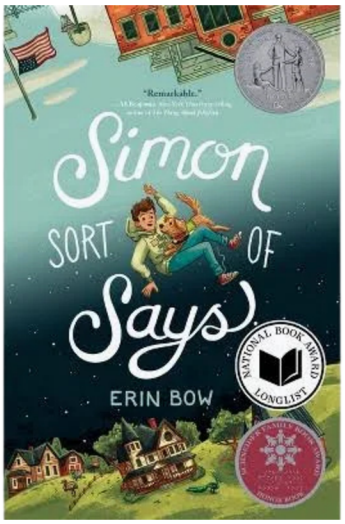
WRITTEN BY
STUDENTS AT
INSIDEOUT
LITERARY ARTS

Student Examples of Ambiguous Loss Themed-Poems

InsideOut Literary Arts®
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NOTE

The following includes letters by BookUp students who wrote to Simon of **SIMON SORT OF SAYS** by Erin Bow. Students were about half way through the book when they wrote these letters. By that time, there had been multiple school shooting threats in the Detroit area following a shooting at a suburban school. Students had a mix of reactions, and some of them opted not to write about Simon and instead focus on their other interests or ideas, which is a trauma-informed choice we offer students when writing.

A LETTER TO SIMON

S . W .

Get better,
and stay away
from bad people.

Don’t let
anyone
hurt you.

Get used
to where
you live.

A LETTER TO SIMON

- D.

Hello Simon! I've heard a lot about you.
I hope you're doing fine and I want to tell you that things are going to get better.
You are not alone. I'm glad you are making friends.
And when you are alone, you have the dog.
Please try to get better and get away from the past.
Have a good day Simon!

ADVICE FOR SIMON

T.W.

Simon should find more friends
and feel safer around other people.
Simon should move to a new house.
My advice to Simon,
is to step out of his comfort zone
and stop being afraid of people.
I know he is traumatized, but it's so old.

A LETTER TO SIMON

M.K.

Simon, you should try to make more friends.
Don’t be scared to socialize and communicate.
Pick who you like and think are real.
Get good grades and be nice to others.

NOTE

The following poems were written by various students in the Metro Detroit area who participate in InsideOut's school programs. They demonstrate the various ways students are dealing with ambiguous loss.

RULES

N.T.

Rules to know growing up without a dad:

Be prepared to be on your own
We are here for you
get over it
it’s ok to still be hurt
you will survive
you will never get better
you are loved
no one loves you including him
you are not unwanted
He didn’t want you
You have strength
You are weak

NOTHING

Z.M.

They ask me what I want

I say
Nothing

Nothing but stepping out the crib on Six Mile
And it just being pavement
Not a battlefield
Not a statement

Nothing but pulling up my hoodie
Cuz I'm cold
Not cuz I'm calculating
How I look to patrol

I'm sure you can run this script in your head
Like it's opening night
Yes, sir
No, sir
My hands where you can see them
Wallet slow
No sudden moves

I'm sure you can feel
how your shoulders tighten up
when sirens slice through the night
or maybe you can't.
Maybe you never had to rehearse
stepping outside your own crib
like it's a performance.
Maybe you never had to shrink your tone
before you even spoke it.

We learn compliance
before we can learn cursive.
Learn survival
before we learn purpose.
Auntie voice echoing:

"Keep your head down."
"Don't look angry."
"Don't look proud."

How do we gotta edit our bodies
before we edit a paper.
Why do I gotta monitor my brother's breathing
like it's something they measure?

Going to school
with backpacks full of books
and invisible weight.
Heart beating heavy
like it know something we don't.
And I'm sure
some of y'all can run that script in your head
right now.

Traffic stop.
Hands up.
Voice calm.
Don't flinch.
Don't argue.
Don't cry.

Because "by any means necessary"
ain't about chaos;
it's about being tired.
Tired of candlelight turning into curriculum.
Tired of hashtags turning into history lessons.
Tired of growing up fast
cuz safety got an expiration date.

In 1966,
the Black Panther Party said in point number seven,
"We want an immediate end
to police brutality
and the murder of Black People."

Immediate.

That word don't stutter.
Immediate don't stretch.
Immediate don't wait for comfort.
Immediate means now.

So when I say nothing,
I mean nothing but walking down Six Mile
and my biggest fear is being late to class.
Nothing but laughing too loud
without tightening up
when a squad car pass.
Nothing but growing old.
Wrinkles. Stories. Peace.

Not being remembered
by a mural on an east side street.
Not like the murals on Eight Mile and John R
that represent Mr. Floyd and Ms. Taylor.
Nothing but breath
that ain't borrowed.
Nothing but futures
that reach past tomorrow.
And I'm sure some of you
can feel your body tighten
just hearing this.
Shoulders inching up.
Jaw locking.
Hands curling.

That's what rehearsal does.
But I'm tired of rehearsal.

I want regular.
I want basic.
I want human.

Nothing
should not sound revolutionary.
Nothing
should not feel radical.

Nothing
should never
cost
us
everything.

HEY THERE

S.T.

How's life? How is everything going?
Do you have time? Just a quick thing?
You know we are stranded,
but that's not how I feel.
I know it's hard, but we're all the same still.

We can't walk together,
talk for hours like before.
But you know I will be there for you.
We don't need to talk every day
to remind you that I love you.

We can't see the moon together.
We're still under the same sky.
Don't let distance take everything away.
Eight thousand miles away is someone who cares.

TO MY OLD FRIEND

F.S.

I never write to you
because I don't know what I will write.
Do you remember me?
When we were kids, we played together.
Do you remember you were my best friend?
Do you remember you were our leader?
I told you my problems,
we watched movies.
It's been five or six years.
I didn't talk to you.
I know you are far from me
but still, do you remember me?

ODE TO MY DAD

M.H.

To my dad.
I miss you but I can't stand the hurt you put me through.
I miss the times where I could run to you about any problem the world tried to make me face.
I miss when I was a little girl and you always had me making you a black coffee with nothing in it because that's the way you like them.
But Dad, I started to realize that you may have not liked me.
I noticed when you left when I was five years old and ran in and out my life when it benefited you.
I saw how you would love your other two children more than you could ever love me.
I heard it when you told me I wasn't yours and you forced my mom to take the DNA test.
I felt it all.
I miss you but now when I talk to you I just feel my insides twisting like someone is turning my stomach upside down.
Dad, I hate you
but I can't hate someone I love to my core, someone who gave me everything.
But I know I can hate the hurt you put me through.
Now that I'm older, I don't look at you like a father. You're more so my sperm donor that did their job and left.

WHAT LOVE MEANS

M.H.

I thought love meant
holding on until my hands bled,
until the memory of you
was stitched into everything I touched,
until there was nothing left of me
that didn't whisper your name.
You felt like forever
in a world that never lets anything stay.
Like the only light
that didn't tremble
when everything else inside me went dark.
So when you left,
it wasn't just goodbye—
it was silence where your name used to live,
an aching emptiness
where my future once stood,
so certain and close.
I carried you in the smallest ways:
in songs I couldn't skip
no matter how much they hurt,
in dreams that forgot you were gone,
in the quiet habit of turning around
with hope still foolish enough
to look for you.
Everyone says
the heart learns to move on.
But no one tells you
how slow healing really is,
how it arrives so softly
you almost miss it—
like morning light
slipping through broken blinds
into a room that still feels empty.
And one day
I noticed I was breathing
without the weight of missing you
crushing my chest
the way it used to.
Not because I stopped loving you.
I don't know if that part of me
will ever disappear.
But because love
was never meant to feel
like losing myself
just to keep someone else.
So I'm setting you down gently,
like something fragile
my heart held too tightly
for far too long.
And for the first time
since you left—
the silence
isn't screaming anymore.
It still aches.
But it lets me breathe.

WISHES

J.W.

I wish I could yell
I wish I could go places and experience the golden sun
I wish I could live my normal life, before COVID
I wish I could say how I feel

2020

A.S.

This tension
like we are all on the edge of something
ominous,
a feeling of impending doom
that no one can put a finger on.
Like a teapot whistling,
we are screaming so loud
and yet
they will still let us boil over
and leave us to clean up the mess.

THE DAYS

P.B.

When you knew everybody on your block
When people actually left the house
When a snow day meant snowmen and hot chocolate
When there were hundreds of 21 games on one rim
When neighbors were family and friends
When you heard the ice cream truck
You would drop everything to get something

When going to the corner store with the boys
was the best
When you could not leave the block without permission
When nobody was getting shot over petty stuff
When people weren't grimy
When guns weren't needed to pump gas

When school fights were not a thing
When kids could play outside
When the streetlight meant “get in the house”
When a bottle on a bike was a motorcycle
When Saturday mornings were reserved for cartoons
When Granny took you to church every Sunday
When two for a dollar chips and juice
would make me think I ate a meal
When life was BETTER!!

WITHIN

T.D.

My heart was sizzling,
burning, fiending for love from my dad.
He lingers like a grey shadow
watching over me from behind a closed door.
How do you just up and leave?

10 WAYS TO OVERCOME SOCIAL ANXIETY

T.D.

1. Befriend your breath.
   Let it anchor you like a tide that always knows the way back.
2. Arrive as you are.
   Not polished, not perfect, just present, which is already enough.
3. Practice being seen in small doses.
   A smile to a stranger, a nod, a ‘hello’ that doesn’t ask for more.
4. Turn the spotlight outward.
   Curiosity quiets fear; wonder what stories live behind other eyes.
5. Name the fear, then loosen your grip.
   Say, ‘I see you’, and watch it shrink from monster to feeling.
6. Borrow courage from repetition.
   Each time you show up, the path grows less thorned beneath your feet.
7. Let silence be a companion, not a verdict.
   Pauses are breaths in conversation, not proof of failure.
8. Speak to yourself like a trusted friend
   with patience, humor, and the grace you give so freely to others.
9. Redefine bravery.
   Not the absence of fear, but the decision to stay anyway.
10. Trust that connection wants you too.
    The world is not a stage, it’s a circle, and there’s space for you in it.