

Children's Books on Dementia loaned from Alzheimer's Society Knowledge Centre

"Always my grandpa",
(pub in the USA in 2006)

Views of Dementia Service User Network

Good but takes itself very seriously. Nice, low key illustrations. Age group? Has the style of Michael Murpurgo. Main character is a boy. Is fiction for children.

Views of Keith Oliver

On a number of levels, shows the perspective of Alzheimer's through eyes of the granddad, the mother/daughter and the child. Explores family relationships in a very positive way. Shows black side of the disease – forgetfulness (burning some cooking), getting lost and the progressive nature of the disease. Good use of metaphor in the text. Feel empathy to all the three main characters, and explores the fears of the child in a matter of fact way. Only negative – first 3 or 4 pages have a number of "Americanisms and expressions". Very useful suggestions for parents at the end of the book.

Views of primary school teachers

Seen through a child's eyes. Talks about tangled, dying brain cells, granddad is the story teller. Shows person has good/bad days. Well presented plot with clear characters which children could relate to. Would work with ages 8 - 11. Very useful information at the back for parents to use.

"Need to know Alzheimer' Disease"

(pub. In the UK in 2004)

Views of Dementia Service User Network

Covers a lot of ground, is a comprehensive guide for children (and adults) possibly covers too much. When quotes made the famous are acknowledged but people with dementia aren't. Very good layout. Use of language such as "devastating" is not helpful.

Views of Keith Oliver

Would be good for older children (able Y6 or secondary pupils) and possibly adults wanting an initial read on Alzheimer's. Goes into some complex science and attempts to explain it. Does quote figures which are now well out of date. Pleasing to see it does cover Young Onset and will I think address some established stereotypes. Very comprehensive in 55 pages.

Views of primary school teachers

Clear headings to this reference book – lots of information. Is a bit dated and possibly has been superseded by the internet as a source of this type of information for youngsters. Able 10 -11 year olds might access sections of the book

“When I visit Granny Jean”

(pub in 2011 in the UK)

Views of Dementia Service User Network

Charming illustrations. Possible to read right through or to dip in. Main character has severe dementia but not shown as scary. She's living in ma care home and this is normalised. Lots of smiling faces. Might be too girly and “pink”.

Views of Keith Oliver

Agree with all of above, with additional points – covers wandering, tiredness, language difficulties and memory problems in the story. Good use of metaphors. Nice tips at the end to do with your granny if she has Alzheimer's.

Views of primary school teachers

Story about a girl and grandma. Grandma is in a care home. Is engaging, comfortable and alludes to tricky stuff in a non frightening and positive way. Tackles key issues relating to dementia positively. Staff liked the book and felt that it could be used as young as Year 2 – age 6/7.

“The Smell of Chocolate”

(pub in 2003 in Australia)

Views of Dementia Service User Network

Informative book which does a good job in telling about the relationships of the main characters. A good story –plot etc which the reader can identify with.

Views of Keith Oliver

Brilliant, Shirley Hughes (Alfie from 1980s) style illustrations. Is about a family including a pet dog and some lovely things they do together – Alzheimer's is only mentioned on the final page of the story.

The second half of the book is a very simple, child friendly factual section about dementia with the same style illustrations plus some photographs. An excellent introduction to dementia for primary school children. Bibliography is Australia orientated.

Views of primary school teachers

A well set out book which blends very well a story and key facts. The facts added to the book and was well received. The text was positive although teachers found the illustrations a bit creepy and dark. Might well appeal to boys – main character is a boy who loves his granddad. Would work best with older children, i.e. Year 6 -10/11 year olds. Teachers suggestion - would use it by reading story, then studying facts and then reading story again

“Still my Grandma”

(pub. In Belguim 2006)

Views of Dementia Service User Network

A sad book which describes a rapid decline in the health of the main character. Reflective text. A bit darka dn then happier again. Attractive coloured pictures.

Views of Keith Oliver

Young girl is narrator and main character and book begins with a lovely account of how close she was with her grandma and some of the activities they did together. Grandma's behaviour changes – quite well explained, and then goes on to explain in a very matter of fact, child friendly way how AD has changed their relationship. Still doing things together when child visits the care home but different things.

Views of primary school teachers

Simple plot – girl/grandma who's going into a home. The author explores understanding of dementia in a subtle way supported by beautiful colour illustrations. Love and relationships are the main themes and children would relate to the character. Could work as young as Year 2 – 6/7 year olds who could have it read to them.

Mile-High Apple Pie

(pub. In England 2004)

Views of Dementia Service User Network

A very nice book, cosy/familiar feel to it through story and lovely illustrations. Children would relate to the main points which include tolerance.

Views of Keith Oliver

On the surface I agree with the above, but actually the text is quite negative in places in the way the child as a narrator describes their gran. Lovely illustrations and a style perhaps suited for very young children but without the depth of understanding and storyline of others and may increase negative stereotyping. Is more about an old lady (gran) who is always forgetting things.

View of primary school teachers

School have this book on shelves in Key Stage 1 (4 -7 year olds). Lovely plot – gentle and positive, but some aspects not so keen on – appeal to boys? Child named Margaret in the book – same name as gran (named after her?) Would work with Year 2 – 4 (ages 6 -9).

The Little word catcher

(pub. In Canada 2007)

Views of the Dementia Service User Network

Great for talking about word finding problems

Views of Keith Oliver

Again lovely illustrations, this time in pen and ink. Story is again narrated by the child and includes the three generations (child, mum/dad, gran) and looks at how gran's word retrieval problems impact upon all three of them. Despite this difficulty, which the author does briefly link to memory problems, the child wants to help and explains the problem in a child friendly way – are positive features. Book finishes with a happy scene.

Views of primary school teachers

Main character needed help finding/catching words. Girl/grandma are characters. Stylistic/compassionate book, dementia/Alzheimer's not named. Good length –not too wordy. Would support discussion for Years 2 – 4, age 6+ - 9.

Can I tell you about Dementia – guide for family, friends and carers

(pub in England in 2013)

Views of Dementia Service User Network

Is exactly what it says in the sub-title. It eases the reader gently into the subject. Very informative, so very good for all three target audiences. *"I've read it and I' glad I did"* – a member of the group.

Views of Keith Oliver

Not for primary school children – could be very useful for those aged 13 - 14+. Gives a very balanced picture with some degree of positivity especially when focusing on the early/mid stages of the disease. First part of the book (37/48 pages) is about Jack (a fictitious chap in his 80s) telling his story of living with dementia – both positive and negative. The last 11 pages are facts and helpful contacts etc. Jack's account is based on fact, is very full and accurate and would be the same as that of many with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's. The reader gets a really good sense of what living with dementia can be like. A very useful guide and for many it may be better than the rather dry, factual booklets produced commercially or by the NHS/charities.

Keith Oliver May 2013