

Grandpa's lonely, isn't he?

Joseph Howard Cooper

Patricia DeWitt, Illustrator

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Grandpa's lonely, isn't he? is a vibrant picture book about social distancing and family love.

In Joseph Howard Cooper's picture book *Grandpa's lonely, isn't he?*, a lonely child reflects on changes brought about by COVID-19.

Sheltering in place with his parents, a young dinosaur wonders where his grandpa is and how he is doing alone in his home without help. He asks his mother and father if his grandpa is able to cook, clean, and find entertainment on his own. While the boy plays imaginary games to fill his alone time, his grandpa is shown making his own fun until he is able to receive the vaccine and go on an adventure around town with his grandson.

Told more in pictures than in words, the story cycles through images of the child and his grandpa in their respective homes, participating in the activities that the boy discusses in brief. The realities of their experiences, from cooking and doing dishes to reading and playing chess, are rendered in black and white, while the products of the boy's imagination, memories, and scenes after he is reunited with his grandpa are rendered in full, bright color.

Elsewhere, the child's parents explain to their son their reasons for sheltering in place. However, the characters' thoughts meander, and they are represented with misplaced commas that muddle their meanings. Further, the boy's mother's advice is impractical, and she brushes off the boy's concerns. Without a final piece of dialogue from the boy or his grandpa, the story seems incomplete.

Still, the color illustrations are intricate works of art. Tiny details, as of the grandpa's fishing hat and family photographs in the background, infuse the characters with personality and hint at their robust inner lives. Through these rich images, evidence of the boy's extensive imagination grows over the course of the book; he dives into learning about dinosaurs and building impressive toy structures. Even the black-and-white pictures include myriad clever components, though some of these illustrations depart from the book's central themes of finding joy and helping others in difficult times.

Grandpa's lonely, isn't he? is a vibrant picture book about social distancing in which a child expresses curiosity and concern for his family.

AIMEE JODOIN (July 26, 2022)

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