

Are Those Aliens?

The mystery of UFOs and the search for extraterrestrial life

About the Story

Lexile: 870L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective: to evaluate evidence that appears in a nonfiction article

Key Skills: inference, cause and effect, text structure, key ideas and details, evaluating evidence

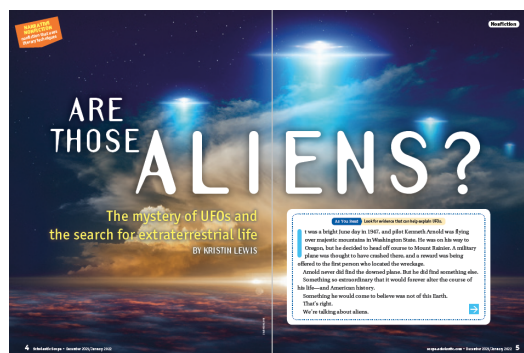
Essential Questions:

- Is there life on other planets?
- What is the universe, and what is Earth's place in it?
- What drives humans to explore?

Standards:

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards:
R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.7, W.1, W.2, 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 support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Author read-aloud
- Text-to-speech

Slideshow: Vocabulary Slideshow

Video: Beyond the Story

Differentiated Articles:

- Lower-Lexile version
- Spanish language version

Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- "The Day We Sent a Message to Aliens"
- *War of the Worlds*
- "What We Saw"
- "Life in the Quiet Zone"
- "Grammar Loves These Aliens"

Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Preparing to Write: Explaining UFOs
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Vocabulary Definitions
- Video Discussion Questions
- Nonfiction Elements
- **Core Skills Workout:** Summarizing,* Text Features, Text Structure*
- Choice Board
- Quiz*
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels



Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read

30 minutes

Do Now: Journal and Discuss. (10 minutes)

- Journal: Project the prompts below on your whiteboard. Have students choose one prompt to respond to in their journal, on a piece of paper, or in their own document.
 1. Do you think intelligent life exists on other planets? Why or why not? If you do, do you think we will ever find it?
 2. List as many books, movies, and TV shows about outer space and/or extraterrestrial life as you can think of. Why do you think these topics are so popular? What do you like about them?
 3. Imagine a group of space aliens has been traveling the galaxy for years, documenting life on each planet they have visited. They have recently landed on Earth. What do they have to say about it?
 4. Compose a message to all intelligent life-forms in the universe. What should they know about our planet and humankind? How might you help them understand what it's like here?
- Discuss: Have students gather in groups according to which prompt they chose and discuss their responses. Then have a member of each group share commonalities and interesting ideas that came up during their discussion.

Watch the Video (10 minutes)

- Watch the **Beyond the Story** video, which builds background knowledge about space and our universe. Have students respond to the **Video Discussion Questions** (available in your Resources tab) in small groups or pairs.

Preview Vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Project the **Vocabulary Slideshow** on your whiteboard. Review the definitions and complete the activity as a class. Highlighted words: *extraterrestrials*, *frenzy*, *microorganisms*, *scrutiny*. (Optionally, share the slideshow link directly to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity independently beforehand.) The audio pronunciations of the words are embedded on the slides.

2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

- Have a volunteer read the As You Read box on page 5 of the magazine or at the top of the digital story page.
- Read the article once as a class. (*Differentiation: Share the **lower-Lexile version** or the **Spanish language version** of the article.*) Optionally, have students listen to Kristin Lewis read her article aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- Divide students into groups to read the story again and respond to the following close-reading questions.

Close-Reading Questions (30 minutes)

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

1. **Lewis writes that Arnold found “something so extraordinary that it would forever alter the course of his life—and American history.” How did Arnold’s experience alter the course of American history?** (cause and effect) *Arnold’s report sparked an immediate national interest in UFOs. The number of reported sightings exploded in the month following his report and continued for years to come. The explosion of sightings in the Southwest specifically led to an entire tourism industry around UFOs. And as the timeline “Aliens Through Time” makes clear, the country’s obsession with extraterrestrial life was reflected in popular culture—appearing in books, films, comics, TV shows, and more.*
2. **How does the section “What’s Out There?” contribute to the article?** (text structure) *The section “What’s Out There?” helps readers understand that the belief that we might not be alone in the universe has been around since long before Arnold’s report—since the beginning of human history, in fact. It also illustrates that while our fascination and curiosity have remained constant, our understanding of the universe is ever-evolving: Great and powerful beings in the night sky were constellations, flying spheres battling overhead were a weather phenomenon called a sun dog, and perceived canals made by martians were likely just a dust storm or an optical illusion. This information introduces readers to the possibility that mysterious UFO sightings like Arnold’s may have a simple explanation.*
3. **What role has Area 51 played in the history of UFO sightings in the U.S.?** (key ideas and details) *The activity on the Area 51 military base—namely the testing of new and secret types of aircraft—likely explains many of the UFOs that were reported.*

Critical-Thinking Questions

(15 minutes)

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

1. In what ways, if any, do you think differently about UFOs after reading this article? **About the existence of extraterrestrial life?** *Answers will vary.*
2. In the final lines of the article, Lewis writes, “But [Arnold’s] story reveals a deeper truth: Human curiosity is powerful. So too is our imagination. And whatever is waiting out there in the mysterious, wondrous expanse of space, it will take both to find it.” **What is the power of human curiosity? Human imagination?** *Answers will vary. Students may offer that without curiosity and imagination, our lives would be boring and meaningless; the moments in which we are curious or using our imagination are the moments we feel most alive. Curiosity draws us to things we find interesting; it prompts us to observe them more fully and seek to understand them. Imagination allows us to bring to mind things that aren’t present, things that have never been but could be. This incredible capacity gives us the power to create, invent, and problem-solve.*
3. **Do you think it is important to explore space? Explain.** *Answers will vary. Students may say there are many problems to deal with on Earth that are more important and urgent, or that space exploration is expensive and causes pollution. They may also offer that what we learn in space can benefit us here on Earth and inspire and unite the people of the planet in shared exploration.*

3. Skill Building and Writing

45 minutes

- Have students complete **Preparing to Write: Explaining UFOs**. This activity will help them evaluate evidence and organize their ideas in preparation for the writing prompt that appears on page 10 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.
- Alternatively, have students choose a culminating task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of differentiated activities.

Connected readings from the Scope archives about space exploration and extraterrestrial life:

- Short Read: [“The Day We Sent a Message to Aliens”](#) (February 2020)
- Drama: [War of the Worlds](#) (March 2017)
- Fiction and Informational Text: [“What We Saw”](#) and [“Are We Alone?”](#) (November 2017)
- Short Read: [“Life in the Quiet Zone”](#) (May 2021)
- Grammar: [“Grammar Loves These Aliens”](#) (October 2019)



Nonfiction, pages 4-10

Featured Skill: evaluating evidence