

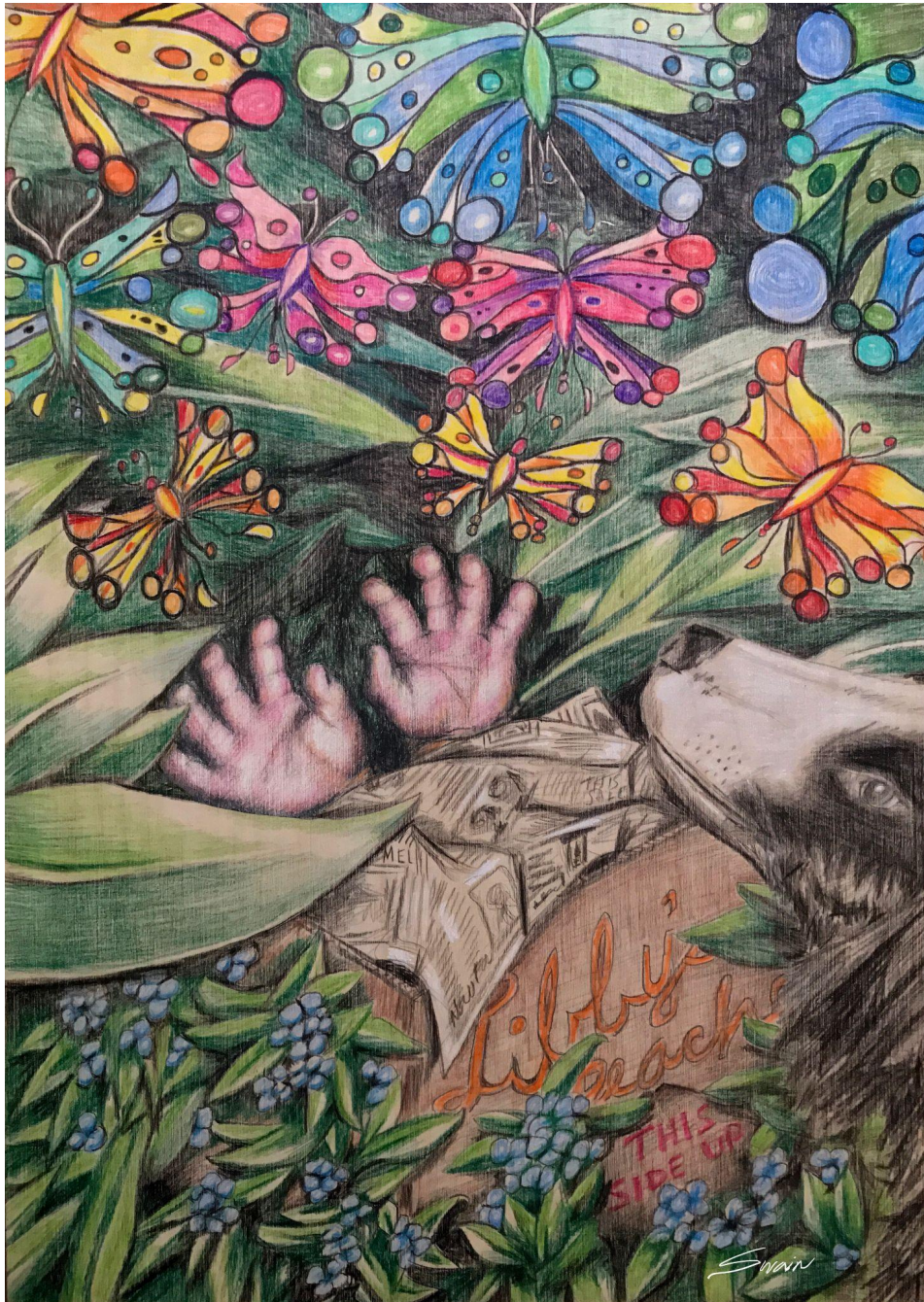
Poems: The Baby on Baxter, Cicada, and Help Wanted

By Candace Pearson

Illustrated by Jennifer Swain

Curriculum developed by Rosalind Helfand

Supplementary curriculum and copy editing by Léna Garcia



OVERVIEW
Quick-Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

Student Population	
Age/Grade-Level Appropriateness	13+, 8th+
Genre/s	* Poetry/Narrative poetry
Length	* 386 words
Content Advisories	* The first poem discusses a baby that has been abandoned.
One-Sentence Summary	Three poignant poems touch on themes of love, regret, birth, and life.
Lesson Planning	
Topics & Key Themes Overview	<p>Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Child abandonment * Television news * Loneliness * Thoughts versus actions * Cicadas * Symbolism <p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Birth * Emergence * Choices * Unfulfilled desire * Missed opportunities * The joy of being alive * Transformation * Truth
Historic Events/Time Period for Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Contemporary culture regarding sensationalistic TV news reporting * Cicada-emerging events in North America, taking place every seventeen years
Complementary Classic & Historic Texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <i>The Little Prince</i> by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry * <i>Dune</i> by Frank Herbert
Author & Artist Information	<p>Candace Pearson is a writer living in Los Angeles, California.</p> <p>Jennifer Swain is an artist living in Los Angeles, California.</p>
Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum)	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.5</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.B; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.D; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.7 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4;</p>

	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4.C; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4.D; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.5.B
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Author Biography

Candace Pearson won the Liam Rector First Book Prize for Poetry from Longwood University for “Hour of Unfolding.” Her poems have been published in such leading journals as *Ploughshares*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Poem/Memoir/Story*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, and *Cider Press Review*. Anthologies include *Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond* and *Sharing the Seasons: A Book of Poems*. You’ll find her writing away in an old hiker’s cabin at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains.

Artist Biography

Jennifer Swain is a designer and artist. She studied design at Pasadena’s ArtCenter College of Design and has done advertising and design for over 20 years. She worked at Warner Bros. and with Acme Corporation. She has designed three Rose Parade floats for the Tournament of Roses, two of which won awards. She does large chalk murals at festivals; her designs twice won Best Animated Illustration at the Pasadena Chalk Festival. She has created murals for JetBlue, Air + Style, and Cirque du Soleil, as well as painted electrical boxes in local cities. She works as an artist, website designer, and illustrator of children’s books. She plays dodgeball, loves hiking, and is practicing to skate as an LA Derby Doll, an all-women roller derby team.

SYNOPSIS

This is a set of three poems. In the first, “Baby on Baxter,” a hiker discovers a baby abandoned on a hill. For a moment, he believes that finding the baby will be a turning point in his life, which will make his life fuller, but then the baby is reported and the moment is lost. As TV news discusses the baby, the mother watches and wonders if she made a mistake, while the man watches and wonders how his life might have changed.

“Cicada” celebrates the 17-year life cycle of this insect and how it seemingly joyfully emerges from the ground after years to shed its skin and sing for about five weeks until it dies.

In “Help Wanted,” the speaker laments that she doesn’t know how to write a love poem or write about being in love without including regret.

CURRICULUM

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

Topic and Main Ideas

What does it mean to be lonely? Have you witnessed loneliness in another or experienced it yourself? Journal about the experience of loneliness, what causes it and why, and your observations about the healthy and perhaps not so healthy ways people sometimes avoid loneliness.

Passage-Specific Themes

Read the following line from “Cicada”:

Life unfurls in one eternal night

How can a night be eternal? Do you think the speaker really means eternal? After writing about this in your journal for five minutes, debate in class.

Universal Themes

Consider the word “rebirth.” In a 10-minute journaling exercise, discuss rebirth in terms of the following questions:

- * What do you think of when you see (or hear) this word?
- * What are examples of rebirth in mythology, religion, and real life?
- * What are some symbols of rebirth?
- * Why do you think the idea of rebirth is so powerful to many people? Partner up with a fellow classmate and share some of your answers.

Key Vocabulary

Definitions are context-dependent. Make sure any definitions you look up or work from are the ones that most correctly fit in the context of the story.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three
summit	crumpled	Wild sage
abandon	nestled	blue plumbago
hiker	unfurls	Mustard (the plant)
tugs	translucent	aspen
blossoms	kindling	oak
eternal	mole	eucalyptus
casing	paper-thin	silver birch
quaking	riotous	cicada
woven	moony	tendrils
passageway	leaching	
shock	broth	

regrets	heft	
charm		

Vocabulary Activity Options

1. In “The Baby on Baxter,” the speaker describes finding the baby amongst “wild sage,” “blue plumbago,” and the “mustard” plant. Look up photos of each of these plants, then draw how you imagine the hill where the baby was found, complete with images of the flowers and the “Libby’s Peaches, Right-Side Up” box.
2. Find the word “translucent” in the poem “Cicada.” What does it mean on its own? Research the cicada’s life cycle. What does translucent specifically mean in the context of the poem? Create an image of the cicada in its translucent existence.
3. In “Help Wanted,” the speaker discusses “moony Junes.” Look up “moony,” then write a journal entry comparing and contrasting the phrase “moony Junes” to the last line of the poem, “filled with moon and June—and no regrets.” How are the references to moon and June similar and different?

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

1. Poems often evoke powerful images and emotions inside the reader. Briefly journal on the poem that evokes in you the strongest emotional reaction and the poem which evokes the most powerful images in your mind. Share your answers in a class discussion.
2. Why does the speaker discuss “regrets” in “Help Wanted”? Is she able to experience love without regret? Is love always accompanied by regret? Discuss.
3. Do you find insects gross or interesting? How does “Cicada” transform (or attempt to transform) the way in which you view the cicada? In a class discussion, list different adjectives that—under this poem’s influence—you might apply to a cicada.
4. What are some of the reasons why people might abandon babies? Discuss social, cultural, psychological, and economic factors that might contribute to such a decision.

Note: The teacher should be prepared to dispel tendencies to make assumptions and judge strongly rather than focusing on a factual discussion about societal issues.

Text-Dependent Question Options

1. The line, “This is what I’ve been waiting for,” is repeated twice in “The Baby on Baxter.” Who thinks that line each time, and how is the thought similar and different each time?
2. What words and phrases create a sense of life and movement in “Cicada”? Discuss how these words and phrases taken together make the last two lines of the poem powerful.
3. What do you learn about the mother in “The Baby on Baxter”? Do you think about her at the beginning of the poem? Does your impression change by the end? Explain your thoughts citing evidence from the text.

4. In “Help Wanted,” what clues do you find about the speaker’s relationship with the experience of love? Is the title a clue as well? Cite evidence from the text to support your response.
5. Look up the word “cadence.” Try reading the poem “Cicada” out loud. Now try it again. What cadence do you experience when reading the poem out loud? Where are the highs and lows? What rhythm do you hear?
6. What moment in the poem does the illustration depict? Are the tone and mood of the illustration happy, ominous, or something else? Explain using specific examples from the text and illustration.

Writing Exercises

Narrative

What happened before the baby was found in “The Baby on Baxter”? Write a poem from the viewpoint of the mother as she leaves her child before the hiker sees it.

Descriptive

Think about an insect (besides the cicada) that fascinates you. Research its life cycle. Write a descriptive poem about the insect’s life cycle that not only helps your reader picture it, but that also evokes strong emotions in your reader.

Analysis

Research the life cycles of cicadas. Make sure to include 17-year life cycle cicadas (some have shorter life cycles) and listen to samples of cicada calls as part of your research, as well as view pictures of cicadas. Research cicadas in mythology, history, and contemporary usage worldwide.

After conducting your research, write a four- to five-page essay that briefly discusses the life cycle of a cicada and also analyzes the mythology of cicadas and how they’ve been perceived and used historically. Compare your findings from myth and history to the scientific information we now have about cicadas.

Why did/do cicadas engender so much awe and fascination? How do you think the myths and stories around them develop? How is it possible for people to both eat and revere cicadas?

Explore these questions in your essay, as well.

Complementary Reading Text

Read *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

Writing Exercise

In *The Little Prince*, the characters often seek truth and experience inner transformation through their encounters. Compare and contrast the themes of *The Little Prince* and the three poems. Write about how themes of truth and inner transformation are woven into the poems and the book.

Activity Options

Classroom Activity One

There are many different species of cicada, each with its unique call and different calls for different occasions. Listen to recordings of different cicada calls. The first time you listen, identify which cicadas they belong to. The second time, attempt to tell them apart without looking at the identification information. The third time, try to match the calls up with each species.

Classroom Activity Two

Is there something you've always been "waiting for"? Write down your thoughts, then choose something you've been waiting for and turn it into a drawing. Next, create a collage of the trees found in "Cicada": aspen, oak, eucalyptus, and silver birch. Attach what you've been waiting for to your collage and hang it on the wall of your classroom. When you're ready for it (and you get to decide what that means for you), pluck the words from your tree collage. If you've changed your mind, take your words and recycle them.

Home Activity

Interview a relative or friend about the idea of regret and missed opportunities. Ask them to share an experience (that's not too personal) that they regretted or wished they'd responded to differently. Why did they make the choice they did? How did it shape them? Would they do it differently if they could go back in time? How have they dealt with it and moved forward?

Write a two-page essay discussing your interview and how and why you do or don't relate to what your interviewee had to say.

Guest Speaker

Option One: Invite the author and/or artist to visit and speak with your class.

Option Two: Invite an entomologist and/or a folklorist from a local museum or university to come and speak to your class about the science and/or folklore of cicadas.

Field Trip

Visit the Entomology Department at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Request a behind-the-scenes tour with one of the scientists who work at the museum; view the cicadas and learn more about them on your tour.

Writing Exercise: Write a vivid poem that includes at least five details from what you saw and learned on your trip to the museum.

TEST PREPARATION COMPONENT

Instructions: Closely read “The Baby on Baxter,” using the graphic organizer to develop your thoughts.

<p>Who is speaking and why?</p> <p>What is their point of view?</p> <p>Their tone?</p>	<p>Why does the poet choose certain words to tell this story? Unpack a few resonant words:</p> <p>What other rhetorical choices are made and why?</p>
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<p>What is memorable about the characters?</p>	<p>What is/are the main idea(s)?</p>
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Writing Activity: Write a thoughtful, one-page analysis of language in “The Baby on Baxter.” What words stay with the reader?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4.C: Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4.D: Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.5.B: Use the relationship between particular words to better understand each of the words.

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.C: Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.D: Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.

Text-Dependent Question Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1: Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3: Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

Writing Exercise Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.1: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.A: Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.B: Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

Complementary Reading Text (Comparative Writing Exercise)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.5: Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.5: Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.