The Stars Below Me
Sometimes looking at things in a new way can change everything

About the Story

Levels
Lexile Range: 600L-700L
Guided Reading Level: T
DRA Level: 50

Learning Objectives
Students will identify how Mara changes when she realizes that her new city surroundings, and a new friend, offer unexpected joys.

Content-Area Connections
Social-emotional learning: social engagement, relationship building

Key Skills
How a character changes, inference about character, sensory details, perspective, plot, author’s craft, narrative writing

Standards Correlations
This article and lesson support the following Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.5, R.6, W.3, SL.1, L.4, L.5 Check our website for more standards information.

Your Teaching Support Package
Here’s your full suite of materials, all of which you’ll find at storyworks.scholastic.com:

Audio: Our audio version of this story provides support for struggling readers or works as a read-aloud for your whole class.

Activities to print or project:
• Vocabulary
• Critical-Thinking Questions
• Core Skills Workout: Character, Inference, Author’s Craft
• Research Kit: Connect this story to astronomy!
• Comprehension Quiz*

*Available on two levels
Mara doesn’t want to move because she has lived in the same place and known the same kids her whole life. She thinks New York City kids will be too cool and grown-up to be friends with a girl from the country. Answers will vary.

Inference About Character
Mara seems like a smart girl who loves the outdoors and everything about space. But she considers herself “uncool” and isn’t confident that other kids will like her. Having an imaginary friend on a faraway star suggests that she is a dreamer and maybe doesn’t open up to people in real life.

Inference About Character
Eta might be important to Mara because she’s always there—or at least the star where Mara imagines Eta to be is there. Eta might also be important because Mara can always picture her as a good friend and listener. Mara doesn’t have to negotiate a real friendship or worry whether Eta likes her.

Sensory Details
The author contrasts the sounds of the city with the sounds of the country. She describes Mara’s hearing “animals baying at the moon” and roosters crowing in the country. In the city, Mara hears “rattling pipes, neighbors shutting doors, the wail of sirens.”

Perspective
Chloe might be impressed that Mara is interested in astronomy; it’s new and different to her. Perhaps Chloe would like to look through Mara’s telescope. To Mara, Chloe’s words suggest she thinks Mara is a nerd, and no one else in the city likes astronomy.

Plot
At this point, Mara and Chloe have a conversation that will eventually lead to a friendship. Mara’s skill at math becomes an advantage for her, and Chloe invites her over.
Differentiate and Customize

For Struggling Readers

Students might be confused by Mara’s friendship with Eta, an imaginary girl named after a star. To help them, read together the seventh paragraph on page 11 (starting with “On our last night at home . . .”). Point out the image of Cassiopeia in the corner, explaining that a star close to the middle is Eta. Review what Mara’s grandfather told her about it.

For Advanced Readers

Have students read Wendy Mass’s novel Every Soul a Star, which has topics and themes similar to “The Stars Below Me.” Find a book review template in our Activity Library and ask students to review the novel.

For ELL Students

Mara’s experience may reflect one that many English language learners have had: moving to a place that’s completely different and feeling unsure about fitting in. Invite students to share how they felt when they first came to the U.S., if they were old enough to remember it.

• Perspective (p. 14) From the height of Chloe’s apartment, the city looks beautiful to Mara. She compares it to seeing the stars in the country, but from above. She is surprised and thrilled.

• How a Character Changes (p. 14) Mara realizes that she can manage without saying goodnight to Eta every evening. Having a real friend she can get to know is better than having a far-off friend that she shapes in her imagination.

Critical-Thinking Questions

• 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? (how a character changes) She probably would not say this. At the beginning, Mara assumes that city kids will look down on her for liking astronomy, math, and outdoor activities. But when she meets Chloe, she realizes that she can connect with a city kid. Chloe is not so different after all, and each girl has something to offer the other.

• Compare the first paragraph of the story with the fifth paragraph on p. 14, starting “‘Over there . . .’” In what ways are these paragraphs alike? Why do you think the author made them similar? (author’s craft) Both paragraphs include many details describing a special place. The author probably made them similar to show that both the country and the city can be magical, as Mara learns.

3. Skill Building

Featured Skill: How a Character Changes

• Distribute our character activity and have students complete it in small groups. Then ask students to respond to the writing prompt on page 14.