

# The Juggler

## Grades

10+

## Author

Cheryl Klein

## Illustrator

Scott Gandell



## Author Bio

Cheryl Klein is the author of the novel *Lilac Mines* (Manic D Press) and the story collection *The Commuters* (City Works Press). She received her MFA from California Institute of the Arts, and her fiction and essays have appeared in *The Normal School*, *Mutha Magazine*, and *New California Writing 2011*, among other publications. Her work has been recognized by the Center for Cultural Innovation and the MacDowell Colony.

## Illustrator Bio

Scott Gandell is a professional illustrator, printmaker, and an entrepreneur. He is a past President of The Society of Illustrators of Los Angeles, and is an alumnus of Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. Scott's work has been published in magazines, newspapers, and books. His work has also been exhibited in galleries in the U.S. and Canada and has been acquired by clients and collectors worldwide.

## Summary

As a teenager in the foster care system, Amalia juggles many identities, and is always searching for her true self. She just might find it, and more, when the circus moves in next door.

## Common Core Anchor Standards Addressed

### Writing Anchor Standards-Text Types and Purposes

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

### Research for Building and Presenting Knowledge

- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

## READING Standards

### Key Ideas and Details

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

### Craft and Structure

Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

## Academic Vocabulary to Explore

*(See vocabulary approach in Appendix A of CCSS.)*

## Tier Two

Inclusive  
Blossomed  
Stunted  
Institutional  
Lithe  
Jezebel  
Reveries  
Amiably  
Endearing  
Magnetism  
Intervened  
Unobstructed  
Capacity

## Complementary Poems to Introduce BEFORE Reading the Text

*(See Warm up Questions below.)*

### Human Family

*by Maya Angelou*

I note the obvious differences  
in the human family.  
Some of us are serious,  
some thrive on comedy.

Some declare their lives are lived  
as true profundity,  
and others claim they really live  
the real reality.

The variety of our skin tones  
can confuse, bemuse, delight,  
brown and pink and beige and purple,  
tan and blue and white.

I've sailed upon the seven seas  
and stopped in every land,  
I've seen the wonders of the world

not yet one common man.

I know ten thousand women  
called Jane and Mary Jane,  
but I've not seen any two  
who really were the same.

Mirror twins are different  
although their features jibe,  
and lovers think quite different thoughts  
while lying side by side.

We love and lose in China,  
we weep on England's moors,  
and laugh and moan in Guinea,  
and thrive on Spanish shores.

We seek success in Finland,  
are born and die in Maine.  
In minor ways we differ,  
in major we're the same.

I note the obvious differences  
between each sort and type,  
but we are more alike, my friends,  
than we are unlike.

We are more alike, my friends,  
than we are unlike.

We are more alike, my friends,  
than we are unlike.

### **People Are Strange**

*by Robby Krieger and Jim Morrison*

People are strange when you're a stranger  
Faces look ugly when you're alone  
Women seem wicked when you're unwanted  
Streets are uneven when you're down

When you're strange  
Faces come out of the rain  
When you're strange  
No one remembers your name  
When you're strange  
When you're strange  
When you're strange

## Warm-up Questions

*(To introduce the story, should be used as a quick write or a journal/reflection piece.)*

1. How are we different versions of ourselves for different people? Why would we change ourselves?
2. Have you ever succeeded at learning an unusual skill or trick (even if just for a moment). What was it and why was it important to you to succeed?

## Main Idea for Study

An opportunity to grow can arrive in an unexpected form.

## Possible Themes for Study

- We create our own families.
- All humans have the same innate desires to belong and to be loved.
- Appearances do not indicate a person's true self.

## Focus Questions

1. Who is Amalia? That is, which version of herself is she truly?
2. According to *The Juggler*, what makes us our true selves?

*(The focus questions can be used for a Socratic Seminar and/or a writing assignment.)*

## Comprehension Questions

1. What is the significance of St. Julian to Amalia?

2. Why is Amalia in the group home?
3. What does Ginger do?
4. What makes Amalia different from her “Avenues” friends?
5. What are the circumstances that led to Amalia being in the group home?
6. What happens when Webb enters the audition?
7. What is Ginger’s response to Webb?

## Text-dependent Questions

These questions may be used for Response to Literature writing pieces. They should not be used as comprehension questions. Make sure you analyze the text features.

1. What does Amalia’s prayer, “help me juggle real good so I join that circus next door and get outta here,” reveal about her as a person?
2. How does Amalia want the adults in her life to talk to her? What makes Ginger different from other adults in Amalia’s eyes?
3. Does this story have a happy ending? A sad ending? A neutral ending? Explain why, and include a quote from the story to illustrate your reasons.

## Types of Writing – Exercises & Activities

### Narrative

Write a letter from Amalia to her mother detailing her experiences with Ginger and Webb.

### Descriptive

Write a review of the circus act including details about the performances and what it means to be a “political circus troupe that focuses on community engagement.”

### Expository/Analytic

1. Do close readings of the *People Are Strange* lyrics, and *Human Family* by Maya Angelou. What are the similarities and differences between the two chosen texts?

2. Are the people auditioning in *The Juggler* strange? If so, to whom? Do you think they're strange to themselves? To their friends?

## Possible Instructional Approaches

### Activity

1. Invite someone who juggles well to do a juggling lesson with the class. Preferably, the juggler should be a physicist who can share the physics of juggling while teaching the class. After the juggling lesson, have the students write about their juggling experiences—what were they thinking? How did they feel? What did it look like?

**Students need:** Juggling balls or fruit (such as small citrus fruit).

2. On a routine outing, such a trip to the grocery store, observe the people around you. Take notes on their styles, their behavior, and their mannerisms. Who do you consider to be the most eccentric out of the people you observed? Have fun writing the most colorful, interesting description of them that you possibly can. (Make sure to separate judgement about this person from your description—this should be someone who you do not know.)

**Students Need:** Notebook.

### Field Trip

Take a class trip to a local, community show! Scan events in your community for upcoming free or low cost theater events that will be most in line in character and nature with the story. Organize an outing to the show. Afterwards, have students each write and share in class a description of their experience.