

## [willamena, she ain't trippin'...]

### Grades

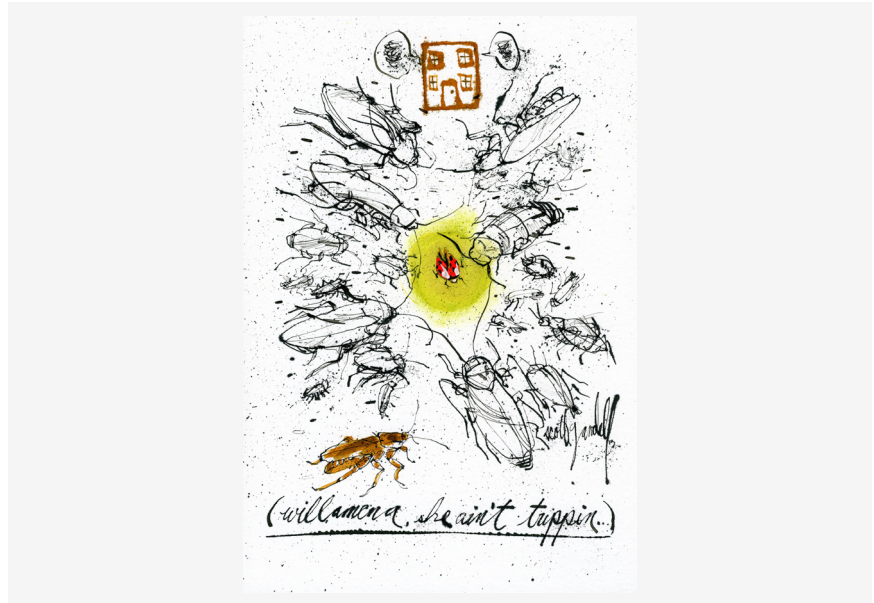
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### Author

Tim Stiles

### Illustrator

Scott Gandell



### Author Bio

Tim Stiles lives and works in SF-Bay Area. His poems and short stories have appeared in literary magazines throughout the United States and Great Britain. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing/Poetry from San Francisco State University.

### 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

Willamena is telling a story about her neighbor being killed. The teenage girl lived with her drug dealer brothers, and was shot by Michael, a drug addict and the father of her baby. Willamena's attitude is that the murder was not a surprise, given the drug addicts coming and going all night. As she relates the story, the reader learns about her own life.

## 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.
- 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.
- 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.

### Craft and Structure

- Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- 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.
- Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.

### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- 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 One (slang terms)

**Johnny:** police

**Tweak:** doing hard drugs

**Que es eso?:** Why is it like this?

### Tier Two

**Vigilant:** on guard

**Grim:** sad truth

**Altima:** model of car

**Carpport:** covered driveway

## Complementary Poem to Introduce BEFORE Reading the Text

### Porphyria's Lover

*by Robert Browning*

The rain set early in to-night,  
The sullen wind was soon awake,  
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,  
And did its worst to vex the lake:  
I listened with heart fit to break.  
When glided in Porphyria; straight  
She shut the cold out and the storm,  
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate  
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;  
Which done, she rose, and from her form  
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,  
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied  
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,  
And, last, she sat down by my side

And called me. When no voice replied,  
She put my arm about her waist,  
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,  
And all her yellow hair displaced,  
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,  
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,  
Murmuring how she loved me—she  
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,  
To set its struggling passion free  
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,  
And give herself to me for ever.  
But passion sometimes would prevail,  
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain  
A sudden thought of one so pale  
For love of her, and all in vain:  
So, she was come through wind and rain.  
Be sure I looked up at her eyes  
Happy and proud; at last I knew  
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise  
Made my heart swell, and still it grew  
While I debated what to do.  
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,  
Perfectly pure and good: I found  
A thing to do, and all her hair  
In one long yellow string I wound  
Three times her little throat around,  
And strangled her. No pain felt she;  
I am quite sure she felt no pain.  
As a shut bud that holds a bee,  
I warily oped her lids: again  
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.  
And I untightened next the tress  
About her neck; her cheek once more  
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:  
I propped her head up as before,  
Only, this time my shoulder bore  
Her head, which droops upon it still:  
The smiling rosy little head,  
So glad it has its utmost will,  
That all it scorned at once is fled,  
And I, its love, am gained instead!

Porphyria's love: she guessed not how  
Her darling one wish would be heard.  
And thus we sit together now,  
And all night long we have not stirred,  
And yet God has not said a word!

## Other Complementary Texts to Read

[*willamena, she ain't trippin'...*] is a good story to pair with other texts. There are many facets of the writing that contrast with traditional scholastic literature, in both structure and content. Furthermore teachers can use [*willamena, she ain't trippin'...*] alongside similar texts to address the non-traditional grammatical choices (e.e. cummings) or the heavy subject matter (*Fall of the House of Usher, The Grapes of Wrath, or Hope, Despair, and Memory*).

## Warm-up Questions

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

1. Why would an author write in non-autobiographical first person?
2. Are stereotypes always examples of bigotry?
3. How have the rules of English grammar changed over time?
4. Is it important to document the grim aspects of life?

## Main Idea for Study

Acting tough doesn't protect you from feeling the effects of what you see or do.

*(Note: Students will be expected to voice their impressions of the main character supported by textual evidence. This story has the potential to invoke strong opinions. A teacher who can channel that passion and focus it, will find this is an excellent text for stimulating student debate.)*

## Possible Themes for Study

- Violence in society.
- Stereotyping.
- The effect of negative life experience on a person's perspective.
- The effect of a female presence in, or absent from, the family unit.

- Is it possible to tell a story without inserting one’s personal bias?
- A single action can have a chain of effects on the lives of many people—from those directly involved to those observing.

## Focus Questions

1. What is the effect of the author’s non-traditional narrative style? Does it limit or increase understanding?
2. What kind of person is the narrator? How does our perception change over the course of the story?

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

## Comprehension Questions

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Who is Michael?
3. What happened to bring the police?
4. Why was this incident not a surprise to the neighbors?
5. Why doesn’t the speaker want her neighbors working in the carport?
6. What does the narrator mean by a “free kill”?
7. How old is the “little vato”?
8. What happened to the narrator’s cousin?

## Text-dependent Questions

These questions may be used for Response to Literature writing pieces. They should not be used as comprehension questions.

1. Although it is clear Willamena dislikes her neighbors, does she reveal understanding or even sympathy for some of them at any point?
2. Why does the speaker discuss the importance of females in a household?
3. Do you think Willamena is a cold-hearted person?
4. Does the final line in the story, in which Willamena explains that she is merely “saying what it is,” change or reinforce the perception of the narrator or the events she describes?

## Types of Writing – Exercises & Activities

### Narrative

1. Tell a first person story from the point of view of someone else.
2. Have students write their own narratives using a style that breaks the rules.
3. Study the concept of *The Grim* in story writing. Have students each write their own “Grim” based on either a real life or fictional event.

### Descriptive

Describe in detail the setting of [*willamena, she ain't trippin'...*] using details from the story. What is the mood of the setting? What do you see? How does it smell? What do you hear?

### Expository/Analytic

1. Write about what literary techniques the author uses to develop Willamena. Characterization, ambiguity, dramatic irony, dialect.
2. How are the narrators in [*willamena, she ain't trippin'...*] and the poem *Porphyria's Lover* by Robert Browning alike and different?

## Possible Instructional Approaches

### Narrator

In this story it is not immediately clear who the speaker is.

- Begin discussing how sometimes, in telling a story, the first person narrator reveals their own view of the world (i.e., Huckleberry Finn, Holden Caulfield).
- Differentiate between an omniscient and unreliable narrator.
- Discuss why an author would write in non-autobiographical first person.

During the first reading, ask students to guess who they think is talking.

- After each section, ask if their opinion about the identity of the narrator has changed.

- Prompt suggestive questions: Is the narrator a man or woman? Is the speaker young or old? Could it be the opposite of what they initially thought?
- What textual evidence can they provide to support their beliefs?

Writing activities can include a narrative told in first person from the point of view of another character in the story.

## Character Development

Ask the students, who is Willamena?

- Initially this could include speculation about whether she is the narrator, or perhaps someone the narrator is speaking to, or about.
- Why is her name only mentioned in parenthetical asides?
- What do her opinions reveal about her?

Have the students create a profile of Willamena that excavates the embedded biographical information.

- Where does she live? E.g., “I live right above them...”
- What is her demographic?
- How have her life experiences shaped her point of view?
- Why does the author say Willamena “softens her stance” in the final section?

## Theme: Stereotype and Bigotry

Willamena speaks about her neighbors in language that is judgmental.

- Begin with a writing exercise asking students to provide examples or definitions of stereotype, bigotry, prejudice, etc.
- While reading the story, ask students to collect evidence of Willamena’s prejudices. E.g., “I never liked them Mexicans.”
- How do the students explain Willamena’s hostility toward the police?
- Does the final line in the story, in which Willamena explains that she is merely “saying what it is,” change or reinforce their perception of her?

## Nontraditional Grammatical Structure and Language Choices



In writing this piece, the author breaks rules of capitalization.

- Begin by showing students the ways in which rules of English grammar have changed over time.
- Discuss the intentional misspellings that appear in popular culture.
- A writing exercise could speculate why rules of grammar exist at all.

After reading the story, prompt oral or written discussions about:

- Why did the author choose to ignore rules of capitalization?
- What effect does his choice have on the mood and tone of the story?
- What effect does his choice have on the reader's impression of Willamena?

### **The Grim**

This is a very sad story about children being abandoned by drug addicts.

- Begin by having students speculate orally or in writing about the reasons some authors feel it is important to document the harsh aspects of life.
- Perhaps ask students to share similar stories they have heard or experienced.
- This could be paired with Elie Wiesel's *Hope, Memory, and Despair* in which he argues for the importance of preserving the memory of horrific events.

In the final section, Willamena talks about her cousin that was similarly abandoned.

- What does her experience reveal about her point of view?
- Why does the narrator seem indifferent to the sadness?
- Does the final line in the story, in which Willamena explains that she is merely "saying what it is," change or reinforce the perception of the events she describes?

### **Activity**

Discuss the concepts of lingo and specifically slang. Have students share examples of slang that they've heard around school. (Be careful to work with the students to keep the discussion academic and avoid or identify prejudice.) Ask the students to keep a slang journal for a week. They should keep daily entries identifying slang that they've overheard and describing what it means. At the end of the week, they should share what they've heard and written about in class.

As a follow-up, see if students can track down the origins of the slang words and phrases that they recorded.

**Students need:** Journals.

### Field Trip

Take a trip to visit the Linguistics department of a local university. With the help of one of the professors (who has read the story the students are studying), tour the facilities, learn about the discipline of Linguistics and have the professor discuss the style of the narrator in the story from his or her perspective (and then discuss this with the students).