World Words

Baby Scorpion
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Student's Activities
Pre-Listening Activity 1

A baby scorpion

A log burning on a fire

A couple sitting together, embracing

Later: the ghost of the baby scorpion

fear   hold
hate   smile
defend tremble
love   cry
warm hug
chill hurt
worry
defend

Protect

Scream
Pre-Listening Activity 2

1. You will hear the poet talking about the poem and some international students discussing their reaction to it. Read through the following comments which are made in the broadcast and decide first who was speaking - the poet or the students - and then decide if they were discussing the symmetry of the poem, the characters that appear in the poem, issues related to dialogue, folk or fairy tales or developing empathy and sympathy in the listener or reader. Then listen to the broadcast to check your answers.

a. "...and then out of his love came this deep, dark thing, the baby scorpion. Maybe he was jealous."
b. "I wanted it to have an atmosphere, a quality of a very old story that might be in a children's book."
c. "They seem to have a lesson or a moral, and you can't quite decide what that is!"
d. "After reading this I might think twice about killing a spider."
e. "It's a circle .... the fire is kept going .... keeping their love alive, perhaps .... at the end they die, the scorpion dies, the fire consumes itself and dies and with them dies their love."
f. "I much prefer to read or listen to stories that show me things rather than tell me things, where people act or do things in front of my eyes. I didn't want to tell people what was happening. I wanted it to happen."
g. "I would like to commend the writer for putting across such a different view of scorpions."
h. "The woman - girlfriend - seems extremely vulnerable, or threatened. She is trying to convince herself it's right to kill this animal."
i. "I felt frightened of scorpions even though I was much bigger than them and I felt this was quite unfair."
j. "I wanted to suggest that the scorpion was noble: the knight through a forest of red thorns."

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After Listening Activities

A. There appear to be a number of animals which, as babies, elicit very different feelings from humans to those felt when the animals are full grown. In the case of the baby scorpion in the poem the sentiment described is pity. The fear only came when the woman thought of the scorpion as an adult.

Which of the following animals might elicit positive feelings in humans when young but negative ones when older? Describe the positive feelings and then the negative ones.

- lion
- snake
- elephant
- fox
- spider
- eagle
- wolf
- duck
- sheep
- horse
- shark
- seagull

B. In the poem, the girl says:

“I am young and beautiful among my own kind”.  
I will not harm you unless frightened. 
If there is no alternative I will kill myself.  
I do not want death forced upon me.  
I will come to meet it in all my wildness”

In which ways might these have been the words of the scorpion?

C. Language Point

There is a little dialogue in the poem. Note that when positive things are being stated 'It's a black snowflake', 'I am young and beautiful' the language is a simple use of subject-verb-object', but when fear or aggression comes into the story then the imperative is used, 'Find it and kill it', 'Make sure....', 'Look ....'. This adds a harder, more brutal note to the language.