

Just Surviving Another Day

by **Detrice Jones**

Illustration by **Rosalind Helfand**

Curriculum developed by **Katy Eyberg**

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OVERVIEW

Quick Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

Student Population	
Age/Grade Level Appropriateness	* Ages 15+ * Grades 10+
Genre/s	* Fiction
Length	2,188 words
Content Advisories	* Explicit language * References to drug use * Child neglect
One Sentence Summary	A gifted high-school student struggles to survive while living with her drug-addicted, neglectful, and lying parents.

Lesson Planning	
Topics & Key Themes Overview	Topics * Money * Drug addiction * High school * Parental neglect * Food insecurity * Deception * Survival * Perseverance
Topics & Key Themes Overview	Themes * Drug addiction affects more than just those suffering from it. * Drug addiction transforms loved ones into strangers. * Drug addiction makes everyday life a struggle for survival * Adults do not always act their age. * Children are sometimes forced, by circumstance, to behave like adults. * Sometimes life presents people with incredible life challenges that require a monumental effort to surmount.

Lesson Planning	
Historic Events / Time Periods for Study	<p>* America's Drug War (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/cron/ (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/cron/))</p> <p>* The Psychedelic Era (http://www.shsu.edu/~lis_fwh/book/hybrid_children_of_rock/Psychedelia2.htm (http://www.shsu.edu/~lis_fwh/book/hybrid_children_of_rock/Psychedelia2.htm))</p> <p>* Colombian Drug Cartels (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/business/inside/colombian.html (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/business/inside/colombian.html))</p>
Complementary Classic and Historic Texts	<p>* <i>Go Ask Alice</i> by Beatrice Sparks</p> <p>* <i>Speak</i> by Laurie Anderson</p> <p>* "What I Mean When I Say Truck Driver" by Geoffrey Davis</p>
Author and Artists Information	<p>Detrice Jones is a writer who was raised in San Francisco and studied African American Studies at UCLA. She lives in Los Angeles.</p> <p>Rosalind Helfand was the Managing Editor of Literature for Life (renamed Locavore Lit LA) and is a photographer.</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.9-10.4, 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.9-10.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3 (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/9-10/3/), CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3 (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/9-10/3/), CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.A (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/9-10/3/a/), CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/9-10/3/d/), CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9</p>

Author Biography

Detrice Jones was born and raised in the vibrant city of San Francisco. She graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles with a Bachelor's Degree in African American Studies and English. As a student, Detrice's short story "Just Surviving Another Day" was published in the anthology *The Cocaine*

Chronicles. Her story was critically hailed and highlighted in the *Los Angeles Times* and on NPR. Detrice was later awarded the UCLA Extension Writers' Program Scholarship. She currently lives in Los Angeles where she works on several short stories and her debut novel.

Artist Biography

Rosalind Helfand was the Managing Editor of Literature for Life (renamed Locavore Lit LA) and is a professional photographer.

SYNOPSIS

"Just Surviving Another Day" is a fictional account of a gifted high-school student, the unnamed narrator, who lives with drug-addicted and neglectful parents. While her peers are concerned with grades and boys, the narrator worries more about how she will pay for her next meal after her parents have stolen her lunch money. Despite her difficult home life, the narrator excels academically, although her daily life is a struggle to survive.

CURRICULUM

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

Topic and Main Ideas

Respond to the following journal prompt in 4-5 complete sentences:

What does survival mean to you? Have you ever "survived" something? What happened?

Select one word from your journal response to share with a partner and/or out loud to the class.

Passage-Specific Themes

Read the following opening paragraph of *Just Surviving Another Day*:

There was a knock at my door. Then a jingle and he was in. Cheap-ass lock. I looked at the clock and it was 3:36 a.m. He turned on the light and began his search. I watched him, hoping he wouldn't find it.

What is the mood (or feeling) of this first paragraph? Does it have a positive, negative, or neutral mood? Describe this mood or draw a picture of it in your journal.

Universal Themes

With a partner, make a list of 10-15 ways people survive difficult experiences. Once finished, partners will share their ideas out loud with the class.

To do this, start by brainstorming a variety of experiences people might struggle to endure. Then think about strategies, actions, decisions, and ways people cope to get through difficulty.

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
maneuver	Great Depression (history)	Miss Daisy (cultural reference)
procrastinate	point guards (sports)	
denial	suicides (sports)	
hesitate	scrimmage (sports)	
minorities	top ramen	
meditation	okra	
paranoid	rocks (drug reference)	

Vocabulary Activity Options

1. Divide students into pairs. Each pair will look up all of the Level One words and write down their corresponding definitions. After defining each word, the pairs will create an original story using all of the Level One words correctly and at least once. Stories must be at least one paragraph (4-5 sentences) long. Students will share their stories with the class once they've finished writing them.
2. Level Two and Level Three words are all references to history, sports, food, drugs, or culture. Instruct students to select one of these words for further study. Students will then work independently to research their chosen word and create a reference fact sheet that includes the follow-

ing elements: a definition of the reference, background information about the reference, image(s) of the reference, and an example of the reference in another story. Post all the fact sheets on the wall as a gallery walk, and have students present their references to the class.

3. Divide the class into large, equally sized teams. Assign each team 8 vocabulary words from the list above, or allow the teams to select 8 vocabulary words of their choice. Make sure both teams receive words from all three levels. Instruct each team to define its 8 vocabulary words. The class will then play charades: one team will pantomime its 8 vocabulary words, while the other team has to guess the words. Teams that guess correctly on the first try will receive 3 points, 2 points on the second try, and 1 point on the third try. The team with the greatest number of points will win and receive a prize determined by the teacher.

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

1. Why does the narrator bother with coming to school and returning home? Why doesn't she spend all her time begging for money she desperately needs? Why doesn't she run away from home? Explain what you think motivates her and why she behaves the way she does.
2. Predict what you think will happen in the narrator's future. How long do you think she will tolerate living with her drug- addicted parents? Will they ever recover? Will she find support and happiness in them, or will she have to take care of herself until she becomes an adult?
3. Do the narrator's friends know how terrible her home life is? Do they do enough to care for her? Is it their responsibility to care for her? What would you do if one of your friends struggled with the same problems the narrator does?

Text-Dependent Question Options

1. What are the narrator's parents' names?
2. Which friend does the narrator plan to actually pay back?
3. How welcoming is April's mother to the narrator?
4. How is the way the narrator speaks different from her friends at school?
5. What time does the narrator return home from April's house?
6. Dialect is the style of language spoken by a group of people. Describe the dialect(s) that appear(s) in this story. Include a specific example from the text to illustrate your description.
7. Imagine that the statue in the illustration was inspired by the narrator's character. How does the statue reflect the narrator's behavior, actions, and abilities? Consider how artistic details compare to textual details.

Writing Exercise Options

Narrative

Pick a character from “Just Surviving Another Day” who is not the protagonist (Beatrice, Ronnie, Jessica, Mr. Gordon, Keyona, or someone else). Rewrite the story from your selected character’s point of view.

Descriptive

The narrator often confronts her parents searching her room for money. Write a short story that describes the narrator’s room. Be sure to include details on the narrator’s possessions, clothes, decorations, bed, and other objects. Describe how the narrator’s parents look through these items as they search for money.

Analysis

Write an original character analysis of the narrator using textual evidence. Consider the narrator’s appearance, behavior, ideas, actions, speech, moods, and motivations. Your analysis should seek to answer these questions: Who is the narrator? What does she value? How does she live her life? What do her actions and behavior reveal about her character?

Complementary Reading Text Option

“What I Mean When I Say Truck Driver” is a narrative poem about one son’s drug-addicted father, who works as a truck driver and is often away from home. The poem recounts a story of the father’s return home after a “haul” with an inappropriate and untimely birthday gift for his eldest son. Although it addresses the father’s shortcomings, the poem reveals an enduring but troubled bond his family shares.

What I Mean When I Say Truck Driver
by **Geffrey Davis**

During the last 50 miles back from haul & some
months past my 15th birthday, my father fishes
a stuffed polar bear from a Salvation Army
gift-bin, labeled Boys: 6-10. I can almost see him
approach the decision: cold, a little hungry, not enough
money in his pocket for coffee. He worries
he might fall asleep behind the wheel as his giant,
clumsy love for that small word—son—guides

his gaze to the crudely-sewn fabric of the miniature bear
down at the bottom of the barrel. Seasons have flared
& gone out with little change in his fear of stopping
for too long in any city, where he knows the addict
in him waits, patient as a desert bloom. Meanwhile, me:
his eldest child, the uneasy guardian of the house.
In his absence, I've not yet lost my virginity,
but I've had fist-fights with grown men & seen
my mother dragging her religious beliefs to the bitter
border of divorce. For years my father's had trouble
saying no to crack-cocaine & women flowered in cheap
summer dresses. Watch his face as he arrives at last
& stretches the toy out, my mother fixed
on the porch behind me, the word son suddenly heavy
in my father's mouth, his gray coat gathered
around his shoulders: he's never looked so small.
We could crush him—we hug him instead.

“What I Mean When I Say Truck Driver” from *Revising the Storm*. Copyright © 2014 by Geoffrey Davis, BOA Editions, Ltd. Reprinted from Split This Rock's The Quarry: A Social Justice Poetry Database (<http://www.splitthisrock.org/poetry-database>).

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/what-i-mean-when-i-say-truck-driver> (<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/what-i-mean-when-i-say-truck-driver>)

Writing Exercise

Write a brief essay (no longer than one page) that compares the son's experience with a drug-addicted father in “What I Mean When I Say Truck Driver” to that of the narrator in “Just Surviving Another Day.” Include specific references to both texts.

Activity Options

Classroom Activity One

1. Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students.

2. Instruct each group to select a drug/controlled substance from the following list: https://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/schedules/orangebook/c_cs_alpha.pdf (https://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/schedules/orangebook/c_cs_alpha.pdf)

3. Each group will work on designing a public health information campaign about their selected drug/controlled substance. To do this, the groups must complete the following tasks:

A. Research on the drug/controlled substance

—What is it?

—What is it made of? / How is it made?

—What is its history?

—What is its status with the federal government (e.g., Schedule I-V)?

B. Research on those who are most vulnerable to becoming addicted to the drug/controlled substance

C. Develop public health messaging that targets the vulnerable population to reduce its risk of addiction

D. Design a billboard/flier/other product that communicates the public health messaging effectively

E. Develop a distribution plan and timeline for their billboard/flier/other product that communicates the public health messaging

3. Groups will present their public health information campaigns to the class by sharing their product, distribution plan, and timeline.

4. As each group presents their work, other students will offer peer evaluations that answer the following questions:

A. Is the public health information campaign clear and easy to understand?

B. Does the public health information campaign include effective messaging?

C. Does the public health information campaign hold your attention?

D. Does the public health information campaign's timeline and distribution plan make sense and sound reasonable?

Classroom Activity Two

1. Instruct students to write at least two original poems about the struggles of high school, inspired by this story.

Note: Students do not have to write about topics that are as serious as drug addiction, problems at home, etc. They should be encouraged to write about whatever struggles they actually face in high school, no matter how serious or insignificant they might appear to others.

2. Students must share at least one of their two poems in front of the class during the poetry slam. They may choose which poem they share.
3. Conduct the poetry slam during a whole class period. If possible, hold the class in a different area of the school, such as an auditorium, library, or outdoor patio, to establish a creative ambiance.
4. Encourage students to bring snacks and/or bring snacks for students so the poetry slam so it's less like an academic activity and more like an authentic creative experience. Do not pressure students to bring snacks, simply ask for any volunteers who are interested.

Home Activity

1. Students will interview an older sibling, adult, parent, guardian, or friend outside of class.
2. During class, students must select one older person they can interview. Their interviewee must be out of high school for this activity.
3. Students will prepare interview questions during class about the interviewee's high school experience. Samples questions could include:
 - A. When did you graduate or leave high school?
 - B. Did you enjoy high school?
 - C. What is your favorite high-school memory?
 - D. What is your least favorite high-school memory?
4. Encourage students to create original questions to ask their interviewees.
5. Students will transcribe their interviews, share them with a partner during class, and write a paragraph (4-5 sentences) on what they learned from the interviews.

Guest Speaker

Option One: Invite the author and/or illustrator to visit your class.

Option Two: Juan Navarro, Executive Director of the Los Angeles Centers for Alcohol and Drug Abuse (L.A. CADA)

- Email: jnavarro@lacada.com (<mailto:jnavarro@lacada.com>); (562) 906-2676
- URL: <http://lacada.com/> (<http://lacada.com/>)

- Ask Mr. Navarro to speak about alcohol and drug-related issues in Los Angeles.

Field Trip

1. Organize a field trip to the Museum of Broken Relationships in Los Angeles.
2. Inquire about a field trip here: <https://brokenships.com/visit/museum-details-la> (<https://brokenships.com/visit/museum-details-la>)

Writing Exercise:

1. Instruct students to write a short reflection (no longer than one page) on the guest speaker(s) and/or field trip. Their writing must answer, at minimum, the following prompt:

A. How does the guest speaker(s)/field trip connect to the story “Just Surviving Another Day”?

2. Responses may also include answers to the following prompt(s):

A. How did the guest speaker(s)/field trip make you feel?

B. What did you learn from the guest speaker(s)/field trip?

C. What did you like the most about the guest speaker(s)/field trip?

D. What did you dislike about the guest speaker(s)/field trip?

E. How has the guest speaker(s)/field trip change the way you view the world?

TEST PREPARATION COMPONENT

Writing Exercise

In “Just Surviving Another Day,” April’s day is largely influenced by the people with which she spends time. In no more than one page, explain at least one way the people you spend the most time around impact your daily life.

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 standards 1-3 above.)

Vocabulary Activity Options

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.

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 standards 1-3 above.)

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.9-10.3 (<http://www.corestandards.org/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.

Writing Exercise Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3 (<http://www.corestandards.org/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 (<http://www.corestandards.org/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 (<http://www.corestandards.org/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 standards 1-3 above.)

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.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2 (<http://www.corestandards.org/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.

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.9-10.3 (<http://www.corestandards.org/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.