



Before You Read

Growing Pains

MEET JEAN LITTLE



Jean Little was born with seriously impaired eyesight. As she grew, however, her sight improved enough so that she could learn to read on her own. "Reading," she says, "became my greatest joy." As Little went through school, she showed enthusiasm for writing. When she was eighteen, a magazine published two of her poems. She remembers her father reading them aloud. "I listened, and [when] his voice broke, I knew why I wanted to be a writer."

Jean Little was born in 1932 in Taiwan. "Growing Pains" was first published in 1986.

READING FOCUS

Think about how you feel when someone is angry with you. When you get angry with someone, do you keep your anger inside or do you express it? How do you feel after the person who expressed anger with you apologizes?

Think/Pair/Share

After you have jotted down your responses to these questions, share your thoughts with a partner.

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover one person's feelings about anger—and growing up.



BUILDING BACKGROUND

Writers and Blindness

Jean Little is one of a long line of distinguished writers who happened to be seriously sight impaired or totally blind. Many scholars believe that Homer, the ancient Greek who composed the epic poems the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, was blind. The seventeenth century English poet and essayist John Milton became blind before he wrote his greatest epic poem *Paradise Lost*. Closer to our own time, Helen Keller, who wrote a famous autobiography, was deaf as well as blind, and humorist James Thurber lost his sight late in life but continued to write.

Growing Pains

Jean Little~

Mother got mad at me tonight and bawled me out.
She said I was lazy and self-centered.
She said my room was a pigsty.
She said she was sick and tired of forever nagging but I gave her no choice.
5 She went on and on until I began to cry.
I hate crying in front of people. It was horrible.

I got away, though, and went to bed and it was over.
I knew things would be okay in the morning;
Stiff with being sorry, too polite, but okay.
10 I was glad to be by myself.

Then she came to my room and apologized.
She explained, too.
Things had gone wrong all day at the store.
She hadn't had a letter from my sister and she was worried.
15 Dad had also done something to hurt her.
She even told me about that.
Then *she* cried.
I kept saying, "It's all right. Don't worry."
And wishing she'd stop.

20 I'm just a kid.
I can forgive her getting mad at me. That's easy.
But her sadness . . .
I don't know what to do with her sadness.
I yell at her often, "You don't understand me!"
25 But I don't want to have to understand her.
That's expecting too much.



Responding to Literature

PERSONAL RESPONSE

- ◆ What went through your mind as you read this poem? What, if anything, would you have done differently?

Analyzing Literature

RECALL

1. Who is the **speaker** in the poem, and what is she feeling?
2. What does the main character do that she wishes her mother would not do?

INTERPRET

3. Why do you think the author chose "Growing Pains" as the title for this poem?
4. How do you think the speaker's feelings about her own crying in front of people affect how she feels about her mother's crying?

EVALUATE AND CONNECT

5. Does the speaker think she deserved to be "bawled out"? How can you tell?
6. How do the main character's feelings about her mother's behavior seem true to life? Support your opinion with examples.
7. Do you think the poet showed both sides of the conflict between the mother and the daughter? Why or why not?
8. What does the poem tell you is one common reason that people often lose their tempers?
9. **Theme Connection** About how old do you think the speaker might be? Why do you think her mother suddenly confides in her?
10. How does the poem express feelings about the new responsibilities that come with growing up?

LITERARY ELEMENTS

Mood

The emotional atmosphere, or feeling, of a story or poem is called the **mood**. Writers choose details to create a mood or feeling that brings a scene to life. Descriptive words, setting, dialogue, and characters' actions can all contribute to the mood of a piece of writing. In "Growing Pains," the poet uses such lines as, "it was horrible" and "I was glad to be by myself" to express the mood of the poem.

1. Reread "Growing Pains." How would you describe the mood of the poem?
2. Find two other examples of details that express the mood of the poem.
3. Compare the mood of the first two stanzas with the mood of the last stanza.

● See **Literary Terms Handbook**, p. R7.



Extending Your Response

Writing About Literature



Appreciating Rhythm "Growing Pains" is an example of a poem that does not rhyme but that has a rhythm most easily grasped if you read the poem aloud. Working with a partner, read the poem aloud to each other, and then write about how the rhythm affects the listener or contributes to the effect of the poem.

Creative Writing



Expressing Yourself Return to your notes from the **Reading Focus** on page 132. Write a short poem telling about a time when you were angry or confused because someone had hurt your feelings. Use details that describe why you were angry or confused.



Performing



Words Set to Music Work with a small group to find instrumental music that evokes the mood of "Growing Pains." Then make a tape of the music to use as background during a group reading of the poem. Try various effects—for example, by grouping low and high voices or single and group voices.

Literature Groups



Problem Solving The speaker in the poem is having trouble communicating with her mother. Find examples from the poem that describe how the two characters are not getting along. Then work together to come up with a list of recommendations to help them better understand each other. Write a plan with suggestions for both characters, and share it with the class.

Reading Further



If you enjoyed this poem, try these other books by Jean Little:

Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird
Little by Little: A Writer's Education

Save your work for your portfolio.

Skill Minilesson

READING AND THINKING • SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

Jean Little divided "Growing Pains" into four stanzas. The first three tell a story that is a sequence of events. The events appear in the order they happened. Paying attention to the sequence of events in a story or poem helps you better understand the piece of literature. How would "Growing Pains" be different if the poem began with the mother crying?

PRACTICE Reread "Growing Pains," paying special attention to the events that happen in each stanza. Then write one paragraph that explains the sequence of events in the poem.

- For more about sequencing, see **Reading Handbook**, p. R91.