

**An Educator’s Guide to *Bright Sky, Starry City***  
**Written by Uma Krishnaswami, illustrated by Aimée Sicuro**

**Grades 1, 2 and 3**

*Note: The activities in this guide align with English Language Arts standards for grades 1, 2 and 3, but standards for other grades may also apply.*

Prepared by We Love Children’s Books

**About the Book**

Phoebe helps her dad set up telescopes on the sidewalk outside his store. It’s a special night – Saturn and Mars are going to appear together in the sky. But will Phoebe be able to see them with all the city lights?

Raindrops begin to fall, followed by lightning and thunder. Phoebe is filled with disappointment as she and her father hurry inside to wait out the storm.

But suddenly the power fails and then, amazingly, the rain and clouds disappear. Phoebe and her dad and all kinds of people spill into the street. And there, in the bright night sky, the splendor of the planets and a multitude of stars are revealed for all to see.

An illustrated afterword includes information about the solar system, planetary conjunctions and rings, moons, telescopes and light pollution. A glossary and recommended further reading are also included.

**About the Author**

**Uma Krishnaswami** has written many highly acclaimed children’s books, from picture books to middle-grade novels to retellings of classic tales and myths. Her books include *The Grand Plan to Fix Everything* (*Kirkus* and *Publishers Weekly* starred reviews), *Out of the Way! Out of the Way!* (*Kirkus* and *School Library Journal* starred reviews), *The Girl of the Wish Garden* (*Kirkus* starred review) and, most recently, *The Problem with Being Slightly Heroic*. She teaches at Vermont College of Fine Arts in the MFA program in Writing for Children and Young Adults and is an active blogger. Some of her stories are set in North America, and some in India. Some cross from one place into the other and back again, just like her.

<http://umakrishnaswami.org>

**About the Illustrator**

**Aimée Sicuro** is an award-winning illustrator who has also worked as a designer and gallery artist. She graduated from Columbus College of Art and Design with a BFA in Illustration. She lives in Brooklyn, New York with her husband and young son. *Bright Sky, Starry City* is her first picture book.

<http://www.aimeesicuro.com>

**Praise for *Bright Sky, Starry City***

“Capture[s] a strong sense of a special, shared moment.” — *Kirkus Reviews*

“Krishnaswami’s elegant, understated writing focuses . . . on Phoebe’s hopes, disappointments, and curiosities, as well as her tender relationship with her father. Newcomer Sicuro’s mixed-media illustrations are similarly attentive to the story’s emotions.” — *Publishers Weekly*

### **Pre-Reading Questions & Activities**

As a class, perform a “picture walk” through the book. Based on the illustrations, what do students think this book will be about? Can students identify the main characters? What do they like to do?

Do students know what a telescope is? Have any of them ever looked through one? Do students know what astronomy is?

Review the elements of our solar system – the sun, moon, stars and planets. Which of these have students seen? Have any of them seen a falling star or the Milky Way?

Have students ever heard the term “light pollution?” What do they think it means? How does it affect looking at the stars? Briefly explain to them the effects of light pollution on stargazing and the environment.

### *Vocabulary*

This story is about a girl and her love of the night sky. There are many words that have to do with the stars, planets and astronomy. Discuss the following words as they are used in this book and what they mean in this context.

axis	Milky Way
constellations	Deneb
galaxy	Vega
orbit	Sun
planet	Mercury
star	Venus
solar system	Earth
telescope	Mars
planetary conjunction	Jupiter
light pollution	Saturn
	Uranus
	Neptune

### **Post-Reading Discussion Questions and Activities**

### **Think-Pair-Share – All About the Book**

Have students “think-pair-share” — think about the following questions, pair with another student and share information. Who are the main characters? What is the story about? What is the main problem? What is the solution? What is the theme or “big idea” of this book? Come together as a class and have pairs share their insights.

### **Pictures and Words**

The words and illustrations in a picture book work together to tell a story. As a class, reread the story and closely examine the illustrations. Discuss how the different elements of *Bright Sky, Starry City* work together. What information do students get from the pictures? What information comes from the text? For example, what do we know about Phoebe and her father? What might have gotten Phoebe interested in the night sky to begin with? Be sure to have students cite specifics from the book (text and illustrations) to support their responses.

### **Figurative Language**

The text of *Bright Sky, Starry City* often verges on poetry. The words have a distinct rhythm when read aloud and the author uses figurative language to tell the story and how Phoebe is feeling. As a class, come together and read the book aloud. Have students raise their hands when they hear an instance of figurative language (metaphor, simile, onomatopoeia, or words that appeal to the senses.) Pause and discuss what feeling, emotion or atmosphere the phrase communicates to the reader. If you wish, pay special attention to the text that describes the rainstorm. Review it as a class and discuss how its repetition, alliteration and rhythms paint a picture of the rainstorm with words. What other passages are similar?

### **Looking Closer**

The illustrations in *Bright Sky, Starry City* are integral to telling its story. Sometimes they reinforce the text, and sometimes they provide additional information. Break the class into small groups and assign each group an illustration. Have the students analyze the picture closely, comparing it to the words on that page. What does the picture convey? Why is it drawn the way it is? What is the illustrator communicating that is different from the words of story? What concepts is she emphasizing? Have each group present their findings to the class.

### **In the Night Sky**

Before the blackout in the city, no one in the city notices the night sky. When Phoebe studies the sky, she finds that it is difficult, if not impossible, to see anything. Why is it hard for her and her father to see the stars? What happens to change the circumstances?

### **Light Pollution**

Review with students the sections of this book that discuss light pollution. Go over what it is, its sources and how it affects the appearance of the night sky, our environment, and our own health and well-being. Illustrate your points by showing students an image of the earth at night and the sources of light pollution from different cities. Working with an adult at home, have students go outside at night to observe and record the light pollution they see and how it affects the appearance of the sky. Come together as a class and discuss their findings. How does light pollution differ from location to location? What causes the light pollution that students have recorded — nearby cities, shopping centres, streetlights? How could this light pollution be limited or eliminated?

*Note:* Images, information and statistics are available from The International Dark Sky Organization (<http://www.darksky.org>)

### **Plan-et Syl-la-bles**

Have students practice recognizing syllables using the names of the planets. Instruct students to clap their hands to indicate each syllable as you say the planet's name aloud. Then repeat the exercise, this time having the class say each planet's name aloud and clapping for each syllable. Ask for volunteers to tell how many syllables are in the name. Write the names of the planets on the board and have the class organize them by number of syllables, from most to least.

### **Comprehension Trivia Contest**

Explain to students that traditionally the teacher asks the questions and the student gives the answers, but today things will be a little different. Today students will make up the questions! Discuss the "Five Ws and one H" question words — Who, What, Where, When, Why and How. Working with an adult if necessary, have each student make up five reading comprehension questions that show their familiarity and understanding of the story, with each question using one of these key words. Next, have students write each question on a separate slip of paper. Review the questions, adding any additional of your own to the mix. Break students into small teams and have them come up one at a time to pick a question and try to answer it. Each correct answer earns two points for the team. If they get it wrong, someone else on their team can answer it to earn the team one point. Encourage students to cheer for their teammates and have fun!

### **My Planet and Welcome to It**

Have each student select a planet and use the Internet or library resources to prepare a short research project on it, working with an adult if appropriate. Each report should include interesting facts about the planet, including physical description, size relative to Earth, location in the solar system and composition. Have students illustrate their reports with a drawing or drawings of the planet. Their report should also list the next dates when the planet will be visible in the area and where in the sky it will appear. When revised and finalized, use the computer to combine these reports to create a classroom *Primer of Planets* to publish and distribute.

### **Solar System**

Phoebe draws the planets on the sidewalk using chalk while her father sets up the telescopes. As a class, come together and review this section. Why does she call her drawings "special effects?" Have students draw their own diagram of the solar system. They should refer to the illustrations in *Bright Sky, Starry City* and the chart at the back of the book, as well as other solar system diagrams that can be found on-line or in library resources. Collect students' drawings and display them in the class.

### **Starry Night Field Trips**

*Bright Sky, Starry City* imparts to the reader the wonder that Phoebe and her Dad feel when stargazing. A trip to a local planetarium is a magical, transformative experience for children — and provides a solid introduction to astronomy. If equipment is available and circumstances permit, you can also plan an evening stargazing event for the class. Coordinate with an astronomy teacher or local stargazing group to provide support for this event. Be sure to prepare students for what they will see in advance so they can get the most out of the evening. A telescope will provide the best experience for all involved but can only be used by one person at a time. To keep interest and enthusiasm high, encourage students to

bring binoculars as well. The moon is an impressive sight through binoculars, and a great introduction to amateur astronomy and stargazing. The next class day, discuss students' impressions. What did they learn from this experience?

### Internet Resources

**Nine Planets:** A great resource for learning about our solar system and the objects in it.  
<http://nineplanets.org>

**Kids' Astronomy:** This site provides basic information about astronomy, with a good overview of the planets and our solar system.  
[http://www.kidsastronomy.com/solar\\_system.htm](http://www.kidsastronomy.com/solar_system.htm)

**The Space Place:** Activities, information and images for students and teachers.  
<http://spaceplace.nasa.gov>

**NASA Kids Club:** Games and activities about space. Be sure to check the navigation and explore the "For Students" and "For Educators" links available from the page.  
<http://www.nasa.gov/audience/forkids/kidsclub/flash/index.html>

**SkyMaps.com:** This site sells many supplies and accessories for stargazing and also provides a free sky map, revised monthly to reflect the current night sky. The map is in PDF format and can be printed or viewed on a computer.  
<http://www.skymaps.com/downloads.html>

**SkyMapOnline:** An interactive online simulation of the current night sky, with constellations shown. Users can also search for objects in the night sky and set the time and location to change what stars are displayed.

<http://www.skymaponline.net>

**International Dark-Sky Association:** Web site for an organization working to fight light pollution and preserve the night sky.

<http://www.darksky.org>

## **FOR REFERENCE:**

### **Standards Used**

#### **Reading Standards for Literature Grade 1**

##### *Key Ideas and Details*

Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

Retell stories including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.

Describe characters, settings and major events in a story using key details.

##### *Craft and Structure*

Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.

##### *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*

Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting or events.

#### **Reading Standards: Foundational Skills Grade 1**

##### *Phonological Awareness*

Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables and sounds (phonemes).

- Distinguish long from short vowel sounds in spoken single-syllable words.
- Orally produce single-syllable words by blending sounds (phonemes), including consonant blends.
- Isolate and pronounce initial, medial vowel and final sounds (phonemes) in spoken single-syllable words.
- Segment spoken single-syllable words into their complete sequence of individual sounds (phonemes).

### *Phonics and Word Recognition*

Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

- Know the spelling-sound correspondences for common consonant digraphs.
- Decode regularly spelled one-syllable words.
- Know final -e and common vowel team conventions for representing long vowel sounds.
- Use knowledge that every syllable must have a vowel sound to determine the number of syllables in a printed word.
- Decode two-syllable words following basic patterns by breaking the words into syllables.
- Read words with inflectional endings.
- Recognize and read grade-appropriate irregularly spelled words.

### **Writing Standards Grade 1**

#### *Text Types and Purposes*

Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic and provide some sense of closure.

#### *Production and Distribution of Writing*

With guidance and support from adults, focus on a topic, respond to questions and suggestions from peers and add details to strengthen writing as needed.

With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

#### *Research to Build and Present Knowledge*

With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

### **Speaking and Listening Standards Grade 1**

#### *Comprehension and Collaboration*

Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

- Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
- Build on others' talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges.
- Ask questions to clear up any confusion about the topics and texts under discussion.

Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to gather additional information or clarify something that is not understood.

#### *Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas*

Describe people, places, things and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.

Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts and feelings.

### **Language Standards Grade 1**

#### *Vocabulary Acquisition and Use*

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 1 reading and content, choosing flexibly from an array of strategies.

- Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- Use frequently occurring affixes as a clue to the meaning of a word.
- Identify frequently occurring root words (e.g., look) and their inflectional forms (e.g., looks, looked, looking).

### **Reading Standards for Literature Grade 2**

#### *Key Ideas and Details*

Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson or moral.

Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges

#### *Craft and Structure*

Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem or song.

*Integration of Knowledge and Ideas* Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting or plot.

### **Reading Standards: Foundational Skills Grade 2**

#### *Phonics and Word Recognition*

Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

- Distinguish long and short vowels when reading regularly spelled one-syllable words.
- Know spelling-sound correspondences for additional common vowel teams.
- Decode regularly spelled two-syllable words with long vowels.
- Decode words with common prefixes and suffixes.
- Identify words with inconsistent but common spelling-sound correspondences.
- Recognize and read grade-appropriate irregularly spelled words.

### **Writing Standards Grade 2**

#### *Text Types and Purposes*

Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points and provide a concluding statement or section.

#### *Production and Distribution of Writing*

With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.

With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

#### *Research to Build and Present Knowledge*

Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

### **Speaking and Listening Standards Grade 2**

#### *Comprehension and Collaboration*

Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

- Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
- Build on others' talk in conversations by linking their comments to the remarks of others.
- Ask for clarification and further explanation as needed about the topics and texts under discussion.

Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media

Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.

#### *Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas*

Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.

Create audio recordings of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts and feelings.

### **Language Standards Grade 2**

#### *Vocabulary Acquisition and Use*

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 2 reading and content, choosing flexibly from an array of strategies.

- Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- Determine the meaning of the new word formed when a known prefix is added to a known word (e.g., happy/unhappy, tell/retell).
- Use a known root word as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word with the same root (e.g., addition, additional).
- Use knowledge of the meaning of individual words to predict the meaning of compound words (e.g., birdhouse, lighthouse, housefly; bookshelf, notebook, bookmark).
- Use glossaries and beginning dictionaries, both print and digital, to determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases.

### **Reading Standards for Literature GRADE 3**

#### *Key Ideas and Details*

Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers

Recount stories, including fables, folktales and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

#### *Craft and Structure*

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.

#### *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*

Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

### **Reading Standards: Foundational Skills GRADE 3**

#### *Phonics and Word Recognition*

Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

- Identify and know the meaning of the most common prefixes and derivational suffixes.
- Decode words with common Latin suffixes.
- Decode multisyllable words.
- Read grade-appropriate irregularly spelled words.

### **Writing Standards GRADE 3**

#### *Text Types and Purposes*

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

- Introduce a topic and group related information together; include illustrations when useful to aiding comprehension.
- Develop the topic with facts, definitions and details.
- Use linking words and phrases (e.g., also, another, and, more, but) to connect ideas within categories of information.
- Provide a concluding statement or section.

#### *Production and Distribution of Writing*

With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.

With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising and editing.

With guidance and support from adults, use technology to produce and publish writing (using keyboarding skills) as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

#### *Research to Build and Present Knowledge*

Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.

Recall information from experiences or gather information from print and digital sources; take brief notes on sources and sort evidence into provided categories.

### *Range of Writing*

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes and audiences.

## **Speaking and Listening Standards GRADE 3**

### *Comprehension and Collaboration*

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

- Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.
- Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
- Ask questions to check understanding of information presented, stay on topic and link their comments to the remarks of others.
- Explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.

Ask and answer questions about information from a speaker, offering appropriate elaboration and detail.

### *Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas*

Report on a topic or text, tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.

Create engaging audio recordings of stories or poems that demonstrate fluid reading at an understandable pace; add visual displays when appropriate to emphasize or enhance certain facts or details.

## **Language Standards GRADE 3**

### *Vocabulary Acquisition and Use*

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning word and phrases based on grade 3 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

- Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- Determine the meaning of the new word formed when a known affix is added to a known word (e.g., agreeable/disagreeable, comfortable/uncomfortable, care/careless, heat/preheat).
- Use a known root word as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word with the same root (e.g., company, companion).
- Use glossaries or beginning dictionaries, both print and digital, to determine or clarify the precise meaning of key words and phrases.

Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

- Distinguish the literal and nonliteral meanings of words and phrases in context (e.g., take steps).
- Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., describe people who are friendly or helpful).
- Distinguish shades of meaning among related words that describe states of mind or degrees of certainty (e.g., knew, believed, suspected, heard, wondered).