



Literature for Life Issue 2 | Stories & Curriculum at Glance

1. YOU REMEMBER EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED

Written by Tyra Lyn and Illustrated by Scott Gandell

- * **Genre/s:** Historic fiction
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 11th+, 16+
- * **Length:** 3,783 words
- * **Content Advisories:** References to family violence, war, violent death, and abuse of women.
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Tyra Lyn lives in Goleta, CA and Scott Gandell lives in South Pasadena, CA.
- * **Overview:** Set in Vietnam, “You Remember Everything that Happened” is the story about a general who meets his end by assassination, narrated by the general’s grandchild. The story is divided into two parts and two different perspectives. Part one is written from the perspective of the general’s first wife. She recounts how she came to marry the general, her unhappy family life with him, and how she stood up to him when the general’s second wife accused her daughter of stealing a necklace. In the second part, the general survives several assassination attempts, but in the final attempt meets his end.
- * **Topics & Themes:** **Topics** - Vietnam War, repression of women, patriarchal culture, women’s empowerment; **Themes** - Fate, regret, taking back one’s life, looking back at what could have been.

2. NORM, ALIVE AND WELL

Written by Andrew Ramirez and Illustrated by Scott Gandell

- * **Genre:** Fiction
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+, 14+
- * **Length:** 1,189 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Some graphic descriptions of violence and an injury
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Andrew Ramirez lives in Los Angeles, CA and Scott Gandell lives in South Pasadena, CA.
- * **Overview:** A bar fight leaves Norm with a knife protruding from his eye, but that doesn’t seem to phase him. Heading home, life for Norm and his wife goes on pretty much as usual until Norm starts to...dream.
- * **Topics & Themes:** **Topics** - Relationships, how the brain works, absurd situations and how people react to them; **Themes** - The consequences of one’s actions, end of life experiences, putting life into perspective, subjective perception.

3. THE JUGGLER

Written by Cheryl Klein and Illustrated by Scott Gandell

- * **Genre:** Fiction, Coming of Age
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 10th+, 15+
- * **Length:** 3,728 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Foster care system discussion, allusions to sexuality.
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Cheryl Klein lives in Los Angeles, CA and Scott Gandell lives in South

Pasadena, CA.

- * **Overview:** As a teenager in the foster care system, Amalia juggles many identities, and is always searching for her true self. She just might find it, and more, when the circus moves in next door.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Growing up in foster care, circus culture, opportunity; **Themes** - Finding one's identity, embracing the new and unexpected, tolerance of people's differences and eccentricities.

4. **LOVE WILL MAKE YOU NAKED (excerpt from the story, Hope Found Chauncey)**

Written by Jervey Tervalon and Illustrated by Jessica Chrysler

- * **Genre:** Fiction, Comedy
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 11th+, 16+
- * **Length:** 5,210 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Discussion of nudity, references to sex, profanity
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Jervey Tervalon lives in Altadena, CA and Jessica Chrysler lives in Los Angeles, CA.
- * **Overview:** Googie is the comical protagonist that knows a closed mouth does not get fed. His eager and precocious ways often land him in hot water whether he finds himself naked somewhere in the Crenshaw District, explaining himself to the police or being hit over the head with a broom by Hope's Aunt Thelma. The narrator in the story, Jervey, often laughs at Googie but in the end is still "nodding in admiration."
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Decisions and good judgement, adventures, mishaps; **Themes** - Teenage love, good intentions gone awry, the funny side to things gone wrong.

5. **THE THING ON TREUFEL'S ARM**

Written by Andrew Nicholls and Illustrated by Allison Strauss

- * **Genre:** Fiction, Comedy
- * **Length:** 4,408 words
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+, 14+
- * **Content Advisories:** Some animal cruelty, mature relationships, reference to smoking
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Andrew Nicholls lives in Los Angeles, CA and Allison Strauss lives in Los Angeles, CA.
- * **Overview:** Cameron, a young man, witnesses his sister's boyfriend, Treufel's, encounter with a crab during a family vacation. The story unfolds at the family's lake cottage in front of the following characters: Cameron, Eric Treufel, Beck, Janie, Anastasia and mom. Treufel has a crab hanging around his wrist. Instead of removing it, he prods it and parades with it as a badge or tool for a bully. The family is torn by these events, but when Treufel is forced to stop, the family comes together in the process.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Family, siblings, empathy for other animals, good judgement; **Themes** - How family comes together, role of siblings in each other's life decisions, the experiences that bind us, dating and breaking up.

6. **N.W.A.: A HARD ACT TO FOLLOW (reprint of a May 5, 1989 LA Weekly cover story)**

Written by Jonathan Gold and Illustrated by Patrick Farley

- * **Genre:** Nonfiction, journalism, historic Los Angeles, music writing
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 11th+, 16+
- * **Length:** 4,638 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Profanity, discussion of violence and gang life, depictions of gun culture
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Jonathan Gold lives in Los Angeles, CA and Patrick Farley lives in Oakland, CA.
- * **Overview:** Gold's piece from May 1989 is the first major article/cover story about the notorious Los Angeles gangster hip hop group N.W.A. Offering a behind-the-scenes account of the group's rise to fame and their philosophy, Eazy E, Ice Cube, MC Ren and Dr. Dre are all heavily quoted in the piece. Their rise is put in context with the late 1980s LAPD and gangs crisis as well as earlier precedents like the

Blaxploitation era. Gold explicates the mythology behind the group, contextualizing the band's image—both truth and possible fiction—while exploring the band's music and talent. Gold characterized their appeal, "while the urban- gangster life had been romanticized since Capone, nobody had ever made it sound quite so much fun before." The story is infused with irony— whether discussing the band's image or their appeal to suburban audiences.

- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - History of music, hip hop, and rap in Los Angeles; history of racism and segregation in Los Angeles; gang violence in Los Angeles; violence; family; community; being an artist; conflict within a group; **Themes** - The place and culture we come from and how it shapes our lives; the dream of wealth and fame vs. the reality of it; self-destructive behavior; seeking to transcend our roots and not always succeeding; what it means to be an artist; romanticizing gang culture; exploring how and why we consume art; commercialism vs. art for art's sake; being true (or not) to one's self; what it means to do what it takes to be successful.

7. SON2MOTHER (poem)

Written by Kevin Powell and Illustrated by J. Michael Walker

- * **Genre:** Poetry
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 8th+, 13+
- * **Length:** 1,865 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Child abuse references, allusions to sex, mention of slavery
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Kevin Powell lives in Brooklyn, NY and J. Michael Walker lives in Los Angeles, CA.
- * **Overview:** Powell writes an epistle poem to his mother where he reflects intimately on their turbulent family history. Ultimately he forgives her for her mistreatment of him, nonetheless he does confess, "I am that little boy/cowering beneath the power of/that slap, the swing of that belt." Powell spells out his frustrations but even more so extolls his mother's strength, "someone who fought landlords/and crooked police officers." The long poem is about family loyalty and forgiveness. He closes the poem by telling his mother that in spite of everything that has transpired over the years between them, she is "the greatest love I've ever had in my life."
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Growing up with a single mother, child abuse, hardship, poverty ; **Themes** - Family loyalty, forgiveness, triumph over hardship, coming to understand one's parents.

8. ROADKILL

Written by Lainnie Capouya and Illustrated by Allison Strauss and J. Michael Walker

- * **Genre:** Childhood memoir, Comedy
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 6th+, 11+
- * **Length:** 2,195 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Dead animal (it should be noted that roadkill can carry diseases and shouldn't actually be touched), a child with a disability
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Lainnie Capouya lives in Pasadena, CA and Allison Strauss and J. Michael Walker live in Los Angeles, CA.
- * **Overview:** Three siblings, including one who has become disabled, bond with each other as they find entertainment on a hot day in the countryside by playing a dangerous game with a dead armadillo that they found.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Family, growing up in the rural American South, siblings, getting in trouble

for

childhood mishaps; **Themes** - Finding acceptance and bonding through getting into trouble, the ethics of what we do with animals that are dead, the innocence of childhood.

9. **[WILLAMENA, SHE AIN'T TRIPPIN'...]**

Written by Tim Stiles and Illustrated by Scott Gandell

- * **Genre:** Poetry, Alternative prose style, Monologue
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 11th+, 16+
- * **Length:** 913 words
- * **Content Advisories:** References to murder and drug use, profanity, racism, abuse of women
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Tim Stiles lives in the San Francisco Bay Area, CA and Scott Gandell lives in South Pasadena, CA.
- * **Overview:** Willamena is telling a story about her neighbor being killed. The teenage girl lived with her drug dealer brothers, and was shot by Michael, a drug addict and the father of her baby. Willamena's attitude is that the murder was not a surprise, given the drug addicts coming and going all night. As she relates the story, the reader learns about her own life.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Drug use, poverty, violence, abuse, family issues; **Themes** - Cycles of poverty and violence, loss of childhood, loss of innocence, how our environment and experiences shape our perceptions.

10. **ESSAY TO MY SON**

Written by Robert Schilling Schick and Illustrated by Allison Strauss

- * **Genre:** Personal essay, Memoir
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 7th+, 13+
- * **Length:** 1,104 words
- * **Content Advisories:** A parent deals with his feelings about the death of his child
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Robert Schilling Schick lives in Scotland, UK and Allison Strauss lives in Los Angeles, CA.
- * **Overview:** This memoir piece is about the tragic death of Mr. and Ms. Schick's son at birth and Mr. Schick's struggle to cope with the loss.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Grief, struggling with loss, pressure to be strong; **Themes** - Everyone deals with death differently, allowing men to show strong emotions, trying to make sense of loss, what it means to be human.

11. **STREET TRASH: POEMS (collection of 16 short poems)**

Written by Celeste Gonzalez and Illustrated by Allison Strauss

- * **Genre:** Poetry (16 short poems)
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 12th+, 17+
- * **Length:** 1,340 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Gritty content tackling abuse of women, depression, sexuality, drugs, and drinking.
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Celeste Gonzalez lives in Los Angeles, CA and Allison Strauss lives in Los Angeles, CA.
- * **Overview:** In this revealing collection of short poems, the narrator moves through different times and space, and encounters various women and their struggles to be strong and survive: teenage moms, a woman locked into a cheap hotel room, a drug addict, an abused young girl, a depressed woman, a suicidal teenager, a left-behind lover, etc.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Depression, addiction, abuse of women; **Themes** - Loss of innocence, not being able to get out of difficult life situations, loneliness, longing, life choices.

12. BELIZE

Written by Robert Schilling Schick and Illustrated by Allison Strauss

- * **Genre:** Memoir, narrative nonfiction
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+, 14+
- * **Length:** 1,075 words
- * **Content Advisories:** None.
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Miranda Morgan lives in Austin, TX (and previously in Santa Barbara, CA) and Allison Strauss lives in Los Angeles, CA.
- * **Overview:** A young woman recalls a vacation with her family that gave her a glimpse of her father as he wished to be.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Childhood, remembering, family, parents, father/daughter relationships, travel abroad, reflection; **Themes** - Longing to connect with parents, looking back at the good moments in life, what we learn from our parents, how travel can change relationship dynamics, what might have been.

13. LOVE, DOVE

Written by Eva Huang and Illustrated by Leora Wien

- * **Genre:** Fiction
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+, 14+
- * **Length:** 1,713 words
- * **Content Advisories:** This story deals with seeing a loved one go through a mental and subsequent physical decline - a grandmother suffering from dementia.
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Eva Huang lives in California and Leora Wien lives in Los Angeles, CA.
- * **Overview:** A young woman, Dove, visits her grandmother, Marguerite, in the nursing home. Her grandmother is suffering from dementia and is having a challenging time communicating with Dove. Dove hopes that her grandmother will remember her and wonders what it means that she seems to have disappeared from her grandmother's memory.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Aging, dementia, family, grandparents, communication, disability, hope, caring for relatives; **Themes** - How people change over time, loving someone who is no longer the same mentally, patience and fortitude in the face of adversity, trying to find meaning in life, not giving up.