

# Caterpillars Crawl

SA choir, piano

Elizabeth Alexander

*Seafarer Press*

## Caterpillars Crawl

Caterpillars crawl and that's okay for them.  
It gets them where they need to go and keeps them slim.  
They inch along and roll around,  
And pretty much stay on the ground,  
And from a very early age they learn to blend right in.  
And like I said, that's okay for them.

Caterpillars crawl and that's okay for them.  
They rarely think beyond their local flower stem.  
Upon their bellies day and night,  
They do not often dream of flight.  
They live their caterpillar lives and munch on blades of grass.  
And like I said, that's okay for them.

Caterpillars crawl and that's okay for them.  
Except for some who take a lonely interim.  
To search their caterpillar souls,  
Rethink their caterpillar goals,  
And nurture what they have inside in hopes of finding more.  
And, so to speak, go out on a limb.

Elizabeth Alexander

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(Original lyric © 2006 by Elizabeth Alexander)



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Inching along ( $\text{♩} = 80-84$ )

Pno

The piano introduction consists of two staves in 2/2 time. The right hand plays a series of chords and dyads, while the left hand plays a simple bass line. The tempo is marked as 'Inching along' with a quarter note equal to 80-84 beats per minute. The dynamic is *mp*.

If the singers are processing or using choreography, feel free to repeat the four-measure introduction.

**A**

5 *mp*

S Cat - er - pil-lars crawl, \_\_\_\_\_ Cat - er - pil-lars crawl \_\_\_\_\_ and that's o -

A *mp*

Cat - er - pil-lars crawl, \_\_\_\_\_ Cat - er - pil-lars crawl and that's o -

The first system of the vocal piece features two vocal staves (Soprano and Alto) and a piano accompaniment. The vocal lines begin with the lyrics 'Cat - er - pil-lars crawl, \_\_\_\_\_ Cat - er - pil-lars crawl \_\_\_\_\_ and that's o -'. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with chords and a bass line. The dynamic is *mp*. There are four 'Ped.' markings under the piano accompaniment.

9

S - kay for them.

A - kay for them.

The second system continues the vocal piece. The vocal lines end with the lyrics '- kay for them.' The piano accompaniment continues with the same harmonic structure. The dynamic is *mp*. There is one '\*' marking under the piano accompaniment.

\* **Composer's Note:** While this song is certainly all about "going out on a limb," you should feel free to shorten long held notes if it's best for you and your choir. Similarly, if splitting into three-part harmony (or even two-part harmony) is too much of a "higher goal" for you at this point, omit some of the harmony and sing with gusto.

13

Tutti

1. It gets them where they need to go, \_\_\_\_\_ and  
 2. They rare - ly think be - yond their lo - - - cal

17

Tutti

keeps 'em slim.  
 flow - er stem.

**B**

21

Tutti

*mp*

They inch a - long and roll a - round, and pret - ty much stay on the ground,  
 Up - on their bel - lies day and night, they do not of - ten dream of flight,

25

Tutti

1.  
 and from a ver - y ear - ly age they learn to blend right

28

S  
in. doo - doo - doo - doo, doo

A  
in. And like I said, and like I

l.h.  
r.h.

Ped. \*

32

S  
doo - doo - doo - doo - doo, and like I said, that's o - kay for

A  
said, and like I said, that's o - kay for

Ped. \*

36

S  
them.

A  
them.

40 2.

Tutti

they live their caterpillar lives, and munch on blades of

Ped.

*very hungry indeed! (unvoiced)* **mf**

43

S

grass. (s) chmp! chmp! chmp! chmp! chmp! chmp! chmp! chmp!

*very hungry indeed! (unvoiced)* **mf**

A

chmp! chmp! chmp! chmp! chmp! chmp! chmp! chmp! chmp! chmp! chmp!

Ped. \* Ped.

47

S

And like I said, and like I said,

**mp**

A

doo - doo-doo - doo - doo, doo - doo-doo - doo - doo,

**mp**

\*

\* "Doo-doo-doo-doo-doo" is so fun that everyone should get a chance to sing it! That's why the parts are switched in measures 47-50. But if you prefer to keep things simpler, you may sing the voice parts as they were in measures 29-32.

Opal Palmer Adisa, poet • Paul Adams, technological hero • Stephen Alexander, lyric consultant • Ginny Allen, Agile coach and friend • The great people at American Composers Forum • Yehuda Amichai, poet • A. R. Ammons, poet • Jennifer Anderson, conductor and composer advocate • Scott Bates, poet • Abbie Betinis, initiator of collaborative endeavors • Beth Norton, conductor and composer advocate • Dennis Blubaugh, more than just a music dealer • Michael deVernon Boblett, poet • Edna Busby, my first piano teacher • Ray Bradbury, writer • Augustin Cadena, translator • Norbert Capek, minister and advocate for religious freedom • Jessica Corbett, editor • David Cummings, poet • Philip Dacey, poet • Catherine Dalton, composer and serum partner • Emily Dickinson, poet • Evelyn Dudley, poet and caregiver • Rob Eller-Isaacs, minister and composer advocate • Ralph Waldo Emerson, philosopher and poet • Louise Erdrich, writer • David Allan Evans, poet • Sophia Lyon Fahs, writer • Richard M. Fewkes, minister and writer • Pasha Gertler, poet • Jack Gallagher, composer and teacher • Paul Gerike, proofreader • Jocelyn Hagen and Michael Hakan, founders of Graphite Marketplace • Steve Harper, just about everything • Steve Harkins, web designer • Edie Hill, composer and friend • Langston Hughes, poet • Margaret and George Heald, piano technician • Karel Husa, composer and teacher • David Ignatow, poet • Kabir, mystic • Linda Kachelmeier, composer and serum partner • Ruth Palmer, conductor and composer advocate • Joan Wolf Prefontaine, poet • Paul Rardin, conductor and composer advocate • Kalidasa, poet • Steve Kaul, recording engineer • Søren Kierkegaard, philosopher and poet • Dorothy Knost, piano teacher • Ben Krywosz, artistic director of Nautilus Music-Theater • Denise Levertov, poet • George Ella Lyon, poet • Jonathan Machen, vocalist • Dawna Markova, writer • Anne Matlack, conductor and composer advocate • Nancy Menk, composer advocate • Edna St. Vincent Millay, poet • Jane Ramseyer Miller, conductor, composer, social activist • Joe Mish, conductor and composer advocate • J. David Moore, composer • Gerald Rich, poet • Carl Sandburg, poet • friend • King Sigismund III, religious reformer • Ann Silsbee, composer, poet and friend • Simon Alexander-Adams, sounding board, fellow creative, and awesome son • Steven Stucky, composer and teacher • Rabindranath Tagore, poet • Sister Peronne Marie Thibert, teacher and writer • Oliver Alexander-Adams, unconventional thinker and light of my life • Howard Thurman, civil rights leader and writer • Everyone whose work supports the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries • Charles Varney, high school choral director • Anna Vonhuben, illustrator and graphic designer • Nancy White, poet • John Greenleaf Whittier, poet • Theodore Chickering Williams, poet • Daniel Winter, pianist and teacher • Nancy Wood, poet • Yehudi Wyner, composer and teacher

**A lot of hard work  
and creativity went  
into bringing this  
music to you...**



**...and some of it  
was even mine.**

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*Elizabeth Alexander*

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6

64

S  
A

Ex - cept for those who  
Ex - cept for those who

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

68

S  
A

take a lone - - ly in - ter - im(m).  
take a lone - - ly in - ter - im(m).

*sustain note as if meditating...*  
*sustain note as if meditating...*

Ped. Ped. Ped.

**D**

74

Tutti

*mp*

To search their cat - er - pil - lar souls, re - think their cat - er -

*mp*

Ped. Ped. Ped.



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87

S doo - doo - doo - doo - doo, and so to speak, go out on a

A speak, and so to speak, go out on a

Ped. \*

91

S limb.

A limb.

*mf*

**E**

95

S Cat - er - pil - lars crawl,

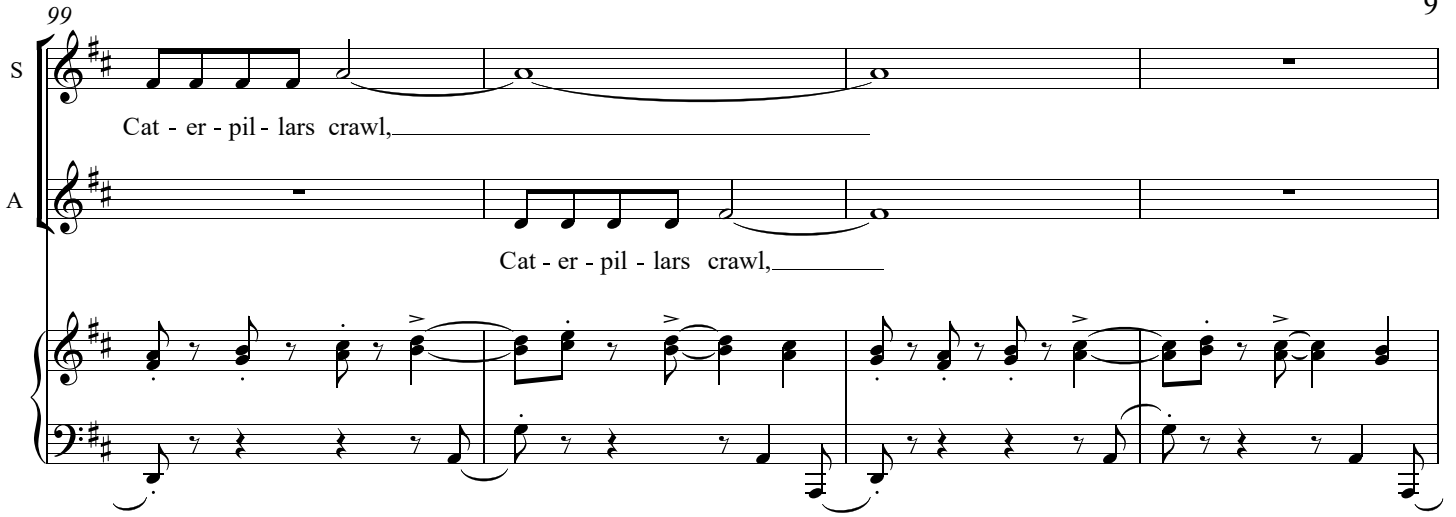
A Cat - er - pil - lars crawl,

*mp*

99

S  
Cat - er - pil - lars crawl,

A  
Cat - er - pil - lars crawl,



103

S  
Cat - er - pil - lars crawl, un - less they go out on a

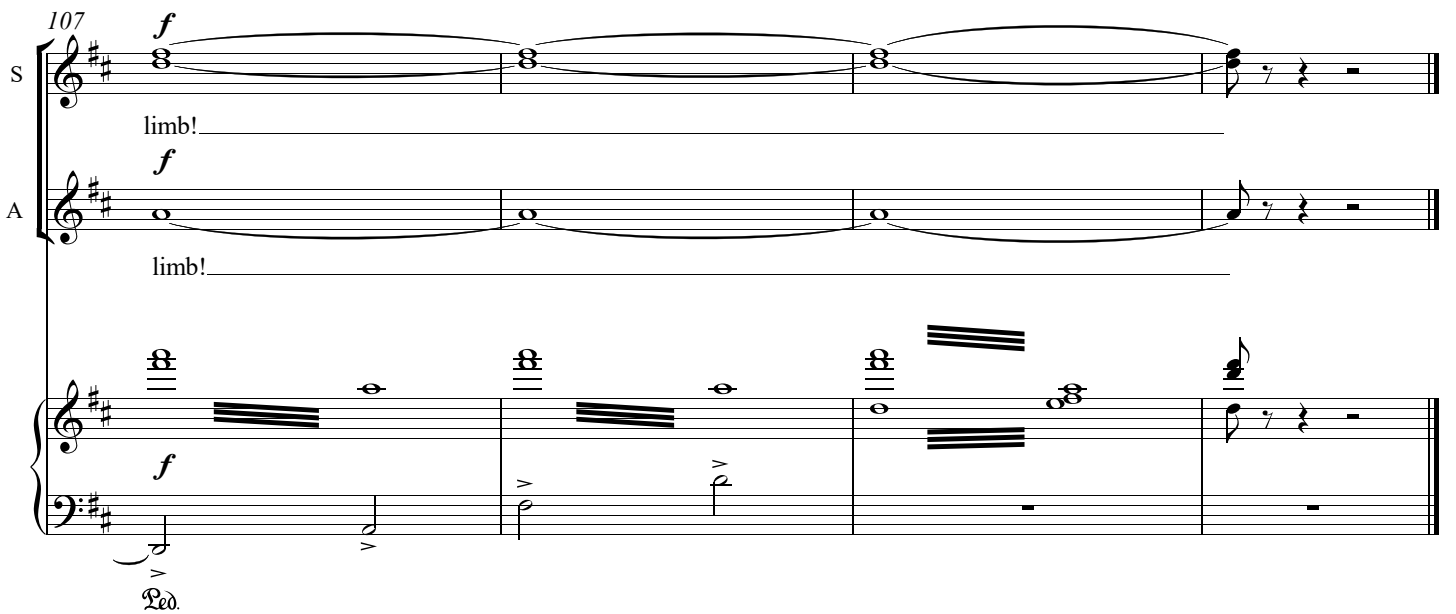
A  
Cat - er - pil - lars crawl, un - less they go out on a



107

S *f*  
limb!

A *f*  
limb!



## **A few Composerly Thoughts about *Caterpillars Crawl*:**

The music I write teaches me astonishing things about myself. Most of the time the lessons it teaches me are delightful, offering me new and interesting ways of looking at the world. But in the case of *Caterpillars Crawl*, the lesson held a surprising amount of pain.

I originally wrote *Caterpillars Crawl* just for fun. When I sang it to myself, strumming along on my guitar, it made me happy. It always reminded me that I was absolutely okay even when I didn't feel particularly popular or talented or smart.

One day I got the delicious idea to make a children's choir arrangement of *Caterpillars Crawl*. I was so excited to share this song with the world! A few days after it was finished I was happily playing it at the piano when I suddenly realized something that stopped me in my tracks: the most important rhyming words in my song didn't actually rhyme! I felt so ashamed that I started to cry.

Unless you've lived in Appalachia or the South, you may have no idea what I'm talking about. It all has to do with different ways of pronouncing vowels. Where I grew up, words like "them" and "stem" have the same vowel sound as words like "slim," "limb," and "interim." When I went to graduate school in the Northeast, my fellow students noticed right away that I said "rint" instead of "rent," "pin" instead of "pen," and "mimmo" instead of "memo." Even some of my professors made fun of me, joking that I was a "hillbilly" or a "Southern belle."

There is a strong stereotype that people who speak in a Southern dialect are uneducated and stupid, and I sure didn't want anyone thinking I was uneducated or stupid, so I worked hard to change. Some changes were not too hard to make, like avoiding using the word "y'all." But changing certain vowel sounds required a lot more practice. I finally thought I had stamped out all traces of my past. And yet, years later, it was clear I had failed. Any sophisticated musician who heard *Caterpillars Crawl* would instantly know I was still a dumb hick.

Of course, I was not a dumb hick. You would think I'd know that by the time I was a thirty-year-old woman with three university degrees, but self-doubt is a brutal foe. It can be powerfully hard to believe in your own beauty when the folks around you don't see it. It took me many years to truly believe, deep inside, that my "down home" dialect was not inferior. In fact, I finally came to understand that it's an exquisite and expressive way of talking, with its own poetry and grace.

One day I realized I was ready to claim my heritage and, like the caterpillars, "go out on a limb." I officially changed my professional biography to read: "Elizabeth Alexander grew up in the Carolinas and Appalachian Ohio." That same day, I added a new composition to my music catalog: *Caterpillars Crawl* — a song that always reminds me that I am absolutely okay even when I don't feel particularly popular or talented or smart.

Elizabeth Alexander, 2022