

The following review is written by D. Donovan, Senior Reviewer, Midwest Book Review, and will appear in the August 2025 issue of *Midwest Book Review* and Donovan's Literary Services.

The Day Sweetie Pie Died

Laurie Sharp

Belle Isle Books

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\$26.95 (Hardback), \$15.95 (Paperback), \$4.99 (Ebook), \$6.99 (Audiobook retail), \$20.99 (Audiobook library)

Author Website: <https://lmsharpbooks.com/>

Publisher Website: <https://www.brandylanepublishers.com/product/the-day-sweetie-pie-died/>

The Day Sweetie Pie Died is a picture book that differs from most about death, in that it surveys the events leading up to death. It is intended to be read long before a child experiences an actual death.

In this story, a group of schoolchildren and their teacher confront death, grief, emotions, and recovery. The story starts off unexpectedly (in comparison to most children's books about death): young Maggie is enthusiastic about school ("School ROCKS!") and anticipates having a wonderful day.

She especially loves the class guinea pig Sweetie Pie, the subject of this story. Her encounter with her teacher and the other kids is joyful, but the stage is set when her beloved teacher seems unusually reflective. How Ms. Lamms tells the class about Sweetie Pie's demise and helps them absorb this fact makes for an engrossing lesson on loss. Read-aloud adults will find *The Day Sweetie Pie Died* the perfect choice for kids experiencing pet loss, grief, and the myriad of emotions that converge around death.

Laurie Sharp does an especially good job of contrasting everyday life with a sudden change and the variety of emotions this sparks in the class as a whole and the young first-person narrator in particular:

I blurt out, "I want my Momma!" I don't want this to be a new day anymore. I want it to be yesterday, when Sweetie Pie was alive.

Colorful, engaging artwork by Emily Hurst Pritchett is the perfect accompaniment to this somber subject as the kids reflect on the joy of knowing Sweetie Pie and absorb the pain of her loss.

There are plenty of children's picture books about grief, death, and coming to terms with dying. Few embrace the bigger picture of life and death in the manner of *The Day Sweetie Pie Died*, which shows how a day like any other turns into a day of not just mourning, but a renewed celebration of life.

Read-aloud adults will find *The Day Sweetie Pie Died* a compelling, moving story that takes all manner of reactions and insights into consideration as Maggie moves through her grief, shares with her classmates, and acknowledges some powerful truths:

I know I'm only a kid.

I don't understand why people and animals have to die. But I do know that I am glad I knew Sweetie Pie.