Themes: acceptance, death, friendship, self-esteem, stereotypes

Summary: The author relates how old Mr. Sweet, though often on the verge of dying, could always be revived by the loving attention that she and her brother gave him.

Background for Teacher: Alice Walker wrote this story to commemorate the old ones of her childhood who taught her the most important lesson of all: “That I did not need to be perfect to be loved. That no one does.”

Initiating Activities
1. Ask students to share about an older person in their lives who is special.
2. Ask students to define what love means to them and how they know when they are loved.
3. Discuss the concept of death. What does it mean to students?
4. Discuss how the elderly are treated in society.

Critical and Creative Thinking
1. Who was Mr. Sweet?
2. Why was Mr. Sweet so important in the children’s lives?
3. Why is the book entitled To Hell With Dying?
4. What changes took place in the life of the narrator during the story?
5. How do you remember friends or relatives who have died?

Responses:
1. Design a prayer service to remember friends and family members who have died. Invite students to bring pictures of loved ones to place on the classroom altar and share an anecdote or story from the person’s life.

2. Have students write a letter to an older person who is special in their lives. Send the letters.

3. Make arrangements to visit a nursing home for a holiday. Invite students to make decorations and prepare a short program or refreshments to present to the residents.