Critical-Thinking Questions: After reading “The Stars Below Me,” think about the whole story to answer the questions below.

1. At the beginning of the story, Mara says, “I don’t think I’m going to be very popular.” Do you think she would say the same at the end? Why or why not?

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2. Compare the first paragraph of the story with the fifth paragraph on page 14, starting “Over there. . .” In what ways are these paragraphs alike? Why do you think the author made them similar?

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## Pick Your Own Vocabulary Words

**Directions:** We’ve given you the definitions of five important words from this issue’s story “The Stars Below Me.” Look for the words as you read. Then pick out three more words that are new to you. Write their definitions, using context clues or a dictionary to help you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORD</th>
<th>PAGE NO.</th>
<th>IT MEANS . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. astronomy</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>the study of stars, planets, and space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. baying</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>barking with long, low sounds; howling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. constellation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>a group of stars that form a shape or pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. planetarium</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>a building or room where images of stars, planets, and other space objects are projected onto a high, curved ceiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. squirrelly</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>restless; anxious to move around</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MY OWN WORDS:**

6. 

7. 

8. 

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Making Sense of Sensory Details

In the story “The Stars Below Me,” author Wendy Mass uses creative sensory details to make the story come to life. Sensory details tell you what characters see, hear, touch or feel, smell, and taste. They pull you into the story by making you feel as if you’re experiencing the action along with the characters.

For example, on page 13, Mara says about Chloe: “Her face brightens.” In plain words, the author means that Chloe suddenly seems more cheerful. By using a striking detail about what Chloe looks like, the author brings that moment to life for readers.

Directions: Read the lines from the story below. Then answer the questions that follow.

1. “Here there are rattling pipes, neighbors shutting doors, the wail of sirens.” (p. 12)
   What sense do these details describe (sight, hearing, touch or feel, smell, or taste)? ________________
   In plain words, what does “Here there are rattling pipes, neighbors shutting doors, the wail of sirens” mean?
   _______________________________________________________________________________________

2. “I feel my cheeks burn.” (p. 13)
   What sense does this detail describe? ________________________________
   In plain words, what does “I feel my cheeks burn” mean? ________________________________

3. “Her eyes are red, and her cheeks are blotchy.” (p. 13)
   What sense does this detail describe? ________________________________
   In plain words, what does “Her eyes are red, and her cheeks are blotchy” mean? ________________________________

4. “We take a break for hot chocolate, which, I admit, does taste as good in the city.” (p. 12)
   What sense does this detail describe? ________________________________
   The sentence above is written in plain words. Rewrite this line using at least one sensory detail.
   _______________________________________________________________________________________

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**Making Sense of Mara**

**Directions:** Answer the questions in the chart below, comparing Mara at the beginning of the story with Mara at the end. Use specific examples from the story. Then answer the writing prompt below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>At first</th>
<th>By the end</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How does Mara feel about living in New York City?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What does Mara think about kids who live in the city?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What is Mara looking forward to doing in the city?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How does Mara feel about Eta?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Your turn!** Use your answers to help you respond to the writing prompt on page 14: Imagine you are Mara at the end of the story. Write a letter to Eta, telling her why you might not see her for a while and how you feel about that.
Making Inferences

**Directions:** In “The Stars Below Me,” the author does not always tell you how characters feel or why they act the way they do. Instead, you must use text clues to make inferences. Read each set of lines from the story. Think about the questions in small type on the sides. Then make an inference to answer each question in bold.

1. Think about these lines from the beginning of the story:

I doubt that one. Kids in the city are cool. They grow up next to famous people, and they know what to wear for every occasion. I like looking at the stars and growing big pumpkins. I’m in the 4-H club. I even like math. I don’t think I’m going to be very popular.

What do you think is one main reason Mara doesn’t want to move to New York City?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

2. Think about these lines from page 11:

On our last night at home, I step outside to say goodnight to my best friend, Eta. We’ve known each other since we were 7 years old, and we say goodnight every night before bed. I met her when my grandfather gave me my first telescope on my birthday. He pointed it at the constellation Cassiopeia [kass-ee-uh-PEE-uh]. He showed me how the bright stars spell out ‘M’ for Mara, and that a star close to the middle is named Eta. He said Eta is a star just like our sun and might have a planet around it just like Earth. And on that planet, there may be a girl looking up at the stars, wondering if anyone’s looking back. I decided to call that girl Eta. We’ve been friends ever since.

“Goodnight, Eta,” I whisper. “Next time I see you, it will be from the city.”

Why do you think Mara’s best friend is a girl she imagines lives on another planet?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

**Continued on next page >**
3. Now think about these lines from page 12:

When I finally decide to go to bed, it’s late. I drift in and out of sleep all night, the strange sounds startling me. At my old home, I’d hear the occasional animal baying at the moon, but here there are rattling pipes, neighbors shutting doors, the wail of sirens. It takes a long time for morning to come. When it finally does, I lie there waiting for the roosters that never crow. Instead, Mom sticks her head in.

“You have a guest,” she says, beaming.

I sit up so quickly I get a head rush. “Eta?”

When Mara’s mom says she has a guest, why do you think Mara immediately thinks of Eta?

_________________________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. Now think about the end of the story:

“Thank you!” The elevator arrives and I step in. “Goodnight, Chloe.”

“Night, Mara,” she says with a smile and a wave.

Hearing Chloe say goodnight is almost like hearing it from Eta.

Except more real. I know Eta is still out there. But until I see her again, I get to explore the stars below me with a new friend.

How have Mara’s feelings about Eta changed?

What does this tell you about how Mara feels about Chloe?

Do you think Eta will continue being Mara’s best friend as time goes on? Why or why not?

_________________________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________________________
Research Kit

Directions: Read the story “The Stars Below Me” in the March/April 2019 issue of Storyworks. Then follow the steps below, which will lead you on a research journey inspired by the story.

STEP 1: Reread the first page of the story. Think about why Mara likes looking up at the night sky with her telescope. Then consider the following question:

What can we learn by studying stars, planets, and other objects in space?

That is the big question that will guide your research. Start by getting some background from these resources:

• https://spaceplace.nasa.gov
• https://www.amnh.org/explore/ology/astronomy#all

STEP 2: To further explore the question, choose one of the two research paths below.

Research Path 1
Choose an object in space and find out what scientists have learned about its characteristics.

You can choose:
• a specific star (e.g., our sun)
• a specific planet (e.g., Mercury)
• the moon
• or go online to find another space object!

Research Path 2
Choose an astronomer (from either the past or today) and learn about his or her work.

You can choose:
• Galileo
• Edwin Hubble
• Aomawa Shields
• or go online to find another astronomer!

Continued on next page >
STEP 3: Think about the questions you’ll need to answer to complete your project. Then start to hunt for answers! Visit your school or public library and ask your librarian or your teacher to help you find nonfiction books about your topic. You can also search for information online—but make sure you’re using trustworthy resources, such as online encyclopedias, well-known newspapers and magazines, and government websites. Here are some sites that can help get you started on your research path:

- https://www.ted.com/talks/aomawa_shields_how_we_ll_find_life_on_other_planets#t-27077

STEP 4: Turn the information you’ve collected into a dazzling final product!
Select one of the choices below:

**Choices for Research Path 1:**

1) Design a trivia game with questions that test people's knowledge about your chosen space object. (Make sure to write the answers too!)
2) Imagine that a group of lucky travelers is blasting off to space to see the object up close. Using the online program ReadWriteThink Printing Press, create a travel brochure with images and text that tell them what to expect.
3) Write a poem or song about the object that celebrates its different features.

**Choices for Research Path 2:**

1) Imagine that your town is putting up a statue to honor your chosen astronomer. Write a short description for a plaque telling people about the person and his or her accomplishments.
2) Create a painting or drawing of the astronomer at work. Include at least three captions explaining what he or she is doing in the illustration.
3) Pretend that the astronomer is being interviewed about his or her work on a radio news show. Work with a partner to write and record both the interviewer's questions and the astronomer's answers.
“The Stars Below Me” Quiz

Directions: Read the story “The Stars Below Me” in the March/April 2019 issue of Storyworks. Then fill in the bubble next to the best answer for each question below.

1. Which of the following is one of the main reasons Mara loves living in the country?
   A. She gets woken up by roosters in the morning.
   B. She can look at the night sky with her telescope.
   C. She can spend time on her balcony.
   D. She can spend time with her family.

2. Eta is Mara’s ______.
   A. mother
   B. nickname
   C. pretend friend on a faraway planet
   D. new friend from her apartment building

3. In the phrase “I’m already getting squirrelly from being cooped up inside,” the word squirrelly means ______.
   A. hungry
   B. angry
   C. sleepy
   D. restless

4. Mara helps Chloe by . . .
   A. tutoring her in math.
   B. offering her hot chocolate.
   C. introducing her to Eta.
   D. welcoming her to the apartment building.

5. At the end of the story, how does Mara feel about living in the city?
   A. sad
   B. unsure
   C. excited
   D. ashamed

6. Which line from the story supports your answer to question 5?
   A. “Her eyes are red, and her cheeks are blotchy.”
   B. “I’m not convinced.”
   C. “I feel my cheeks burn.”
   D. “How cool is that?”

Constructed Response

Directions: On a separate piece of paper, write your answer to each question in a well-organized response. Make sure you support your answers with details from the story.

7. Why does Mara think that Chloe doesn’t like her when they first meet?

8. What does the title “The Stars Below Me” refer to? How does seeing these “stars” change Mara’s feeling about living in the city?
“The Stars Below Me” Quiz

Directions: Read the story “The Stars Below Me” in the March/April 2019 issue of Storyworks. Then fill in the bubble next to the best answer for each question below.

1. What one thing does Mara expect to be the same in the city as in the country?
   A) the hot chocolate
   B) the stars
   C) the kids
   D) the balcony

2. Eta is Mara’s ______.
   A) mother
   B) nickname
   C) pretend friend on a faraway planet
   D) new friend from her apartment building

3. When they first meet, Mara assumes Chloe thinks she’s a “geek” because Mara . . .
   A) has a telescope.
   B) is good at math.
   C) grows pumpkins.
   D) lived in the country.

4. In the phrase “I’m already getting squirrelly from being cooped up inside,”
   the word squirrelly means ______.
   A) hungry
   B) angry
   C) sleepy
   D) restless

5. Why does Mara decide to explore the lobby of her apartment building?
   A) The plants, water, and ducks remind her of her old home.
   B) She’s looking for Chloe.
   C) It’s easier to see the stars from there.
   D) She’s angry at her parents and wants to be away from them.

6. At the end of the story, how does Mara feel about living in the city?
   A) sad
   B) doubtful
   C) excited
   D) ashamed

7. Which line from the story supports your answer to question 6?
   A) “Her eyes are red, and her cheeks are blotchy.”
   B) “I’m not convinced.”
   C) “I feel my cheeks burn.”
   D) “It’s . . . it’s amazing!” I say, exhaling.”

8. Which statement best expresses the theme of the story?
   A) Country life is better than city life.
   B) Looking at something in a new way can change how you feel about it.
   C) Geeks are more interesting than other people.
   D) Imaginary friends never let you down.

Constructed Response

Directions: On a separate piece of paper, write your answer to each question in a well-organized response. Make sure you support your answers with details from the story.

9. In the story, Mara and Chloe each face a big problem. What is each girl’s problem, and how does the other help her solve it?

10. Mara thinks “How cool is that?” twice in the story: once in the second paragraph and again at the end. Why do you think the author chose to repeat this line?
Stars Contest

My name: _____________________________________________________________

Teacher’s name: _______________________________________________________

School name: _________________________________________________________

School address: ________________________________________________________

(Remember to include city, state, and ZIP code!)

School phone: _________________________________________________________

Parent’s name and email (optional): _______________________________________

See page 14 of the March/April 2019 issue of Storyworks for more information about this contest.

My Response

Imagine you are Mara at the end of the story. Write a letter to Eta, telling her why you might not see her for a while and how you feel about that.

Entries will be judged on:

⇒ a clearly stated main idea    ⇒ good organization and transitions
⇒ effective use of supporting evidence    ⇒ grammar, spelling, and punctuation

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Continue on another piece of paper if you need more room.