



***The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden***

Written by Heather Smith

Illustrated by Rachel Wada

Orca, 2019, 32 pp

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Following a natural tragedy that destroyed his Japanese village, Mr. Hirota builds a phone booth in his garden to help himself as well as his community heal. In this story, we learn about Mr. Hirota and his young friend Makio. They both lost a loved one when a big wave came and swept almost everyone into the ocean. The story also describes how Mr. Hirota built a phone booth to face his grief and come to terms with his loss. Although the phone in the booth is not linked to anything, it allows

Mr. Hirota to connect with his daughter. Makio is also able to use the phone booth to express how he feels to his dad. The villagers learn about the phone booth and use it to voice their sadness, help them grieve and find peace and hope in their hearts again. This story conveys the feelings that individuals of any age face to overcome the grief of lost loved ones.

The illustrations use soft shades of blues to portray the tragedy of the wave and to emphasize the heartbroken emotions faced by the characters. Though the story shines light on sad emotions, it also shows how communities can come together. We learn in this book how tragedy can upend people's lives but an act of kindness like that of Mr. Hirota's phone booth helps others feel close again to their lost loved ones. This story brings hope to all on how a small act of kindness can bring healing for others.

This book can be paired with *Walk with Me* by Buitrago and Yockteng (2008). It explores the importance of feeling safe and having someone that makes them feel protected. A young girl has her own protector, an imaginary lion. The young girl and her lion companion go to various places together. Readers can infer that the lion represents her father, and assume that the father may no longer be at home. Young readers can explore who makes them feel safe and connect to the events in the book. They can also learn about strong emotions of love and remembrance from family members who are with them or long gone as well as those who are near or far away from them. *Outside Inside* by LeUyen Pham (2021) may also be used to support strong emotions of love and family in a story that is set in a time of remarkable change when everyone has to stay inside to protect those who must go outside.

The collaboration between Heather Smith and Rachel Wanda shows respect and accuracy to the inspiration of the true story of the wind phone in Ostuchi, Japan. The author, Heather Smith, tells a powerful story of love and healing in times of great loss. Heather lives in Ontario with her family. She writes books for children and young adults that explore a variety of characters with meaningful experiences. Her books include *Barry Squires*, *Full Tilt* (2020), *A Plan for Pops* (2019), *Angus All Aglow* (2018), and many more.

The artist, Rachel Wada uses a traditional Japanese art form with her own techniques for

Sumi-e and calligraphy to build on the strong emotions of love, remembrance, and healing in this book. She used watercolors, black ink and pencils as she referenced a woodblock print style and photos to weave together her illustrations. Rachel is Japanese-Chinese and says that she merges her cultural heritage in her visual style. She lives in Vancouver as a freelance illustrator and designer. Her illustrations have also appeared in Globe and Mail, various magazines and guides.

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