

Camille Acker: *Cicada* – Analysing a short story

Facts

Today's teenagers often struggle with reading long texts. Consequently, short stories may offer a way of capturing their attention and making reading more attractive to them. Especially the conflict the protagonists must deal with may evoke a strong emotional reaction and, thus, help to develop one's opinion in a discussion. Camille Acker's collection of short stories *Training School for Negro Girls* offers great reading experiences that meet all the criteria of a short story. Her focus on discrimination addresses current social and political issues as well as challenges faced by many young people, which highlights the up-to-dateness of her book.

Notes on the material

The **Topic** consists of three materials. The pre-reading material (M1) for *Cicada* begins with a focus on competitions in general. Students discuss personal experiences in a two-minute speech and also explore the consequences of defeat. In the next step, students watch a video about a musical competition. M1 also provides background information on the literary genre of realism through online research that leads to a placemat activity. Additionally, symbolism as a stylistic device is introduced through a reading comprehension section. The while-reading activities (M2) primarily centre on understanding the text. Students are tasked with creating a flowchart depicting the plot and crafting avatars for the main characters. Afterwards, they do a character analysis through group work, examining various aspects of the short story and applying their findings to *Cicada*. Using a jigsaw puzzle-like approach, they further explore the language of the text (including grammar and stylistic devices), the type of narrator, point of view, and the style chosen by Camille Acker. With the assistance of the after-reading activities (M3), students gain insight into methods of financing college education in the United States. The material also includes a group discussion that explores the topic of fairness in competition, and a creative reading assignment prompts them to compose a letter from the perspective of one of the main characters.

c) Whose point of view is it? Fill in A (Austin), AN (Anna), T (Tim) or S (Shreya).

Point of view	A, AN, T or S
It creates camaraderie.	
It shows the progression of singers.	
It provides an opportunity to showcase.	
Offers a chance to be part of the music of this community.	
It's a way of friendly competition.	
Offers an opportunity to meet some great people.	

d) How does taking part in a competition influence the musicians? Write down two examples.

3. As a group of four, conduct online research to define the genre of realism, then do this placemat activity. You may refer to these websites or explore additional sources.

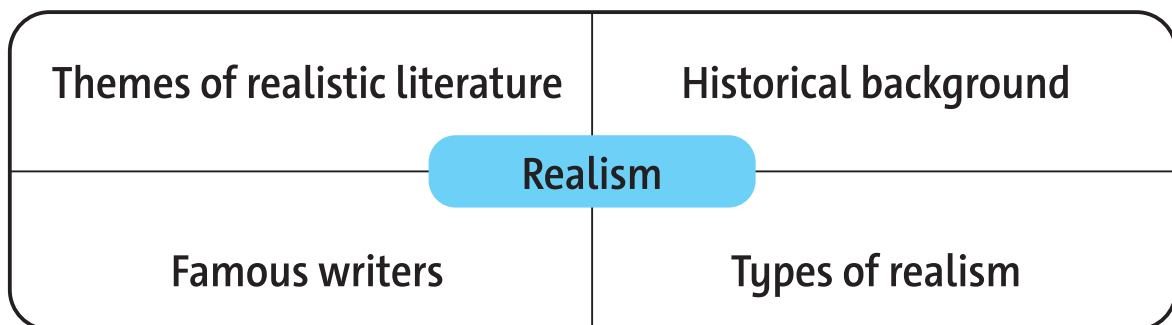
▶ <https://raabe.click/RealismDevices>



▶ <https://raabe.click/RealismLiterature>



[last access: 22/10/2023]





4. Read these dictionary excerpts. Then respond to the tasks.

Cicada (family Cicadidae), any of a group of sound-producing insects (order Homoptera) that have two pairs of membranous wings, prominent compound eyes, and three simple eyes (ocelli). Cicadas are medium to large in size, ranging from 2 to 5 cm (0.8 to 2 inches).

- 5 Male cicadas produce loud noises by vibrating membranes (tymbals) near the base of the abdomen. Most North American cicadas produce rhythmical ticks, buzzes, or whines, although in some species the “song” is musical.

Female cicadas usually lay their eggs in woody plant tissues that drop from the plant when, or shortly after, the eggs hatch. Newly hatched nymphs burrow into the ground where they suck juices from roots of perennial plants. Nymphs usually undergo five molts during the several years required to reach maturity. Although not ordinarily considered a pest, the females, if numerous, may damage young saplings during their egg laying.

More than 3,000 species of cicadas are known. With the exception of two species of hairy cicadas in the family Tettigaretodae that are found only in southeastern Australia, including Tasmania, cicadas belong to the family Cicadidae and are tropical and occur in deserts, grasslands, and forests. In addition to the dog-day cicada (Tibicen and others) that appears yearly in midsummer, there are also periodic cicadas. Among the most fascinating and best-known are the 17-year cicada (often erroneously called the 17-year locust) and the 13-year cicada (Magicicada). These species occur in large numbers in chronologically and geographically isolated broods.

The several species are easily recognized by differences in songs, behaviour, and morphology. Males of each species have three distinct sound responses: a congregational song that is regulated by daily weather fluctuations and by songs produced by other males; a courtship song, usually produced prior to copulation; and a disturbance squawk produced by individuals captured, held, or disturbed into flight.

Cicadas have been used in folk medicines, as religious and monetary symbol, and as an important source of food. Their song once was considered to forecast weather changes. In China, male cicadas were caged for their song. The cicada appears in the mythology, literature, and music of many cultures, including that of American Indians.

Source: *The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica: cicada*. Oct 23, 2023. Found at <https://www.britannica.com/animal/cicada> [last access: 06/11/2023]



b) Complete the text.

With only two exceptions, cicadas are _____ and occur in _____, grasslands and forests. There are types that appear every year in _____, but many species are _____.

c) Explain the underlined words in these sentences:

The several species are easily recognised by differences in song, behaviour and morphology.

Cicadas have been used as an important source of food.

d) Think of ways the cicada can be used as a symbol.

Person E: You do not have a strong musical background. To you, fairness primarily relies on the specific criteria outlined in the evaluation sheet provided to the jurors. Additionally, you believe that widely recognised pieces are generally more enjoyable and, as a result, are more likely to receive higher scores.

Person F: You are an immigrant, and you have been fortunate to win several competitions, even though you did not understand a word the jurors said. You are uncertain whether their intentions were to be kind and help you get a good start in this new country or whether they genuinely evaluated your performance.

Creative writing

4. Write a WhatsApp conversation with either Ellery or Lori, discussing the competition and their prize. In your messages, include both positive and constructive aspects. Also, share your own experiences with competitions.

Digital alternative: You can use the tool *Zeob* to create your chat:
<https://zeob.com/generate-whatsapp-chat/>



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