggestions for Supporting a Grieving Child	11
• For More Information	12
<i>Ida, Always</i> Activity Sheets	
• Coloring Sheets	13
• Gus & Ida’s Feelings Sheet	16
• Reader’s Dedication Sticker	17
• Emotional Clouds	18
• Stomps & Snarls Translation Page	19
• Wonder, Guess, Imagine Storyteller Sheet	20
• Fill Your Heart	21



# Before Reading *Ida, Always*

Underlines indicate accompanying tip or activity sheet

**Check out Sonya's Self-Care Tips for Caregivers:** You are a child's most important resource, so be sure to take care of yourself, as you would anything else children treasure!

**Pre-read/practice:** Read *Ida, Always* to yourself or aloud to another adult. Notice your own emotional reactions. Do you imagine questions your child might have? Review the guide and print out activity sheets you might want to try.

**Consider:** What is your reader's experience with loss? Has your child expressed curiosity about the lifecycle? Grounding yourself in their current circumstances, thoughts, or feelings can help you tune in to their reactions to the story.

**Pick Your Sunniest Spot:** Where and when will you read the story? Do you want a cozy, uninterrupted spot when you have lots of time, because you anticipate your child having many questions? Is it best to read *Ida, Always* at your regular reading time to further normalize the feelings and events in it? Maybe you want to create a cozy bear cave to read it in.

**Introduce the Story:** What might you want to tell your reader about the story before you read it?

**Use Gus & Ida's Feelings Sheet** to identify and name feelings they may encounter in the story. Young children need help building their emotional vocabulary.

**Give Permission to Scribble & Squirm:** Kids may need a place to express their emotions while listening to a story or having a conversation that might be challenging. Use the Coloring Sheets or blank paper to allow children a non-verbal way of expressing themselves. Your child may express their emotions physically by squirming, or getting up, so let them know that's okay. Help them make self-observations by noticing, "I see you are (using a lot of sharp blue lines in your drawing/moving around the room/etc). I wonder how you are feeling right now?"

**Prepare to Pause:** As you read, your reader may or may not want to ask questions or to share thoughts and feelings. Allow space for them to interject, or check in once in a while to ask if they have any questions or feelings to share. For example, your reader may have feelings and questions about the moment Gus gets the news, or Ida dies. (Or not, which is okay too!)

**Ask the child to be the Page-Turner** either with their hands or by selecting a sound to signal the turn (ex: a bear's growl, a pigeon's coo.) This allows the child to choose the pace that's right for them. It's okay if the child chooses to skip pages, stop and stare at illustrations, pause to snuggle and talk, or flip to the end or back to the beginning. Let them know there is no right or wrong way to read this story, and follow their lead.



# After Reading *Ida, Always*:

Underlines indicate accompanying tip or activity sheet

**Make a Reader's Dedication Sticker:** Caron and Charles dedicated their work of writing and illustrating this book to people who are important to them. Who will you dedicate your reading of *Ida, Always* to? Write this down and print out the sticker to put in your copy.

**Re-tell:** Ask your reader to tell the story in their own words. Hear what they've absorbed.

## Get Edumotional:

- **Make Emotional Clouds** to explore how children felt while listening to the story. Ask your child to choose different colors to fill and/or label the clouds with different emotions they saw the bears feeling in the book, or that they felt themselves. Use the activity sheet.
- **Be Emotional Explorers:** Engage in creative feeling questions such as: "What does \_\_\_\_ look like? How does it sound? Smell? Taste? What shape is this emotion? Size? Color? Texture? Where do you think Gus/Ida feels it in their body? Can you show me where you feel that feeling?" (Try reading Caron's book *Stuck with the Blooz* to keep exploring feelings in this way.)
- **Emotional Growling:** Make growls with different feelings: Sad Growls, Scared Growls, Proud Growls...
- **Feel the Feelings:** Gather different kinds of cloth and ribbon; point to different parts of the story and ask kids to pick the fabric pieces that express the emotions they or the bears felt.

**Be an Emotional Model:** Show kids where and how you feel your emotions! Let them know that you sometimes feel sad, scared, or confused, too, and what helps you when you do. A child can learn so much by watching how you experience and manage a range of emotions.

**Shape Sounds:** Charles Santoso drew the sounds *Ida* & *Gus* loved in their city into cloud shapes. Draw the shapes of special sounds in your life! Cut them out and make a collage.

**Create a Comforting Cave:** Caron and Charles had to brainstorm what might make a sick bear feel loved and cared for. Make or draw your own cozy cave. Decorate it, write your own visitors' notes.

**Make Story-to-Self Connections:** Bridge the bears' experience to the child's by making observations and asking questions such as:

- Observe, "Gus and *Ida* tell each other they miss each other." Then ask, "What are things you say or do to show people you care about them?"
- Observe: "Gus and *Ida* sometimes needed moments alone." Then ask, "Why? Do you ever need a moment alone? What do you like to do when you need a moment alone?"

**Soft/Rough Words:** to discover more about what your child understands about death, turn to the page where *Sonya* tells *Gus* the news of *Ida's* terminal illness and/or the page where *Ida* dies. Ask your reader: "What was *Sonya* telling *Gus* here?" "What happened to *Ida*, here?" "What questions do you think *Gus* has? What feelings?" "What questions and feelings do you have now?"

**Write the Right Words:** Ask your reader to write some new lines on a sticky note that in their words explains what death means to *Gus*. Add it to the story.



**Help Gus Understand the Life Cycle:** Ask kids to help you explain what the difference between alive, dead and inanimate is to Gus. Think like detectives: what are the clues that tell you something is alive? (What are the sounds, movements, temperatures?) What are the clues something has died? Gather, examine, and categorize things from Gus's world, such as a bird outside or in a pet store, a ball, water, a fallen leaf or a broken twig.

**Discuss and define Death and Loss:** See [Communicating with Children about Loss and Death](#).

**Stomp and Snarl:** When Gus hears about Ida's illness, he growls at Ida, and she growls back. Make your own growls, stomps, and snarls, then ask children to translate them from bear language to human words. What are the bears saying? Feeling? Use the activity sheet to write the ideas down.

**Wonder, Guess, and Imagine:** Ask your reader to describe what they think Gus and Ida are wondering, guessing, and imagining about what will happen to Ida when she dies. Let them answer with words, drawings, or gestures. Use the sheet.

**Growling Days, Laughing Days, Days That Mix You Up:** Friends and families have all kinds of days together. Act out, write or draw what you imagine Ida and Gus did on the different days. What kinds of days do you and your friends and family have together?

**Fill the Zoo with Good-Byes:** Ask your child to draw the way they think visitors, zookeepers, and Gus said good-bye to Ida. Draw or act out how they would like to say good-bye to Ida. Maybe your reader wants to reach out and give Ida one last pat on the page, just like Gus.

**Letters:** Sometimes when someone dies, we still have things we want to share with them. One thing we can do is write a letter when we're thinking about someone we love.

- **Help Gus write a letter to Ida:** What would he want to tell her about? Are there things going on in the zoo he wants her to know? Does he think about Ida? How is he feeling? Has he made some new friends? Did he and Sonya do something special? You can make drawings too. What can Gus and Sonya do with this letter?
- **Letter to a Loved One:** Ask your child to write a letter to someone they miss. What do you want them to know about your life right now? About how you feel? If the person is alive, send it to them! If the person has died or is out of reach, there are many different things you can do with the letter. Here are some suggestions:
  - Read it to a special person in your life.
  - Fold it into a paper airplane and fly it in the park.
  - Turn it into a message in a bottle and send it off.
  - Mail it to someone who can keep it safe for you.
  - Mail it to yourself.
  - Ask your caregiver to keep it safe for you to read when you are older.
  - Think of your own idea. What feels good to do with the letter?

**Advise Gus:** What are some things you think Gus can do to help himself feel better now that Ida is gone? Draw, write, or talk out some advice.

**Love Life:** What are some of the things Ida and Gus loved about life? What are some of the things you love about your life? Draw them, act them out, and make a plan to go do them!

**Fill Your Heart:** What people, places, activities, sounds, smells do you keep in your heart? Draw a big Heart—or use the activity sheet—fill it up, and share it.



# Sonya's Self-Care Guide for Caretakers

Whether you are reading *Ida, Always* and introducing the life cycle, or caring for a grieving child, it's important to recognize that talking with children about loss and death can be challenging—and to care for yourself. Here are a few ideas and activities:

**Recognize Your Own Emotions:** While you are focusing on your child's feelings, you will have your own too, of course. Stories of love and loss affect us in many ways. Identify, explore, and validate your own emotions.

**Make a List of Accessible Activities that Bring You Joy, Relaxation, or Release:** such as: journaling, aimless walks, exercising, a bath, meditating, calling a friend, reading, telling a joke, chopping vegetables, yelling at a televised sports event, dancing in your PJs. Keep the list handy, so if you feel nervous, stressed, or sad, you can pick something and do it. Not only will this support you, but you can also share (the appropriate ones) with kids and help them make their own list.

**Identify Your Support People:** Who can you bounce ideas off of and compare notes with? Debrief with? Be your emotional human self around? Who can help out with the child(ren) so you can take a moment alone? If you haven't already, consider joining a local caregivers group or following a parenting or education blog, and sharing experiences.

**What Would You Advise Sonya?:** It's often easier to advise another adult to care for themselves than it is to do those things for ourselves. Take a moment and imagine how Sonya may have felt while telling Gus about Ida's terminal illness. How might she have felt when Ida died or while watching Gus mourn? Imagine Sonya is a close friend of yours. List three things you would advise her to do for herself while she is talking to or caring for Gus at this time:

---

---

---

Now keep this list, add to it, and do these things for yourself.



# Grounding and Relaxation Exercises to Do Together

**Belly Breaths:** Caron learned about belly breathing from acting and martial arts training; she uses it whenever she wants to relax, calm nerves, or focus. Try it:

- Sit centered on feet or bottom; close your eyes or pick a spot to rest your gaze.
- Notice your breath and how it is moving today, right now (is it fast? slow? quiet? loud?) Whatever it's doing to support you is great.
- Now, imagine the air in front of you is a cloud. Take a slow, deep breath that that brings that cloud all the way to your belly, filling it up. You'll know it's there when you see your tummy move out a little.
- Then slowly breathe the cloud back out.
- Do this 3 times. Notice how your body feels.

**Squeeze/Release:** Going from your toes to your head or just choosing one part of your body, explore tensing and releasing muscles to feel a sense of ease. Make it a game with fun images, repeating each movement 3 times. Try:

- **Muddy Toes:** Imagine your feet are in the mud, squish that mud between your toes tight, tight, tight. Then let it go. Repeat.
- **Raisin/Grape Face:** Squeeze your face into a tiny/wrinkly raisin. Then stretch your face into a wide, plump grape. Go back and forth. Use a tiny raisin voice and a booming grape voice to say "raisin" and "grape."
- **Make Lemonade:** Use your hands to squeeze lemons into lemonade. Relax after each lemon has been juiced.
- **Cocoon/Butterfly:** Squish your whole body into a tight cocoon, then stretch and spread your wings into a butterfly.

**"Soak in the Sun":** Sit or lie down somewhere comfortable. Close eyes or find a spot to rest your gaze. Ask children to imagine the sun has entered the room and to describe the colors and the heat. Next, guide the child/ren (or yourself!) through an imaginary soak in the sun. Start from the toes and go all the way up to the tippy top of your head—don't forget the fingertips! Keep wording soft and simple, for example: "Now you can feel that shiny striped-orange sun warming your toes and they wiggle just a little, now the sun is warming your ankles, your knees, your tummy..." Keep the pace at their level (watch for wiggle signals that they're done!) At the end, ask them to slowly open their eyes, shake off the sand, and notice how their body feels.

(Option: before you soak, smooth and soothe your skin with imaginary sunscreen.)

**Pocket a "Favorite Rock":** Having a soothing stone to hold or keep in a pocket can be a way to ease nervous or confusing feelings (this is sometimes known as a worry stone.) Go to a park, the beach, or your neighborhood pet store and have your child pick out their own stone. You can name it or paint it, too.





# Communicating with Children about Loss and Death

**Identify Your Unique Communication Strengths:** There isn't one "right" way to communicate with children about love and loss, and it should be an ongoing conversation. If you feel nervous or unsure, recall successful talks you've had with kids and what your strengths are. Are you good at keeping it simple? Listening? Using humor? Write one communication strength here: \_\_\_\_\_.

**Listen Actively** to words and observe body language. Notice if your child needs a hug, or some space.

**Pause** for questions and to ask about, notice, and name their emotions.

**Validate:** Say, "Yes." Nod. Repeat what they've said out loud. Let them know what they say is important. The child is the expert on what they are feeling and wondering, so let them know they can't say anything wrong, or ask anything silly. Think in terms of "similar and different" rather than "right or wrong." If you need to guide them to a new idea or definition try transition phrases such as, "Yes, that's a great idea/answer; another idea/answer might be..." or, "Thanks for sharing that important thought. Let's try out another way to think about this."

**Don't react—act:** You may be caught off guard or feel stressed or sad when a child asks a tough question. Take a breath, choose your words and the tune of your tone. It's okay to need a re-do: "Sorry, I felt surprised by that question. It's important, and I want to answer you again in a different way."

**Realize Children Understand Death Differently:** How kids grasp the concept of death differs according to developmental age, culture, and circumstances. A young child might not fully grasp the concept of Ida's death, because that's where they are developmentally. You can re-visit the story and watch as understanding grows. Typically preschool children experience loss and sadness but don't yet understand death as permanent; and children begin conceiving of death as permanent when they reach school age (about 5). Kids experience a full range of emotions as their intellectual understanding of death and loss evolves. Since every child is unique, it's best to find out what a child understands by listening to and observing them.

**Define Death/Don't Use Euphemisms:** Young kids can be quite literal, so avoid things such as comparing death to "sleep," as this can cause fears rather than soothe them. Define death by talking frankly about the physical processes (when an animal dies, they don't breathe anymore); the interpersonal changes (when a person dies they won't be seen or heard or touched in the way people who are alive are); discuss the religious/spiritual/personal beliefs of your family, community, and others, leaving room for the child to explore (eg. some people/I believe people have an invisible part called a spirit...some people/I believe all living things go back into the earth and help it grow...what do you think?)

**Answer Truthfully:** If a child asks tough questions about death or grief, it is tempting to want to protect them by avoiding or lying, but kids find things out or fill in gaps with their own imaginations and logic which is often far scarier than the truth. You can answer honestly while still omitting disturbing details and choosing words that are appropriate for a child's age, culture, and circumstance.

**Give Simple, Age-appropriate Answers:** Be concise and brief; use the child's language.

**Be Ready to Repeat:** Kids may need/want to ask certain questions several times.

**Don't Know Everything:** It's okay not to know it all, or to need time to think of how you want to answer a kid's question. Try, "That's a great question. I don't know the answer but I will try to find out." or "That's an important question, and I want to make sure I answer you the best I can, so I'm going to think for a moment before I do."

**Look out for Guilt:** (if with a bereaved child.) Kids who have experienced a significant loss can be prone to feelings of guilt (see [How Children Grieve](#)). Be clear and firm about letting them know they are not to blame.

**Be There:** Let them know they can come to you with questions or concerns anytime.

# Gus's Glossary

Here some ways to start defining words which may come up when discussing *Ida, Always*. Adapt these to the age, culture, and circumstances of the child, and add to it. You don't have to talk about everything at once. Tailor the discussion to your child's needs and understanding. Explore the rituals of your family, community, and culture; talk about how different people have different kinds of rituals, events, and beliefs.

**Alive/Living:** When a person, animal, or plant's body is able to move, breath, pulse, have a heartbeat, grow, and other kinds of energetic things.

**Anticipatory Grief:** The kind of grief that happens when someone is expecting a loss to happen. This is the kind of grief Gus and Ida experienced when they found out about Ida's illness.

**Bereavement:** is what you call somebody's circumstance when someone they loved has died.

**Burial:** when a hole is dug, the body of the deceased is placed in it, and then covered up.

**Cemetery:** A place where the bodies of those who have died are buried in the ground.

**Coffin:** A special kind of box that the body of someone who died might be put in before they are buried.

**Cremation:** When the body of someone who is dead is put in a special place that has a lot of heat, and the heat changes the body into ashes.

**Dead/Died/Death:** When a person, animal, or plant's body stops working, it stops being alive. When someone or something dies, it's permanent.

**Deceased:** When someone dies, you can call them the deceased or say they are deceased.

**Funeral:** A time when families and friends get together to say good-bye to someone who has died. There are many different kinds of funerals.

**Grave:** The place in the ground where the body of somebody who has died is buried at a cemetery.

**Grief:** is the word for the thoughts and feelings somebody has inside them after a loss.

**Loss:** is when something or someone isn't in your current life the way they once were.

**Memorial Service:** When people get together to remember and honor someone who has died.

**Mourning:** is the word for all the different ways people say good-bye and show their grief and love when somebody has died. This can be anything from crying, to going to a funeral, to telling stories about the person who has died.

**Obituary:** A piece of writing that shares the news and describes the person who died.

**Terminal Illness:** Sometimes someone gets sick in a way that means they won't get better; instead, they will get sicker until their body stops working and they die. This is what happened with Ida.

**The Life Cycle:** The stages and changes living things go through from birth to growth to death.

**Urn:** A container that holds the ashes of a body that has been cremated.

# How Children Grieve

Writing *Ida, Always* led Caron to learn more about how children grieve. Knowledge and communication are key to supporting kids. Here's some information to start you off; for more, or if you have a child who has experienced a loss, look to the resources page.

## **Childhood Grief:**

- Is a normal reaction when a child experiences the death of someone in their life.
- Looks different than adult grief.
- Is experienced by and will affect every child uniquely.
- Can be affected by different developmental stages.
- Will come and go as children revisit the loss at different stages of their lives.
- Is often expressed through behaviors, play, and artistic expressions rather than verbal communication.

**All Kinds of Loss:** *Ida, Always* depicts Gus's experience of anticipatory grief and loss of a significant figure. Circumstances of a death and the child's relationship to the deceased may affect the grief process.

- Bereavement losses include: long-term illness, sudden illness, suicide, homicide, accident, environmental disaster.
- Accompanying Losses/Changes include: moving from home, changing schools or religious affiliations, no longer seeing certain living relatives/peers. Also, loss of future dreams or hopes related to the deceased.
- Ambiguous Loss: This kind of loss refers to losses such as divorce, military deployment, incarceration, foster care, mental illness, and other losses where the person is not deceased but is indefinitely/permanently away or changed.

Typical Grief (a.k.a. "uncomplicated grief"): is not a problem; rather, it is an experience a child lives with. Children don't "get over" the death of a loved one; they learn how to incorporate the loss into their lives.

Complicated Grief: (a.k.a. Traumatic Grief; Persistent Complex Bereavement.) While most children will experience typical grief, some children may experience more significant and/or persistent distress. **Risk factors** may include: ambivalent or poor relationship with the deceased or current caregiver; lack of support network; inability to express feelings about the loss; nature and amount of changes in child's life resulting from the death; feelings of self-blame and guilt; and if the death is related to the revealing or concealing of "family secrets." **Signs** may include: PTSD symptoms, severe anxiety, persistent depression, anger, or guilt, suicidal thoughts, preoccupation with death, social isolation.

**Common Grief Reactions** (in both complicated and uncomplicated grief) include:

- Somatic complaints such as stomach aches, headaches, fatigue, sleeping problems.
- Crying or not crying.
- Withdrawal from activities.
- Regression: kids may temporarily revert to younger behaviors (thumb sucking, bedwetting, "baby-talk.")
- Guilt, anger, sadness, loneliness, fear, anxiety, worry.
- Magical Thinking: Children are creative, developing thinkers prone to making irrational or illogical connections as they strive to make sense of events and fill in gaps of understanding. A child may, for example believe that if they get good grades or misbehave, the loved one will return to reward or punish them. A child may think that if only they hadn't sneezed when dad was in the hospital, he wouldn't have died.
- Feelings of being alone, different, or misunderstood.

The Tasks of Mourning: Current theory holds that grieving is not a linear or uniform process; rather, there are several "tasks" that a grieving child accomplishes over time. These include:

- Accepting that the death is real and permanent.
- Fully experiencing a range of emotions related to the loss.
- Adjusting to the absence of the deceased internally and externally, including new familiar roles and changes.
- Internalization of the relationship to the deceased.
- Having a sense of hope and future without the deceased.



# Sonya's Suggestions for Supporting a Grieving Child

- Be open, honest, and normalizing about their experience and emotions.
- Follow their lead: Let them show/tell you what they need.
- Listen: Let them know you'd like to hear about their experience.
- Don't Assume: Grief is unique, and children are resilient and often able to express joy and take part in normal activities even while they are grieving. Don't assume they are hiding or denying. Look for how and when they are expressing themselves.
- Reassure: Kids may have anxieties over their own safety or that of loved ones.
- Make decisions together: about attending funerals, memorials; finding ways to say good-bye. If they are infants or toddlers, discuss with other adults you trust. There's no right or wrong.
- Give Choices: Death can leave us feeling powerless, so find ways to let them take control (eg. picking what they wear to a funeral; what you'll do Saturday; what music to listen to).
- Observe with care, don't watch with worry: Just as having the event be ignored can cause a child to feel alone, being overly worried over can also make a child feel different. Remember that most children will process their grief in a healthy, typical way. Expect them to be resilient, while keeping an eye out for struggles.
- Encourage expression through play and arts activities: Give them a journal and crayons, try out a dance or martial arts class. Encourage make-believe and outdoor play.
- Read children's books about the life cycle and loss together. Read all kinds of books together!
- Gain information from respected sources; relay useful knowledge.
- Engage and educate your community: Adults and children often don't know how to react and support a grieving friend or peer, which can increase social isolation. Give resources and educate your community about loss and how to be supportive.
- Consider finding the child a peer bereavement group to normalize their experience, form connections, and provide a safe place to express themselves. Consider family therapy.
- Do and Don't Know What to Say: It's natural for adults and kids to feel confused, sad, or afraid when around a bereaved child. It's okay to make mistakes. Here are some things to try to do, and to avoid.

**Don't:** Avoid the bereaved child because you think you aren't needed or will "say something wrong."

**Do:** Let them know you're there for them, whether it's to talk or just do some regular activities together. It's okay to say, "I don't really know what to say or do for you right now, but I love you and want to find out how I can help."

**Don't:** Tell them how they should feel or mourn (ex: "How can you want to go to the playground at a time like this? Don't you feel too sad?")

**Do:** Show interest in their feelings and follow their lead: (ex: "Are you feeling energized?" "Who do you want to go with you to the playground?")

**Don't:** Demand a child participate in an activity or to talk about the loss.

**Do:** Invite the child to join in activities or talk if/when they are ready.

**Don't:** Overly idealize the deceased or the relationship.

**Do:** Encourage them to talk about both the positive and the negative memories and feelings.

**Don't:** Ask a million questions. It's natural, especially for peers, to be curious about loss, but getting a ton of questions can be overwhelming.

**Do:** Choose a few questions to show you're interested. "You said you went to the funeral, do you want to tell me about it?"

**Don't say:** "I know how you feel." "Aren't you over it by now?" "How are you?"

**Do try:** "I'd like to hear about how you're feeling if you want to tell me." "Grief comes and goes, seems like you are feeling it today." "What kind of a day has it been?"

# For More Information

## Gus & Ida

Many articles, photos, and videos of the real Gus & Ida can be found online. Start with reading the article that first inspired *Ida, Always*: <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/06/06/after-24-years-suddenly-alone-at-the-central-park-zoo>  
To visit Ida & Gus's old home and meet the new animals living there, visit [www.centralparkzoo.com](http://www.centralparkzoo.com).  
To find information on Polar Bears, you can start with: [www.polarbearsinternational.org](http://www.polarbearsinternational.org)

## Childhood Loss & Bereavement Resources

The Dougy Center: [www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)  
The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)  
The National Alliance for Grieving Children: [www.childrengrieve.org](http://www.childrengrieve.org)  
New York Life Foundation: [www.achildgrief.com](http://www.achildgrief.com)  
National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement: [www.schoolcrisiscenter.org](http://www.schoolcrisiscenter.org)

Loss & Bereavement Services for Children/Teens In NYC:

A Caring Hand, The Billy Esposito Foundation: [www.acaringhand.org](http://www.acaringhand.org). Group and individual services for children and families; school consultation and evaluations.

The Jewish Board Loss & Bereavement Program for Children and Adolescents: [www.jbfc.org](http://www.jbfc.org). Offers bereavement groups in community settings, including schools, community centers, and residential programs. Trainings for social workers, educators, and mental health professionals also available.

National:

Comfort Zone Camp: [www.comfortzonecamp.org](http://www.comfortzonecamp.org). Free bereavement camps for kids.

## Author Visits

Caron loves coming to schools and other community settings, to offer author workshops that use drama and creative writing to explore the themes of her books, and to share the process of writing and publishing. Workshops for kids of all ages, parents, and educators are available. For details, visit her at [www.caronlevis.com](http://www.caronlevis.com).

## References

*In addition to the above resources, this guide is informed by books and articles including:*

Brown, G. (2014) Persistent complex bereavement disorder as a call to action. In *Stress Points*, published online by International Society For Traumatic Stress Studies; Illinois.

Fogarty, J. (2000). *The Magical Thoughts of Grieving Children: treating children with complicated mourning and advice for parents*. New York: Baywood Publishing Company.

Rudolph, M. (1978) *Should the Children Know? Encounters with Death in the Lives of Children* New York: Schocken Books, Inc.

Silverman, P.R., (2000) *Never Too Young To Know: Death In Children's Lives*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Stroebe, M., Hansson, R., Stroebe, W., Schut, H. (Eds.) (2001) *Handbook of Bereavement Research: Consequences, Coping, and Care*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

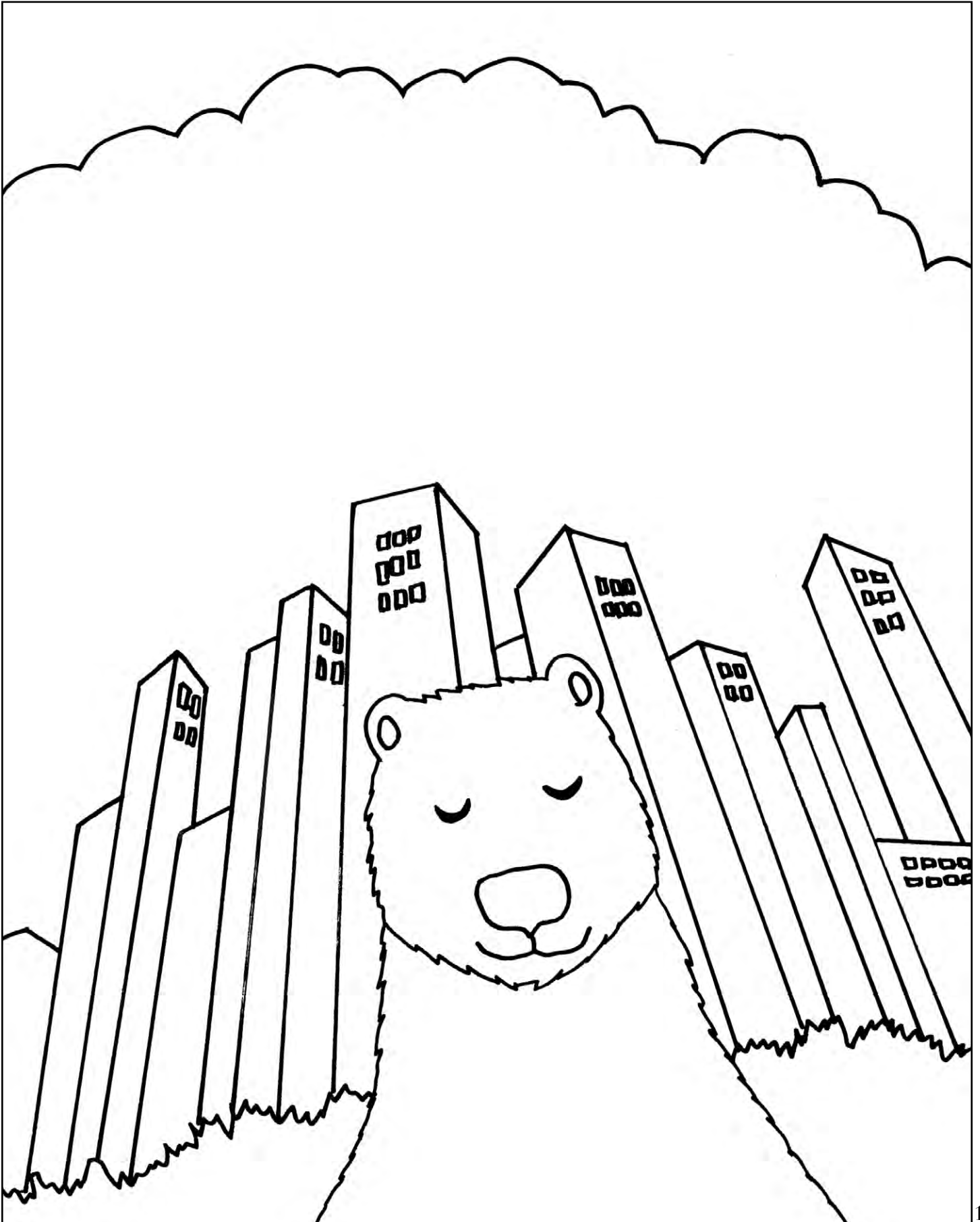
Stuber, M (2001) "What do we tell the children?": Understanding childhood grief. *Western Journal of Medicine, Vol 174*.

## About the Author and Illustrator of *Ida, Always*

**CARON LEVIS** enjoys working with kids, using drama and writing to develop social, emotional, and literacy skills. She was inspired to write this story by the brave students, teachers, and parents she met during visits for her first book, *Stuck with the Blooz*. She is an MSW candidate at Hunter College, with an MFA in creative writing from the New School, where she now teaches. She lives in New York City, where she grew up near the real Gus and Ida. Some sounds that remind Caron of people she loves and misses are: the squeak of a sticky candy jar opening, the whirl of a rotary phone dial, and the *crash-swoosh* of the ocean. You can visit her at [www.caronlevis.com](http://www.caronlevis.com).

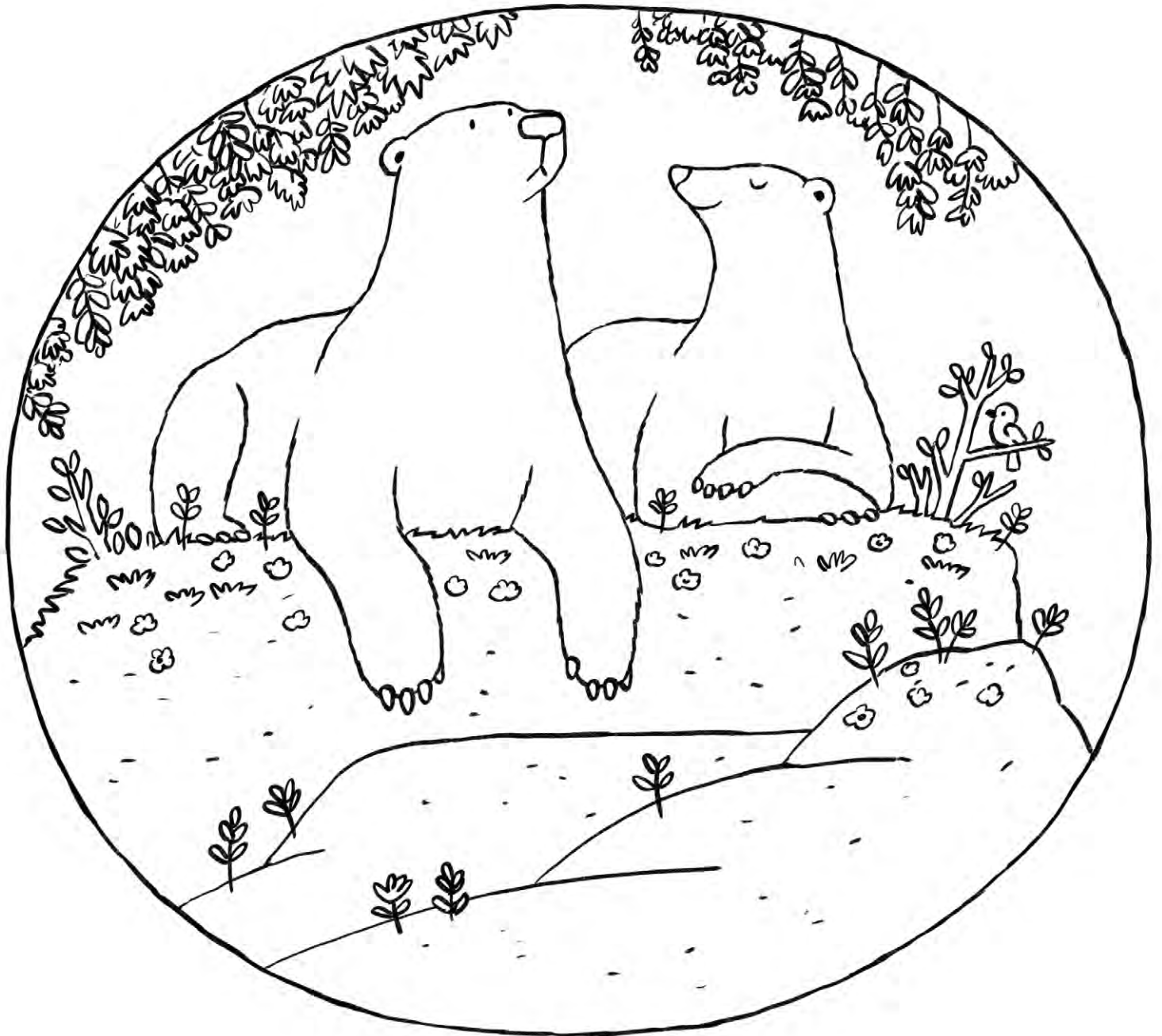
**CHARLES SANTOSO** loves drawing little things in his little journal and dreaming about wondrous stories. He gathers inspiration from his childhood memories, and curiosities he discovers in his everyday travels. He has illustrated several picture books, including *I Don't Like Koala* by Sean Ferrell. Charles has also worked as a visual development artist, creating illustrations for feature film projects. He lives and works in Sydney, Australia. You can visit him at [www.charlessantoso.com](http://www.charlessantoso.com).

# Coloring Sheets

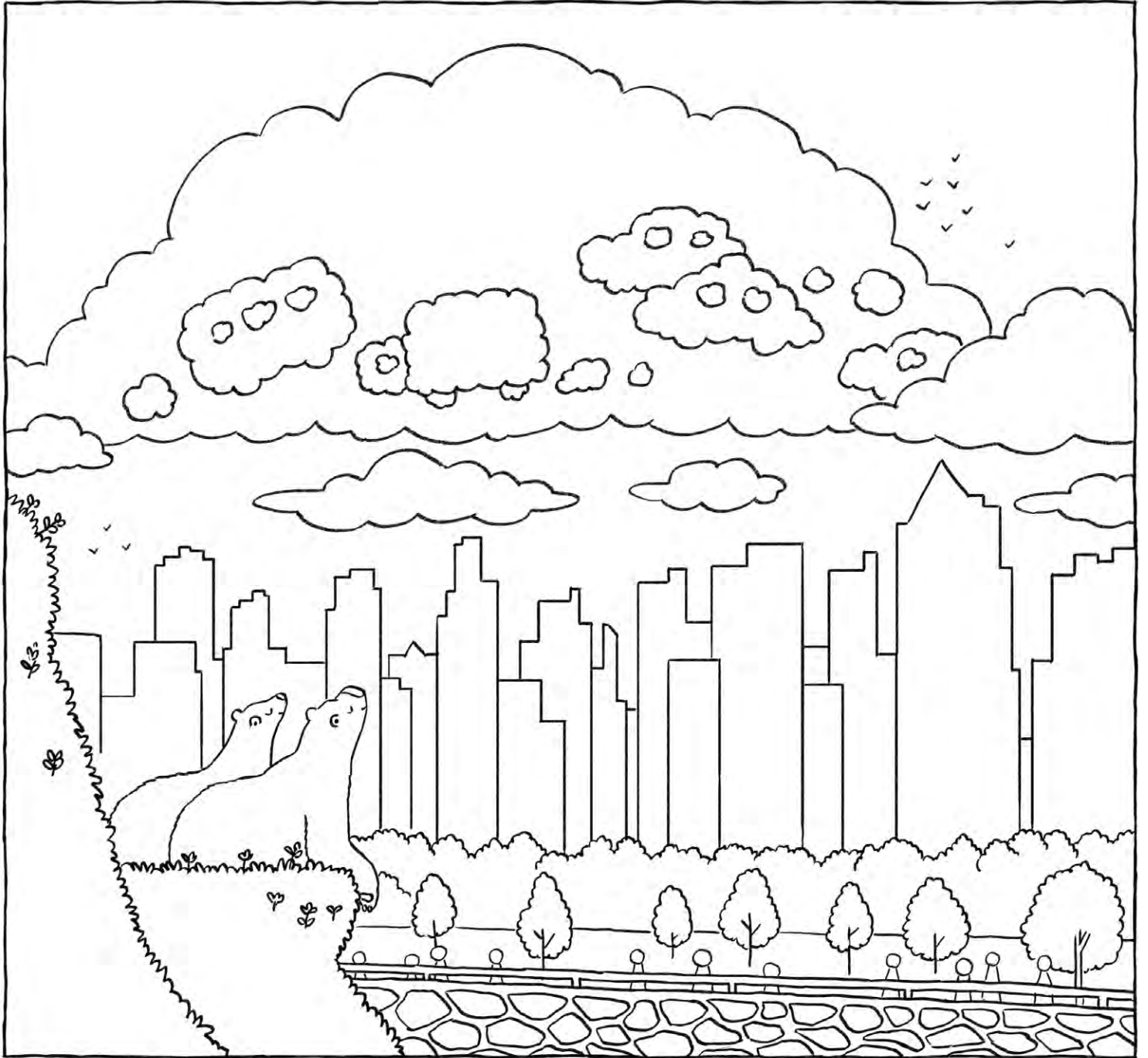




# Coloring Sheets



# Coloring Sheets



# Gus & Ida's Feelings Sheet

How are you feeling today?



Gus



Ida



Happy



Afraid



Confused



Dissapointed



Hopeful



Tired



Angry



Peaceful



Lonely



Anxious



Guilty



Loving



Sad

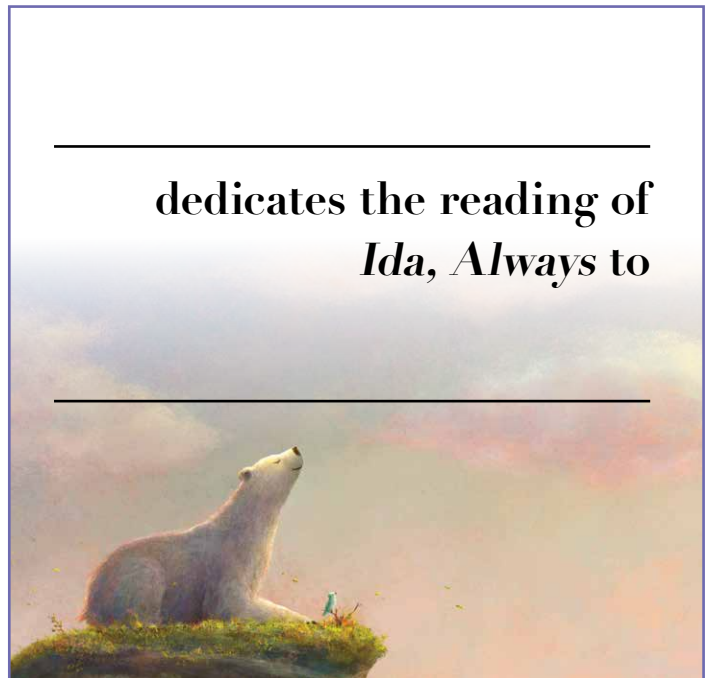
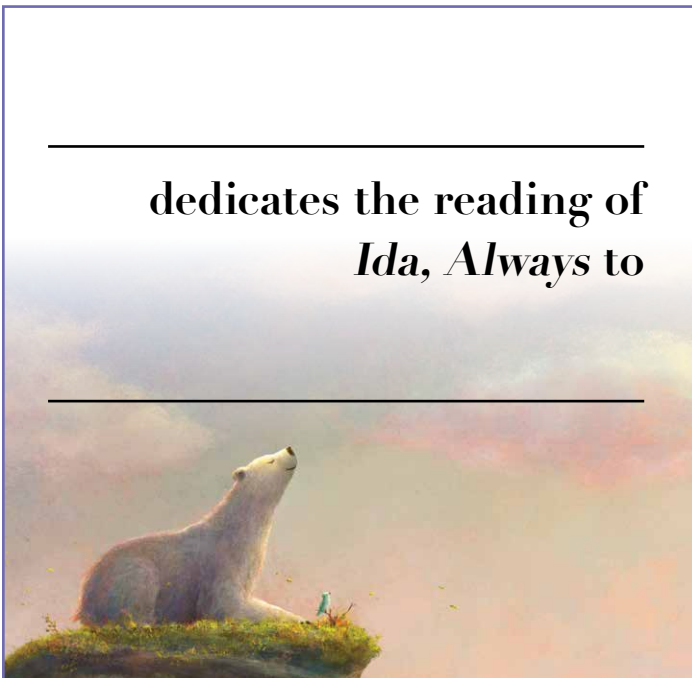
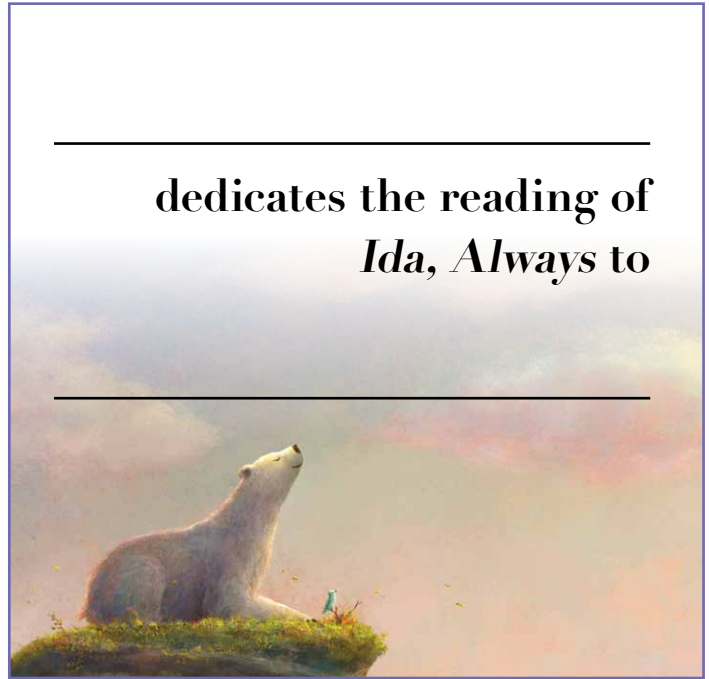
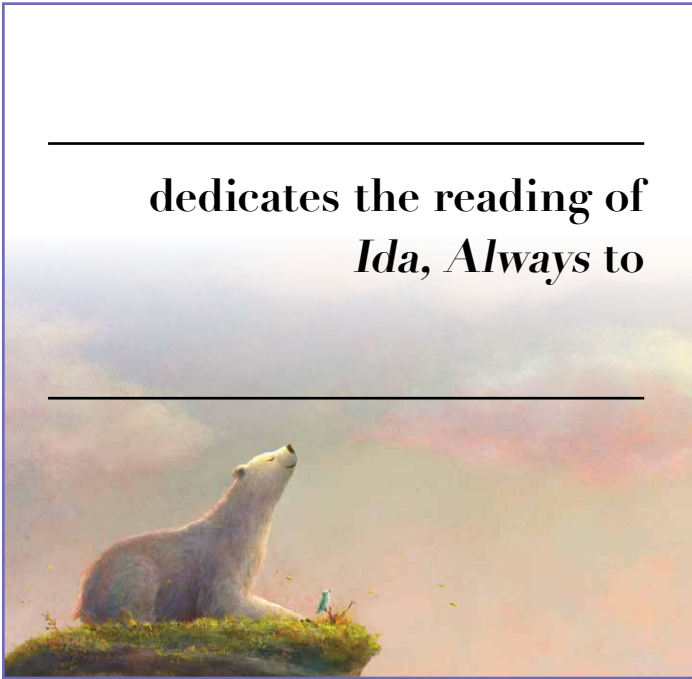


Proud

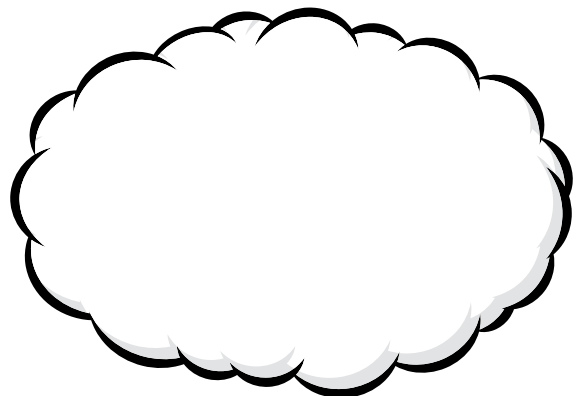
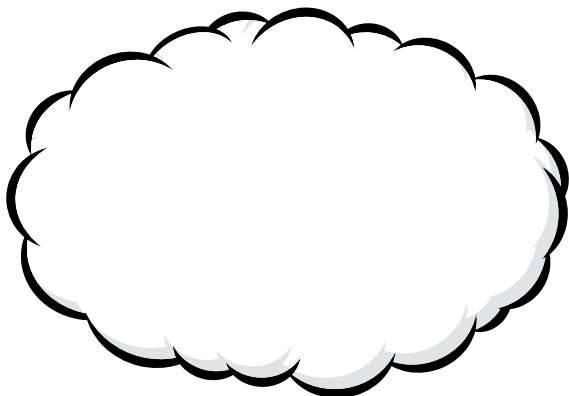
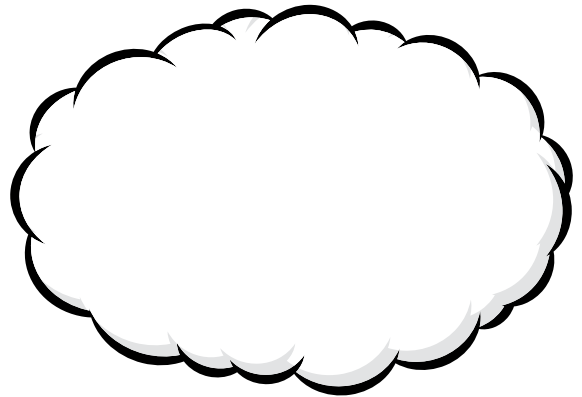
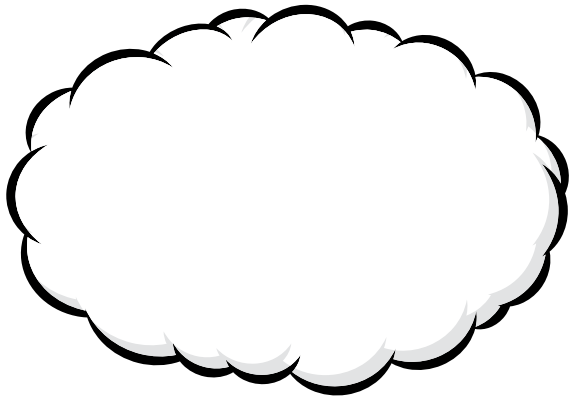
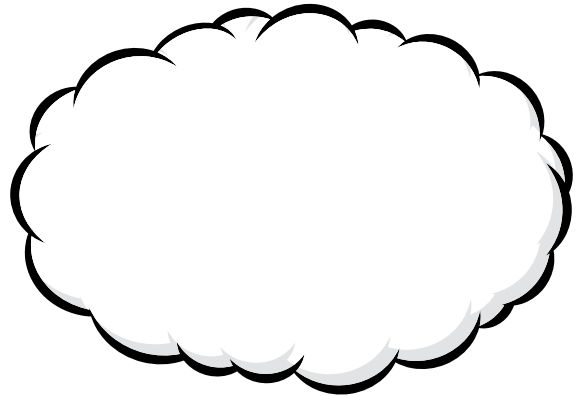
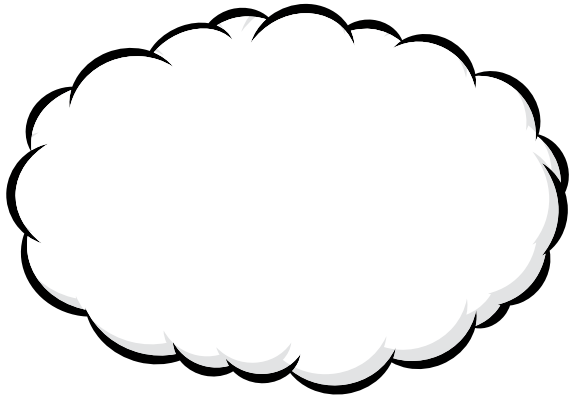
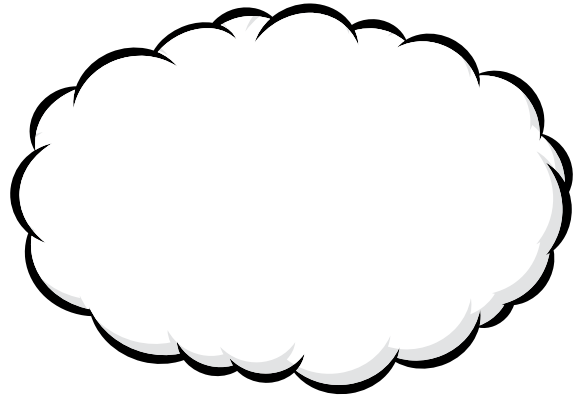
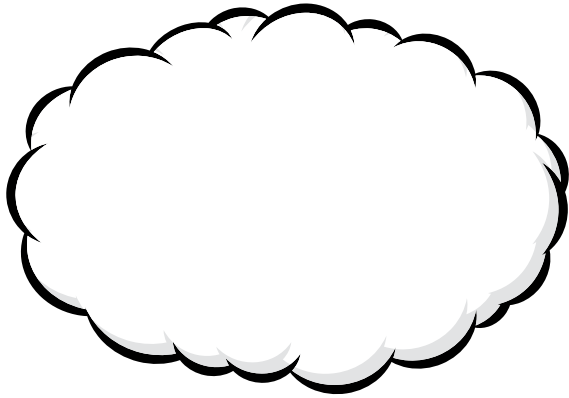


# Reader's Dedication Sticker

Caron and Charles dedicated the writing and illustrating of *Ida, Always* to people who are important to them. A book needs a writer, an illustrator, and a READER: that's you! Make your Reader's Dedication below, print it on sticker paper, and place it on the dedication page of *Ida, Always*. Add as many as you like.

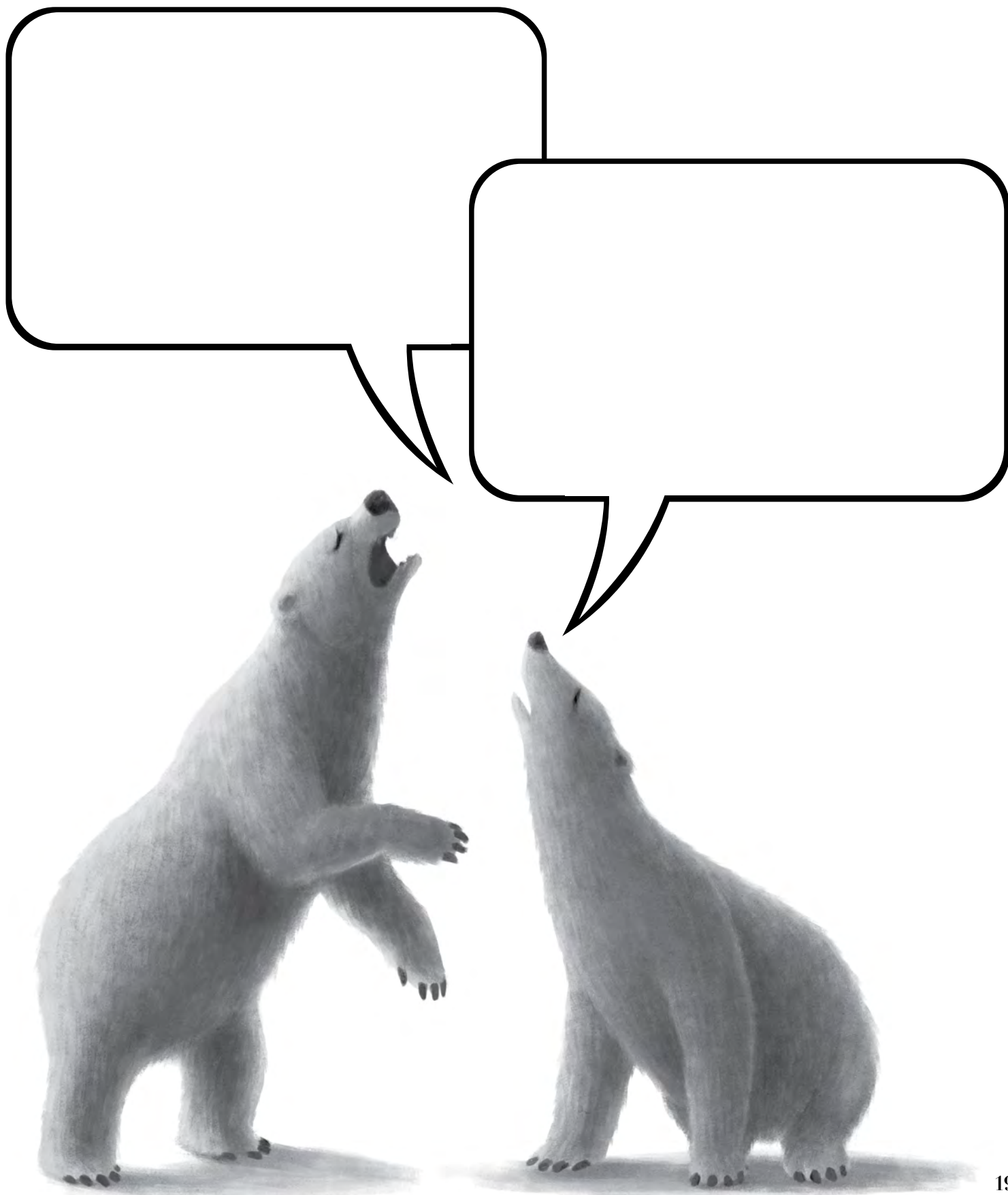


# Emotional Clouds



## Stomps & Snarls Translation Page

Turn the growls into words to show what the bears are feeling and saying here.



# Wonder, Guess, Imagine Storyteller Sheet

Write your ideas about what the bears are wondering, guessing, and imagining.



---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---



---

---

---

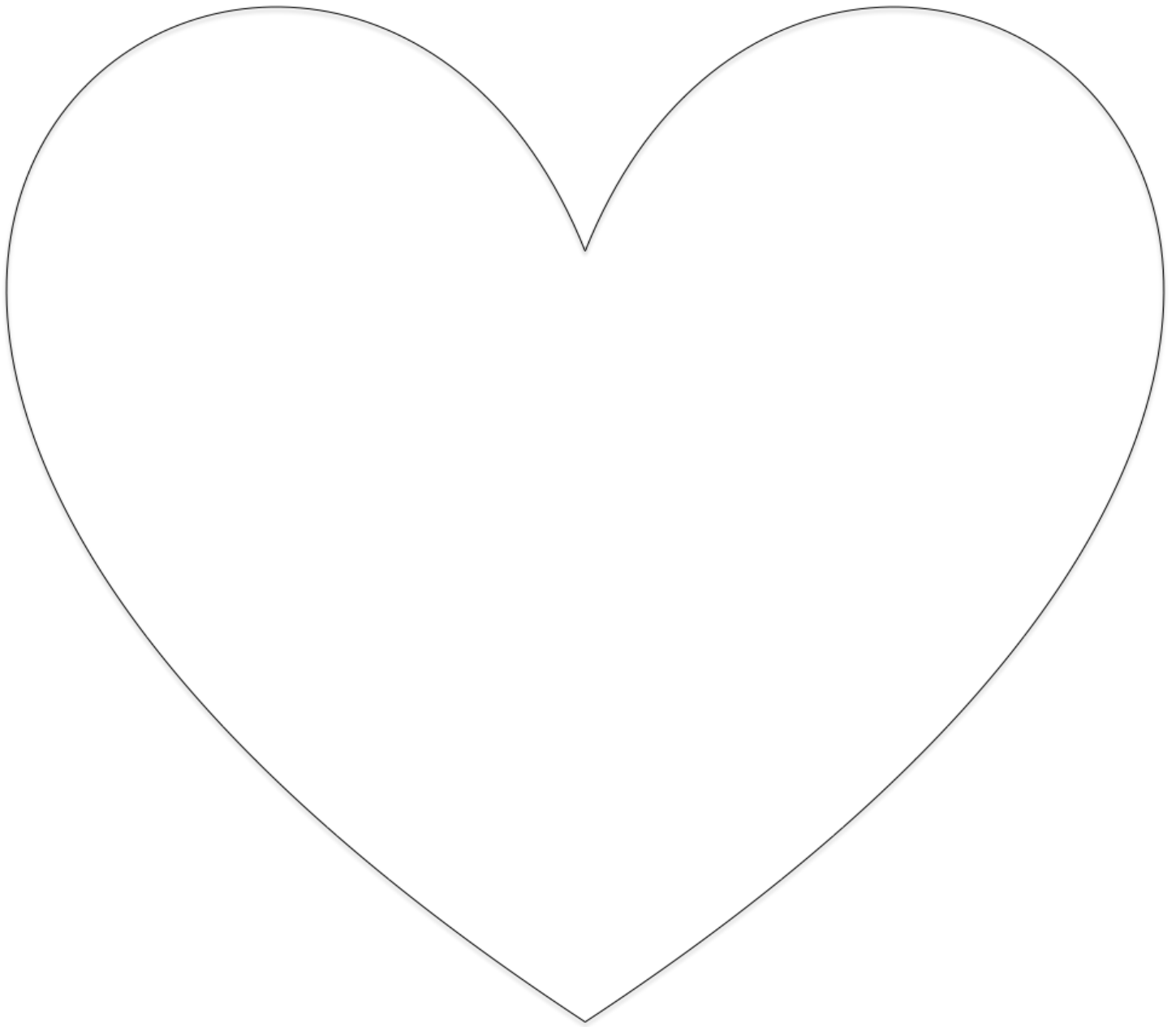
---



**What sounds and someones do you,**

**\_\_\_\_\_ , hold in your heart, always?**

**Draw the colors, shapes, scenes, things,  
and people you love...**



**I Keep \_\_\_\_\_ with me, always.**