

## Literature for Life Issue 4 | Stories & Curriculum at Glance

### 1. ADEBOWALE ON THE YANGTZE RIVER

Written by Kosiso Ugwueze and Illustrated by Erwin Papa

- \* **Genre/s:** Narrative, contemporary, realistic fiction, short story, travel fiction
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+, 14+
- \* **Length:** 1,064 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** Ethnicity/race, languages, cross-cultural interactions, international travel, cultural insensitivity
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Kosiso Ugwueze lives in Los Angeles, CA and Erwin Papa lives in Long Beach, CA.
- \* **Overview:** A traveler in China, struggling with issues of identity, experiences unexpected acceptance from strangers whose kindness transcends his expectations.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics -** Ethnicity/race, identity, inclusion/exclusion, cross-cultural discovery; **Themes -** Finding and maintaining identity in changing circumstances, finding community in new environments, struggling with rejection and acceptance, resisting stereotypes, unexpected kindness.

### 2. CREASES

Written by Chiwan Choi and Illustrated by Maddie Saunders

- \* **Genre:** Fiction, coming of age
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 11th+, 16+
- \* **Length:** 1,100 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** References to sex, alcoholism, gang activity, and drug use; some explicit language
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Chiwan Choi lives in Los Angeles, CA and Maddie Saunders lives in Glendale, CA.
- \* **Overview:** As two young men bound by friendship, experience, and violence drive the nighttime streets of South Los Angeles together, one muses upon the past, present, and future events that connect them.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics -** Boyhood, friendship, masculinity; **Themes -** Coming of age, the bad seed, life's twists and turns, on a roller coaster to doom, loyalty in friendship.

### 3. JUMPING

Written by Kosiso Ugwueze and Illustrated by Cathleen Abalos

- \* **Genre:** Fiction
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+, 14+
- \* **Length:** 2,115 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** Some allusions to sex and sexuality.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Kosiso Ugwueze lives in Los Angeles, CA and Cathleen Abalos lives in Los Angeles, CA.
- \* **Overview:** Kenneth an insecure, straight-laced, shy student, struggles with his own self-doubt in order to transition his friendship with May, an outgoing, worldly expatriate and exotic beauty, into the romance of his dreams.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics -** Romance, insecurity, self-confidence, taking risks, cross-cultural relationships,

new age spirituality; **Themes** - Coming of age, opposites attracting, turning a hopeless situation around, finding confidence in oneself.

#### 4. VINE A LOS ANGELES (poem)

Written by Adolfo Guzman-Lopez and Illustrated by Scott Gandell

- \* **Genre:** Historical poetry, immigrant experiences, Mexican American
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+, 14+
- \* **Length:** 167 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** References to episodes of conflict and protest in Los Angeles's history.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Adolfo Guzman-Lopez lives in Long Beach, CA and Scott Gandell lives in South Pasadena, CA.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - History of Los Angeles, history of Mexico City, Exploring our personal roots and the roots of where we live; **Themes** - Foundations, the passage of time, layering of history and culture in places over time, living in more than one world simultaneously, being shaped by our past, the importance of remembering our past, the blending of cultures together, transformation, old giving way to new continuously, remembering the justice and arts movements that paved the way for our modern communities, our rights, and our culture, connections between changes within ourselves and changes without: connections between our inner foundations, and the foundations of our home and society; connecting the roots of ourselves and our homes.

#### 5. WOMEN IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

Written by Jamila Osman and Illustrated by Jen Swain

- \* **Genre:** Nonfiction, memoir, immigrant and refugee experiences, family, Somali American, coming of age
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 10th+, 15+
- \* **Length:** 524 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** The word "shit" is used twice; references to conflict in Somalia.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Jamila Osman lives in Portland, OR and Jen Swain lives in Los Angeles, CA.
- \* **Overview:** A young woman who immigrated to the United States from Somalia muses upon the transition from her old home to her new, and the effect of this transition on her family, community, and herself.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Immigration, family-ties, ancestral roots, mother/daughter relationships, identity, Somali refugee experience; **Themes** - Home, creating a home in a new land, connections to your roots, belonging, not belong to one place or another, coming of age.

#### 6. LOTUS OF THE MUDDY WATERS

Written by Ivy Kuo and Illustrated by Santosh Oommen

- \* **Genre:** Fiction
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 8th+, 13+
- \* **Length:** 3,588 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** References to the torture, imprisonment, and slavery endured under the Khmer Rouge and the Cambodian Genocide.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Ivy Kuo lives in Santa Barbara, CA and Santosh Oommen lives in Pasadena, CA.
- \* **Overview:** While struggling with the contrast between her parents' subsistent household and the abundant American lifestyles she sees at school and on TV, 12-year-old Chhouka learns to appreciate the horrors of the genocide her parents barely escaped and her name and identity, honoring her Cambodian roots.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - History of the Khmer Rouge and the Cambodian Genocide, class struggle in America, courage, respect, parental relationships with each other, parent-child relationship, personal identity, family; **Themes** - Adolescent rebellion, family conflict, coming of age, TV versus real life, income inequality, search for cultural identity, want versus need, appreciating the freedoms we have, immigrants/refugees adapting to a new life, overcoming adversity.

## 7. MRS. MCKAY AND THE DEAD PONY

Written by Mary Lea Carroll and Illustrated by Tony Wong

- \* **Genre:** Fiction
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 6th+, 11+
- \* **Length:** 1,831 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** Animals—a dead pony, eccentricity
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Mary Lea Carroll lives in Pasadena, CA and Tony Wong lives in Los Angeles, CA.
- \* **Overview:** Young Mary’s curiosity leads her to seek out the mysterious and frightening Mrs. McKay’s estate, where she and her brother have their first lessons in taking chances, working hard, and learning that first impressions are not always what they seem.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Responsibility, perseverance, teamwork, mortality— everything dies, individuality and eccentricity; **Themes** - Coming of age, first impressions and questioning them, defying expectations, overcoming personal limitations, valuing diverse perspectives, value of hard work.

## 8. NUEVO MEXICO PROFUNDO

Written by Rebecca Gonzales and Illustrated by Joey Feldman

- \* **Genre:** This challenging, poetic piece is a stream-of-consciousness narrative.
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 11th+, 16+
- \* **Length:** 626 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** References to drug and alcohol use, drunk driving, death and loss, strong language/cursing, depression/self-harm.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Rebecca Gonzales lives in East Los Angeles, CA and Joey Feldman lives in Los Angeles, CA.
- \* **Overview:** Tortured with grief over loss and impending further loss, the narrator describes a frantic cross-country trek to escape pain and seek solace in the company of others who can relate to her experiences.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Death and dying, self-destructive behavior, grief; **Themes** - Escape, women’s empowerment/feminism, grief and solace, strength in times of crisis.

## 9. THESE ARE MY CHILDREN

Written by Angelina Coppola and Illustrated by Scott Gandell

- \* **Genre:** Fiction, feminist literature, Latino Los Angeles
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+, 14+
- \* **Length:** 991 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** References to sex and murder
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Angelina Coppola lives in Los Angeles, CA and Scott Gandell lives in South Pasadena, CA.
- \* **Overview:** The voice of a distraught woman in this surreal work of fiction hauntingly identifies with Echo Park Lake’s “Lady of the Lake” statue, as workers drain the lake, and portrays the event as a metaphor for the hopes of all members of the local community as well as her own secrets, crimes, and sorrows.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - \* Grief / sorrow, loss, shame, guilt; **Themes** - Violations of nature by humans, violations of what’s held (or should be held) sacred, the power of the feminine divine, seeking redemption, immobilization.