

Aqua Girl

by **Yxta Maya Murray**

Illustration by **J. Michael Walker**

Curriculum developed by **Lisa Beebe**

Supplementary curriculum and copy editing by **Athena Villard**



OVERVIEW

Quick Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

| Student Population | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Age/Grade Level Appropriateness | * Ages 14+ * Grades 8+ |
| Genre/s | Fiction, magic realism, fantasy, myth |
| Length | 1,740 words |
| Content Advisories | Brief cursing |
| One Sentence Summary | A baby who is half human and half sea god is stolen by her father, Poseidon; as she grows into a woman, she struggles to figure out who she is and where she belongs. |

| Lesson Planning | |
|--|--|
| Topics & Key Themes Overview | Topics * Parent/child relationships * Father/daughter relationships * Love * Feeling like an outcast * Self-control * Fate |
| Topics & Key Themes Overview | Themes * Leaving home * Finding home * Personal identity * Love as a weakness * Parent/child conflicts * Natural vs. manmade environments * Death and loss * Passage of time * Vulnerability |
| Historic Events / Time Periods for Study | * RMS Titanic shipwreck of 1912 * Contemporary Santa Monica, Studio City, and San Fernando Valley |

| Lesson Planning | |
|--|--|
| Complementary Classic and Historic Texts | <p>* Short Story: “The Little Mermaid” by Hans Christian Andersen: http://bit.ly/29q1Xkv (http://bit.ly/29q1Xkv)</p> <p>* Poem: “Diving into the Wreck” by Adrienne Rich: http://bit.ly/2bUkWpf (http://bit.ly/2bUkWpf)</p> <p>* Song: “Wave of Mutilation” by the Pixies: http://bit.ly/1lGVWnH (http://bit.ly/1lGVWnH)</p> |
| Author and Artists Information | <p>Yxta Maya Murray is an award-winning author living in Los Angeles, CA.</p> <p>J. Michael Walker is the founding Locavore Lit LA artist. He has been an exhibiting artist since 1984 and has participated in more than 100 exhibitions.</p> |
| Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum) | <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.A CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.6 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3</p> |

Author Biography

Yxta Maya Murray is the author of *The Conquest*—winner of the Whiting Award—and *The King’s Gold*, the second novel in her acclaimed Red Lion series. She is a professor at Loyola Law School and lives in Los Angeles.

Artist Biography

Michael Walker is the founding Locavore Lit LA artist. He has been an exhibiting artist since 1984 and has participated in more than 100 exhibitions, received a dozen grants, fellowships, and residencies, and enjoyed solo shows at the following institutions: the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard; el Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares, Mexico City; the National Museum of Catholic Art and History, East Harlem, New York City; and the Arkansas Arts Center, among others. As a writer, J. Michael is the author and illustrator of *All the Saints of the City of the Angels: Seeking the Soul of*

L.A. on Its Streets (Heyday 2008), which was awarded the Eric Hoffer Award for Art Book of the Year and the Independent Publishers Association Award for Best Regional Non-Fiction on the Pacific-West, and is co-editor of *Waiting for Foreign: L.A. Writers on (and in) Guadalajara* (Peregrino Press 2010).

SYNOPSIS

This short, magic realism story addresses themes such as leaving home, parent and child conflicts, and natural vs. manmade environments, as it tells the life story of a girl who is half human and half sea god. When she is a baby, her father, Poseidon, sinks a ship to steal her and raise her underwater, and, as she grows into a woman, she is torn between life underwater and life on land. When she recognizes similarities between herself and her murderous but loving father, she distances herself from him by moving to the San Fernando Valley. As a very old woman, she returns to the sea, reconnects with her father, and seems to finally accept who she is.

CURRICULUM

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

Topic and Main Ideas

Activity One

Journaling: How would your life be different if you could breathe underwater? What if you were the only person you knew who had that ability? Journal for 10 minutes about what your life might be like and how you think you'd feel about it.

Activity Two

Small group discussion: Relationships between parents and children are often complicated. In small groups, pick a specific parent and child whom most of you recognize. It could be a real parent and child or a fictional relationship from a book, movie, or TV show. Make two lists: In the first one, list the positive things about the relationship, and in the second, list what is negative about it. Overall, do you think this parent is a "good" parent? Choose someone from your group to explain your decision to the class.

Passage-Specific Themes

Read the following passage from "Aqua Girl":

He had taken the creature from her mother, a stubborn worldling who wished to keep the girl safe from his deadly ways. Yet he'd not killed the woman or saved her offspring out of any soft feelings, as he only harbored disdain for mortals who were fated to die in pain and fear. Rather, he had snatched his daughter from the brink as his possession.

Journaling: In your journal, write for 5-10 minutes about the personality of the man it discusses. Based on what you read, what kind of person do you think he is? How does he view the world and his place in it?

Universal Themes

Discussion Activity: In small groups, discuss if love makes people weaker or stronger.

- If you believe it can do both, which effect do you think is more common or more likely?
- Why do you feel this way? Make an evidence list to backup your decision.
- Does platonic love affect people differently than does romantic love?

Choose someone from the group to share your group's opinion with the class.

Key Vocabulary

Definitions are very context-dependent. Make sure that 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 |
|------------|--------------|----------------|
| priestess | pacify | flotsam |
| brutality | offspring | Poseidon |
| doomed | tempermental | worldling |
| aquamarine | ornamented | agnostic |
| littered | harbored | mortification |
| tides | disdain | Charles Darwin |
| tremble | expanse | undines |
| kiosk | fated | ephemerality |
| turquoise | half-blooded | runes |
| dissolve | encrypted | anima |

| Level One | Level Two | Level Three |
|-----------|----------------|-------------|
| mingle | lair | penitent |
| appetite | prophecies | |
| gazing | consecrated | |
| lure | opalescent | |
| melody | occult | |
| | phosphorescent | |
| | renounce | |
| | wrath | |
| | penance | |
| | patriarch | |

Vocabulary Activity Options

1. In “Aqua Girl,” the girl’s father is called by several different names: Poseidon the Terrible, the Old Man of the Sea, the Lord of the Waters, and the Water God. Why do you think he is called by so many different names? Which name fits him best? What do you think Poseidon looks like? Make a collage or drawing of his appearance and give him a new name based on your artwork.
2. Research what a siren is in Greek mythology. Do you think it’s fair to describe the girl in the story as a siren? Respond in a 10-minute journal entry.
3. In “Aqua Girl,” the main character and her father are both temperamental. As a class, make a list of the different emotions they experience in the story.

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

1. Was the woman happier living underwater or on land? Why do you think she waited so long to return to the ocean?
2. In what ways is the woman like her father? In what ways are they different?
3. Do you think the woman feels like she’s in control of her own life? Or does she believe everything was predicted by the secret messages in the coral?

Text-Dependent Question Options

1. Why does Poseidon give his daughter a name that means “The Thief”? Cite the text. Why do you think he chooses a name that is unpronounceable by humans?

2. How is the woman's relationship with water different while she is living on land? Give examples from the story.
3. Why does the main character's father think she is wicked? Why do you think she considers herself a monster?
4. The story's diction includes several different words referring to the color blue and its many shades. Why do you think the author was so specific in her word choice?
5. Do you think Poseidon's relationship with his daughter changes him? Cite the text.
6. How does artist J. Michael Walker's illustration show the main character is torn between two worlds? The image is styled like an old-fashioned sign that would be used to promote a freak show. How do you think the main character would feel about that? Do you think she considered herself a freak?

Writing Exercise Options

Narrative

Option One: Author Yxta Maya Murray starts "Aqua Girl" by quoting a line from a book of myths. Choose a sentence from "Aqua Girl" and create a new story inspired by that sentence. You can use the characters from "Aqua Girl," or create an entirely different story based on the sentence you choose.

Option Two: "Aqua Girl" was inspired by myths about the character Poseidon, god of the sea. Look up what a myth is, and write a one- or two-page myth of your own.

Option Three: What do you think Poseidon's life was like during the years that his daughter lived on land? How do you think he felt about the fact that she ran away from the ocean—and from him? Write a stream of consciousness narrative from Poseidon's perspective. Write down what may have gone through his head at any point during her absence.

Descriptive

What do you think the main character in "Aqua Girl" was like as a teacher? Imagine you are one of her students as she explains everything she knows about the ocean, life, and heartbreak. Write a description of what she looks like, how she sounds, and how she acts as she teaches. How is she different from other teachers?

Analysis

Research Poseidon's place in mythology. How is the Poseidon in Murray's story different? Why do you think she included certain aspects of his personality and left others out? Refer to his specific characteristics you discover in your research.

Complementary Reading Text Option

The original short story "The Little Mermaid" by Hans Christian Andersen is more tragic than is the Disney movie it inspired. After reading the original story, complete the following writing exercise.

"The Little Mermaid" by Hans Christian Andersen: <http://bit.ly/29q1Xkv> (<http://bit.ly/29q1Xkv>)

Writing Exercise

In both "Aqua Girl" and "The Little Mermaid," the main characters are torn between life in the water and life on land. Do you think the women in these stories would get along? If they met, what do you think they would say to each other? Imagine they are having a conversation in which they give each other romantic advice. What might they say? Write a one-page dialogue between the characters.

Activity Options

Classroom Activity One

In "Aqua Girl," the main character's appearance on land is different from her appearance under the water. In small groups, collaborate on a drawing or collage that shows what you think she might look like in either place. Before she dies, she writes out her real name in the wet sand on the beach. What do you think it looks like? Include a depiction of her name in your artwork. When the artwork is finished, display it around the classroom.

Suggested materials: Old magazines (including science and nature magazines), markers, and colored pencils.

Classroom Activity Two

Stories can be told in many different genres. Imagine "Aqua Girl" were a TV sit-com instead of a short story. How would the girl's relationship with her father be portrayed? In small groups, write a two-page scene between the father and daughter, and choose two people to act it out in front of the class.

Home Activity

Do you think the woman in “Aqua Girl” felt at home anywhere? When and where do you feel most at home? Is it when you’re in a particular place, with certain people, or when you’re eating something specific? Think about what home means to you, and make a list of the 10 things that make you feel at home. Then bring your list to class and share some of your responses.

Guest Speaker

Option One: Invite the author, Murray, and/or the artist, Walker, to visit your class and talk about this project and their work.

Option Two: Invite someone who has spent time underwater, like an instructor from a local scuba diving school, to speak about what it’s like being able to breathe underwater and how being underwater is different from spending time on land.

Option Three: In “Aqua Girl,” the ocean is portrayed as a dangerous place, but in the real world, humans often harm the ocean, too. Invite an environmental science educator from Heal the Bay to talk about Southern California’s water system and marine pollution: <http://bit.ly/2jNvwoE> (<http://bit.ly/2jNvwoE>).

Field Trip

Visit a local aquarium, such as the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach: <http://bit.ly/2hKY9hX> (<http://bit.ly/2hKY9hX>)

Writing Exercise: Picture the woman from the story and what her life may be like in the ocean. She is surrounded by sea creatures and plant life, but since she is the only half-human creature, she doesn’t know anyone else like her. How do you think that would feel? Write a fifteen-minute journal entry from her perspective, and include specific details about plants and animals you saw in the aquarium.

TEST PREPARATION COMPONENT

Background

What does it mean to live a fulfilling life? How fulfilled do you think the main character, “The Thief,” feels both before and after living on land?

Give up to five examples of how “The Thief” feels when living with Poseidon, before escaping to land.

Give up to five examples of how she feels upon her reunion with the Sea and her father.

Writing Exercise

Using your examples above, write two paragraphs explaining how “The Thief” changes from the beginning to the end of the story, as well as the significance of those changes in light of her death at the end. Is she fulfilled as a person when she dies? Cite the text.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS REFERENCE

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D: Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in Text Type and Purposes standards 1-3.)

Vocabulary Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 9-10 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.6: Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career-readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D: Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Text-Dependent Question Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10. (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/9-10/5/)5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Writing Exercise Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.A: Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in Text Type and Purposes standards 1-3.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Complementary Reading Text Writing Exercise

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D: Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.