

They Might Be Dangerous

Who are the mysterious creatures that crashed down from outer space?

About the Story

Lexile® Measure 720L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective: to analyze characters in a work of fiction, then continue the narrative in a sequel

Featured Skill: character

Additional skills covered in this lesson plan: inference, character, author's craft, figurative language, setting, genre

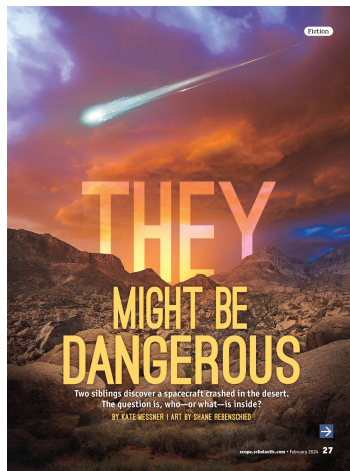
Essential Questions:

- Are humans alone in the universe?
- What causes fear? What are its effects?
- How can people understand and respect those who are different from them?

Standards:

The article and its suite of support materials support these Common Core Anchor Standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.6, W.3, SL.1

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



Your Teaching Package

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

Audio:

- Story read-aloud
- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

Slideshow:

- Vocabulary

Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- "Are Those Aliens?"
- "The Day We Sent a Message to Aliens"
- "What We Saw"

Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Theme Anticipation Guide
- Vocabulary: Definitions
- Featured Skill: Character
- Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking Questions
- Choice Board
- Lesson Plan Slide Deck
- **Core Skills Workout:** Inference
- Quiz*

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Featured Skill

1. Prepare to Read (20 minutes)

Do Now: Anticipation Guide (10 minutes)

- Project the **Theme Anticipation Guide** on your whiteboard or share the Google Form version with each student (both are available in your Resources tab). Have students decide whether they agree or disagree with each statement, then discuss. After reading the story, ask students how they think the characters would respond to the statements in the Theme Anticipation Guide.

Preview Vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Project the **Vocabulary Slideshow** on your whiteboard. Review the definitions and complete the activity as a class. The audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud of the definitions are embedded on the slides. Highlighted words: *annihilate*, *celestial*, *colonize*, *cosmos*, *electromagnetic*, *keening*, *presumed*, *telepathic*, *veered*.

2. Read and Discuss (75 minutes)

- Read the “As You Read” box on page 28 or at the top of the digital story page.
- For students’ first read, have them follow along as they listen to the **audio read-aloud**. The read-aloud is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- Optionally, have students reread and annotate the story independently. Here are some symbols you might have them use:

! = I’m surprised.

? = This is unfamiliar.

★ = This is important.

💬 = “I wonder . . .” (add comments or questions)

♥ = I love this.

- Divide students into groups to discuss the close-reading questions along with their annotations. (The close-reading questions appear in the margins of the print magazine or by clicking on the bolded words on the digital story page.) If you'd like students to respond in writing, an interactive and printable **Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking activity** is available in your Resources tab.

Close-Reading Questions

(30 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

- 1. Why do Zak and Alia want to avoid the watchers?** (inference) *Based on the way Zak commands Alia not to touch the wreckage, his urgency to leave the park, and his fear that he and Alia will get in trouble if they don't leave, readers can infer that the watchers control the search for intelligent life in their galaxy and don't take kindly to interference. Later, it is revealed that the watchers' goal is to take control of other planets, no matter who already lives there. The watchers are clearly an intimidating force in Zak's and Alia's eyes.*
- 2. How are Alia and Zak different from one another?** (character) *It's clear that Alia is full of curiosity, longs for adventure, and wants to push the boundaries that have been set for her. She has difficulty sitting still at school, she always wants to explore further into the desert (against her parents' rules), and she is excited and fearless at the prospect of meeting life from other planets. Zak seems to be the opposite of Alia. He is fearful of the unknown and the authorities.*
- 3. Why do you think the author put the dialogue in italics instead of quotation marks?** (author's craft) *Later in the story, it is revealed that Zak and Alia communicate telepathically; they do not speak to each other aloud. This is likely the reason the author put the dialogue in italics instead of quotation marks; quotation marks are traditionally used for spoken language. Perhaps the author used the italics as a subtle hint that Alia and Zak are not human.*
- 4. How does the line "Zak's fear filled the air like fog" contribute to the mood of the story?** (figurative language) *Fog is a weather phenomenon where moisture in the air creates a dense, hazy, and disorienting atmosphere. Instead of saying that Zak was afraid, the author describes Zak's fear as though it were physically present and hanging in the atmosphere as fog does. This simile conveys the idea that Zak's fear is thick, enveloping, and obscuring. This line contributes to the mood of unease and uncertainty in the story around who or what is in the pod and what the right thing to do is.*
- 5. What does Alia mean by "just like us"? What does Zak mean by "just like us"?** (inference, character) *When Alia asks, "What if they're just like us?," she is suggesting that the beings in the pod might have a lot in common with her and Zak; that they might have similar emotions, thoughts, or behaviors, and that because of this, Alia and Zak should treat them with the same kindness and compassion that they would treat members of their own species. When Zak says, "Exactly. What if those awful-looking things are just like us?," he means that the creatures may*

share the dark side of Zak and Alia's kind—the side that wants to destroy others' homes and colonize their planets. He sees the aliens as a threat—just as those on his planet are a threat to other intelligent life—and therefore doesn't want to interact with them, let alone help them.

6. **Where does this story take place? What details reveal the setting?** (setting, genre) *The story takes place on a planet that is not Earth. The details that reveal the setting include: Mip, which readers are likely to have assumed is a dog, turns out to have antennas and a horn; Alia has wings and an antenna; Alia and Zak communicate telepathically; and most revealing of all, the pod from another planet has the word Earth written on it.*
7. **Who are the creatures in the pod? How do you think they would answer Alia's questions?** (inference, critical thinking) *The creatures in the pod are human beings from Earth. These humans would likely answer that they do indeed dream of holding star scraps in their hands, like Alia, and that they do dream of meeting someone like Alia. Like Alia, humans are naturally curious beings. For as long as we have walked the earth, we have gazed up at the sky and wondered what might be out there.*

“Desert Eclipse”

- Read the essay as a class. Optionally, have students listen to the essay being read aloud. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- As a class, discuss the following **Critical-Thinking Questions**, some of which apply to both the story and the essay. Optionally, have students respond to these questions using a “graffiti wall” conversation:
 - Cover tables, boards, and/or walls with large pieces of butcher paper.
 - Post one question in the center of each paper. Give each student a marker. (Having students write in marker will make the boards easier to read from a distance than if students write in pencil or pen.)
 - Students should remain silent as they visit each “graffiti wall” and respond in writing to the questions. Encourage them to respond to ideas that other students have written with questions, comments, and pictures.

Critical-Thinking Questions

(20 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **What motivates Alia to stay as the watchers arrive at the end of the story? Predict what you think will happen after the watchers arrive.** *Answers will vary.*
2. **Which details does the author include to lead readers to assume Zak, Alia, and Mip are Earthlings? What is the purpose of waiting until the end of the story to reveal that they are not Earthlings? Zak and Alia go to school, have parents who set rules, and have a**

brother-sister relationship that is like that of many human siblings. Mip has a damp nose and a furry head that Zak scratches, she pants, and she sniffs things she is curious about; these details could all be used in the description of a dog. The author likely leads readers to believe Alia and Zak are human to help readers relate to Alia and Zak—and to think of the creatures in the pod as grotesque, possibly dangerous aliens. Up until almost the very end of the story, readers think of Zak and Alia as “us” and the creatures in the pod as “them.” When it’s revealed that the creatures in the pod are actually humans, readers are surprised and have to rethink who is “us” and who is “them.” This gives the story an interesting twist and makes readers consider how people treat those who are different or who they see as outsiders.

3. **Why do you think the title of the story is “They Might Be Dangerous”?** *The title reflects Zak’s fear of creatures he doesn’t know. It refers to an assumption that what is unknown is scary or dangerous.*
4. **Consider this line: “And yet, if that were her inside the pod, she’d hope someone would choose courage over fear.” What does it mean to choose courage over fear? Can you think of examples of other characters in literature who choose courage over fear? Can you think of examples of real people from history who chose courage over fear?** *Students may offer that choosing courage over fear means making a conscious decision to act despite feeling afraid or apprehensive. People who choose courage over fear face challenges or potentially dangerous situations with bravery in hopes that their actions can lead to positive change—for themselves as individuals, for a community, for the world. Students might offer examples of characters from literature such as Katniss Everdeen from the Hunger Games series, Harry Potter and Hogwarts students from the Harry Potter series, August Pullman from Wonder, Liesel Meminger from The Book Thief, and Starr Carter from The Hate U Give. They might mention people from history such as Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King Jr., Malala Yousafzai, Ruby Bridges, and Anne Frank.*
5. **What connections can you make between what the author describes in the essay “Desert Eclipse” and the story “They Might Be Dangerous”?** *The author camped out to view a lunar eclipse in the Anza-Borrego Desert, and Alia and Zak live on a desert planet; the author describes an experience involving a stink bug, and like stink bugs, Alia and Zak have wings and antennas; the author relates observing a celestial event with wonder, just as Alia is fascinated by the stars and the secrets of the galaxy; the author explains that the stink bug in the desert appeared gross to a young boy, just as the aliens appear grotesque to Alia and Zak; Joe, the desert guide, protected the stink bug and its home, just as Alia wants to protect and help the Earthlings.*
6. **What message do you think the author wants readers to take away from “They Might Be Dangerous” and “Desert Eclipse”?** *Answers will vary, but students may offer ideas along the lines of “We should not assume that what is unfamiliar is harmful.”*

3. Write Your Sequel (60 minutes)

- Have students use the **Featured Skill Activity: Character** to help them to respond to the writing prompt on page 31 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page:

Consider the last line of the story: “She knew what she had to do.” What does Alia have to do? What happens after the watchers arrive? Write a sequel to the story that answers these questions. Be sure to stay true to the characters.

- Alternatively, have students choose a task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of culminating tasks. (Our Choice Board options include the writing prompt from the magazine, differentiated versions of the writing prompt, and additional creative ways for students to demonstrate their understanding of a story.)

Other stories from the Scope archives that address the question “Are we alone?”:

- Narrative Nonfiction: [“Are Those Aliens?”](#)
- Short Read: [“The Day We Sent a Message to Aliens”](#)
- Fiction: [“What We Saw”](#)