

TEACHER RESOURCE – Primary School

TRAVELS WITH MY GRANNY

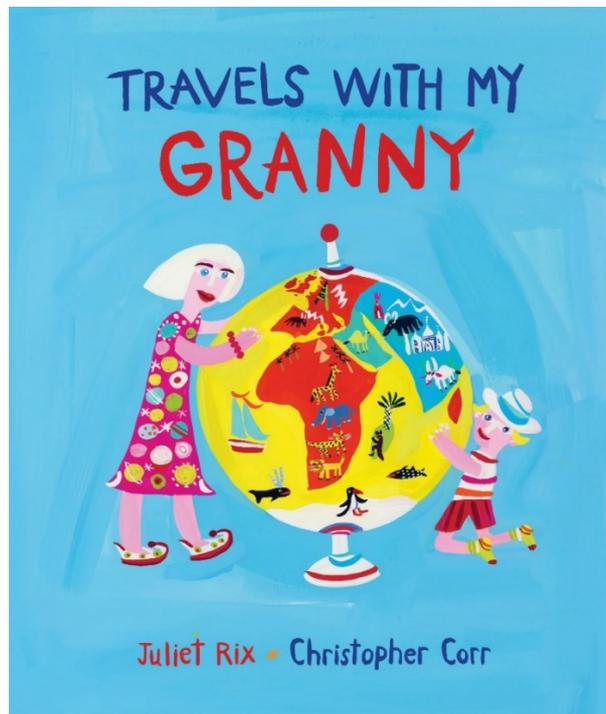
By Juliet Rix

Granny was a great traveller. She journeyed all over the world, and her room is full of souvenirs. Now her legs won't carry her much further than the door, but she still 'travels', and sometimes she takes her grandchild with her. They've been to India and Italy, London and New York; they've snorkelled the Great Barrier Reef and hiked the Himalayas.

The grown-ups think Granny is confused and doesn't know where she is, but Grandchild sees it differently: Granny "knows exactly where she is – it just isn't where the grown-ups are!".

Granny and Grandchild's travelling isn't all plain sailing. Sometimes Granny gets ahead and Grandchild doesn't know where she's gone and has to wait until she returns. Then they are off again....

This book takes kids to all sorts of colourful places – great cities, amazing landscapes – guided by Granny's souvenirs and memories. It also provides adults, if/when necessary, with a simple, positive way to explain the sometimes unpredictable behaviour of people with dementia – whose numbers are rapidly increasing. About a third of children know someone with dementia (even if they don't know the word) and this book can be used to open up age-appropriate discussion and understanding of a condition experts say will touch every child growing up today.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (from travel to dementia):

1. Which of the places Granny goes to would you most like to visit? Why?
2. Have you been to any of these places, or do you know anyone who lives in them?
3. [leading on from 'Granny's facts' about places] Do you know any other facts about this country/city? How might you find out more?
4. Where else would you like to go if you were travelling with Granny? Why?
5. Do you think Granny and Grandchild are actually going to all of these places? Do they pack their bags and get on a train or a plane and actually go away?
6. So how are they 'travelling'?
7. Why do the grown-ups think Granny is confused? Have a look at what she is wearing on the page with this text.
 - Does it fit with the sunshine outside the window and the clothes the other people in the room are wearing?
 - What sort of weather is Granny dressed for?
 - Why is that do you think?
 - Where is Granny in her head?
 - What do you see when you turn the page?
8. Does Grandchild understand the way Granny behaves differently from the way the grown-ups see it? Why is that do you think?
9. Are Granny and Grandchild's travels always simple? Or does Grandchild have to be a bit patient with Granny sometimes?

It is better that kids learn about dementia *before* they come across it in family or friends, the Alzheimer's Society says, and if the whole class understands about the condition, it makes it much easier for any child coping with it closer to home, and contributes to very necessary society-wide de-stigmatisation.

Of course, it is important to introduce dementia in a way that is accurate but not frightening, and always age-appropriate. *Travels with my Granny* is a picture book so its core readership is around 4 - 8, but it can start a conversation for much older children (and indeed adults) as well.

This book is expert-approved and presents the current thinking on how best to interact with people with dementia – ie not to keep correcting them and pulling them forcibly back to our reality, but to, where possible 'go with' them.

So as well as having some fun travelling around the world, a child who has read this book, has a tool to understand unpredictable or peculiar behaviour that is common in early and mid-stage dementia (the stages children are most likely to come across). They can be reminded that the person may be somewhere different in their head – 'travelling' – which demystifies and helps to explain their apparently strange behaviour.

Of course, it also helps to have a basic understanding of what dementia is:

Dementia is a brain condition that changes the way people think. It mainly affects older people – especially the very old. There are several types of dementia and it is different for each person, but most people with dementia start to get very forgetful. They especially lose their short-term memory and their ability to do complicated tasks. They may be able to remember in great detail something that happened 20 years ago while forgetting what happened 20 minutes ago. So, they may not recall the last time you saw them, but, like Granny, may have all sorts of tales about when they were young.

Sometimes people with dementia can seem to behave very strangely (like Granny in her winter furs in summer). They may become frustrated about things they can't do, or get upset or angry for no apparent reason. Sometimes this is because they are 'travelling': They are somewhere else in their mind, so what is happening where their bodies are – and where we are – can be very confusing for them. If we can be patient and understanding and not keep telling them they are wrong, people with dementia are likely to be happier. And, like Granny taking Grandchild travelling, they may be able to share some of their memories with us.

Further information and teaching resources: www.alzheimers.org.uk



ACTIVITIES

1. Spot the souvenir: Can you find where all the souvenirs in Granny's room come from? There is one in each picture of the places Granny has visited. (The answers are on the map at the back of the book, which will also show you where in the world all these places are).
2. Granny tells Grandchild a few fun facts about some of the places they visit. Can you find a few more interesting facts about these places? – or about the other places in the story? (Depending on the age of the children, this might be a class activity or homework, it could be a way of practising simple research skills, and for older kids about differentiating between facts and travel brochures (ie opinion).
3. Draw a picture of a place you would like to go. It could be a real place you've already been, a place you would like to go one day, or somewhere that exists only in your imagination.
4. What would happen if the grown-ups tried to get Granny out of her winter clothes and into summer clothes when she is on her way to Antarctica (in her head)? Write or draw what you think would happen, how Granny might feel, and what you think Grandchild might do about it.
5. Where do you think Granny and Grandchild go next? Draw or write the next part of the story.
6. Where is the most interesting place you have been? It could be a long way away, or it might be just around the corner (there are plenty of interesting places very nearby!). Tell us about it (in drawing or writing).

7. Most of the grandparents and older people you know won't have dementia, but they all have interesting memories and stories. Ask your adults to help you choose an older relative or friend you could talk to. Ask them a few questions about their childhood, their favourite places, and what they did when they were young.