



# The Dragon Story

A resource for children.  
About dragons. And dementia.

This 4 minute cartoon is about a young dragon called Simon, his mummy, and Grandpa Drake. As Grandpa Drake gets older, he exhibits behaviours common with dementia and getting old, like not being able to find items, or forgetting things. Children may have come across some of these things in their own families, and the cartoon can be used to discuss these issues.

This resource pack identifies mini themes from the story for discussion, suggested questions, and activities to help facilitate a positive attitude to the condition of dementia that affects many families.

A preview version of the cartoon can be viewed at:

[thedragonstory.org](http://thedragonstory.org)



Dr Jennifer Bute retired as a GP with early onset Alzheimer's Disease and since then has used her experience as a carer, a medical professional, and now a patient to help people understand more about dementia. Dr Bute regularly speaks at conferences and groups, and has different resources available on her website: [www.gloriousopportunity.org](http://www.gloriousopportunity.org). This cartoon has been produced by her family.

## The Dragon Story - Guidance Notes for Adults

*The Alzheimer's Society (in their 'Dementia 2012' report) estimate that there are currently over 800,000 people in the UK with dementia, and that by 2012, there will be over a million.*

*Alzheimer's Research UK (in their 'Dementia Statistics 2012') estimate that 25 million people (42% of the UK population) know a close friend or family member with dementia.*

With these statistics in mind, it is likely that a significant number of children know of someone with dementia, and that number is set to increase.

### Synopsis:

The story involves three main characters, a young dragon called Simon, his mother and his maternal grandfather - Grandpa Drake. It begins with Simon and his mummy visiting Grandpa Drake in his own home - a cave. Later, it is revealed that Grandpa is forgetting things - where he has put a book and even at times, that Grandma Lucy has died. Grandpa Drake seems unable to make a cup of tea but still able to sew costumes. Then Grandpa Drake comes to live with Simon. Sometimes, it is good having Grandpa Drake staying with them, and sometimes Simon is sad and confused by what Grandpa Drake says or does. So Grandpa Drake goes to live in a special home and Simon visits him.



## **Discussion Points & Mini themes identified from the story:**

### **1. Older people in your family.**

Suggested questions/activities:

Who is in your family at home?

Do you live near anyone else in your family?

Can you remember any special stories that you have been told by your mummy / daddy / grandparent about when they were young?

Aim of discussion:

People's families can be just a single parent and a child, or several generations under one roof. Older people can be a valuable source of information and social history commentators.

### **2. Grandpa Drake forgets things (where is the book?) and his family reacts differently (Simon says, 'Silly Grandpa' and mummy laughs).**

Suggested questions/activities:

What kind of things do you forget? Does it matter?

Do you sometimes lose things?

If you lose something, is it nicer for someone to laugh and say you are silly, or help you to find it?

Aim of discussion:

Sometimes it matters, sometimes it doesn't. One should be helpful to people who can't do things, or can't remember things, or can't find things. Humour is important and a natural diffuser of awkward situations!

### **3. Grandpa Drake doesn't know who his family are.**

Suggested questions/activities:

If someone knocks on the door, how do we know who is there?

Have the children take it in turns being blindfolded, and try to identify other children by just listening to them say 'hello' or by shaking hands.

Alternatively, children could wear masks.

How easy is it for them to know who it is? What would make it easier?

Aim of discussion:

When a person with dementia doesn't recognise someone, it is helpful to provide them with contextual clues such as one's name, relationship, common interest.

### **4. Grandpa Drake can sew costumes but can't make a cup of tea.**

Suggested questions/activities:

What are you good at?

What do you need help with? (Music, sport, writing, tying shoelaces, cooking)

Aim of discussion:

Routines and patterns are important. Familiar things make one feel confident and secure.

### **5. Finding things in strange places.**

Suggested questions/activities:

Where did Simon find the cloth? (In the fridge) Why was this strange?

What do you keep in the fridge?

Do you have a special place where you keep special things?

Aim of discussion:

There is always a reason - it isn't always possible to understand the reason behind something, but it is important to accept the situation positively.

## **6. Grandpa Drake comes to stay with his family.**

Suggested questions/activities:

How did Simon feel when Grandpa was coming to stay?

How do you feel when you have visitors? (Excited, sad, confused)

Aim of discussion:

A child may feel unsettled with a visitor (even someone they know). In the same way, a person with dementia may feel unsettled in a new environment, whether they are just visiting or staying the night.

## **7. Grandpa Drake doesn't stay at home.**

Suggested questions/activities:

Where did Grandpa Drake go when he didn't stay at Simon's home?

(In someone else's cave; in town buying cloth; playing with pebbles in the stream.)

Why did he go there? Why did he do those things?

If we are feeling lonely or unsure of things, where do we like to go?

What do we like to do? (Special teddy, blanket)

Aim of discussion:

When in an awkward situation, people with dementia will prefer to revert to familiar patterns or places where they will feel most comfortable. This may even be something or some place that was familiar to them in their childhood.

## **8. Grandpa Drake goes to a special home.**

Suggested questions/activities:

Why couldn't Grandpa Drake stay with Simon anymore?

(Always leaving, Simon's mummy having to fetch him, somewhere people could look after him)

Aim of discussion:

When people are ill, they might go to hospital.

Sometimes older people go to a special home for elderly, to be looked after.

## **9. Grandpa Drake was sad for no reason.**

Suggested questions/activities:

What makes you sad?

What makes you happy?

Aim of discussion:

It is not always possible to cheer someone up, and one needs to accept how someone is feeling even if one doesn't understand why.

But of course establishing the reason for the upset is useful for the future.

## **10. Leaving without saying 'goodbye'.**

Suggested questions/activities:

Why do you think Simon didn't say 'Goodbye'?

Aim of discussion:

Feelings remain when the facts are forgotten. Saying 'Goodbye' could make one feel sad, and the tone of voice could communicate worry, anxiety, being in a hurry, or sadness, all of which are negative emotions.

A person with dementia will pick up on these and then view the whole visit negatively. In not saying 'goodbye', but giving a reasonable explanation as to why one is leaving, the person is left calm and happy. But no lies!

## **Additional Information**

Dr Jennifer Bute was diagnosed with early onset dementia and since then has used her experience as a carer, a medical professional, and now a patient to help people understand more about dementia. Different resources have been produced for carers and professionals.

But Jennifer, her three adult children and their spouses, felt there were no resources available in the UK that were suitable to explain Jennifer's condition to her younger grandchildren. They had the idea of creating their own resources and that is how the concept started - to write a story, and bring the story to life by creating a cartoon that would be fun and informative for children. The story is based on real life events.

You can read more about Jennifer's experiences and download further information and resources from her website: **[www.gloriousopportunity.org](http://www.gloriousopportunity.org)**

This particular story is intended as a pilot episode and, to some extent, is an overview of the story involving Simon and Grandpa Drake. There are further stories planned which deal with specific scenarios that will allow certain themes to be explored in more depth.

Three principles basic to any understanding of dementia are:

- 1. There is always a reason.** (For finding odd things in the fridge, or getting lost)
- 2. Feelings remain when facts are forgotten.** (It is so important that children understand that the person remembers a happy occasion even if the details are forgotten. There are lots of good memories to share.)
- 3. Patterns continue.** (Whether in making costumes or collecting pebbles.)

Please send us your feedback about the cartoon and resources, with any suggestions to:

**[info@thedragonstory.org](mailto:info@thedragonstory.org)**