



Literature for Life Issue 3 | Stories & Curriculum at Glance

1. FOLSOM ALLEY

Written by Rebecca Gonzales and Illustrated by Graeme Fordyce

- * **Genre/s:** Contemporary, narrative nonfiction, memoir
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+, 14+
- * **Length:** 2,021 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Gang violence, gun usage, moderate profanity
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Rebecca Gonzales lives in East Los Angeles, CA and Graeme Fordyce lives in Pasadena, CA.
- * **Overview:** A mother insists on raising her son in the East L.A. neighborhood where she grew up, despite the threat of violence.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Gang violence, neighborhoods of East L.A., parental love and protection, Innocence, innocence lost, different growing up experiences; **Themes** - Concept of home, neighborhood and identity, the power of one's roots, denial, a child's vs a parent's perspective.

2. NOPALITOS

Written by Conrad Romo and Illustrated by Christopher Perez

- * **Genre:** Narrative nonfiction; personal essay
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+, 14+
- * **Length:** 1,609 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Occasional cursing in English and Spanish, allusions to catholicism, modest references to sex
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Conrad Romo and Christopher Perez both live in Los Angeles, CA.
- * **Overview:** A traditional dinner between an adult son and his aging father is an opportunity for reflection and redemptive acceptance.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Yearning for connection, fear of loss, roles of food and religion in culture and family, cultural assimilation; **Themes** - Family relationships, passage of time, acceptance of others' limitations, aging, grief, renewal and redemption, traditional father-son relationships; machismo pressures and cultural expectations.

3. KICKS (novel excerpt)

Written by Janet Fitch and Illustrated by Walter Askin

- * **Genre:** Teen Fiction
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+, 14+
- * **Length:** 3,734 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Some mention of sex and sexuality; One character has brain damage.
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Janet Fitch lives in Los Angeles, CA and Walter Askin lives in Pasadena, CA.
- * **Overview:** Teenage Laurie, a child of Russian-speaking immigrants, struggles to find her identity while dealing with family challenges, including her disabled father, pressure from her mother, and her high achieving brother.

- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Disability, identity, family and dysfunctional family life, first generation Americans, the Russian-speaking immigrant experience, fitting; **Themes** - Seeing family differently as you age, dealing with pressure to succeed, the need to fit in with peers, surviving one's teen years, the transition from childhood to adulthood.

4. **BURNERS (novel excerpt)**

Written by Bronwyn Mauldin and Illustrated by Scott Gandell

- * **Genre:** Science Fiction, Urban, Young Adult, Los Angeles Setting, Dystopian
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+, 14+
- * **Length:** 6,115 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Someone hands the hero a joint. He gives it to someone else without smoking; Some cursing.
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Bronwyn Mauldin lives in Los Angeles, CA and Scott Gandell lives in South Pasadena, CA.
- * **Overview:** A small band of young hackers in Los Angeles seek to disrupt government corruption and corporate greed, bringing power to the people — literally — by installing solar energy panels at public schools.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Government corruption, corporate greed, injustice, poverty, fringe culture, use of disruptive technology, anonymous hacking culture, environmental activism; **Themes** - Survival, resilience, perseverance, hope, the haves and the have-nots.

5. **ROOM (novel excerpt)**

Written by Elsa Valmidiano and Illustrated by Ester Petschar

- * **Genre:** Realistic literary fiction
- * **Length:** 2,653 words
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 8th+, 13+
- * **Content Advisories:** Occasional cursing, Some words in Tagalog, A child's description of defecation
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Elsa Valmidiano lives in Oakland, CA and Ester Petschar lives in Pasadena, CA.
- * **Overview:** A young girl, who immigrated from the Philippines, comes to realize that her family is different from her friends' families — and poorer — when she brings a friend home from school.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Making friends, cultural assimilation, social/sociocultural status, poverty, immigrant experiences; **Themes** - Yearning for acceptance/fitting in, self-discovery, identity, shifting friendships, child vs. adult perception, social acceptance amongst one's peers in the face of ethnic and class differences.

6. **THE BROOKLYN TOLSTOY**

Written by Doug Benerofe and Illustrated by Alexander Lee

- * **Genre:** Fiction
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+, 14+
- * **Length:** 3,209 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Modest references to menstruation, smoking, sex, and sexuality.
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Doug Benerofe lives in San Francisco, CA and Alexander Lee lives in Los Angeles, CA.
- * **Overview:** A widowed father must learn to guide his teenage daughter, who idolizes environmental protest icon Julia Butterfly Hill, through the difficulties of puberty even as he struggles with his own grief and fears.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Navigating the changing parent / teen relationship, dealing with the loss of a parent or spouse, moving on, the onset of puberty; **Themes** - Loss, fear of abandonment, nostalgia, a parent's vs a child's perspective.

7. FRIDAY

Written by Norris Keenan and Illustrated by Nery Gabriel Lemus

- * **Genre:** Fiction
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+, 14+
- * **Length:** 2,800 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Violence, Cursing, Truancy
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Keenan Norris lives in San Leandro, CA and Nery Gabriel Lemus lives in Los Angeles, CA.
- * **Overview:** Coming from a poor neighborhood, Luster Little undervalues the hard work ethic of his brother and instead chooses to emulate a local gangster named Eddie.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Poverty, gang activity, truancy, hard work in challenging circumstances, getting ahead, family, cultural identity; **Themes** - Perseverance, longing, hope / aspiration, choosing a path in life, respect.

8. POEMS (five short poems)

Written by Yvonne Estrada and Illustrated by Sherry Giang-Chen

- * **Genre:** Poetry
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 11th+, 16+
- * **Length:** 570 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Discussion of graffiti, Allusions to sexual abuse and drug use
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Yvonne Estrada lives in Los Angeles, CA and Sherry Giang-Chen lives in Pasadena, CA.
- * **Overview:** Los Angeles poet Yvonne Estrada explores issues of identity in a set of five poignant poems about coming of age, family history and trauma, and tagging culture.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Graffiti; urban landscapes: taggers, graffiti, cars, freeways, helicopters; mirrors/reflections; birds; abuse; **Themes** - Self-reflection; internal struggle; unfulfilled potential; legacies; juxtaposition; power/helplessness; nature/man-made landscapes; layers of meaning and experience.

9. 1181 DURFEE AVENUE: 1983-1986

Written by Michael Jaime-Becerra and Illustrated by Scott Gandell

- * **Genre:** Narrative Nonfiction; Memoir
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 8th+, 13+
- * **Length:** 2,110 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Mild profanity
- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Michael Jaime-Becerra lives in El Monte, CA and Scott Gandell lives in South Pasadena, CA.
- * **Overview:** Set against the backdrop of Southern California in the 1980s, this second-person narrative reveals how the author's love of riding his bicycle and playing video games at local arcades are the foundational experiences of his transition, through independence and freedom, from childhood into adolescence and later adulthood.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Adolescence, video games, Californian middle class in the 1980s; **Themes** - Coming-of-age, independence, joy of childhood, nostalgia.

10. THE DOG WHO SOLVED A MURDER MYSTERY: A TRUE STORY

Written by Joel Jacobsen and Illustrated by Jennifer Swain

- * **Genre:** Historical nonfiction, Murder mystery, True tales, True crime
- * **Grade / Age Level:** 6th+, 11+
- * **Length:** 2,986 words
- * **Content Advisories:** Some graphic imagery; References to violent crime, murder, and execution

- * **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Joel Jacobson lives in New Mexico and Jennifer Swain lives in Los Angeles, CA.
- * **Overview:** A historical recount of an 1890's New Mexican dog who helps a cowboy discover how his brother was murdered.
- * **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Life in the Old West, historical research methodology, Animal loyalty and intelligence; **Themes** - Persistence, patience, determination, different cultural perspectives on the same issue, problem solving, legal justice vs. social justice.