

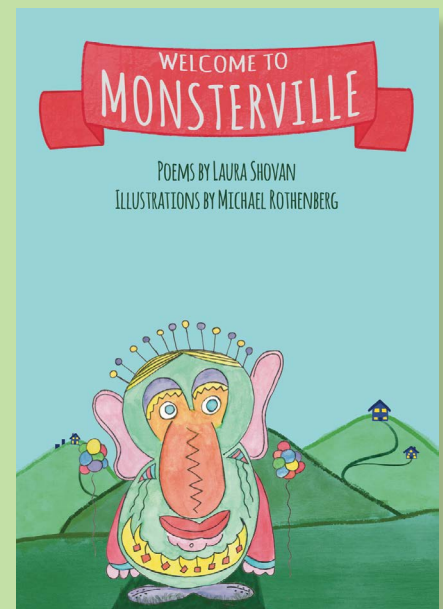
WELCOME TO MONSTERVILLE

POEMS BY LAURA SHO VAN
ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL ROTHENBERG

MONSTERS. We all know them. We've been taught to fear and even hate them. The monsters under the bed, in the closet, beneath us in the basement, or above us in the attic – they've all been given a bad reputation. In *Welcome to Monsterville*, award-winning author Laura Shovan and illustrator-extraordinaire Michael Rothenberg introduce us to their monsters and help us to reckon with our own monsters, too. Together they show us through art and poetry that our monsters are deserving of empathy and acceptance.

Shovan's lyrical style is reminiscent of Silverstein and Prelutsky. Beneath the figurative language devices lies a sense of warmth and understanding for everyone who pauses long enough to read and take to heart the lessons weaved into each poem. Shovan wrote poetry in response to Rothenberg's illustrations and their teamwork produced a book of art and verse that speaks to the depths of their friendship. Shovan remembers Rothenberg as such a special person – a community organizer and activist. She says the number of people and poets who considered him a father figure, a brother, and a friend, is astounding. Poet and artist Michael Rothenberg was so excited to be the illustrator of a book for young readers. Although he passed away in 2022, his beautiful monsters live on with us here in Monsterville.

Welcome to Monsterville opens with an invitation to children, but adults are welcome too. All are accepted in Monsterville, including the green bubble blowing monster who moves in next door. *Welcome to Monsterville* belongs under beds and in closets, in desks and on shelves, in homes and in classrooms. After all, we're all monsters here.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. "NEIGHBOR" PAGE 5:

- How do you approach people or situations that are new and different for you?
- How does the narrator approach this strange new monster neighbor?

2. "BUBBLEGUM HEAD" PAGE 11:

- What emotions does the Bubblegum Head monster express in this poem?
- How would you approach the Bubblegum Head monster?
- What approach do you think might not work?

3. "HUNGER" PAGE 13:

- How do you feel when you are hungry?
- How does it feel when someone shares with you?

4. "BIRTHDAYS" PAGE 15

- Did you know people come from all types of religious and cultural backgrounds?
- Some things that are celebrated in one place, may not be celebrated in another; how can we make sure that no matter someone's background, they always feel welcome?



5. "GREEN CAVE" PAGE 21

- Is it okay to get angry? Why or why not? What do you do when you feel angry?
- Where do you go?
- Why is it so important for us to have a place like a Green Cave to go when we feel out of control?

6. SHO VAN USES MANY TYPES OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN *WELCOME TO MONSTERVILLE!*

- One of our favorites is onomatopoeia. Can you find a poem that uses onomatopoeia?
- What's your favorite type of figurative language? Will you find an example and share?

CCR.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.1

Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCR.ELA-Literacy.L.5.5

Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

CCR.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacherled) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. a. C

INTERVIEW WITH A MONSTER

In *Welcome To Monsterville*, Michael Rothenberg created the illustrations, and Laura Shovan brought life to his drawings with her words. In this activity, students will follow the example of Rothenberg and Shovan by working with a friend to create art.

Before students jump into their own illustration creations, encourage them to explore Rothenberg's beautiful art. What do you notice about Rothenberg's monster characters? Does he use particular shapes? Does he seem to have a favorite color? Which colors seem to express sadness, joy, anger? What surprises you about Rothenberg's illustrations?

Students will interview a classmate about one of their monster friends. After the interviews are conducted, each student will use the information to draw their partner's monster. Be sure to use vivid language and sensory details in your descriptions so that your artist will be able to capture an accurate image of your monster – just like Shovan and Rothenberg skillfully do in *Welcome to Monsterville*!

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- How tall is your monster? As tall as a mountain? Or an anthill?
- What does your monster's hair feel like? Is it soft or rough or greasy or silky?
- What color are your monster's eyes? What kind of eye brows and eyelashes do they have?
- What shape is your monster's nose? Is there any drainage?
- What does your monster smell like?
- What does their skin feel like? What color is their skin?
- What kind of clothes are they wearing?
- Where does your monster live?
- How many fingers?
- How many toes?
- How does your monster feel right now? Sad? Mad? Glad? Nervous?
- Does your monster have any superpowers?
- Is there anything your monster always tells you?
- What does your monster's voice sound like?
- Does your monster whisper or shout?

NEXT STEPS:

- Students will need a sufficient amount of time to create their partner's monster.
- Partners will need to meet again to exchange the drawings and discuss the results. Guide students to compliment and question. Ask each person to share one thing they think the artist captured well and to question one thing they don't understand about the monster.

IDEAS FOR AUTHENTIC SHARING:

- Combine student work into a book and have partners go and share their work with students in a younger or older grade.
- Create an art gallery with a Monsters Exhibit and invite the community to come.

MA: Cr1.1.2: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

a. Discover multiple ideas for media artworks through brainstorming and improvising.

Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. Communicating effectively.

“WHEN I _____”

Shovan’s poems help young people navigate strong emotions in an imaginative and literary way. Some emotions feel good and some are a little more difficult. But Shovan doesn’t shy away from those more difficult monsters. She welcomes them, one and all! This activity will get students playing with language to express emotions in a fun, word-filled kind of way.

STEPS:

- Examine the poem “When I Cry” on page 25 and its corresponding monster on page 24.
- As a class, discuss the Sadness Monster

ASK:

- How does the speaker describe the Sadness Monster?
- How does this Monster feel, and how do we know?
- What two contrasting feelings do the Monster and the speaker have in this poem?
- Does it seem possible to laugh and cry at the same time? Explain.
- What does the Monster tell the speaker?
- Do you believe it’s true that you can have multiple feelings at the same time?

NEXT:

- As a class, make a list of emotions...there are plenty to go around!
- Choose one emotion to use as you write a class model poem.
- Write a class poem that borrows the style and format of “When I Cry” on page 25. Pay close attention to the tools that Shovan uses and try to use them in the class poem (e.g., metaphor, imagery, stimulating the 5 senses).
- Post your class poem where students can see and refer back to while drafting their own poems.
- Guide students to write their own poems about the Emotion Monsters that live inside of them, using the Borrowing the Style and Format guidelines below.
- Encourage students to use vivid language and sensory details to describe the monsters within them. (Teachers, as you know, it is great practice to have your students see you writing. Go ahead and write about your own Emotion Monster and share it with your students!)



A SAMPLE TEACHER’S MODEL:

When I Worry... by Tracei Willis

There is a monster inside me called Anxiety.
Its rubbery arms and legs wrap around its body.
It is isolated, as if it’s spent too long alone
slouching beneath a barren bridge.

There is a monster in me whose hair
is matted and pressed against its head.
Its locs inching slowly down its shoulders...
blending in with the shadows.

When I worry, Monster wrings its weathered
hands.
Panic squirms like earthworms in its belly.
It begins to dance! Monster sways to the soothing
rhythm
until his feet find the beat.

Can I dance and be anxious at the same time?
*Of course, Monster says, You must hum the songs
of your ancestors and find the comfort that you need.*

Notice how this teacher follows the style and format of Shovan’s poem, the mentor text, but makes the content her own. You can do that, too! What is the monster inside of you called and how does it behave when expressing its feelings?

BORROWING THE STYLE AND FORMAT OF “WHEN I CRY”

When I _____
(Choose one feeling or emotion)

Stanza One:
There is a monster in me called _____.
(What emotion does your monster feel? What do your monster's arms and legs look like?)

Stanza Two:
There is a monster in me whose _____.
(What does your monster's hair look like? What bothers your monster?)

Stanza Three:
When I _____, Monster _____.
(What does your monster do when you feel your emotion?)

Stanza Four:
Can I _____ too, even though
I am _____?
(What is your emotion? What is the opposite of your emotion?
Can you do both at the same time?)

When writing your poem, look back at the mentor poem and notice the different types of figurative language Shovan uses to describe her monster. Have you matched her style?



IDEAS FOR AUTHENTIC SHARING:

- Sharing personal poetry can be scary; sharing personal poetry about emotions can be BIG scary. Try having students record their poems using a record/share app (e.g., Flip). Students can record and share with the teacher or a limited audience.
 - Grow a Poet Tree. Make a wall size tree out of butcher paper. Attach student poetry to the tree limbs. Poets should be allowed to remain anonymous if they wish.
 - Figurative Language Search: All students must have a copy of their own poem. The teacher will say, “I am searching for an example of alliteration.” Students search their poem for the figurative language term; if they have an example in their poem, they stand and read the line.

CCR.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5.7

Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).

CCR.ELA-Literacy.W.5.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

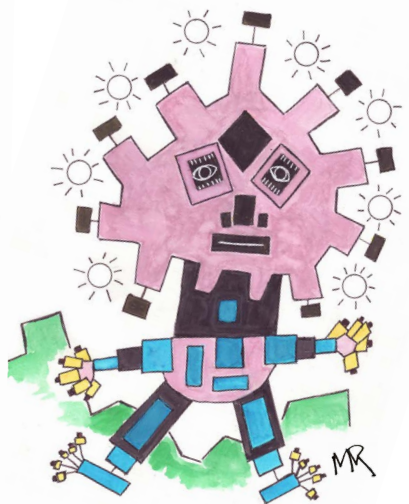
Self Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.

Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.

EXTENDING THE LEARNING: WE'RE ALL MONSTERS HERE! WORKSHEET

The “We’re All Monsters Here!” worksheet was designed to help students find the right words to describe their monsters. This worksheet might be particularly useful if you’ve noticed some conflicts in class or students dealing with some tough emotions; or perhaps as part of a Social Emotional Learning workshop. You decide how you’d like to use it. After reading *Welcome to Monsterville*, this reproducible will give students an understanding of how similes are made and how they can truly help express their strong emotions. Then they can dive back into Monsterville to see how Shovan uses similes in her poetry. Find them. Savor them. Devour them. Talk to your students about what makes Shovan’s use of figurative language stand out. Guide students to see how they can add descriptive details to give their writing (and their monster feelings!) a little sparkle or a powerful punch of pizzazz!

Once students have created similes for their emotions, they can use those similes as jumping points for other poetic devices. For example, “When I am happy, I am like a hippo surfing on the waves.” When asked to develop the simile into alliteration, a student might say, “I am a happy, healthy hippo hurdling over the waves.” The possibilities are boundless! Have fun and remember to be kind to your monsters and embrace all of their emotions.



This teaching guide was written by Room 228 Educational Consulting, with public-school teacher Tracei Willis as lead educator. We at Room 228 believe all monsters' (and humans'!) emotions are valid and important.

To learn more, visit rm228.com.

Name : _____

Date: _____

WE'RE ALL MONSTERS HERE*!

Take a deep, cleansing breath. Release all the monsters within and the monsters with wings circling your head. Invite all of your monster friends and monster foes to pull up a seat at your conference table. Collaborate with your monsters to create a list of emotion similes.

Simile: To compare two things that are NOT alike using like or as.

Example: The baby was as cute as a button.

The baby is being compared to a button, but the baby is NOT a button.

One more example: The track star ran like a cheetah.

The track star is being compared to a cheetah, but the track star is NOT a cheetah.

When I'm happy, I'm like a/an _____ . And when I'm angry, I'm like _____ .
When I'm excited, I'm like _____ . When I'm at my best as a human, I'm like _____ .
But when I'm grumpy, I'm like _____ . When I feel invincible, I'm like _____ .
And when I'm sad, I'm like _____ . But when I feel defeated, I'm like _____ .
When I'm calm, I'm like _____ . And when I feel backed into a corner, I'm like _____ .
When I'm brave, I'm like _____ . When I feel triumphant, I'm like _____ .
But when I'm nervous or scared, I'm like _____ .

Once you've thought about these ideas and compared your emotions to all sorts of cool things, what do you think you now understand about similes?

Why might writers use figurative language like similes?

- Go back and reread what you wrote – do your similes reflect who your inner monsters are? Can you elaborate on your similes by adding any descriptive details?
- What other figurative language device might you use to create a variation of this poem? (Examples: alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, imagery, metaphor, rhyme, rhythm, repetition)
- Play around with the possibilities. Think about how your monsters come together to make you who you are, and ask yourself, how do other people perceive me and my monsters?
- Before you nudge your similes into a poem that reflects both your sweet and your sour monsters, look back at *Welcome to Monsterville* and find your absolute favorite poem and use it as a mentor text! Ask yourself, what poetic devices does Shovan use in this poem that I want to borrow? Always remember to make the content truly your own, but it's okay to look at what a poet did well and imitate that style.

ONCE YOU ARE HAPPY WITH YOUR POEM, PUBLISH IT!

Paint it on a tile

Type it in a cool font on pretty paper

Write it on a scroll with a fancy pen

PUT IT ON A T-SHIRT AND WEAR IT WITH PRIDE!

Make it a mobile and hang it from the ceiling!

Set it to music and "rap" it all up, top it with a bow, and give it away! (To me, by the due date.)

*Lesson inspired by and adapted from Di Wickman, with permission