



*the trouble
with
shooting stars*
meg cannistra

The Trouble With Shooting Stars Educators' Guide

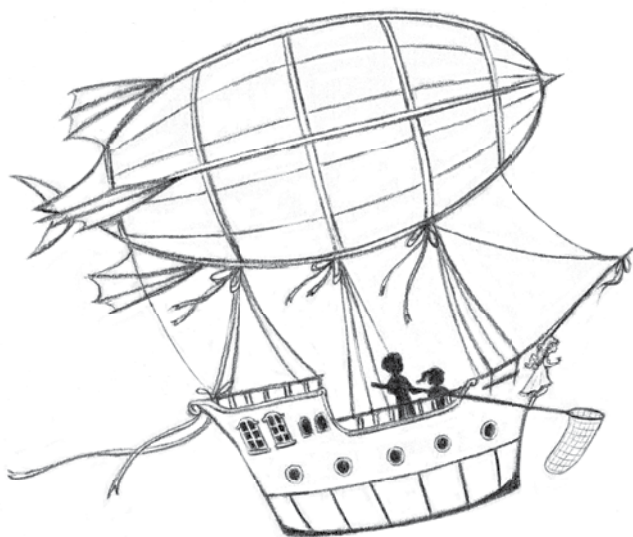
GRADES 3-7 • HC: 9781534428966

ABOUT THE BOOK

Twelve-year-old Luna loves the nighttime more than anything else. It's when no one gives her "that look" about the half mask she must wear while healing from a disfiguring car accident. It's also the perfect time to sit outside and draw what she sees. Like the boy and girl from the new family next door...zipping out of the window in a zeppelin and up to the stars.

At first, she thinks she's dreaming. But one night they catch her watching. Now Luna spends her nights on adventures with them, as they clean full moons, arrange constellations, and catch jars of stardust. She even gets to make a wish on a shooting star they catch.

But Luna learns that no wish is strong enough to erase the past—as much as she may hope to.



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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The Common Core Standards push readers to look closer when reading a text, including examining author's craft and analyzing word choice and narrative elements. The *Trouble with Shooting Stars* includes intricate themes, complex characters, specific word choice, and a well-crafted plot that allows the reader to deeply delve into the text.

This teaching guide includes discussion questions and language arts activities to be used in grades 4 to 7 as this text is read as a whole group, small group, or in a combination. This guide could also be modified to be used with a student who is reading the novel independently.

The Common Core Anchor Standards in English Language Arts and National Core Art Standards Anchors that can be addressed using the discussion questions and activities in this guide are:

English Language Arts

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10: Read and comprehend complex literary texts independently and proficiently.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Art

- Creating: Anchor Standard #1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- Connecting: Anchor Standard #10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to art.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use these questions as reading check-ins, writing prompts, or classroom discussions throughout *The Trouble with Shooting Stars*.

1. Luna feels that the world is completely different at night. (p. 4, 5, 10) Sit outside for 15 minutes one night and sketch or take notes about what it is like and how it is different than daytime. Share.
2. The author alludes to *The Little Prince* and *Phantom of the Opera* in *The Trouble with Shooting Stars*. How do these two stories relate to Luna's experience?
3. Although Luna is telling her mom the truth about the neighbors, her mom does not believe her. (p. 14) Is there a time that you've been truthful but were not believed? Why were you not believed?
4. Luna's favorite seasons are fall and winter. (p. 60) What is your favorite season? Use Luna's writing about her favorite seasons as a mentor text to create your reason.
5. How did Luna's perception of herself change after the accident? How did Luna's parents treat Luna different after the accident?
6. Luna was struggling with keeping up with schoolwork while she was at home, primarily because she couldn't focus on it and found it boring, especially when she could be drawing. Many students have the same complaints about schoolwork. What could teachers do to help make schoolwork more engaging for students? What would have specifically been a way to make schoolwork more engaging for Luna?
7. Luna learns that people may surprise you. What is an example of a time that a person surprised you and was different than you'd assumed?
8. Luna and Chiara sing the baby stars a lullaby. (p. 101) What is a song that you were sung as a child?
9. Luna loves her tree, despite its imperfections. (p. 183) What is something you love? What imperfections does it have that makes you love it more? Why?
10. Chiara and Alessandro have very different rooms (p. 216, 219) that fit their personality. What type of room do you have? How does it fit your personality?
11. Both Luna and Chiara/Alessandro have the pressure of a family business. How do each of them feel about the family business?
12. Luna shares many of her family's traditions, specifically when it comes to winter holidays (p. 180-186, 252). What are your family's traditions during the holiday season?
13. Chiara and Alessandro's father is afraid of outsiders working as spazzatrici, while Luna's dad is afraid of change at the deli. How are both of these ideas that will hurt their businesses in the end?
14. What was stopping Luna from getting her wish to come true? Do you think there is anything she could have done to change this?
15. What are some themes the author may want you to take away from the book?
16. What is the trouble with shooting stars?



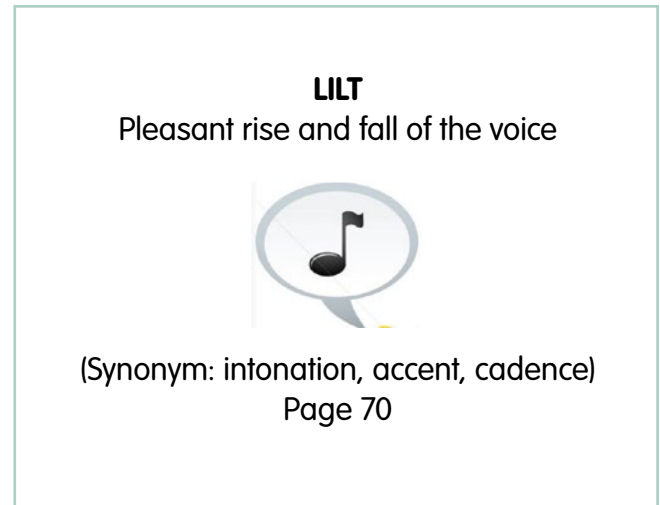
CLASSROOM EXTENSIONS

Use these activities to extend your students' thinking and experience with *The Trouble with Shooting Stars*.

Intriguing Words

Research shows that finding, defining, and discussing vocabulary within the context of reading is one of the most effective ways to learn vocabulary, and Meg Cannistra uses very specific word choice in *The Trouble with Shooting Stars*.

- While reading, have students mark words that intrigue them. Intriguing words can be words they like, words they didn't know, words that they can tell were specifically chosen by the author, Italian words, etc.
- Using these words that are identified by your students, have your students create a word wall of the vocabulary from *The Trouble with Shooting Stars* by picking five words that they liked learning the most and putting them with their student-worded definition and a drawing/symbol to post on the word wall. They should also put what page the word is on in the book. You can have them add anything else on the word wall index card as well such as synonyms, antonyms, etc.
- Before posting the word wall words on the wall, have students get in small groups and share their words with peers making sure to share why they chose the word and where it is in the book.
- **Example of word wall index card:**



Some examples of words (page #) that may be chosen are:

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| • lilt (9) | • smoldering (163) |
| • tawny (12) | • malleable (182) |
| • lucid (14) | • cavernous (198) |
| • furrow (29) | • wafting (199) |
| • grit (40) | • throngs (206) |
| • churns (57) | • emanating (212) |
| • muffled (82) | • rudimentary (228) |
| • plaits (85) | • glinting (238) |
| • warbling (101) | • abrasive (278) |
| • warily (112) | • reverberating (278) |
| • acclimate (117) | • scoffs (284) |
| • indentation (135) | |

Extension Activities

- Using the student-chosen words, create a list of “intriguing words” that your students found and challenge students to use some of the words in their own writing.
- Ask students to answer the following standards-based question about their intriguing word(s): Why would the author choose to use this word over a synonym? How did the author's choice of this word change the tone or mood of the section the word is found in?

Figurative Language

Throughout the book the author uses figurative language, specifically personification and simile. If new to your students, define and discuss figurative language and imagery. Then share some examples in the first three chapters.

- **Some examples from the first three chapters:**

- **Similes**

- “My mask feels like a face prison...” (6)
- “The bloated bag of tea leaves pokes out of the milky brown slurry like an iceberg.” (6)
- “The word feels strange on my tongue, but not entirely unfamiliar. Like a story your mom would read every night before bed, or a song your choir teacher taught you for Christmas Mass.” (7)
- “Bursts of red and orange leaves shoot across the drizzly late-autumn sky like flare guns.” (18)
- “Then the word ‘surgery’ sprouted up in doctors’ appointments like a prickly weed.” (23)
- “[My heart] booms in my ears like a drum.” (38)

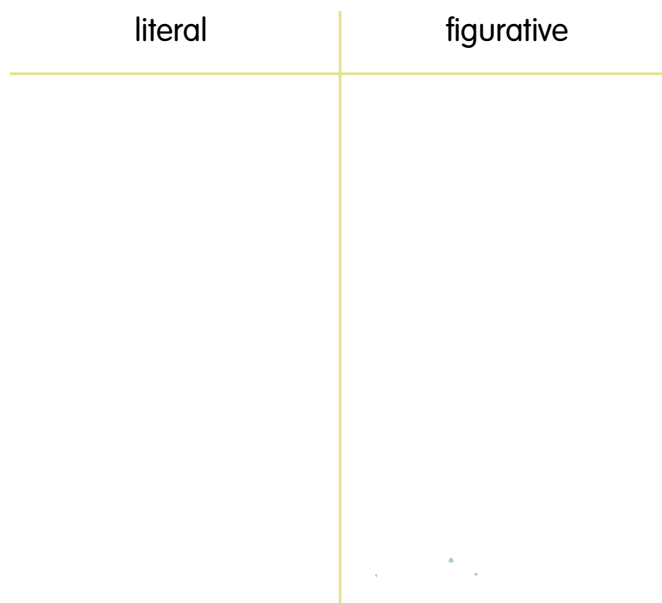
- **Personification**

- “But my voice was trapped in my chest. Buried under the debris from the car wreck.” (23)
- “My heart leaps into my throat.” (37)

- Have students find examples of simile and personification in the text on their own.

- More similes found on pages 51, 57, 62, 68, 71, 72, 76, 83, 86, 99, 113, 118, 126, 141, 156, 167, 168, 176, 180, 181, 190, 195, 196, 211, 219, 229, 237, 243, 245, 271, 273, 276, 305
- More personification found on pages 57, 84, 89, 91, 92, 94, 97, 110, 120, 159, 174, 195, 210, 214, 288, 311, 320

- Using these examples or examples that your students find on their own, have students draw a literal and figurative interpretation of the figurative language.



For example, for “my mask feels like a face prison” on page 6: On the literal side students would draw a face with a prison over it while on the figurative side students would draw what the author meant: Luna with her mask.

Connotation of Words

The connotation of a word is as powerful as its denotation. *In The Trouble with Shooting Stars*, certain adjectives are used yet it is pointed out that they can be switched to a different word to seem more positive. For example: Is Luna nosy or observant? Are her parents helping or bothering her? Does her father hate change or is he just particular? Is homework boring or important?

- **If denotation/connotation are new to your students, first introduce the concepts.**
- As a class look at each of these sets of words and discuss how using one word (nosy, bothering, hate change, boring) versus another (observant, helping, particular, important) can completely change the point of view of a situation or character.
- After the introduction and discussion, have students complete the following two activities:
 - What are two words that mean the same thing but one has a negative connotation and the other has a positive? Explain.
 - Find an adjective that is used in the book that Luna uses to describe herself negatively and come up with a word to replace it that has a more positive connotation.

Food

Food is a large part of Luna’s story as it is not only her family’s business but also is part of family traditions and is loved by Luna’s family.

As students read, have them use post it notes or a sheet of notebook paper to track when the book makes them hungry. After they finish reading, have them pick on passage where food was mentioned and have them explore how imagery was created in the passage using this graphic organizer:

Food described, Page Number				
Words used in the passage that added to the sight imagery.	Words used in the passage that added to the sight imagery.	Words used in the passage that added to the sight imagery.	Words used in the passage that added to the sight imagery.	Words used in the passage that added to the sight imagery.
How did these words help add to the imagery of this passage?				
Why did this passage over others that talked about food specifically make you hungry?				

Extension Activity

- If allowed by your school/district, have a potluck with your students of the different food mentioned in the book. Students could attempt to make it at home or much of it can be found at grocery stores and restaurants.
 - Pages that food is mentioned on include (starting pages): 19, 30, 68, 137, 185, 186, 225, 241, 252, 299
- Uncle Mike redesigned part of the diner to make it more friendly for patrons. Have students design a deli or other type of eatery including what would go on the walls, how tables would be set up, etc. For each decision, have them put an explanation of why they chose what they did.

Luna's Art

Luna's art is a huge part of her healing and processing throughout the book. Use the following to look at Luna's artwork:

- On pages 1 to 3, Luna was outside drawing but the author never told us what she was drawing. Now that you know her better, what do you think she was drawing?
- Find examples of times in the book that art helped Luna process or heal.
- On page 160, Luna tore apart a drawing but then wanted to put it together. To see how hard this is, create copies of one of Luna's drawings in the book and have students rip it up and attempt to tape it back together. Another option is to have students create their own art to turn into a puzzle.
- Have students pick one of Luna's pieces that is shared in the book and write Luna a letter as she instructed on page 47.



Letters

- Every day magic is described on page 185. Have each student create a piece of artwork, of their chosen medium, illustrating an example of everyday magic. It can be literal or abstract. Provide very little instructions other than it should show everyday magic.
- Collect all of the students' work and distribute them back to the students at random.
- Then direct them to Luna's letter on page 47. Instruct them to follow Luna's instructions for the piece of artwork that they just received.
- Students will create a letter back to the artist sharing what they see in the art.
 - Angela's letter on pages 192 to 193 is a good example of how to set up a letter.
 - If students need direction, ask them to answer:
 - What magic do you see in the artwork?
 - How does the artwork make you feel?
 - How does the artwork connect to your life?
 - What is something that the artwork make you think of?
- Students will then receive the letter that their peer wrote about their artwork.
- Ensure students know that the letter will be returned to the artist.



The Sapienti's Ship

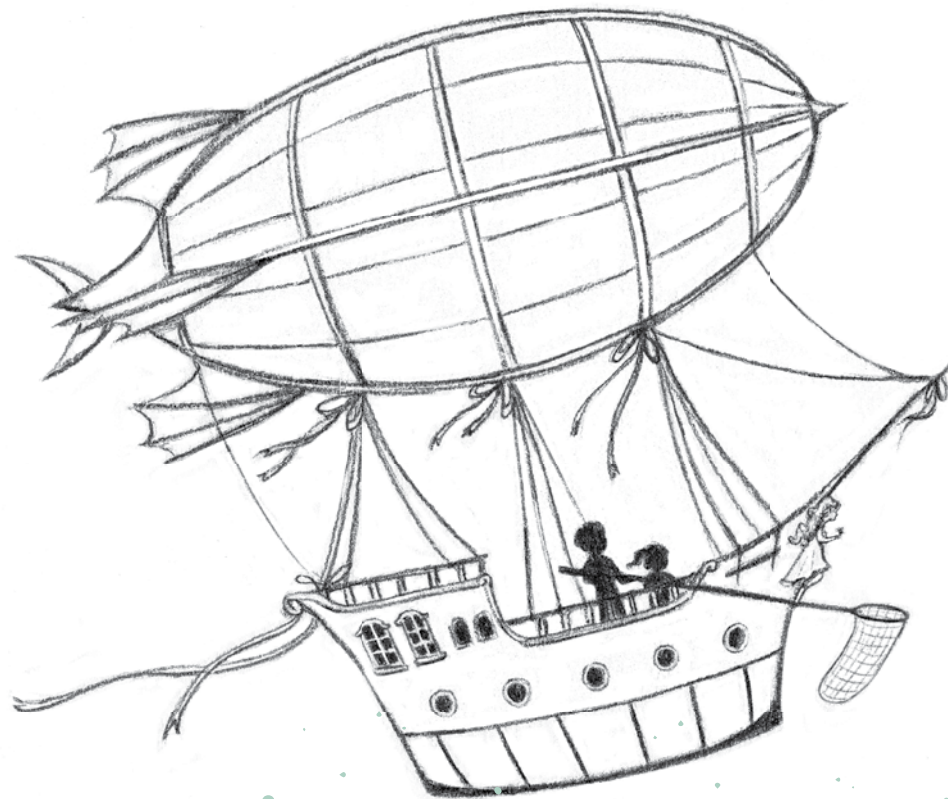
Alessandro and Chiara allow Luna to be part of their spazzatrici adventures on the *Stella Cadente*, but she must grasp a lot to help them. To help students understand the ship terminology, use the National Park Service's "The Parts of a Ship" activity: nps.gov/sama/learn/kidsyouth/upload/partsship.pdf. You could use the illustration from the cover to have students label *Stella Cadente*.

Students also may not be familiar with zeppelins and their history. Break students up into five groups and assign each group a question/topic. Have each group research for 20 minutes to gather information then have them create a display or presentation sharing what they learned.

- Group 1: What is a zeppelin?
- Group 2: Parts of a zeppelin.
- Group 3: Military uses of zeppelins.
- Group 4: Recreational uses of zeppelins.
- Group 5: Why are zeppelins not used anymore.

Extension Activities:

- On pages 94 to 95, Luna is worried about being on *Stella Cadente* because normally when you go to space you cannot be in an open-air ship. Have students look at the science behind why astronauts must wear space suits and how rockets protect astronauts.
- Space debris is mentioned a few times in the book. Have students determine how space debris makes it to space, what it is causing, and what needs to be done about it.



Constellations

Six different constellations were mentioned in *The Trouble with Shooting Stars*: Andromeda, Lynx, Hercules, Gemini, Sagittarius, Pegasus. Have students create “trading cards” for each of the constellations (this can also be jigsawed or done in groups). Students can use *The Constellation Guide* as their resource: constellation-guide.com/constellation-list/.

FRONT

BACK

CONSTELLATION NAME

Drawing of the constellation (just the stars)

Founded _____

Facts:

CONSTELLATION NAME

Drawing of the constellation
(with the shape drawn in)

Myth information:



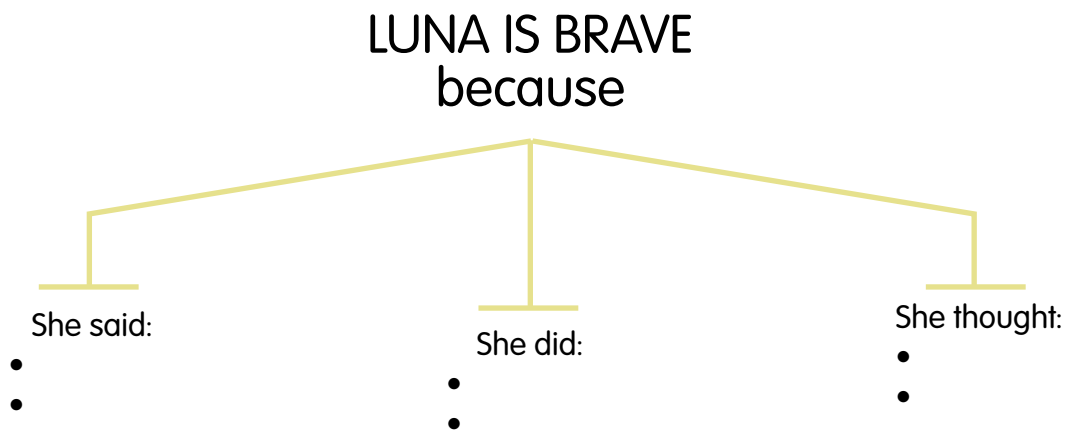
Extension Activity:

- Have students view the Sky Map at stelvision.com/en/sky-map/ looking at the constellations that can be seen in the sky that night at their home. If possible, have them go outside and sketch what they can see.

Luna's Growth

Much of the story focuses on Luna's process after her disfigurement in the car accident, and this process was successful because of support by her family, therapist, and friends. Many of the thought processes and tasks that Luna went through can be transferred into the classroom.

- On page 159, Dr. Miles asks Luna to set up “therapy goals” to direct their time together. This same idea can be used in the classroom. Have students set goals at the beginning of units or lessons stating what they hope to achieve throughout the learning process.
- On page 238 to 240, Dr. Miles has Luna take part in an activity where she asks her to “draw the qualities you like about yourself.” Have students complete this activity.
- Luna defines bravery as “working through your fears” (p. 311) and this is exactly what Luna does throughout the book. Have students complete a graphic organizer showing how Luna is brave throughout the book even though she doesn't feel like she is being brave/strong. This same activity could be done for the adjective beauty, defined on page 254, or strong, defined on pages 291 to 292.



- Luna also says that she isn't ready to be brave, but are we ever ready to be brave? Using the definition of bravery that Luna shared, have students explain why bravery is something you can never be completely prepared for.

Extension Activities:

- Have students read about Luna, the Roman goddess of the moon, and complete a similar graphic organizer showing how Luna is like the goddess.
- Luna suffers from PTSD and anxiety from the anxiety leading to panic attacks. Dr. Miles helps her deal with these feelings by teaching her breathing exercises. Even people not suffering from mental illness can benefit from breathing exercises when they feel overwhelmed. Have students read psychologytoday.com/us/blog/neuraptitude/201602/the-science-slow-deep-breathing and take part in a discussion on when deep breathing would benefit them.

PRAISE FOR THE TROUBLE WITH SHOOTING STARS

“A story brimming with hope and sparkling with magic. Meg Cannistra’s writing shines as bright as any shooting star.”

—Cassie Beasley, author of *Circus Mirandus*

“Loving, imaginative, and gorgeously written, this book shines with magic and heart.”

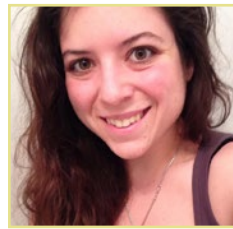
—Anne Ursu, author of *The Lost Girl*

“Luna’s happy ending requires discovering not just inner, but also outer beauty. Sweet and heartwarming.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“[A] cute standalone for fans of Ingrid Law and Cornelia Funke.” —Booklist

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Meg Cannistra grew up in Sarasota, Florida, where she spent her childhood chasing after older sisters and cousins and learning how to cook. After living in New York City and north New Jersey for a few years,

Meg now resides with her two cats, Gloom and Doom, in Charlotte, North Carolina. She has a BA in English literature from Flagler College and an MFA in creative writing from Hamline University. When she’s not taking pictures of her cats or wandering around grocery stores, she writes magical, mysterious, and sometimes scary stories. *The Trouble with Shooting Stars* is her debut novel. You can find her on Twitter and Instagram at @MegCannistra and learn more about her books at MegCannistra.com.

MORE MIDDLE GRADE NOVELS TO SHARE WITH STUDENTS



This guide was created by Kellee Moyer, a middle school literacy specialist in Orlando, FL. Kellee is the author of various teaching guides for all levels; the co-author of the blog Unleashing Readers; a jury member of the 2020-2021 Schneider Family Award Committee; on the 2016-2018 ALAN Board of Directors; a member of NCTE, ALAN, and ALA; and a member then chair of the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Book Award committee from 2012-2014.