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**Books to Teach Children About Alzheimer’s**

*By*

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I stopped at a children’s bookshop in Manhattan last week and asked to see books on Alzheimer’s disease. The store stocked at least half a dozen, with titles like “What’s Wrong with Grandma?” and “What’s Happening to Grandpa?”

That was only a small sample. Three doctoral students at Washington University, analyzing [the way storybooks describe the disease](http://aja.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/1533317512459796v1), found 33 of them published for 4- to 12-year-olds from 1988 to 2009.

It’s a growing market, since the number of people with Alzheimer’s keeps rising along with the number of older Americans. I wonder, given that most of those people are in their 70s and 80s, whether storybook readers are likely to be not grandchildren but great-grandchildren.

Nonetheless, “storybooks about a difficult disease like Alzheimer’s can be a gentle way to introduce it to young children,” said Erin Y. Sakai, lead author of the study, which was just published in the [American Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease and Other Dementias](http://aja.sagepub.com/). “It’s a recognized technique.” Not only can books give children insight, she added, but also, “they can also guide parents with their discussions.”

Ms. Sakai and her co-authors were disappointed, however, by many of the 33 books they examined. “There are areas that are important to address that some books aren’t capturing,” she told me in an interview.

Like, for example? “The books did a generally good job of portraying the cognitive aspects — memory problems, poor judgment,” Ms. Sakai said. “But other elements were less well-represented.”

They include symptoms like wandering, agitation, sleep disturbances and depression. Only about a third of the books depicted anger or irritability, and very few showed functional limitations — the inability to drive, feed oneself, walk.

The researchers, arguing for more comprehensive portraits, noted that only a quarter of the books discussed the diagnostic process, and only 12 percent reassured kids that Alzheimer’s wasn’t catching and that they wouldn’t come down with it. Acknowledgments that people with the disease will get worse were rare, and references to incurability and eventual death even rarer.

Moreover, few authors pointed out the difference between dementia and normal aging. “I think that’s an important distinction, in terms of reducing stereotypes about aging in general,” Ms. Saka saidi.

Who could disagree? But some books that hit most of those marks — like [Maria Shriver](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/26/magazine/26wwln-Q4-t.html?ref=mariashriver)’s “What’s Happening to Grandpa?” — struck me as so earnestly well-intended and so lifeless that I couldn’t imagine reading it the requisite 30 times in a row to a 6-year-old. <https://www.amazon.com/Whats-Happening-Grandpa-Maria-Shriver/dp/B000FDFW0U>

Ms. Sakai declined to offer opinions on specific titles, so I called my highly opinionated friend [Marjorie Ingall, a Tablet columnist](http://www.tabletmag.com/author/mingall) who reviews children’s books for The New York Times. “The kid’s not going to want to hear it 30 times,” she pointed out. “The kid will run from the room.”

We both sympathized, as authors ourselves, with the difficulties of trying to convey information about a terrible disease while simultaneously telling an absorbing story, all without inducing nightmares. But, Ms. Ingall insisted, “Picture books are not school. Picture books are not medicine. You can be a very little kid and understand good literature.”

The book we both liked — I felt so validated — was “[The Memory Box](http://books.google.com/books/about/The_Memory_Box.html?id=6OmcnqLQHk4C),” published 20 years ago by a small Illinois press, written by Mary Bahr and beautifully illustrated by David Cunningham. I imagine the Washington University team would find it insufficiently comprehensive — it doesn’t mention diagnostics or communicability, and uses the term “Alzheimer’s disease” precisely once — but it’s a lovely tale of a boy already feeling the loss of his grandfather. <https://www.amazon.com/Memory-Albert-Whitman-Concept-Paperbacks/dp/0807550531>

“It works as a story,” Ms. Ingall said. “I believe in the concept of bibliotherapy. Reading about stuff can enrich your life. But you have to start with, ‘Is this book successful as a book?’”

I don’t imagine children’s authors will resolve this tension between comprehensiveness and literary merit any time soon, but meanwhile, I thought I’d pass along a couple of Ms. Ingall’s other picks for parents and grandparents hoping to introduce children to a subject we would all rather not face.

She likes “[Still My Grandma](http://www.amazon.com/Still-Grandma-Veronique-Van-Abeele/dp/0802853234),” by Veronique Van Den Abeele, with illustrations by Claude K. Dubois, because “it’s got lot of kid appeal.” <https://www.amazon.com/Still-Grandma-V%C3%A9ronique-Van-Abeele/dp/0802853234>

And for older readers past the picturebook stage, she gives props to Gordon Korman’s “[Pop](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/14/books/review/Sandomir-t.html),” the rare book in which a character has early-onset Alzheimer’s <https://www.amazon.com/Pop-Gordon-Korman/dp/0061742619> . And to Jordan Sonnenblick’s “[Curveball: The Year I Lost My Grip](http://www.jordansonnenblick.com/my-books/curveball-the-year-i-lost-my-grip/),” (<https://www.amazon.com/Curveball-Year-Lost-My-Grip/dp/0545320704>) because “it’s fabulous.”

Your picks are invited, too, in the comments box below.

[Paula Span](http://www.paulaspan.com) is the author of “When the Time Comes: Families With Aging Parents Share Their Struggles and Solutions.”

## 12 Books for Children About Alzheimer’s and Dementia

To make it easier for you, I have compiled information about 12 of the top books for children about Alzheimer’s for you below:

### 1. “[A Heart Full of GEMS](http://www.amazon.com/Heart-Someone-child-loves-dementia/dp/0996979808)“

<https://www.amazon.com/Heart-Someone-dementia-Possell-2015-08-02/dp/B01K3LGK72>

* Published 2015
* Rev. Linn Possell and Teepa Snow (Authors), Katya Villano(Illustrator)
* 62 Pages
* Paperback

### 2. “[Forget Me Not](http://www.amazon.com/Forget-Not-Nancy-Van-Laan/dp/0449815439" \t "_blank)“

<https://www.amazon.com/Forget-Not-Nancy-Van-Laan/dp/0449815439>

* Published August 2014
* Nancy Van Laan (Author), Stephanie Graegin (Illustrator)
* 40 Pages
* Hardcover & Kindle

### 3. “[Grandma](http://www.amazon.com/Grandma-Jessica-Shepherd/dp/1846436028" \t "_blank)“

<https://www.amazon.com/Grandma-Childs-Library-Jessica-Shepherd/dp/1846436028>

* Published July 2014
* Jessica Shepherd (Author/Illustrator)
* 32 Pages
* Hardcover & Paperback

### 4. “[Grandma Noonie Has Alzheimer’s](http://www.amazon.com/Grandma-Noonie-Alzheimers-Cindy-Chambers/dp/1457542218" \t "_blank)“ I think we should remove this book – there is only 1 copy for sale on Amazon for $800. Yikes!! KF

* Published October 2015
* Cindy Chambers (Author), Jim Huber (Illustrator)
* 38 Pages
* Paperback

### 5. “[Great Nanny Doesn’t Remember Me: Dementia Explained to Kids](http://www.amazon.com/Great-Nanny-Doesnt-Remember-Explained/dp/1512010324)“

<https://www.amazon.com/Great-Nanny-Doesnt-Remember-Explained/dp/1512010324>

* Published June 2015
* William G Bentrim (Author), Ivan Earl Aguilar (Illustrator)
* 44 Pages
* Paperback & Kindle

### 6. “[Harry Helps Grandpa Remember](https://www.amazon.com/Harry-Helps-Grandpa-Remember-Tyrrell-ebook/dp/B00Z01SAN8)“

<https://www.amazon.com/Haven-House-Perspective-Alzheimers-Disease/dp/1504333128>

* Published June 2015
* Karen Tyrrell (Author), Aaron Pocock (Illustrator)
* 34 Pages
* Hardcover, Paperback & Kindle

### 7. “[Haven House: A Child’s Perspective of Alzheimer’s Disease](https://www.amazon.com/Haven-House-Perspective-Alzheimers-Disease-ebook/dp/B015FXV61I)“

* Published September 2015
* Rebecca Darling (Author), Alex Perlin (Illustrator)
* 28 Pages
* Paperback & Kindle

### 8. “[Lovely Old Lion](http://www.amazon.com/Lovely-Old-Lion-Julia-Jarman/dp/1783441186" \t "_blank)“

<https://www.amazon.com/Lovely-Andersen-Press-Picture-Books/dp/1467793108>

* Published August 2015
* Julia Jarman (Author), Susan Varley (Illustrator)
* 32 Pages
* Hardcover, Paperback & Kindle

### 9. “[Remember Me… Remember Me Not](http://www.amazon.com/Remember-Me-Not/dp/1496914694" \t "_blank)“

<https://www.amazon.com/Remember-Me-Not/dp/1496914694>

* Published May 2014
* Carma Lee Weisbrook (Author), Susan Shorter (Illustrator)
* 26 Pages
* Paperback & Kindle

### 10. “[Remembering for Both of Us: A Child Learns About Alzheimer’s](http://www.amazon.com/Remembering-Both-Us-Learns-Alzheimers/dp/1939930383" \t "_blank)“

<https://www.amazon.com/Remembering-Both-Us-Learns-Alzheimers/dp/1939930294>

* Published November 2014
* Charlotte Wood (Author), Dennis Auth (Illustrator)
* 32 Pages
* Hardcover & Paperback

### 11. “[Weeds in Nana’s Garden](http://www.amazon.com/Weeds-Nanas-Garden-Alzheimers-dementias/dp/0994946708" \t "_blank)“

<https://www.amazon.com/Weeds-Nanas-Garden-Alzheimers-dementias/dp/0994946708>

* Published March 2016
* Kathryn Harrison (Author/Illustrator)
* 32 Pages
* Hardcover, Paperback & Kindle

### 12. “[When My Grammy Forgets, I Remember: A Child’s Perspective on Dementia](http://www.amazon.com/When-Grammy-Forgets-Remember-Perspective/dp/0991623606" \t "_blank)“

<https://www.amazon.com/When-Grammy-Forgets-Remember-Perspective/dp/0991623606>

* Published March 2015
* Toby Haberkorn (Author), Heather Varkarotas (Illustrator)
* 40 Pages
* Paperback & Kindle
* [***The Remember Balloons***](https://www.amazon.com/Remember-Balloons-Jessie-Oliveros/dp/1481489151/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&linkCode=ll1&tag=thiwescoamom-20&linkId=614d9256e27baf0c6829263db70e0319&language=en_US) – Jessie Oliveros ana Wulfekott
* <https://www.amazon.com/Remember-Balloons-Jessie-Oliveros/dp/1481489151>
* “James’s Grandpa has the best balloons because he has the best memories. He has balloons showing Dad when he was young and Grandma when they were married. Grandpa has balloons about camping and Aunt Nelle’s poor cow. Grandpa also has a silver balloon filled with the memory of a fishing trip he and James took together.
* But when Grandpa’s balloons begin to float away, James is heartbroken. No matter how hard he runs, James can’t catch them. One day, Grandpa lets go of the silver balloon—and he doesn’t even notice! Grandpa no longer has balloons of his own. But James has many more than before. It’s up to him to share those balloons, one by one.”
* Recommended ages 4-8 years.
* [***Granny Can’t Remember Me: A Children’s Book About Alzheimer’s***](https://www.amazon.com/Granny-Cant-Remember-Childrens-Alzheimers/dp/0998618705/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&linkCode=ll1&tag=thiwescoamom-20&linkId=35b64fbd8868b7a9961f8e80e1981c87&language=en_US) – Susan McCond Timur Deberdeev
* <https://www.thriftbooks.com/w/granny-cant-remember-me-a-childrens-book-about-alzheimers_timur-deberdeev/19667155/item/33666153/?mkwid=HKWqsOk7%7cdc&pcrid=509967659940&product=33666153&plc=&pgrid=21517256472&ptaid=pla-868027311988&utm_source=google_shopping&utm_content=HKWqsOk7%7cdc%7cpcrid%7c509967659940%7cpkw%7c%7cpmt%7c%7cproduct%7c33666153%7cslid%7c%7cpgrid%7c21517256472%7cptaid%7cpla-868027311988%7c&gclid=CjwKCAjwhaaKBhBcEiwA8acsHDBJ6szeE0HKJPm5EtMnc_IsnNSPJj15n9xH-2kJVkyMYKygC5Fa5xoCn04QAvD_BwE#idiq=33666153&edition=20889601>
* “Granny Can’t Remember Me is a lighthearted picture book about Alzheimer’s disease and dementia told from the perspective of a six-year-old boy, appropriate for children in preschool through early elementary school. Granny can’t remember that Joey likes soccer and rockets and dogs. Granny can’t remember much of anything. But with Granny’s stories of her Three Best Days, Joey knows she loves him just the same.”
* Recommended ages 3-8 years.
* [***My Book About Brains, Change and Dementia***](https://www.amazon.com/Book-about-Brains-Change-Dementia/dp/1785925113/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&linkCode=ll1&tag=thiwescoamom-20&linkId=dc0f44db96a6974063f024d10ffc03b2&language=en_US) – Lynda Moore
* <https://www.amazon.com/Book-about-Brains-Change-Dementia/dp/1785925113>
* “This friendly book explains the complex concepts of dementia, such as brain function, disease progression and death to pre-school aged children in a direct and age-appropriate way, as well as exploring children’s feelings about these issues. This book caters for children aged 4+ who have a loved one at any stage of dementia.”
* Includes helpful introduction for adults. Recommended ages 4-7 years.
* [***Grandma and Me: A Kid’s Guide for Alzheimer’s and Dementia***](https://www.amazon.com/Grandma-Me-Guide-Alzheimers-Dementia/dp/1683506995/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&linkCode=ll1&tag=thiwescoamom-20&linkId=9afef2495a51247284f49b60bf7e2fb4&language=en_US) – Beatrice Tauber Price, Mary Ann Drummond, and Julia Walther
* <https://www.amazon.com/Grandma-Me-Guide-Alzheimers-Dementia/dp/1683506995>
* “Grandma and Me provides a gentle, yet age appropriate description of Alzheimer’s disease, while providing tools that helps children continue to have a relationship with their loved one despite the disease. Grandma and Me addresses a difficult topic with love and understanding and provides the tools for children to successfully navigate the journey ahead.”
* Recommended ages 4-7.
* [***This Is My Family***](https://www.amazon.com/This-Family-dementia-Something-things/dp/0648013219/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&linkCode=ll1&tag=thiwescoamom-20&linkId=5cb235ff2c8c4bcc31799574b123b8bf&language=en_US) – Barbara Chambers, Karen Harborow, and Eddie Mort
* <https://www.amazon.com/This-family-American-English-version/dp/0648013243>
* This is a children’s book for kids with a parent with younger onset dementia/early onset dementia. Jack is 13 years old. He lives with his daddy, mummy, sister Amy and dog Sam. Jack’s daddy has dementia. Something isn’t right in his brain and Jack can help him to do things. This kids’ book tells the story of Jack whose father lives with younger onset dementia.”
* Recommended ages 4-8.
* [***Forget Me Not***](https://www.amazon.com/Forget-Not-Nancy-Van-Laan/dp/0449815439/ref=as_li_ss_tl?keywords=Forget-Not-Nancy-Laan&qid=1554448173&s=books&sr=1-1&linkCode=ll1&tag=thiwescoamom-20&linkId=2053bbf207d1f783ba4d3b66624c4669&language=en_US) – Nancy Van Laan
* <https://www.amazon.com/Forget-Not-Nancy-Van-Laan/dp/0449815439>
* “Grandma’s whole family is concerned as they start to notice that she is becoming more and more forgetful. After they find her wandering the neighborhood, they need to make an important decision on her behalf—that the time has come for her to move out of her house and into an assisted living community where she can have the best care possible.”
* Recommended ages 4-8.
* [***Still My Grandma***](https://www.amazon.com/Still-Grandma-V%C3%A9ronique-Van-Abeele/dp/0802853234/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&linkCode=ll1&tag=thiwescoamom-20&linkId=97dc64942955aab678e7fb531bf5032a&language=en_US) – Véronique Van den Abeele and Claude K. Dubois
* <https://www.amazon.com/Still-Grandma-V%C3%A9ronique-Van-Abeele/dp/0802853234>
* “Camille and her grandma have a special friendship. They have sleepovers, bake chocolate cupcakes together, go out shopping, and giggle at old photographs. But one day Grandma forgets Camille’s name. Then she can’t remember where to put her shoes.
* Camille learns that her grandma is sick, but ‘not the kind where you cough and blow your nose.’ Grandma has Alzheimer’s disease, which is what makes her do strange things. And even though Grandma has to move out of her house and rely on nurses to care for her, Camille finds a way to continue their special traditions.”
* Recommended ages 4-8.
* [***Always My Grandpa***](https://www.amazon.com/Always-My-Grandpa-Children-Alzheimers/dp/1591473128/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&linkCode=ll1&tag=thiwescoamom-20&linkId=de7a13df07fb8a43cf557e7b7f0f4fa8&language=en_US) – Linda Scacco and Nicole Wong
* <https://www.amazon.com/Always-My-Grandpa-Children-Alzheimers/dp/1591473128>
* “Daniel learns that since Grandpa has Alzheimer’s disease, he will have trouble remembering all the things that belong to him-his clothes, his words, his memories-and eventually, his own grandson. Features gentle narrative and easy-to-understand explanations.”
* Recommended ages 5-8 years.
* [***Weeds in Nana’s Garden***](https://www.amazon.com/Weeds-Nanas-Garden-Alzheimers-dementias/dp/0994946708/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&linkCode=ll1&tag=thiwescoamom-20&linkId=2de6a2ad5b6eba4714bccf8416518c17&language=en_US) – Kathryn Harrison
* <https://www.amazon.com/Weeds-Nanas-Garden-Alzheimers-dementias/dp/0994946708>
* “A young girl and her Nana hold a special bond that blooms in the surroundings of Nana’s magical garden. Then one day, the girl finds many weeds in the garden. She soon discovers that her beloved Nana has Alzheimer’s Disease; an illness that affects an adult brain with tangles that get in the way of thoughts, kind of like how weeds get in the way of flowers. As time passes, the weeds grow thicker and her Nana declines, but the girl accepts the difficult changes with love, learning to take over as the garden’s caregiver.”
* $1 from the purchase of this book will be donated to the Alzheimer Society of Canada, Canada’s leading health charity for people living with Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias.
* Recommended ages 5-9 years.
* [**Why Did Grandma Put Her Underwear in the Refrigerator?**](https://www.amazon.com/Why-Did-Grandma-Underwear-Refrigerator/dp/1489501673/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&linkCode=ll1&tag=thiwescoamom-20&linkId=1daffc54872b5b5180f9d7eab6f695f9&language=en_US) – Max Wallack and Carolyn Given
* <https://www.amazon.com/Why-Did-Grandma-Underwear-Refrigerator/dp/1489501673>
* “On some days, seven-year old Julie feels like she’s living in a Fun House. Hers is a topsy-turvy world where the toaster sprouts a toothbrush, and a watermelon gets dressed up in pink underpants for Fourth of July! But on other days, Julie struggles with understanding why her Halloween trick-or-treating got cancelled, or why Grandma can’t remember her name. Julie is struggling with understanding her grandmother’s Alzheimer’s disease.”
* Recommended ages 6-9 years.
* [***Singing with Momma Lou***](https://www.amazon.com/Singing-Momma-Linda-Jacobs-Altman/dp/1620142279/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&linkCode=ll1&tag=thiwescoamom-20&linkId=b4cb58825af48c7bf62f84c111177c08&language=en_US) – Linda Jacobs Altman and Larry Johnson
* <https://www.amazon.com/Singing-Momma-Linda-Jacobs-Altman/dp/1620142279>
* “Nine-year-old Tamika Jordan dreads visiting her grandmother at the nursing home. Momma Lou has Alzheimer’s and always forgets who Tamika is. After her father shows her Momma Lou’s scrapbooks, Tamika comes up with an idea to jog Momma Lou’s memory. Tamika is successful in reaching her grandmother one day when Momma Lou recognizes a newspaper clipping of a Civil Rights demonstration and leads everybody in a celebration of song.”
* Recommended ages 6-9 years.
* [***The Dementia Diaries***](https://www.amazon.com/Dementia-Diaries-Novel-Cartoons/dp/1785920324/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&linkCode=ll1&tag=thiwescoamom-20&linkId=593dbff2a735f79c8b04a8e4f3706b82&language=en_US) — Matthew Snyman
* <https://www.amazon.com/Dementia-Diaries-Novel-Cartoons/dp/1785920324>
* Brie’s Granddad has always been a serious man, never without a newspaper and knowing the answer to everything. But now he keeps losing track of the conversation, and honestly, Brie doesn’t really know how to speak to him. At first, Fred was annoyed that Gramps had come to live with them, it meant he had to give up his room! But then he starts to enjoy watching old films with him and spending time together… although there’s the small problem of Gramps calling him Simon.
* Follow the stories of Brie, Fred, and other young carers as they try to understand and cope with their grandparents’ dementia at all stages of the illness. Adapted from true stories, and supplemented with fun activities and discussion ideas, this book for children aged approximately 7-14 cuts to the truth of the experience of dementia and tackles stigma with a warm and open perspective.
* Recommended ages 7-14 years.
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