

The Mission

Is a one-way trip to Mars the solution to Philip's problems?

About the Story

Lexile: For info about the Lexile of this story and the informational text as well as qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective:

to synthesize ideas from a story and an article about the desirable traits of a Mars colonist

Key Skills:

author's craft, character, setting, text structure, inference, theme, synthesis

Essential Questions:

- How can we get through difficult situations?
- Why do humans explore space?
- What would it be like to live on another planet?

Standards:

This article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards:

R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.9, W.2, W.9, SL.1, L.4, L.5, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Story
- Informational text

Literature Connections: ideas for connecting to curricular texts

Activities to print or project:

- DIY Vocabulary (for fiction)
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Synthesis: Evaluate Philip
- **Core Skills Workout:** Inference, Quiz*
- **Literary Elements:** Theme Anticipation Guide, Character Thinking Tool
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1 Preparing to Read

Do-Now: Theme Anticipation Guide

(5 minutes, activity sheet online)

As a class, complete the **Anticipation Guide** to activate prior knowledge and build curiosity. Ask students to explain their responses.

2 Reading and Discussing “The Mission”

(40 minutes, activity sheet online)

DIFFERENTIATION: Students who need more support should first listen to the audio version.

- Read the story once through as a class.
- Break students into groups to read the story again and discuss the close-reading questions. Have students write answers in the margins or on the **Close-Reading Questions** handout.

Answers to Close-Reading Questions

▶ **1. Author's Craft** (p. 19) *These paragraphs raise such questions as: What happened at the narrator's school? Why is he worried about being recognized? What interviews is he going on? Why might he never have to choose an outfit again?*

▶ **2. Character** (p. 19) *This line shows that Philip is very self-conscious and hints that something embarrassing recently happened to him.*

▶ **3. Setting** (p. 19) *The story takes place in the near future. The reference to the bot suggests a futuristic setting, but other details (the way the characters are dressed, Blythe's library book, Philip's tablet) reveal a world not very different from the present.*

▶ **4. Text Structure** (p. 21) *This line suggests that Philip is avoiding school activities and that he is very upset about something related to prom. This hints at what he later tells Blythe about the video.*

▶ **5. Character** (p. 21) *The way Blythe flings herself down suggests that she is confident and comfortable in her own skin; she does not hold herself back. She dives in and “owns” the space she inhabits. Philip is just the opposite: He sits gingerly on the edge of the bench, as if trying to make himself small and insignificant. The way he sits reveals that he is nervous and insecure.*

▶ **6. Inference** (p. 21) *Blythe uses the fake band name to test people's integrity. She names a fake band to see whether someone will—at the risk of not seeming cool—admit to not having heard of it.*

▶ **7. Text Structure** (p. 23) *The scene reveals that Philip is able to stay calm under pressure, handle emergencies well, and calm others down.*

▶ **8. Inference** (p. 23) *You can infer that VidHub is a video-sharing website similar to YouTube.*

▶ **9. Theme** (p. 23) *Philip took the chance of asking Ava to prom. He also took the chance of applying for the Mars mission. At the end of the story, he takes a chance and addresses VidHub viewers, even though doing so could make things worse. Blythe takes a chance on applying for the Mars mission and, when she is accepted, of going to Mars and leaving her life on Earth behind.*

▶ **10. Character** (p. 23) *Philip's main reason seems to be to escape the attention caused by the VidHub video. He sees going to Mars as a way to avoid being made fun of or criticized by others.*

▶ **11. Character** (p. 24) *At first, Philip is terrified of drawing attention to himself. He is trying to solve his problems by avoiding them. At the end of the story, Philip confronts his problems. He goes live on VidHub in front of 10,000 people. He seems to have gained confidence. He changes because of his relationship with Blythe—her belief in him and her encouraging him to keep taking risks.*

3 Reading and Discussing “Could You Be a Mars Colonist?”

(15 minutes, activity sheet online)

- Read the article as a class.
- Discuss the questions that follow, which draw on both the article and the fiction.

Critical-Thinking Questions

(20 minutes, activity sheet online)

▶ **Did Lauren and the other committee members treat Philip fairly?** *Answers will vary, but students are likely to say no. Lauren and the other committee members got Philip's hopes up, making the news that he wasn't selected for the mission all the more painful.*

▶ **What effects do you think the decision to speak to viewers on VidHub will have—on others and on Philip himself? Why?** *Perhaps the decision will cause people to start supporting Philip instead of making fun of him because they will begin to see him as a human being rather than as a joke.*

▶ **Do you think Philip has good reasons for wanting to go to Mars? What about Blythe?** **Explain.** *Answers will vary. Some students may say that Philip's main reason for wanting to go*

to Mars—to escape the VidHub fiasco—is not a good one, and that confronting his problems, as he does at the end of the story, is the way to improve his life. As for Blythe, some students may see her desire to contribute to a fresh start on Mars as noble, while others may think she should stay and work to solve the problems on Earth.

▶ **Choose one of the traits on page 25. Explain how author Kass Morgan shows in “The Mission” that this trait is important.** *Answers will vary. Students may say that Morgan illustrates the idea of independence when Philip and Blythe talk about not being able to text on Mars, for example. Or students could say that Morgan demonstrates the idea of imagination when Blythe suggests she and Philip have a dance party.*

▶ **Based on what you read in the informational text and the story, would you apply for a mission to Mars? Explain.** *Answers will vary.*

4 Skill Building Featured Skill: Synthesis

(15 minutes, activity sheet online)

To prepare students for the prompt on page 25, have them complete the activity **Synthesis: Evaluate Philip**. For alternate culminating tasks, see the box below.

Differentiate and Customize

For Struggling Readers

Complete the following statement: “*The Mission*” implies that it would be important for Mars colonists to be _____ because _____. Support your completed statement with two details from the story.

For Advanced Readers

Choose yourself or someone you know and explain why that person would or would not be a good candidate for a mission to Mars. Draw on ideas in “The Mission” and “Could You Be a Mars Colonist?”

For Fiction Writers

It's one year after “The Mission” takes place. Blythe has been on Mars for six months. Write an email exchange between Blythe and Philip.

For Future Employees of Mars One

You work for Mars One, a company that sends colonists to Mars. Write or make a video for the “Apply for a Mission” page on the Mars One website. Describe the ideal candidate and what applicants should expect if they are chosen. Draw on ideas in “The Mission” and “Could You Be a Mars Colonist?”