



***The Conqueror Worm* by Edgar Allan Poe
Who's Afraid by L. Frank Baum**

Public Performances: October 8-23, 2005
927 Liberty Avenue

Student Matinees: November 9-11, 2005
Charity Randall Theatre

Who's Afraid?

Who's afraid?

Ev'ry Giant now is dead--
Jack has cut off ev'ry head.

Ev'ry Goblin, known of old,
Perished years ago, I'm told.

Ev'ry Witch, on broomstick riding,
Has been burned or is in hiding.

Every Dragon, seeking gore,
Died an age ago--or more.

Ev'ry horrid Bogie Man
Lives in far-off Yucatan.

Burglars dare not venture near
When they know that papa's here.

Lions now you only see
Caged in the menagerie.

And the Grizzly Bear can't hug
When he's made into a rug--

Who's Afraid?

By L. Frank Baum

THE CONQUEROR WORM

Lo! 'tis a gala night
Within the lonesome latter years!
An angel throng, bewinged, bedight
In veils, and drowned in tears,
Sit in a theatre, to see
A play of hopes and fears,
While the orchestra breathes fitfully
The music of the spheres.

Mimes, in the form of God on high,
Mutter and mumble low,
And hither and thither fly-
Mere puppets they, who come and go
At bidding of vast formless things
That shift the scenery to and fro,
Flapping from out their Condor wings
Invisible Woe!

That motley drama oh, be sure
It shall not be forgot!
With its Phantom chased for evermore,
By a crowd that seize it not,
Through a circle that ever returneth in
To the self-same spot,
And much of Madness, and more of Sin,
And Horror the soul of the plot.

But see, amid the mimic rout
A crawling shape intrude!
A blood-red thing that writhes from out
The scenic solitude!
It writhes! it writhes! with mortal pangs
The mimes become its food,
And seraphs sob at vermin fangs
In human gore imbued.

Out-out are the lights-out all!
And, over each quivering form,
The curtain, a funeral pall,
Comes down with the rush of a storm,
While the angels, all pallid and wan,
Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy, "Man,"
And its hero the Conqueror Worm.

THE END

by Edgar Allan Poe

GRADE LEVEL: 6-10th grades

AIMS:

1. Explore the idea of hero as it pertains to Worm vs traditional hero
2. Explore the idea of inevitability of death
3. Understand device of perspective as seen in both poems
4. Introduce students to poetry composition
5. Understand the devices of tone and mood
6. Prepare students to see a stage adaptation of these poems

ASSESSMENT ANCHORS

R6.A.1 Understand fiction text appropriate to grade level.

R6.A.1.3 Make inferences, draw conclusions and make generalizations based on text.

R6.A.1.3.1 Make inferences and draw conclusions based on information from text.

R6.A.1.3.2 Cite evidence from text to support generalizations.

R6.B.1 Identify/compare components within and across texts.

R8B.1.1 Analyze characters, settings, plots, themes, tone, style, and mood.

Author Information

Lyman Frank Baum (15 May 1856-6 May 1919)

L. Frank Baum was a very prolific American writer from 1896 until his death in 1919, whose work was a mixture of the iconoclastic and the folksy. He is most famous for being the author of *The Wizard of Oz*. *Who's Afraid*, was in the first book he ever wrote and published on his own in the 1800's.



Born in Chittenango, New York, a suburb of Syracuse, to a religious couple who had eloped, he was given his loathed first name after his uncle, Lyman Spaulding Baum. Baum was mostly home-schooled until attending the Peekskill Military Academy, but the stress affected his health, and though he probably did not, based on existing correspondence, have the heart attack that his son Frank would later claim, it was enough to remove him.

Then his father gave him a printing press which he used to create his own newspaper, and his tutoring resumed. Eventually, he took up acting, often lead roles in Shakespeare plays, before he began to write plays himself, which he would also act in, and as self-effacing as his own comments about it were, he received very positive reviews. While acting, he met Maud Gage, of Fayetteville, New York and daughter of activist Matilda Joslyn Gage, his first and only love, whom he married on 9 November 1882.

He became an instructor of drama at Syracuse Oratory School, specializing in directing, playwriting, operettas, stage business, revision, and translation of plays

from French, German, and Italian. After running a bazaar and newspaper in Aberdeen, South Dakota, he moved to Chicago and became a salesman, but soon his writing submissions led to a book deal for *Mother Goose in Prose*. Although the book failed financially, it was well-enough received that more books would follow, until he became a very famous writer of fantasy.

To slow the pace as he grew older and more successful, he moved to Hollywood, which became a hub of filmmaking several years later, and he would go on to write a number of films and direct two, although without success. By this time he had become something of a celebrity as a writer, and was able to act again with an amateur group called The Uplifters. After much health difficulty, during which he stopped writing only at its most severe, he died of a stroke in 1919. Baum's most famous work is *The Wizard of Oz*.

Summary of Poems

The Conqueror Worm - The poem describes a theater performance. The play is the tragedy "Man" and it is watched by a horde of angels. As the actors run in circles, a "crawling shape" emerges. It is the hero of the play, the worm. It eats the actors and the curtain falls.

Who's Afraid? – The poem assures its reader/listener that all the monsters are dead and gone and not to be feared. While the deaths of the villains are told, they are not described in detail so as not to scare the child.

Poetry Activities/Curriculum Support – for class or small group discussion; essay questions

Level: Level 4 - Analysis

1. Students read poems to themselves, then teacher/student/s should read poems aloud to class. Discuss the tone and mood of each poem and how they compare and differ. Ask them to look at the word choice and rhythm to support their ideas.

Level: Level 2 - Comprehension

2. Determine why Baum might have written this poem. Do we have stories, mantras to ease our fears? Do these stories, mantras change with age-our own age and the age in which we live?

Level: Level 5 - Synthesis

3. Compose Mother-Father Goose poem to ease a fear they have.

Level: Level 2 - Comprehension

4. Divide students into several small groups. Give half the groups the assignment to observe the action of the poem from the audience's/reader's point of view. Give the other half of the groups the assignment to observe the action of the poem from the angels' point of view.

Level: Level 2 - Comprehension

5. Determine the significance of the Worm in the poem.

Level: Level 6 – Evaluation

6. List the stereo-typical characteristics of a hero. Does the Worm fit the description? Why is he considered the hero?

Please share your thought, ideas, and suggestions with us. We'd love to hear from you.

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