

## RAINBOW ROCKET

BY FIONA TINWEI LAM  
ILLUSTRATED BY KRISTI  
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**H**ow do you explain the ideas of loss and grief to children? Or more specifically, how do you explore these themes in a children's book? These questions can be tough to address, but in *Rainbow Rocket*, the answer is simple: with art.

Written by Fiona Tinwei Lam and illustrated by Kristi Bridgeman, *Rainbow Rocket* tells the story of James, a young boy who has to deal with the process of slowly losing his grandmother to Alzheimer's. James' Sunday afternoon visits with his grandmother, or Poh-Poh as he calls her, are initially spent making art together; he draws, she paints. These visits create a strong bond between the two, and James looks up at Poh-Poh as his inspiration to be an artist. As time goes by, Poh-Poh's health and memory begin to decline, and their relationship suffers as a consequence. The book narrates James' journey as he deals with this new circumstance, and how art helps him cope with his loss and grief.

When Poh-Poh has to stay in the hospital, James turns to art for consolation: "*James' arms and legs feel heavy and empty at the same time. He doesn't know what to do. Then, he reaches into his knapsack to take out a pad of paper. He sits down and starts to draw.*" Later, when he leaves the hospital, James puts his rainbow rocket drawing next to his sleeping Poh-Poh and whispers: "*My rainbow rocket will keep*

*you company.*" Not only does art help James deal with his grief, it also creates a strong bond between him and Poh-Poh and provides a way for him to express his love for her.

The illustrations in this book nicely correspond to these means of art; they are bright, cheerful and at times magical, contrasting James' struggle in watching Poh-Poh's deteriorating condition. *Rainbow Rocket* is also culturally rich; it is embedded with references to Chinese culture, which includes artwork and cultural tradition. For someone who is not familiar with this culture, this book is a wonderful place to learn its bits and pieces; and for those who recognize the cultural references, it may be even easier to identify with the story and its characters. Throughout the entire narrative, Fiona Tinwei Lam creates a world that is easy to relate to. Her choices of words are simple and straightforward, giving us a clear and honest picture of James' experiences.

*Rainbow Rocket* is a beautifully illustrated and touchingly narrated story about a child who has to lose someone very dear to him. It addresses the sensitive issues of loss, grief and illness with delicate honesty, deftly avoiding melodrama, or over-simplification. It's a wonderful read for both children and adults. 🚀

