



World Words

Baby Scorpion

Francesca Beard

Teacher's Notes

The Poem

Francesca Beard's poem, '*Baby Scorpion*' deals with transformation and consequence. A baby scorpion crawls from a burning log in front of a couple who are keeping warm by the fire. At first the girl feels pity for the small creature's vulnerability but then imagines it as a grown scorpion and the danger it would pose. Her lover kills it but it appears again, to rise as a ghost. The poem would appear to end with the death of the two lovers, and of the fire itself. Everything is consumed.

Method

It is important that the students do some creative thinking before they engage with the poem, either by listening or by reading. Use the Pre-listening 1 activity first. As the text will be heard as part of a longer broadcast, prepare students for the interview part as well before they listen to it – Pre-Listening Activity 2.

When they have had the opportunity to explore the theme of the poem and have contributed some of their own ideas, then they are ready to listen. The authors would suggest the following method:

1. Students listen without referring to the text. Ask them to recall, orally, any words or phrases after the listening has finished. Write these on the board.
2. Use the worksheets as suggested to help students build the poem from memory before playing the poem for a second time.
3. Hand out the text of the poem and read through. Interrupt with questions (below) if appropriate.
4. Allow the students to listen again, this time with the text in front of them.

Now the students are ready to move onto the final part of the activities. These consist of following through ideas or themes, and a brief look at some of the language used. You may do all the activities, or only one, depending on time.

Pre-Listening Activity 1

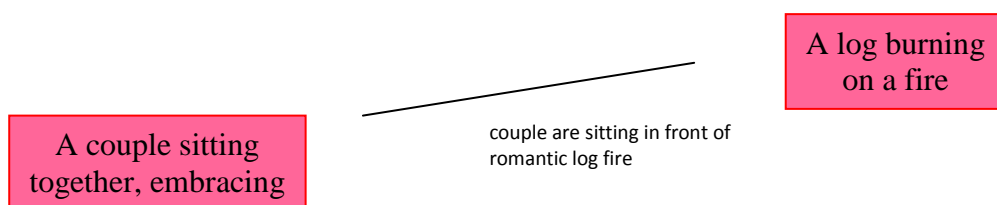
Give the students the Pre-Listening activity sheet but do NOT give them a copy of the poem at this stage.

1. Students to choose verbs in blue box to match pink boxes. Not all blue words need to be used. Some blue words can be used more than once. Students should be asked - at random - to explain the relation between the pink box and the blue words they have chosen (they can use first, second or third persons)

(Example: A log burning in the fire = warm (fire produces heat); smile (a fire makes people feel good); hurt (if you touched it, you would be harmed)

2. Students to find links between the four pink boxes. Draw lines between each that can be connected, with an explanation for the link. Any one box may be liked to more than one other.

Example



Pre-listening Activity 2

1. Give students the second pre-listening activity. Ask them to read through the quotations from the radio broadcast and decide who is saying what - writer or student. Then they must choose which category the quotation comes from and to write the appropriate letter in the appropriate square (see answer key below). They then listen to the broadcast to check their answers. The listening activity will have been made easier by this process of identification first.

- "...and then out of his love came this deep, dark thing, the baby scorpion. Maybe he was jealous."
- "I wanted it to have an atmosphere, a quality of a very old story that might be in a children's book."
- "They seem to have a lesson or a moral, and you can't quite decide what that is!"
- "After reading this I might think twice about killing a spider."
- "It's a circle the fire is kept going keeping their love alive, perhaps at the end they die, the scorpion dies, the fire consumes itself and dies and with them dies their love."
- "I much prefer to read or listen to stories that show me things rather than tell me things, where people act or do things in front of my eyes. I didn't want to tell people what was happening. I wanted it to happen."
- "I would like to commend the writer for putting across such a different view of scorpions."
- "The woman - girlfriend - seems extremely vulnerable, or threatened. She is trying to convince herself it's right to kill this animal."
- "I felt frightened of scorpions even though I was much bigger than them and I felt this was quite unfair."
- "I wanted to suggest that the scorpion was noble: the knight through a forest of red thorns."

	Symmetry	Characters	Dialogue	Folk Tales	Sympathy
The poet			f	b, c, j	i
The students	e	a, h			d, g,

While Listening

1. Students are now ready listen to the broadcast. They can check their Activity 2 chart as they do so.

2. Ask them to feed back any words or phrases from the poem that they remember. It doesn't matter how disjointed they are. As a class activity try to rebuild the poem from collective memory. Some students will remember parts that others didn't. Write what they remember on the board in more or less the order in which they would appear in the poem.

3. Divide the class into two. Hand out the following worksheets (appendix) with one half of the class (for example, all those sitting on your left) with worksheet A and hand out worksheet B to those remaining (e.g. on your left). Together, within group A or within group B, they must try to reconstruct as much of the poem as possible. Group A has only verbs, and group B has only nouns. At this stage don't let the two groups communicate.

After a suitable period of time (not more than 10 minutes) pair up students, one from group A and one from group B and allow the completion process to continue with the additional information. Allow up to another 10 minutes. Then play the poem again and the students can check their attempts and write in extra information that is missing.

4. Hand out the text of the poem. Allow a few minutes for the students to check what they have recalled with what is on the page.

5. Read through the poem (this can be done individually). At appropriately timed spaces ask these questions:

- Why does the poet use the word 'snowflake' to describe the scorpion, while evoking her pity? (*Vulnerability in a fire?*)
- What heroic imagery is conjured to give sympathy to the plight of the scorpion (*knight in armour/flames as forest*)

- What prompted her thoughts about the danger the scorpion might pose (*thinking about their bed and where the grown up scorpion might hide*)
- Why did the ghost feel both pity and loathing for the girl? (*she would face death bravely, but she had also caused it to be killed. The scorpion ghost is exhibiting the same sentiments as the girl did to it earlier*)
- Can the poem be considered a metaphor for regret and death?

5. Play the recording again. This time the students have the text in front of them.

After Listening

A. Responses will depend on the sentiments of the individual students. Encourage them to use appropriate descriptive language for feelings. You might stimulate this with a small list (see below) which first you would ask them to sort into positive and negative sentiments, then add some of their own to each list and finally to use to describe their feelings to the baby and adult of each animal.

adore	like
awe	love
concern	regret
creepy	sweet
cuddly	terrify
cute	venerate
dread	want
fear	worry

B. The girl had already found a strange beauty in the scorpion, within conditions (*'strange symmetry'*) and scorpions are said to kill themselves rather than be killed, so perhaps the line is an echo of the baby scorpions 'thoughts'. One might surmise that the girl herself was born under the sign of Scorpio. However, the purpose of this activity to allow some students to speak more freely about the topic and reach their own conclusions.

C. In the interview, the poet talks about the poem as a story, one that might have a moral. Refer students to this part of the interview and ask them to discuss the moral, of any, of this poem.

Appendix

Group A

Baby Scorpion

___ put ___ to keep ___.

___ crawled ___.

___, ___

___ ran ___, ___.

'It's ___', ___ said

___ felt ___.

___ was ___,

galloping ___.

___ would not step out ___,

___ would it tuck in ___.

___ would not be saved.

___ tumbled off ___.

___ said "We'll never find ___".

___ was failing.

___ thought of ___.

___ thought of ___.

___ grows up, ___ will not ___, ___ thought.

___ grows up, it will be ___.

"Find ___ kill ___. Make ___ it's ___." she said ___.

___ had ___.

___ found ___ killed ___.

'Look - it's ___.'

___ went to look ___.

___ rose _,

Shaped ___, ___.

___ was ___. ___ said -

"___ am ___".

___ will not ___.

___ is ___ I will kill ___.

___ do not want ___ forced ___.

___ will come to meet ___".

___ closed ___ to disappear.

___ was torn ___.

___ was ___.

___ dispatched ___.

___, ___ consumed ___ died.

Group B

Baby Scorpion

The man ___ a log ___ the fire ___ sweetheart ____.
___ the bark ___ scorpion.
___ toe, shiny ___ hair,
___ fire, ___ wood.

' ___ snowflake', ___

___.

___ a knight ___ armour ___ charger,

___ a forest ___ thorn.

___ the bridge ___ kindling,

___ lance ___ spine.

___.

___ scorpion ___ the ash.

___ " ___".

Their rescue ___.

___ bed ___ corners.

___ the insects ___ the garden.

___, ___, ___.

___, ___, ___ thing.

" ___ . ___ ." ___ her lover.

___ eyes ___ teeth.

___.

" ___".

___ a smudge ___ the stone.

___ the stain ___ a ghost,

___ a scorpion, ___.

The girl ___ . ___ -

" ___ kind".

___.

___.

___ death ___.

___".

___ her eyes ___.

___ scorpion ___.

___.

___ the girl ___ her lover.

___, the fire ___.

Baby Scorpion

The man put a log on the fire to keep his sweetheart warm.
Out of the bark crawled a baby scorpion.
Long as her little toe, shiny like her hair,
It ran faster than fire, along the burning wood.

'It's a black snowflake', she said
and felt pity for its strange symmetry.
It was a knight in black armour on his tiny black charger,
galloping through a forest of red thorn.
It would not step out onto the bridge of kindling,
Nor would it tuck in the curved lance of its spine.
It would not be saved.

The baby scorpion tumbled off into the ash.
He said "We'll never find it".
Their rescue was failing.

She thought of their warm bed with its soft dark corners.
She thought of all the insects in the garden.
When it grows up, it will not be small, she thought.
When it grows up, it will be an ugly, dangerous thing.
"Find it and kill it. Make sure it's dead." she said to her lover.
He had green eyes and white teeth.

He found it and killed it.
'Look – it's dead now.'
She went to look at a smudge on the stone.

Out of the stain rose a ghost,
Shaped like a scorpion, but ill-defined.

The girl was afraid. She said -
"I am young and beautiful among my own kind.
I will not harm you unless frightened.
If there is no alternative I will kill myself.
I do not want death forced upon me.
I will come to meet it in all my wildness".
Then she closed her eyes as if to disappear.
The ghost scorpion was torn between pity and loathing.
It was expedient.
It dispatched the girl swiftly and afterwards her lover.
Left alone, the fire consumed itself and died.