Unit 1

Title: “Life Doesn’t Frighten Me”

Suggested Time: 4-5 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.4, RL.6.5, RL.6.7; W.6.2, W.6.4; SL.6.1; L.6.1, L.6.2;

Teacher Instructions

**Preparing for Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

People often use bravado to mask their true fears.

Synopsis

This poem, written in a voice of a child (possibly 8 -10 years old), addresses the fears a child faces when starting at a new school and/or being placed in a new classroom. The narrator presents a fearless attitude when she speaks of common childhood fears—undefined noises and sounds, ghosts, strangers—but this bravado is only a mask she uses to try and hide her trues fears of being different and feeling alone.

1. Read the entire selection, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Tier II/academic vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire selection independently.
2. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along or students take turns reading aloud to each other. Depending on the text length and student need, the teacher may choose to read the full text or a passage aloud.
3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
| This poem is made up of rhyming couplets: two successive lines of poetry that rhyme, have the same meter (rhythm or beats), and complete the same thought. In the first stanza, what is the setting presented in the first couplet, “Shadows on the wall/Noises down the hall”? In lines four and five, the next couplet, “Bad dogs barking loud/Big ghosts in a cloud,” the setting shifts. In thinking about your answer to the first question, how does the image presented in this couplet connect to the first image? How are these images connected? | The setting of this stanza is a house or some type of building. The references to wall and hall refer to some type of indoor structure. The first stanza presents what is happening inside the house: noises and shadows. The barking dogs and the ghosts in the cloud represent what is happening outside the house. Both what is happening inside and outside the house can be very scary for a child. |
| Lines three and six, “Life doesn’t frighten me at all,” are a refrain—a line or lines repeated throughout a song or poem—which is repeated throughout the poem. Focusing on the first stanza, why does the narrator repeat this line in this stanza? What in this stanza is the writer trying to emphasize? | In the first stanza the narrator states, “Life doesn’t frighten me at all” at the end of the description to reassure herself and the reader that these sounds and images don’t scare her. The narrator equates these sounds and images to “life,” things that occur throughout a normal life. By also repeating it twice in the stanza, the narrator is trying to convince the reader and herself that she is not afraid. |
| In lines 10-11, “Dragons breathing flame/On my counterpane” (74), a very fantastical image is presented. Explain what you believe the image is that the narrator is trying to convey to the audience. From the images presented in this stanza, what is the setting? How do the images in the second stanza connect to the setting in the first stanza? | As stated in the footnote, a counterpane is a bedspread. The “Dragons breathing flame” are actual images of dragons on the bedspread. This bedspread image and the imagery of Mother Goose and lions running loose connects to a child in bed dealing with the bedtime stories he/she is reading at night and this fantastical bedspread. In the first stanza, the narrator is discussing the sounds and images that are inside the house and outside the house. In the second stanza, the narrator is discussing the terrors he/she faces in the bedroom. |
| In the second stanza, line nine, the narrator states, “They don’t frighten me at all” (74)? Who does the “They” refer to? In the last line of the stanza, the narrator states, “That doesn’t frighten me at all.” What is the “That” referring to? Why does the narrator use “They” and “That” instead “Life” as in the first stanza? | The “they” refers to Mother Goose and the lions. The “that” refers to the dragons on the bedspread. The narrator uses these pronouns instead of “life” because these items in the second stanza are not part of everyone’s life. These items in the second stanza are particular to the narrator’s life. In the first stanza, “life” is more general. |
| In the third stanza of the poem, the narrator shifts and instead of describing what doesn’t scare him/her, the narrator describes action he/she takes. How do lines 13-14,“I go boo/Make them shoo,” connect to the line “Big ghosts in a cloud” (line five)? How do the actions the narrator describes in the third stanza connect to the images presented in the first two stanzas? | The lines “I go boo/Make them shoo” connects to the ghosts in the first stanza because ghosts say “boo” to scare people, but the narrator has taken control and uses “boo” to scare the ghosts. Each action in the third stanza can be connected to one of the items discussed in the previous stanzas, e.g. “I make fun/Way they run” can be connected to the lions; “I won’t cry/So they fly” can be connected to the dragons. |
| The fourth stanza ends with the same refrain, “Life doesn’t…” However, the fifth stanza ends with “No, they don’t frighten me at all.” Who is the “they” Why does the narrator begin this line with “No”? Even though these two stanzas are structurally the same, why is the refrain slightly different? | The “they” in the fifth stanza refers to the panthers and the strangers. The narrator states “No” to emphasize that even these frightening creatures of the dark are not frightening, but again, it is as though the narrator not only has to convince the reader, but herself. The fourth stanza presents images that the narrator sees as part of everyday life. So beginning the refrain with “life” refers to life in general. In the fifth paragraph, these particular images are specific to the narrator; therefore, the narrator uses the pronoun to directly connect them to herself, to emphasize that even these images don’t scare her. Once again, trying to convince herself and the reader. |
| The narrator opens the sixth stanza with the two lines, “That new classroom where/Boys all pull my hair” (75). “Where” and “hair” are near rhymes—words that are spelled differently, but nearly rhyme—and link the images of hair being pulled and a new classroom. What do these two lines tell the reader about the narrator? | These lines solidify the fact that the narrator is a child, possibly 8 to 12 years old. The narrator is a girl because generally boys don’t pull each other’s hair; they pull girl’s hair. The narrator is also at a new school or has been placed in a new classroom where she is being picked on (boys pulling her hair). |
| In the eighth stanza, the narrator tells the reader, “I’ve got a magic charm/That I keep up my sleeve” (lines 37-38). Why is this “magic charm” important? What does the phrase “up my sleeve” imply about who else knows about this charm? | The “magic charm” is something she has that helps her get past her fears. The phrase “up my sleeve” is a phrase related to magicians, so it strengthens the connection to magic, but also implies that no one else knows about this charm. It is hidden from everyone else. |
| The narrator continues in the eighth stanza, “I can walk the ocean floor/And never have to breathe” (lines 39-40). Think about this image. What does this image reflect about a person that can walk under water without breathing? What is the connection between the “magic charm” and this action of walking the ocean floor? Why do you believe that this stanza does not include any rhyme or the refrain? | The ocean floor is dark and oppressive, but if you can walk it without breathing, you have conquered that ocean, and conquered your vulnerability—the need to take in air. The narrator’s “magic charm” provides her with this power to walk the ocean floor without breathing. It provides her with the strength to conquer her vulnerabilities—her fears. The eighth stanza presents the narrator’s solution for her fears. Unlike the previous stanzas where the narrator tells the reader what she is not afraid of, e.g. “Mean old Mother Goose/Lions on the loose/They don’t frighten me at all” (lines 7-9), in the eighth stanza she lays out her secret—this magic charm that gives her special powers to survive. |
| Read the last stanza out loud to a partner. What is the effect of repeating the line “Not at all”? As the “narrator,” what do you feel you are trying to do when you repeat that line? By closing the poem with the refrain, “Life doesn’t frighten me at all,” what do you believe the narrator is trying to tell herself? | When you read the poem out loud, the lines, “Not at all,” sound as if the narrator is trying to convince herself that life does not scare her. Beginning the stanza with the refrain and ending it with the refrain, as well as continually using the refrain throughout the poem, builds a desperate tone of someone who really needs to convince herself that she is not afraid. |

Tier II/Academic Vocabulary

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|  | **These words require less time to learn**  (They are concrete or describe an object/event/  process/characteristic that is familiar to students) | **These words require more time to learn**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part  of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) |
| **Meaning can be learned from context** | Page 74 – shoo |  |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** | Page 74 – Mother Goose  Page 74- counterpane (see footnote)  Page 74 - Panthers |  |

Culminating Writing Task

* Prompt
  + *In Maya Angelou’s poem, “Life Doesn’t Frighten Me,” the narrator—a child—speaks in a series of couplets and refrains as she attempts to convince herself and the reader that life doesn’t frighten her. However, in the second to last stanza (lines 37-40), there are no lines that rhyme and the constant refrain does not appear in this stanza. Why does the rhyming pattern and the refrain completely disappear in this stanza? In answering this question in a one to two page essay, analyze how the rhyming structure and the refrain reflect the narrator’s attempt to make herself believe that life doesn’t frighten her.*
* Teacher Instructions

This evidence chart, first essay draft and subsequent revisions (at least two) should be developed and worked on in class. The editing part of the writing process could be done for homework.

1. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided.
2. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity. Teachers should guide students in gathering and using any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions earlier. Some students will need a good deal of help gathering this evidence, especially when this process is new and/or the text is challenging!

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| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Page number*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| “Shadows on the wall/Noises down the hall”  “loud” and “cloud”  Barking dogs and ghosts in the cloud  “Dragons breathing flame/On my counterpane” | Lines 1-2  Lines 3-4  Lines 10-12 | In the first two stanzas of the poem, the rhyme structure highlights the fears of the unknown and what they create in their imagination. In the lines 1-2, the narrator links together “shadows” and “noises” that children hear and see at night, usually from their bedrooms. These shadows and noises that they can’t identify are scary because they aren’t sure of the source. The rhyme scheme in the first stanza links together all those images and sounds. The connection can be made with “loud” and “cloud” which connects the barking dogs and the ghosts in the clouds. In the second stanza, the narrator presents images—dragons, Mother Goose, lions—that become fearful due to a child’s imagination. The rhyme scheme in the second stanza connects these fears that are created directly from the narrator’s (a child) imagination. |
| “Life doesn’t frighten me at all.” | Lines 3,6,…44 | Beginning this refrain with “Life” connects these images, noises—real and imaginary—that are part of the everyday world of a child. Repeating this refrain, the narrator wants the reader to understand that not only do these images not frighten her, but she is not frightened by anything in life. Since the refrain (or some variation) is repeated throughout the poem (at the end and/or the middle of stanzas), the narrator wants to reassure the reader and herself that she is fearless in the face of all these dangers. This repetition is just like a child who is trying to convince a parent, friend, or someone else that she is not scared while also trying to convince herself. |
| “I go boo/Make them shoo” |  | In the third stanza, the narrator is showing us the action she takes when something tries to scare her, especially those things she presented in the opening stanzas. In lines 12, “boo” refers back to the “ghosts” presented in the first stanza. Saying “boo” to the ghosts, makes then “shoo.” The narrator shows how strong and imposing she is in this line because just by uttering a simple “boo,” the ghosts scatter. |
| “Boys pull my hair”  “And listen for my scream”  “If I’m afraid at all/It’s only in my dreams” | Line 29  Line 34  Lines 35-36 | The change in the poem begins in this stanza. In the previous stanzas, the narrator presents images that can be frightening to any child, but now in the sixth and subsequent stanzas, the images are much more personal. In the sixth stanza, the reader finds out that the narrator is a girl who is in a new classroom and is being harassed by the boys (generally, boys pull girls’ hair, not other boys’). In the seventh stanza, the rhyme scheme changes: there are no rhyming couplets. Also, the refrain disappears. The change of the structure of the poem reflects how the narrator’s fearless attitude starts to drop and we see that maybe she is a little afraid. The narrator tells us that she is only afraid in her “dreams,” but dream is rhymed with “scream” in the previous line, which implies that this fear is very real. |
| “I can walk the ocean floor/And never have to breathe” | Lines 39-40 | The narrator now is telling us about the magic charm she keeps up her sleeve that gives her the impossible power to walk the ocean floor without breathing. This charm helps her do the impossible, overcoming her fears, much in the same way it would be impossible to walk the ocean floor . |
| “Not at all/Not at all” | Lines 42-43 | By the last stanza of the poem, the narrator is once again stating that life doesn’t frighten her. The stanza begins with the usual refrain, but by repeating “Not at all” in the second and third lines of the stanza, the narrator is trying very hard to convince herself and the reader that life doesn’t frighten her. |

1. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (analytical) and think about the evidence they found. (Depending on the grade level, teachers may want to review students’ evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/ thesis\_statement.shtml.
2. Students compose a rough draft. With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go).
3. Students complete final draft.

* Sample Answer

Life for children can many times be very frightening. Whether they are scared of shadows, ghosts, barking dogs, dragons, strangers in the dark, or being the new kid in the class, children have to find the courage to face their fears. Many times they have to convince themselves and others that they are not afraid. In the poem, “Life Doesn’t Frighten Me,” by Maya Angelou, the narrator, a young girl, works hard to convince the reader and herself that she is not afraid of “Life.” Maya Angelou has her narrator boldly state her fearlessness in short pairs of rhyming couplets and a refrain throughout the poem. However, towards the end of the poem, the rhyme scheme changes and the refrain almost disappears, revealing how a young girl struggles with her fears.

In the first two stanzas of the poem, the narrator speaks in rhyming couplets to proclaim to the reader what doesn’t frighten her. In the first stanza, she talks about the fears inside and outside the home, starting with the first two lines: “Shadows on the wall/Noises down the hall” (1-2). The end rhyme connects the scary images and sounds in the house. In the following lines, the narrator presents images outside the house, rhyming “loud” with “clouds”, connecting barking dogs and ghosts. But with the refrain, “Life doesn’t frighten me at all” (3, 6), the narrator emphasizes that not even these frightening images and sounds scare her. The narrator states in the second stanza that she is not even afraid of the great imaginary creatures, “Dragons breathing flame/On my counterpane” (10-11). The rhyme emphasizes how close and terrifying these dragons can be. Again, the narrator states at the end of this stanza, “That doesn’t frighten me at all” (12). For the narrator not even dragons on a bedspread are scary.

The narrator is still speaking in couplets in the third stanza when she tells us how she scares and frustrates these ghosts, lions, and dragons she talks about in the first two stanzas: “I go boo/Make them shoo” (13-14). The narrator shows that she can just say “boo” to a ghost, and the ghost “shoos.” In four sets of couplets in this stanza, the narrator shows how easily she can overpower these creatures (real or imaginary). Again, she ends the stanza, “Life doesn’t frighten me at all” (21) to emphasize that she is the one in control.

In stanzas one through six, the refrain, “Life doesn’t frighten me at all” ends each stanza. Sometimes the line has a slight variation, but the phrase “…frighten me at all” is always part of the line. When children are afraid, many times they repeat a line over to themselves and to others to convince everyone that they are not afraid. With the repetition of the line, “Life doesn’t frighten me at all,” at the end of each stanza the narrator is trying to convince herself and the reader that she really isn’t afraid of life.

A change in the poem starts in the sixth stanza even though the rhyme scheme is still in place. Now the narrator talks about a new classroom where “Boys all pull my hair” (29). This line lets the reader know that the narrator is a girl, but also this is where the fears become even more personal. In the earlier stanzas, the narrator discusses people, creatures (real and imagined), noises and shadows, which are fears for many children. But now in the sixth stanza, the narrator tells us what boys are doing to her. By the seventh stanza, the rhyme scheme changes and the refrain disappears. Unlike the previous stanzas there is only one rhyming couplet with no refrain in the seventh stanza. By the eighth stanza the rhyming has completely disappeared, and there is no refrain. This fearless girl we saw in the earlier stanzas has dropped the mask that she worked so hard to maintain in the first six stanzas. The rhyming couplets and the refrain acted as a mask to try to convince the reader and herself that life doesn’t frighten her. The narrator admits that “If I’m afraid at all/It’s only in my dreams” (35-36). “Dreams” rhymes with “scream” in line 34 and even though she states that she is only afraid in her dreams, the connection to scream implies that this fear is very real.

In the eighth stanza, with no rhyme, the narrator tells us about her charm that she keeps up her sleeve that allows her to do the impossible: “I can walk the ocean floor/And never have to breathe” (40). This magic charm allows her to face her fears when it would seem to be an impossible task. It is in the last stanza that she brings back the refrain, “Life doesn’t frighten me at all” (41). She repeats in the next two lines, “Not at all/Not at all” (42-43), trying to put that mask back on and using the refrain to try and convince herself and us that life does not frighten her.

In this poem, Maya Angelou uses rhyming couplets and a refrain to present a young girl who works very hard to make the reader and herself believe that she is not afraid of anything, but with a change in rhyming structure and the brief disappearance of the refrain, we see that for this young girl, just like for many children, life can be a little frightening.

Additional Tasks

* **“Storyboard:”** Students create a storyboard of the poem with each frame of the storyboard representing a stanza of the poem. After reading the poem once, using pencil, students work together in pairs to create visual images of each stanza, creating a storyboard that tells the story of the poem. After the students read the poem again, addressing the text-dependent questions and analyzing the text, they return to their storyboard and if they feel their interpretation has changed due to their analysis, revise their storyboard. . The teacher may want to have students do a Quickwrite to explain their storyboard and any revisions they made. Teacher can call on pairs to share their storyboards or each pair can share. If the students revised their storyboard, it is important to explain why
* Film and stage directors provide guidance to their actors regarding how to make the written word come alive for the audience. Working with a partner, you will direct your partner on how to read the poem, “Life Doesn’t Frighten Me,” and your partner will direct you on how to read the poem. As the director, you will instruct your partner, “actor,” on the rhythm (pacing) and tone of the poem. Each actor will read the poem at least three times: the first time without any direction; the second and third times with direction from their partner, “director.” After the exercise, students write a brief reflection on how each one of their readings changed or did not change. Discuss in small groups and then as a whole group.

Students then can watch Maya Angelou read the poem, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2O-0-i_9MyA&feature=youtube_gdata_player> and discuss in small or whole groups how her reading is different or similar to their reading. Students should be able to point to specific points in the poem to illustrate their observations.

Answer: This exercise is to help students understand that poetry expresses emotion and should be read out loud to best understand that emotion. By having to act as a “director,” the students become responsible for interpreting the poem and instructing the reader on what type of tone should be used, and possibly, the emotion (s) that should be expressed when reading.

Note to Teacher

* This lesson focuses on poetic structure and the way that poets use rhyme and imagery to reveal true emotions.
* The two primary poetic devices examined in this lesson are rhyming couplets and the refrain.
* As much as possible, encourage the students to read the poem out loud to themselves, partners, small group, or the whole class.
* Almost all the writing should be done in class in order to provide the students the opportunity to collaborate, ask questions, and for you to help guide and monitor (checking for understanding) their work.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**“Life Doesn’t Frighten Me”**

1. This poem is made up of rhyming couplets: two successive lines of poetry that rhyme, have the same meter (rhythm or beats), and complete the same thought. In the first stanza, what is the setting presented in the first couplet, “Shadows on the wall/Noises down the hall”? In lines four and five, the next couplet, “Bad dogs barking loud/Big ghosts in a cloud,” the setting shifts. In thinking about your answer to the first question, how does the image presented in this couplet connect to the first image? How are these images connected?
2. Lines three and six, “Life doesn’t frighten me at all,” are a refrain—a line or lines repeated throughout a song or poem—which is repeated throughout the poem. Focusing on the first stanza, why does the narrator repeat this line in this stanza? What in this stanza is the writer trying to emphasize?
3. In lines 10-11, “Dragons breathing flame/On my counterpane”, a very fantastical image is presented. Explain what you believe the image is that the narrator is trying to convey to the audience. From the images presented in this stanza, what is the setting? How do the images in the second stanza connect to the setting in the first stanza?
4. In the second stanza, line nine, the narrator states, “They don’t frighten me at all”? Who does the “They” refer to? In the last line of the stanza, the narrator states, “That doesn’t frighten me at all.” What is the “That” referring to? Why does the narrator use “They” and “That” instead “Life” as in the first stanza?
5. In the third stanza of the poem, the narrator shifts and instead of describing what doesn’t scare him/her, the narrator describes action he/she takes. How do lines 13-14,“I go boo/Make them shoo,” connect to the line “Big ghosts in a cloud” (line five)? How do the actions the narrator describes in the third stanza connect to the images presented in the first two stanzas?
6. The fourth stanza ends with the same refrain, “Life doesn’t…” However, the fifth stanza ends with “No, they don’t frighten me at all.” Who is the “they” Why does the narrator begin this line with “No”? Even though these two stanzas are structurally the same, why is the refrain slightly different?
7. The narrator opens the sixth stanza with the two lines, “That new classroom where/Boys all pull my hair” (75). “Where” and “hair” are near rhymes—words that are spelled differently, but nearly rhyme—and link the images of hair being pulled and a new classroom. What do these two lines tell the reader about the narrator?
8. In the eighth stanza, the narrator tells the reader, “I’ve got a magic charm/That I keep up my sleeve” (lines 37-38). Why is this “magic charm” important? What does the phrase “up my sleeve” imply about who else knows about this charm?
9. The narrator continues in the eighth stanza, “I can walk the ocean floor/And never have to breathe” (lines 39-40). Think about this image. What does this image reflect about a person that can walk under water without breathing? What is the connection between the “magic charm” and this action of walking the ocean floor? Why do you believe that this stanza does not include any rhyme or the refrain?
10. Read the last stanza out loud to a partner. What is the effect of repeating the line “Not at all”? As the “narrator,” what do you feel you are trying to do when you repeat that line? By closing the poem with the refrain, “Life doesn’t frighten me at all,” what do you believe the narrator is trying to tell herself?