

## Choose Your Days written and illustrated by Paula S. Wallace

### About the Book

**Genre:** Fiction

**Format:** Paperback, 32 pages

**ISBN:** 9781643790657

**Reading Level:** Grade 3

**Interest Level:** Grades K-3

**Guided Reading Level:** 0

**Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:**  
N/A

**Lexile™ Measure:** N/A

\*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

**Themes:** Coping with Death, Age, Human Life Cycle, Imagination and Play, Religious (General), End of Life, Courage, Dreams and Aspirations, Empathy and Compassion

**Resources on the web:**

[leeandlow.com/books/choose-your-days](http://leeandlow.com/books/choose-your-days)

### SYNOPSIS

Will little Corky--so quirky and curious--live her life and her dreams to the fullest? When Corky is a baby, Old Bear gives her the keys to her days. As she grows, she lives in wonderment. As her days grow short, she asks Old Bear for a few more days. Old Bear reminds Corky that she holds the key to her days. She must do what needs to be done, and dream what needs to be dreamed. When she is ready, she will not be afraid to open the door to wonder.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

## BACKGROUND

### Talking with Children About Death

This story ends with the suggestion of an elderly person dying after a life well-lived. While death is not specifically mentioned, it's important to be prepared to support children if/when it arises in class discussion of the book. Parents Magazine offers a list of tips for "How to Explain Death to a Child" (<https://www.parents.com/toddlers-preschoolers/development/social/talking-to-kids-about-death/>). The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia shares similar guidance and includes information about how children understand death in different developmental phases (<https://www.chop.edu/news/health-tip/what-parents-need-know-about-explaining-death-and-grief-child.>) Some key takeaways include:

- Use straightforward language that puts death into the context of the cycle of life: Living things are born (or in the case of plants, they grow), they live, and they die.
- While talking about death with children can be hard, it's an inevitable part of life. Exposure to talking about death in different contexts (e.g., a dead plant, bird, ancestor, etc.) can help children cope when death impacts them more closely.
- Use direct language to explain what happens when someone or something dies. (E.g., "When people die, their body stops working.") Be clear that death is permanent. As teachers, we can let kids know that different families may choose to explain death in different ways depending on what they believe.
- Acknowledge that people who are very old, very sick, or get in very bad accidents can die, but be optimistic that you expect your students (and yourself) to live a nice, long life.
- Answer children's questions succinctly, but honestly. It's okay to say, "I don't know." Remember that repeated questions are likely part of children's attempts to process information.
- When talking about someone who's died, accept kids' emotions. Talk about ways to remember and celebrate that person.

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- How do you and your family keep track of things you need to do and want to do? What are some of those things?
- What's a calendar? How does a calendar help people?
- What happens as people grow older?

## Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

**Book Title Exploration:** Talk about the title of the book, *Choose Your Days*. Ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? Do they think this will be a story or an informational book? What makes them think that?

**Book Walk:** Display the book and analyze the cover. What do students notice in the illustration? Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page text and illustration, dedication, and illustrations.

**Read Author's and Illustrator's Biographies:** Read the biography at the end of this guide. What do you think the process is like to write and illustrate a book for young readers? Why do you think Paula S. Wallace made this book for young readers?

## Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- Who are the characters? When does the story take place? What happens?
- Why does this story have such an interesting title, "*Choose Your Days*?" What does that title mean?
- How do the pictures in the book help us know more about what happens in the story?

Encourage students to consider why the author would want to share this story with young people.

## VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### Content Specific

calendar, purse, cottage

### Academic

list, dream, choose, whispered, sunny, gray, remained, undone, postponed, unsung, plea, reminded, wonder

## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

### Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Who is in this story?
2. What does Old Bear give Corky when she's born?
3. What does Old Bear say to Corky when he gives her the key?
4. When does the story begin? How much time passes in the story?
5. What do the pictures show Corky doing as a child?
6. What does Corky do and say when she gets old?
7. What does Corky ask the bear? How does the bear reply?
8. How does the story end?

### Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What do you think the bear means when he tells Corky to "*Choose Your Days*, make them sunny or gray?"
2. What does the story skip? How does it show that a lot of time passes?
3. Look back at the illustrations. What written details do you notice? How do they relate to the story?
4. How does the illustrator show the passage of time?
5. Why does Corky want to "buy more time" from the bear?
6. Why do you think Bear says, "You hold the key?"
7. After reading the story, what do you think the key is for? What is the cottage?
8. Why do you think the author wanted to share this story with young people?
9. Is this a happy story or a sad story? Why do you think so?
10. What questions do you still have after reading this book?
11. Do you think this book and its message are hopeful? Why or why not?
12. Think about the message is to "make the most of the time you are given, and when the end

has come, do not be afraid. Each of us holds a key to how we live our life." What does this mean to you?

### Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What do you think the author's message to the reader is?
2. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to your own life?
3. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *Choose Your Days*? Why did you make those connections?
4. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world or on the news? Why did *Choose Your Days* make you think of that?
5. What is one big thought that you have after reading this book? Think about different character changes and events. What did you learn from reading *Choose Your Days*?
6. Choose your favorite page. Make a list of things you imagined as you read this page and looked at the illustration.
7. The bear in this story gives Corky advice about her life. What advice would you give to someone about how to live their best life possible?

### Multilingual Learner Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Learners and multilingual learners.

1. Assign ML students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.

4. Have students give a short talk about something they'd choose to do to make their day "sunny."
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
6. Additional resources to support multilingual students is: <https://www.multilingualllearning-toolkit.org/>.

### Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. What Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills does Corky exhibit over the course of the book? Some examples of SEL skills include problem-solving, grit and perseverance, self-regulation, and perspective taking. How does Corky demonstrate these skills?
2. Choose an emotion that interests you: happiness, sadness, fear, anxiety, frustration, hope, perseverance and so on. Illustrate or act out what that emotion looks like in *Choose Your Days*.
3. Do you think the author wants Corky to be a role model for young people or an example of caution? Why or why not?
4. Talk about ways to make your own days "sunny" (by demonstrating self-care) and ways to help make others' days "sunny" (by demonstrating empathy and kindness). Write or share aloud commitments to try some of the ideas. Talk about reasons that someone's day might feel "gray" and how you might help yourself or someone else in these situations. Start a class "sunny days" challenge and tally or otherwise track and celebrate students' efforts to brighten the lives of those around them.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for

building a home-school connection.

### English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Have students practice retelling this story across their fingers, with the prompts “First, next, then, then, finally.”**
- **The bear in this story tells Corky to “Choose Your Days, make them sunny or gray.”** Together or individually, have students make a two-column list of what makes their days sunny or gray. Discuss the group’s responses. Note similarities or common themes, and note variations. (E.g., maybe pizza for lunch makes someone’s day sunny, and someone else’s gray.) Talk about which items on the list people can control for themselves, and to which they can simply control their reactions.
- **Discuss how this could be considered a story about setting and achieving goals in life.** Ask students to talk, write and/or illustrate one of their big life goals. Ask them to include information about how they could achieve it.
- **Look at the illustration of the lists Bear provides Corky.** As a group or individually, have students create their own lists of “To Do” and “Dreams.” You could structure this activity to be about a finite period, such as your to-do’s and dreams for the remaining months of the school year.
- **Read other stories that explain the cycle of life, such as *The Blue Roses*** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-blue-roses>.) Make connections between texts.
- **Revisit the dedication page of the book after reading.** Talk about any unfamiliar vocabulary in the dedication. Ask students to discuss their thoughts about what the dedication means now that they’re familiar with the book.
- **Use this title to introduce the concept of “author’s message.”** Talk about how the title and repeated phrase “Choose Your Days” makes the message of this book easier to identify. Ask students to talk or write in pairs to explain the book’s message in their own words. Use this book as an anchor text when determining author’s message in other stories.
- **Share this news story with students, that explains more about how this book came to be:** [https://omaha.com/life-entertainment/get-to-know-out-of-heartache-paula-wallace-created-a/article\\_d58395be-9d49-5c56-9258-5ed46560321e.html](https://omaha.com/life-entertainment/get-to-know-out-of-heartache-paula-wallace-created-a/article_d58395be-9d49-5c56-9258-5ed46560321e.html). Talk about the author’s idea that this book isn’t meant to be sad, but a “book about hope.” Do students agree? Why or why not?

### Social Studies/Geography

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present



## Choose Your Days

Teacher's Guide [leeandlow.com/books/choose-your-days](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/choose-your-days)

Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Learn more about calendar systems around the world.** Create a chart listing different calendars. Include information about how various calendars relate to the moon and sun.
- **Learn more about life expectancies of different species.** Have students each choose a plant or animal to research its life expectancy. Create a list of data and discuss observations, patterns, and questions. Create a second list of factors that can influence the lifespan of a living thing.

### Math

(Mathematics Standards, Grade 5, Number & Operations in Base Ten, Strands 5 and 7 and Operations & Algebraic Thinking, Strands 1 and 2)

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7) (Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 2 and 3) (Writing Standards, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strand 9)

- **Fill in a calendar with relevant information to students (e.g., holidays, days off from school, school events).** Have students practice finding or determining information about events.
- **Give students examples of yearly, monthly, and daily calendars to study.** Have them record their observations in a list or on sticky notes. Give examples of needs or goals related to calendars and talk about which calendar format would be most appropriate. (E.g., knowing which day of the week your birthday will be this year, scheduling a field trip, etc.)

### Art

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Create artwork for a “Choose Your Days” bulletin board.** Have students draw, paint, or collage images of themselves doing something that makes their day feel “sunny.” Invite them to include words of wisdom embedded in the artwork, using the book illustrations as examples.
- **Have students explore creating a series of images that show the passage of time, using the book illustrations as an example.** For instance, they might draw themselves as a babies, then at different ages.

### School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

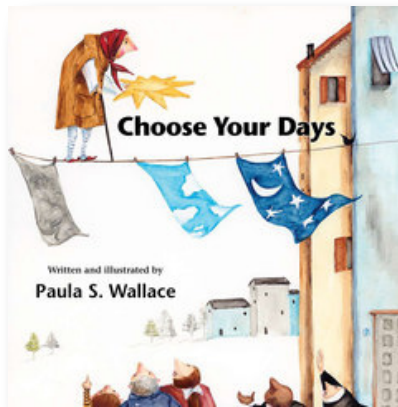
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Have students survey people at home about what makes their days feel sunny and what makes them feel gray. Share and compare responses at school.**
- **Have students ask people at home or in their community if they have a mantra or motto for living their best life, sharing “Choose Your Days” as an example.** Share and compare responses at school and talk about what they each mean.



- **Talk about how this book was inspired by an influential older woman in the author's life (according to this news article: [https://omaha.com/life-entertainment/get-to-know-out-of-heartache-paula-wallace-created-a/article\\_d58395be-9d49-5c56-9258-5ed46560321e.html](https://omaha.com/life-entertainment/get-to-know-out-of-heartache-paula-wallace-created-a/article_d58395be-9d49-5c56-9258-5ed46560321e.html)).** Ask students to interview an older person who they admire to gather their advice about living a fulfilling life. (You could give students the option to research a person they admire if a personal interview isn't possible.)



## Ordering Information

**General Order Information:**

[leeandlow.com/contact/ordering](https://leeandlow.com/contact/ordering)

**Secure Online Ordering:**

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**By Phone:** 212-779-4400 ext. 25

**By Fax:** 212-683-1894

**By Mail:**

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue,  
New York, NY 10016

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

**Paula Wallace** is a working artist, maintaining a studio at the Hot Shops Art Center in Omaha, Nebraska. In addition to fine art, Paula has worked as an illustrator and muralist, a curator and an arts facilitator. She has been involved in liturgical and public art, interior design and privately commissioned work. Paula also collaborates regularly with other artists, writers and musicians.

Much of her work as an artist began years ago and likely, truth be told, at the very beginning -- woven into her DNA and nurtured with crayons and love. She studied formally at Iowa State University and the University of Iowa, in addition to a smattering of coursework in Ireland, Chicago, and elsewhere. Her work is held in many private and public collections, both here and abroad.

To learn more about her and see additional photos, visit <https://www.paulawallacefineart.com/about-the-artist>.

## REVIEWS

"This is the kind of book that will stick with readers, a meditation that they may not understand now but that, if digested, could have magical results." —*Kirkus, Starred Review*

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