WATER BUGS AND DRAGONFLIES

Based on the book written by
Doris Stickney

This story can be used to help explain the concept of death, its inevitability and irreversibility – the fact that it is a natural process which is difficult to understand and impossible to control.

“Once upon a time, down below the surface of a quiet pond, lived a little colony of water bugs. They had a wonderful happy life chasing one another through the debris at the bottom of the pond, far away from the sun. The only strange thing was that their numbers seemed to be going down. Every so often, one of the water bugs would climb up a lily stalk and then just disappear.

It was very odd, the water bugs couldn’t understand it at all. Where did the water bug go? Wasn’t he happy in the pond with his brothers and sisters? Then one water bug suggested that the next one of them to climb up a lily stalk must come back and explain where he or she had been and why. They all solemnly promised they would do this.

Once spring day a little later on, the very water bug who had suggested the plan had an irresistible urge to climb a lily stalk, he couldn’t understand it, he couldn’t control himself, he just had to climb the lily stalk, higher and higher until he broke through the surface of the water and fell onto a broad green lily pad. When he looked down at his body, he couldn’t believe what had happened, a dramatic change had occurred. His stubby little body had shrunk and grown four silver
wings and a long tail. He had become a beautiful dragonfly! He shook his wings out
to dry and then swooping and dipping in great curves he flew through the air
exploring the plants and flowers growing around the edge of the pond.

After a while, he grew tired and alighted on a lily pad to rest. As he looked over the
edge of the lily pad, he could see his old friends, the water bugs, far below him and
he remembered his promise. Without thinking he darted down and hit the surface
of the water but bounced back again. Now he was a dragonfly he could no longer go
into the water. He could never go back and tell his water bug friends what had
happened. And even if he could they would not recognise him. They would have to
wait until they became dragonflies and then they would understand.

He was sorry he couldn’t keep his promise. He still cared about the water bugs in the
pond but there was nothing he could do and so he took to the air again and started
to enjoy his wonderful new world of sun and sky.”

This is best done as a group activity. The children are asked to create the beautiful
pond the water bugs live in using paints, craft material, foliage collected from the
garden and anything else to hand. Making a lasting image of the pond helps to focus
the children’s minds on the story and the message it carries. While they are carrying
out the activity the following questions can be asked:

What was life like for the water bugs in the pond?

Can you understand how they felt when their fellow water bugs kept disappearing
one by one without a trace?

Can you imagining what it felt like when the water bug just had to climb the lily stalk?

Do you think the dragonfly was happy flying around in the air above the pond?

How do you think he felt about his promise?

Do you think sometimes we want to do things very much but it is just not possible?

Having created their pond, the children can then be invited to tell the story in their
own words.