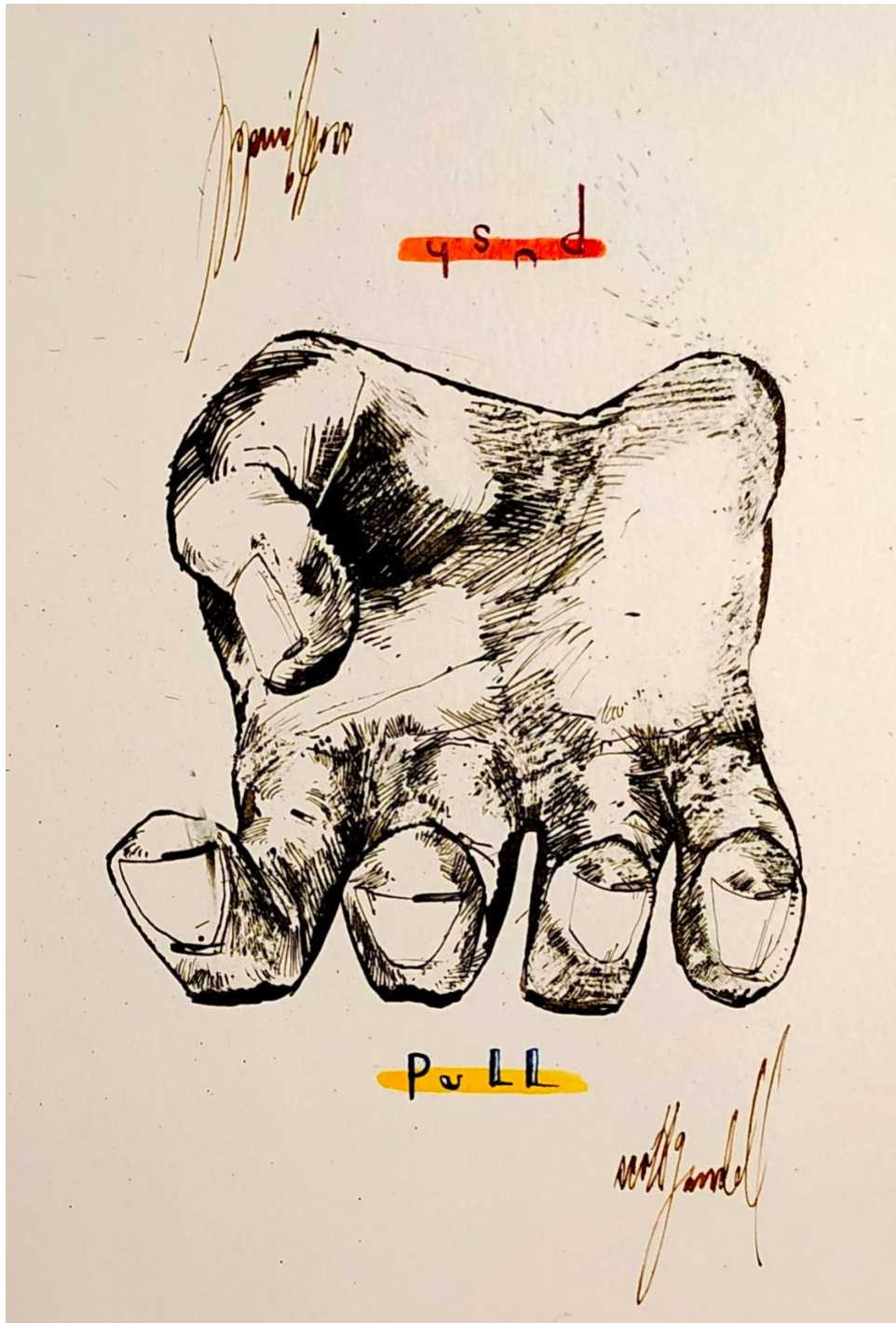


### 3 Poems

By Teresa Mei Chuc

Illustration by Scott Gandell

Curriculum developed by Andrew Ramirez



**OVERVIEW**

**Quick-Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide**

<b>Student Population</b>	
Age/Grade-Level Appropriateness	* 14-16/ 9th-10th grade
Genre/s	* Memoir * Poetry
Length	* 262 words (3 minute read)
Content Advisories	None
One-Sentence Summary	Three poems explore the lived experience of exhaustion, poverty, survival, and the quest to find (and understand) happiness.
<b>Lesson Planning</b>	
Topics & Key Themes Overview	<p><b>Topics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The struggles/difficulties of immigrating</li> <li>* Culture clash and assimilation</li> <li>* Day-to-day getting by in the face of poverty</li> <li>* The responsibilities of a parent</li> <li>* Hard work and exhaustion</li> <li>* Generational gaps between parents and kids</li> </ul> <p><b>Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Desperation</li> <li>* Determination</li> <li>* Coming of Age</li> <li>* Happiness</li> <li>* Loneliness/ Sadness</li> </ul>
Historic Events/Time Period for Study	* Immigration to the US after Vietnam war * “Re-education” camps for Vietnamese immigrants in 70s and 80s
Complementary Text	* Poem: <a href="#">“All-American” by David Hernandez</a> * Interactive Website: <a href="#">I Am An Immigrant</a>
Author	<b>Teresa Mei Chuc</b> is a writer and teacher who lives in California.

<p>Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum)</p>	<p>Grades 9th-10th Common Core Standards:</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.B            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.A            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.C</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1            CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3</p>
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### Author Biography

**Teresa Mei Chuc** was born in Saigon, Vietnam. Shortly after the Vietnam War, Chuc, her mother, and her brother were granted political asylum and settled in Pasadena, California. Her father remained in a Vietnamese “reeducation camp” for nine years. Chuc earned a BA in philosophy and credentials in primary and secondary education as well as an MFA in creative writing from Goddard College. She is the author of three collections of poetry and teaches English. Teresa made several videos for the virtual LitFest Pasadena in 2021, reading her poems “Agent Blue” and “Photosynthesis.” She is a member of the Pasadena Rose Poets.

### Artist Biography

**Scott Gandell** wears many hats. He descends from a long line of creatives and business professionals. His experience is as diverse as the subjects he illustrates. He is a proud alumnus of Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. ([https://www.gallerynucleus.com/artists/scott\\_gandell](https://www.gallerynucleus.com/artists/scott_gandell))

### SYNOPSIS

Three poems that navigate the shifting terrain of a unique immigrant experience: desperation, survival, and the quest to understand happiness. Through economic hardship, a parent improvises to provide for her family. Through different languages, happiness takes on a unique interpretation. With delicately placed, spare language, these poems take the reader down a path illuminated by curiosity and discovery in the face of uncertain times.

## CURRICULUM

### Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

#### Topic

Reflection

In a 15-minute journal entry, explore the following prompt:

Write about a time when you were in charge of something that mattered to you. Maybe you were leading a big group project, and the deadline was coming up. Or perhaps a family member or friend asked you to “house sit” when they went on vacation. It could be a BIG moment in your life where you really stepped up, or something a little lighter, like taking care of your plants by keeping them happy and healthy. Whatever the situation, what did you do to ensure things went well? Did you experience any unexpected challenges, or did everything run like a well-oiled machine? Who put you in charge of this?

Finally, whether you are the type of person who likes to be in charge or not, describe what it was like to have someone or something counting on you.

#### Main Ideas

Partners Discussion

After reading all three poems, on a notecard write down the title of your favorite poem, and three BIG reasons why it stands out to you. Each reason can be just one sentence like “I love the words the author chose to describe X, Y, and Z...” or “This poem is formatted in a way that makes me really see what the author is saying because each line ends on the perfect word!”

After you have your notecard, pair up and share your favorite poems.

If you have **the same** favorite poem: See if you like the poem for the same reasons. Do you both think the poem is about the same thing, or do you have different interpretations of it? Does the poem make you think of yourself when you read it, or does it transport you somewhere far far away?

If you have **a different** favorite poem: What do you think of your partner’s favorite poem? Do their reasons for liking the poem make sense to you? How does your poem connect with your partner’s poem? Is there a connection or link between these poems, or do you think they stand individually?

Spend 5 minutes discussing with your partner.

#### Passage-Specific Themes

Small-Group and Class Discussion:

Read the following passage from the poem “Lesson in Geometry and the Redistribution of Resources.” Discuss the questions below in small groups, then share your ideas with the class:

*I didn’t understand that we were poor but I could smell it  
in the scent of the paper and feel it in the roughness against my face.*

*I learned a lesson in yin and yang before I even knew what it meant.*

*I do not feel shame but only love as I imagine my mother quickly pulling paper after paper after paper from the metal dispenser in the restroom and hiding them in her purse to bring home to my brother and me.*

**Question One:** What does the author mean by, “I didn’t understand that we were poor but I could smell it”? Before you answer, think about the way poverty is symbolized in this excerpt. Consider how symbols empower language, and create understanding for the audience in this moment.

**Question Two:** What does the author mean by “I learned a lesson in yin and yang before I even knew what it meant”? Here’s the commonly known symbol of yin/yang:



**Universal Themes**

Do you believe the road to happiness is paved with “tough times.” In other words, do the struggles we face, and the unexpected road bumps we bounce over, shape our ultimate happiness... or diminish it?

For this answer, consider both the experiences depicted in Teresa Mei Chuc’s 3 poems... but also consider your own experience, as well as the experience of others outside of school.

After you are finished, reread your answer and see if your ideas follow well and are convincing to someone who might feel the other way. Could your argument convince them to change their mind?

Then, if you are comfortable, read your writing to the class.

**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
scent	exhaustion	Geometry
shame	Cantonese	yin and yang
poppies	dispenser	refugees

**Vocabulary Activity Options**

1. Pick three words from the nine vocabulary words in the list. With your three selected words, describe what it means to leave something behind. Keep in mind: The thing you are “leaving behind” can be a thing, a place, or an idea. For example, if you’ve ever moved homes, you may wonder what happened to your old house. If you’ve ever changed your mind, maybe you are curious why you drifted away from your old ideas?

***Your story can take any shape you want, just be sure to INCLUDE the three words in your short writing on leaving something behind. Happy writing!***

2. Select three words from the list, and look up their antonym (the word that means the opposite). With your three antonyms, write about the feeling of being reunited with someone or something. For example, maybe you reconnected with an old friend you had not seen in many years. Or perhaps you ate a delicious food you haven't tasted in quite some time. Whatever the case, use **THREE** antonyms to tell your reconnection story.
3. Take a look at all the words in the vocabulary list. Which word do you know the **BEST**. (This can mean you use this word a lot in your day to day speaking. It could also mean you connect with the word, because you have experienced its definition first hand.) Select your word and **SKETCH** a visual image of that word. This sketch can be a symbol or illustration that connects to your understanding of the word. Even if it is not the exact definition of the word, you have creative license to sketch the word any way you wish. Happy sketching!

### Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

1. How does the poet use from — line breaks, capitalization, punctuation — to emphasize the bigger message or purpose of these poems?
2. Do you believe that someone with a different background than the writer, say for instance someone that was born in the United States, can still relate to what the author is saying? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think the author titles the first poem, “Lesson in Geometry and the Redistribution of Resources”?
4. What is the connection between work and health in the second poem, “Crying Makes You Feel Better”?

### \*\* Text-Dependent Question Options

1. In the first poem — “Lesson in Geometry and the Redistribution of Resources” — when the mother gives her children paper towels, how do the children show their gratitude to their mom for her actions?
2. Identify a moment (a line, word, or stanza) that clarifies or validates why sadness can make you feel better in the poem “Crying Makes You Feel Better”?

OR: If you believe the author thinks crying does **NOT** make you feel better, identify a moment that validates that idea.

3. In what way does the language use different styles of language (big words, small words, complex sentences, rudimentary sentences, etc) to convey ideas in an effective or creative way. In your opinion, do you believe the language complements the message, or contradicts it? Explain.
4. How does the artwork enhance your understanding of the theme and message in these poems? As you read the poem, did the artwork give you a useful visual “landscape” to digest the author’s words?

OR: Maybe you thought the artwork was “off” or a distraction during your reading. If so, explain why the words and the illustrations didn’t connect for you.

## Writing Exercises

### Narrative

“3 Poems” by Teresa Mei Chuc expresses themes of loneliness, pain, and strength through short, spare moments, often no more than a few stanzas long. With this brevity and attention to the power of each word in mind, attempt to tell a FULL story — complete with moments of joy, pain, and sorrow... or something completely different! — in 100 words or less. For this exercise, you may choose to write your 130 word story in a poetry format with stanzas and line breaks and interesting shifts in capitalization... or you may tell it in a prosaic form. The choice is yours!

Remember: You only have 100 words to work with — focus on making every word count! (This can be as easy as avoiding filler words such as “like” or “so.”)

Happy writing!

### Descriptive

*I didn't understand that we were poor but I could smell it  
in the scent of the paper and feel it in the roughness against my face.*

*I learned a lesson in yin and yang before I even knew what it meant.*

*I do not feel shame but only love as I imagine my mother quickly pulling  
paper after paper after paper from the metal dispenser in the restroom  
and hiding them in her purse to bring home to my brother and me.*

What is the taste of defeat? What is the sound of red? What is the color of an F sharp on piano? These questions ask the writer to cross over the senses and make connections between seemingly unconnectable things. In the same way Teresa Mei Chuc links poverty to a feeling of roughness against her face... What other unique connections can we make? Pick from one of the two following prompts, and use well-chosen descriptive words to answer the question.

Question 1: Describe the most beautiful image you have ever seen without using “sight” words — colors, shapes, etc.

Question 2: Describe the most beautiful song you have ever heard without using “sound” words — noises, onomatopoeia, etc.

Question 3: Describe the most delicious meal you have ever tasted to an AI computer that exists only in a computer algorithm

## Complementary Text Option

Read [“All-American” by David Hernandez](#)

### ALL-AMERICAN

*I'm this tiny, this statuesque, and everywhere  
in between, and everywhere in between  
bony and overweight, my shadow cannot hold  
one shape in Omaha, in Tuscaloosa, in Aberdeen.  
My skin is mocha brown, two shades darker  
than taupe, your question is racist, nutmeg, beige,  
I'm not offended by your question at all.  
Penis or vagina? Yes and yes. Gay or straight?  
Both boxes. Bi, not bi, who cares, stop  
fixating on my sex life, Jesus never leveled  
his eye to a bedroom's keyhole. I go to church  
in Tempe, in Waco, the one with the exquisite  
stained glass, the one with a white spire  
like the tip of a Klansman's hood. Churches  
creep me out, I never step inside one,  
never utter hymns, Sundays I hide my flesh  
with camouflage and hunt. I don't hunt  
but wish every deer wore a bulletproof vest  
and fired back. It's cinnamon, my skin,  
it's more sandstone than any color I know.  
I voted for Obama, McCain, Nader, I was too  
apathetic to vote, too lazy to walk one block,  
two blocks to the voting booth For or against  
a women's right to choose? Yes, for and against.  
For waterboarding, for strapping detainees  
with snorkels and diving masks. Against burning  
fossil fuels, let's punish all those smokestacks  
for eating the ozone, bring the wrecking balls,  
but build more smokestacks, we need jobs  
here in Harrisburg, here in Kalamazoo. Against  
gun control, for cotton bullets, for constructing  
a better fence along the border, let's raise  
concrete toward the sky, why does it need  
all that space to begin with? For creating  
holes in the fence, adding ladders, they're not  
here to steal work from us, no one dreams  
of crab walking for hours across a lettuce field  
so someone could order the Caesar salad.  
No one dreams of sliding a squeegee down  
the cloud-mirrored windows of a high-rise,  
but some of us do it. Some of us sell flowers.  
Some of us cut hair. Some of us carefully  
steer a mower around the cemetery grounds.  
Some of us paint houses. Some of us monitor  
the power grid. Some of us ring you up  
while some of us crisscross a parking lot  
to gather the shopping carts into one long,  
rolling, clamorous and glittering backbone.*



**\*\* Writing Exercise**

In “Crying Makes You Feel Better” Teresa Mei Chuc writes:

*the stress  
balancing school,  
work, family  
during the covid-19 pandemic  
nine hour work shifts  
pushing heavy grocery carts  
exhaustion*

*there are carts  
left at the back  
of the parking lot  
where he needs  
to walk that extra  
few minutes  
that extra amount  
of energy left  
squeezed out of him  
to push the carts back  
to the front of the store*

**PROMPT:** Both poems draw toward an ending with common imagery: shopping carts outside of the grocery store. In your opinion, why would both poets choose to use this scene — a parking lot, a bunch of shopping carts, asphalt, darkened cars, etc — to end each poem. What effect does it have on YOUR reading and appreciation (or non-appreciation) of each poem?

Heads up! As you think about your answer, don't forget to consider the stylistic choices both poets employ, such as line breaks, stanza length, and punctuation. Is there a connection between the visual image of the words (the arrangement for example) and the feelings they convey?

**Interactive Classroom Activity**

Students explore the interactive Website: [I Am An Immigrant](#).

**STEP ONE:** On the website, students will peruse the different stories told by immigrants from around the world. After reading a few immigrant stories (don't feel like you need to read them all!) — select one immigrant story that stands out to you the most. The reason it stands out to you can be because you feel inspired by the story, maybe the writer reminds you of yourself or a close friend, or perhaps you just love the way it is written! Whatever the case, pick your favorite story.

**STEP TWO:** With your immigrant story, write down your favorite moment in the story on a notecard. This could be a quick summary of a key moment, or even a direct quote of a few sentences. After you have your notecard filled out, students will share their immigrant story to their peers. This could include:

- The person's name
- What their dreams or goals are
- What struggles they face
- What their purpose or reason for being strong is

After students present, their peers may comment on the story they just heard. Did that person remind them of someone they know or have heard of? Maybe that person reminds them of themselves! Whatever the case, students may respond.

Next student presents until all students have shared their story from the website I Am An Immigrant.

Classwide followup questions:

1. What makes ALL of us immigrants... even people who were born here?
2. Can someone stop being an immigrant through “hard” work?
3. How do different cultures make a country like the United States strong?

## **COMMON CORE STANDARDS REFERENCE**

***This story and its exercises are appropriate for 9th grade and above. 9th- and 10th-grade standards are cited.***

### **Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C: Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

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.9-10.3.E: Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2: Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3: Delineate a speaker’s argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

### **Vocabulary Activity Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1: Cite 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 how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

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.RL.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). (See grade 9–10 Language standards 4–6 for additional expectations.) CA.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

### Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A: Analyze a. Apply grades 11–12 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.B: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning [e.g., in U.S. Supreme is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious Court Case majority opinions and dissents] and the premises, purposes, and reasoning.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.A: Introduce a topic or thesis statement; organize complex ideas, concepts, a. Introduce a topic or thesis statement; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes )d include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics, multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B: Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, oc( extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A: Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

### Text-Dependent Question Options

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.RL.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

### Writing Exercise Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.C: Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas d and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A: Analyze a. Apply grades 11–12 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B: Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A: Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

### **Complementary Reading Text (Comparative Writing Exercise)**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). (See grade 9–10 Language standards 4–6 for additional expectations.) CA.

### **Activity Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B: Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

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.