

Birdfoot's Grampa

A poem about the value of all living creatures

About the Poem

Learning Objective: Students will analyze the theme of a poem.

Featured Skill: analyzing poetry

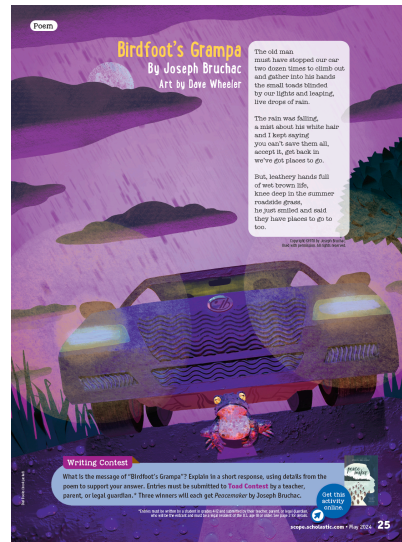
Essential Questions:

- What is our responsibility toward animals?
- What is the value of an animal's life?
- What is special about poetry?

Standards:

The article and its suite of support materials support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.4, W.4, W.5

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Poet read-aloud
- Text-to-speech

Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Featured Skill: Poetry Analysis

Video:

- Poet read-aloud

Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- "Would You Squash This Bug?"
- "The Amazing Pangolin Rescue"
- "The Vanishing Beasts"
- "How to Save a Baby Orangutan"
- "Rescue in the Rainforest"
- "The Bear Attacks That Changed America"

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

1. Read and Discuss (30 minutes)

- As a class, watch the video of poet Joseph Bruchac reading his poem aloud. The **video** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- For a second read, invite students to read the poem silently to themselves. Then discuss the following questions as a class.

Featured Skill: Poetry Analysis (20 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

Note that to keep things simple, we sometimes use the pronouns “he/his/him” to refer to the speaker, but the speaker is not necessarily a boy.

1. **Who is the old man in the first line of the poem? Who is the speaker of the poem? How do you know?** *You can infer from the title of the poem that the old man is the speaker’s grandfather and that the speaker’s name is Birdfoot.*
2. **Why does the grandfather keep stopping the car and getting out?** *The grandfather keeps stopping the car and getting out to move toads off the road so that they do not get run over.*
3. **Consider the way poet Joseph Bruchac describes the toads in the first stanza: “the small toads blinded / by our lights and leaping, / live drops of rain.” Describe the scene these lines create in your mind.** *Answers will vary. Students may say that the lines evoke an image of small toads, illuminated by the headlights of a car, jumping around in the rain, perhaps blending in with the rain as it falls.*
4. **Consider these lines from the third stanza: “But, leathery hands full / of wet brown life.” Why might the poet have described the grandfather holding the toads this way instead of just writing “he held toads in his hands”? In other words, what do these lines offer or express that a more basic description would not?** *Answers will vary. Students might offer that “leathery hands” creates a vivid image of the grandfather’s hands and that “full of wet brown life” emphasizes that the toads are living creatures in a way that just writing “hand” and “toads” would not. The description of the grandfather’s hands being “full of wet brown life” also gets at*

how much responsibility the grandfather has and how vulnerable the toads are—the grandfather is quite literally holding the toads' lives in his hands. Students might also note that the lines are more creative, interesting, surprising, or descriptive than a simple statement that the grandfather was holding toads in his hands would be, and therefore more engaging or delightful to the reader.

5. **How does the speaker feel about his grandfather stopping to move the toads off the road, and why does he feel this way? Which lines tell you this?** *The speaker feels frustrated and impatient with his grandfather's efforts to move the toads. The speaker would like his grandfather to stop moving the toads and just drive over them so that the two of them can continue on their way and do whatever it is they need to do. The following lines tell you this: "and I kept saying / you can't save them all, / accept it, get back in / we've got places to go."*
6. **Does the grandfather seem angry about his grandchild's complaints? Does the grandfather seem like he is going to stop moving the toads off the road? Support your answers with details from the poem.** *The grandfather does not seem angry about his grandchild's complaints—he smiles as he responds to them—but he also does not stop relocating the toads. He tells his grandchild that the toads "have places to go to / too," suggesting that he thinks moving the toads is important and he does not plan to stop doing so.*
7. **The grandfather says that the toads "have places to go to / too." Where might a toad need to go? Answers will vary but could include the idea that the toads need to go where they can find food, safety, or a mate. They might need to go where they can lay eggs or communicate with other toads.**
8. **How does the grandfather saying the toads "have places to go to / too" connect to another line in the poem?** *The grandfather's comment connects to the line in the second stanza when the speaker urges his grandfather to leave the toads on the road because "we've got places to go."*
9. **When the grandfather says the toads "have places to go to / too," what idea about the value or importance of the toads' lives is he expressing?** *The grandfather is saying that whatever it is that he and his grandchild need to do is not important enough to justify killing the toads. He is expressing the idea that the toads' lives are valuable and important, suggesting that the toads, like humans, have goals and responsibilities, and also an innate desire to survive and thrive.*
10. **What do you think of the grandchild's argument "you can't save them all" as a reason not to bother moving any of the toads out of the way of the car? Answers will vary, but students may say that not being able to save them all is not a good reason not to save as many as possible.**

2. Write About It

(30 minutes)

- Have students respond to the prompt that appears with the poem:

What is the message of “Birdfoot’s Grampa”? Explain in a short response, using details from the poem to support your answer.

Connected articles from the Scope archives about our relationship with animals:

- Debate: [“Would You Squash This Bug?”](#)
- Paired Texts: [“The Incredible Pangolin Rescue”](#)
- Paired Texts: [“The Vanishing Beasts”](#)
- Paired Texts: [“How to Save a Baby Orangutan”](#)
- Narrative Nonfiction: [“Rescue in the Rainforest”](#)
- Narrative Nonfiction: [“The Bear Attacks That Changed America”](#)