



## Literature for Life Issue 5 | Stories & Curriculum at Glance

### 1. A WALK THROUGH MEMORIES

Written by Ximena Salas and Illustrated by Cathleen Abalos

- \* **Genre/s:** Fictionalized biography; vignette
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 8th+ / 13+
- \* **Length:** 2,501 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** Reference to young people selling drugs; Allusions to youth gang involvement; This is a story by the winner of a high school writing competition from *Literature for Life*.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Ximena Salas is a Los Angeles, California high school student. Cathleen Abalos is an artist living in Long Beach, California.
- \* **Overview:** A young woman reflects on poignant moments in her life and an impending admission decision from her dream college.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Education, family, relationships, hope, loss; **Themes** - Sacrifice, delayed gratification, following your dreams, moving forward in life, contributing to the world, machismo.

### 2. BORN BY THE RIVER: RICHARD WRIGHT, BARACK OBAMA, & “CHI-RAQ”

Written by Keenan Norris and Illustrated by Katia Grifols

- \* **Genre/s:** Essay excerpt; African American history; urban studies
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 11th+ / 16+
- \* **Length:** 2,281 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** This essay requires knowledge of 20th-century African American history in America to understand. It can be approached as a complement to a course in black history or as a starting point from which to learn more about people and topics in black history. The essay touches on issues of segregation, racism, and other human rights abuses.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Author Keenan Norris lives in Oakland, California and artist Katia Grifols lives in Burbank, California.
- \* **Overview:** Author Keenan Norris explores his Chicago family roots in a far-ranging essay that dives into the history of the Great Migration of African Americans from the South into the cities of the North and the opportunities it brought, as well as the ensuing housing and jobs segregation that impacts urban American life to this day.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - African American history, housing segregation in urban America, racism and poverty, Chicago history, African American literature, The Great Migration of African Americans from the rural south to cities, post-war America, cause and effect; **Themes** - The power of our roots, the insidiousness of prejudice, how the past impacts and shapes people and society in the present, applying lessons from past events to present issues, the human tendency to engage in patterns and repetition of behavior.

### 3. ENTWINED NOTIONS

Written by Veda Stamps and Illustrated by Maddie Saunders

- \* **Genre/s:** Fiction; historical fiction; short story
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 7th+ / 12+
- \* **Length:** 1,451 words

- \* **Content Advisories:** Brief cursing; reference to suicide; racially charged language and mention of racially motivated violence.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Author Veda Stamps lives in Santa Clarita, California and artist Maddie Saunders lives in Glendale, California.
- \* **Overview:** Recalling prejudiced scenes from her life, a grandmother speaks out to prevent her family's fear-fueled history from effecting her grandson.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Family, prejudice, civil rights, pain, loss, masculinity, fear; **Themes** - Creating with your hands, following your heart, learning from previous generations, first- and second-generation Americans, being of mixed-race ancestry, sexual identity, the pressure to fit in

#### 4. IN TRANSIT

Written by Mary Joyce Artap and Illustrated by Jimi Martinez

- \* **Genre/s:** Creative nonfiction; personal narrative
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+ / 14+
- \* **Length:** 1,818 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** None
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Marie Joyce Artap is a Seattle-based writer who was raised in Greater Los Angeles and Jimi Martinez is a Los Angeles, California based artist.
- \* **Overview:** A recent college graduate considers her own identity upon joining a resilient and caring community of "Overseas Filipino Workers."
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Family, immigration, work, poverty, feminism, identity; **Themes** - Filipino diaspora in the U.S., the plight of L.A. commuters, being a newcomer/outsider, moving home after college, finding self, mentorship

#### 5. THE ANCIENT FLOCKS OF WILSON STREET

Written by Bill Cushing and Illustrated by Santosh Oommen

- \* **Genre/s:** Poetry
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 8th+ / 13+
- \* **Length:** 110 words (one poem)
- \* **Content Advisories:** References the Armenian Genocide.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Writer Bill Cushing lives in Glendale, California and artist Santosh Oommen lives in Pasadena, California.
- \* **Overview:** Rich in beautiful imagery, this poem is about the aging Armenian immigrant men of Glendale, California and the community they've formed with one another through playing dominoes in a local park.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Armenian immigration to the Glendale, CA area, Armenian Genocide, Armenian history and culture, the game of dominoes, comparing human behavior to that of other creatures, immigration to a new country, refugees; **Themes** - Forming community far away from your childhood home. making a new home, memories and aging, how the past never leaves us, making space for ourselves and our communities

#### 6. AN OCCURRENCE AT THE INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION

Written by Erica Goodwin and Illustrated by Erwin Papa

- \* **Genre/s:** Science fiction, surrealist narrative, stream of consciousness
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 7th+ / 12+
- \* **Length:** 811 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** References to war and to the 9/11 attacks.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Erica Goodwin is a writer and a student of computer science and math at Harvey Mudd College in Claremont, California and Erwin Papa is an artist living in Long Beach, California.

- \* **Overview:** An astronaut looks down upon Earth in a moment of epiphany about what matters in life.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Spiritual experience, passage of time, humanity's legacy, ecology/evolution, space exploration; **Themes** - Finding meaning in death, space technology/tragedy, patterns in nature, coexistence of humans and nature, globalization, Manifest Destiny, collective unconsciousness

## 7. STRAY DOGS

Written by Angelica Lai and Illustrated by Scott Gandell

- \* **Genre/s:** Fiction
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 8th+ / 13+
- \* **Length:** 1,111 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** This story takes place on Guam and discusses legends of the indigenous Chamorro.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Angelica Lai is a writer who attended UCLA and lives in Cambridge, England. Scott Gandell is an artist living in South Pasadena, California.
- \* **Overview:** Two teen girls, who grew-up on the island of Guam, reminisce about their childhoods and the traditional stories that shaped them, even as one girl prepares to leave the island for college while the other plans to stay behind.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Life on Guam; indigenous peoples living in an occupied territory, folklore of the Chamorro, symbolism of belonging and not belonging, family ties; **Themes** - Coming of age, leaving home for new opportunities vs. choosing to stay behind, belonging—or not, how traditions, beliefs, and stories shape who we are

## 8. THE BABY ON BAXTER - CICADA - HELP WANTED poems

Written by Candace Pearson and Illustrated by Jennifer Swain

- \* **Genre/s:** Poetry; narrative poetry
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 8th+ / 13+
- \* **Length:** 386 words (three poems)
- \* **Content Advisories:** The first poem discusses an abandoned baby.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Candace Pearson is a writer living in Los Angeles, California, and Jennifer Swain is an artist living in Los Angeles, California.
- \* **Overview:** These three poignant poems touch on themes of love, regret, birth and life.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Child abandonment, television news, loneliness, thoughts vs. actions, cicadas, symbolism; **Themes** - Birth, love and regret, emergence, choices, unfulfilled desire, missed opportunities, the joy of being alive, transformation, truth

## 9. HAIL HOLY QUEEN

Written by Sofia Leggio and Illustrated by Avalon Nuovo

- \* **Genre/s:** Fiction
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 8th+ / 13+
- \* **Length:** 1,368 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** An alcoholic parent and her effect on the children of a family.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Sofia Leggio is an author living in Los Angeles, California and artist Avalon Nuovo lives in Los Angeles, California.
- \* **Overview:** A young girl relates the difficulties of life with her alcoholic mother and how she and her siblings seek—and wish for—normalcy and love in their home.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Alcoholism, family, parents/the role of a parent vs. a child, survival, love, abusive situations; **Themes** - Dysfunctional families, learning to forgive, loving someone despite their problems, when the child becomes the parent, loss of childhood innocence OR growing up too young

## 10. WEST COAST GUMBO

Written by Jervey Tervalon and Illustrated by Tony Wong

- \* **Genre/s:** Narrative essay; memoir; social commentary
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 9th+ / 14+
- \* **Length:** 804 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** Discussion of and allusion to ethnicity/race issues; stereotypes; geographic segregation; socio-economics.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Jervey Tervalon is an author living in Altadena, California and the Director of Literature for Life and Tony Wong is an artist living in Los Angeles, California.
- \* **Overview:** Part memoir, part Anthropological field-study, part historical narrative, Jervey Tervalon's "West Coast Gumbo" examines the changing nature of culture in his own past and present, from New Orleans to Los Angeles.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Identity, ethnicity, heritage, segregation, multi-ethnic, multi-culturalism, migration for new opportunities; **Themes** - Cultural change and evolution, integration, hope

## 11. SUBURBAN GOPHER WARS OR HOW I LEARNED TO BE WEAK

Written by Rosalind Helfand and Illustrated by Scott Gandell

- \* **Genre/s:** Fiction; dark comedy; eco-literature
- \* **Grade / Age Level:** 7th+ / 12+
- \* **Length:** 1,704 words
- \* **Content Advisories:** Death of a small animal.
- \* **Author & Illustrator Locations:** Rosalind Helfand is a writer living in Los Angeles, California and the Managing Editor of Literature for Life and Scott Gandell is an artist living in South Pasadena, California.
- \* **Overview:** A girl recounts her childhood battles with garden gophers that led to her realization that the desire to please one's parents may be in conflict with one's own internal sense of right and wrong.
- \* **Topics & Themes: Topics** - Coming of age, the culture of American suburbia, choosing not to follow orders, desire to please parents, human attitudes towards non-human animals; **Themes** - Societal pressure to conform, socio-economic prestige, human made landscapes vs. nature, power over life and death, personal responsibility for determining right vs. wrong, compassion towards/co-existence with non-human animals—even when they're an inconvenience, the ability to find humor even in the darkest moments (and also dark humor), the morality of human domination over nature—and the consequences of this philosophy, an apparent weakness can in reality be a strength