

## CREATIVE ACTIVITIES FOR SELF-EXPRESSION AND WELL-BEING

### About the Book

In order to cope with the pain, fear, and confusion of her parent's cancer diagnosis, fourteen year old Phoenix envisions herself and the people around her as birds. Her perspective is a poetic one: lyrical, subtle, and imbued with magic, yet the vision of her bird self is a concrete way to visualize existential questions. Through her feathery filter, we follow Phoenix as she interacts with her parent, Eagle, and grandparent, Duck, navigates the hospital and middle school, and experiences her first queer love with best friend, Ing. She uses the power of her imagination to take flight from the ashes of her grief, gaining for the first time a sense of her own power.

*Ash and Feather* is an illustrated novel in verse for upper middle grade and early young adult readers.



### Poetry

Phoenix writes her story in poetry. Rather than sentences that string together to make one big story, poetry captures what Phoenix is thinking and feeling. Try writing poems for yourself when you aren't sure what else to do, such as an *I Am* poem, a *Daily Checklist*, or an *-ing Words* poem.

### Open Space Journal



Phoenix also learns that during difficult times, having a notebook where she can draw and write about her thoughts and feelings helps her process everything. Try putting pen, crayon, marker, or paint to paper for yourself. A judging voice may tell you to stop—that what you are doing is silly or weird, but don't listen to it. Judging voices come from fear, and

fear stops us from knowing ourselves. Listen to your body as it connects with something true inside you and let it out on the page!

### What's Your Animal

Phoenix has long seen herself and her loved ones as both people and birds. She chose the bird because it symbolizes freedom, hope and new opportunities. She



also loves their sense of escape and adventure. What animal do you connect with?

Draw yourself as a hybrid animal/human. Using materials found around you, construct a “strong home” that is like the home of your special animal. Phoenix and Ing build nests. What type of home will yours be, and what will you put inside it?

### Sometimes, Always, Never

When Phoenix is with Hen, she learns to respond to statements with the words *sometimes*, *always* or *never*. If you feel comfortable, with a trusted person, create statements about things we struggle with. Then read them together and answer with one of the words: *sometimes*, *always* or *never*. You can then discuss why you responded that way.

### Letter Writing

Phoenix and Eagle write a letter to death. Sometimes, confronting a hard feeling or question can be easier in letter form. You can write a letter that finishes these sentence starters: *I feel*, *I want*, *I hope*, *I need*.

### Sensory Play

Phoenix loves to play, especially games, dancing, being silly, and exploring her senses.

If you have worries or stress, take a moment to play. Even if you think there isn't enough time, the 5-10 minutes you spend playing will help you focus afterward on all the challenging things you have to do. Play can involve making funny faces in the mirror, chanting silly words or sounds, drawing in dirt or salt, sprinkling water on your hands and arms, or any activity you do for enjoyment rather than a practical purpose (like work or school).

### Rest

Midway through her story, Phoenix takes a mental health day and spends a lot of time resting. Taking a break from the stress in your life is important. In a world that praises hard



work and being busy, resting and allowing your body to recuperate is a radical act.

When you have feelings of overwhelm or exhaustion, take a few minutes to pause and rest your body. You can lay on the ground, a couch or bed, or in the car. Breathe

deeply. Feel the rise and fall of your belly. Return to your body and give yourself a hug.

You are here. You are important. You deserve to rest.

### Nature Walk

Phoenix enjoys nature in many ways: walks in her neighborhood, climbing trees, hiking by the bay. Wherever you live, nature is all around you. Take a walk outside, and notice what is growing, like in cracks in the sidewalk. Breathe and look at the details. Close your eyes and feel the sun and air, the earth beneath your feet. Spread out your hands, stretch your arms to the sky. Take it all in. You are a part of nature.

### Grounding for Calm

Phoenix uses grounding to help her feel more calm during moments of anxiety or fear. When you find yourself with these feelings, look around you. Identify 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste. Breathe as you notice these things.

### Tapping for Calm

Another way Phoenix helps herself during anxiety or fear is to tap her flat palms gently on her legs, alternating right and left. When you find yourself with uncomfortable feelings, you can sit and tap your legs. Or, you can crisscross your arms in front of you and tap each shoulder. As you tap, reassure yourself, “I can do this.” “I am me.”

