



Teacher Notes

Moonie and Junie: Interstellar Pen Pals

Written by Katie Kordesh

Teacher notes prepared by Karys McEwen

Publication details

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Reader ages: 7-12 years

About the Book

Two friends separated by the stars. One bottle that brings them together.

Moonie, stuck on a moon with only her rock collection, desperately wants a friend. So she launches a message in a bottle into space hoping it finds someone who will write back. Junie, stuck on Mars with her family during a boring holiday, is happy just studying the world around her. But when Moonie's message in a bottle lands in her lap, she can't help but respond.

Soon the two are pen pals, but when Moonie's eagerness for them to meet clashes with Junie's shyness, their budding friendship is put to the test ...

About the Author

KATIE KORDESH is an author-illustrator based in Los Angeles. Drawing on inspiration from her childhood in the Midwest, Katie aims to tell stories

that make kids laugh, provide a sense of comfort and transport them to other worlds. Before illustrating books, Katie spent several years as a social media illustrator at the NFL. She hopes that her latest graphic novel, *Moonie and Junie: Interstellar Pen Pals*, will inspire children to create their own comics and write letters to their friends.

Learning areas:

- English
 - Language
 - Literature
 - Literacy
- Science
- Health and Physical Education
- Humanities and Social Sciences
- Design and Technologies

Core capabilities:

- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Personal and Social Capability
- Ethical Understanding

Cross curriculum priorities:

- Sustainability

Themes

- Friendship
- Loneliness
- Belonging
- Shyness and social anxiety
- Communication and correspondence
- Respecting boundaries
- Empathy and compromise
- Curiosity
- Scientific discovery
- Courage
- Forgiveness
- Collaboration

Before reading

- Examine the cover and title. What can you infer about Moonie, the setting and the message in a bottle? What questions do you have about Junie, who is named but not shown?
- What is a pen pal? How is writing to a pen pal different from talking face to face or sending a quick message?
- The subtitle calls Moonie and Junie “interstellar” pen pals. What does interstellar mean? Where do you predict each character lives?
- Preview a page from inside the book. How do panels, speech bubbles, lettering and colour tell you this is a graphic novel?
- Imagine receiving a message in a bottle from space. What would you want to know about its sender? Write three questions you would ask.
- Discuss whether friends need to enjoy the same activities or communicate in the same way. What can help a friendship between very different people succeed?
- Moonie is eager to meet her new friend, while Junie is more comfortable communicating from a distance. Without knowing the story, how could both characters’ needs be respected?

Comprehension questions

- Why does Moonie send a message in a bottle into space? What has she already tried?
- Where is Junie when she finds Moonie’s message, and why is she reluctant to socialise with JJ?
- What does Junie hope to create? How does she think Moonie can help?
- How do the letters and walkie-talkies change Moonie’s life on the moon?
- Why does Moonie want Junie to visit? Why does Junie initially refuse?
- What does Moonie find in the moon cave, and why is Junie worried about the discovery?
- How does Junie explain the difference between “Normal Junie” and “Socialized Junie”? What does her letter help Moonie understand?
- How does Moonie trick Junie’s family into travelling to the moon? Why does she convince herself this is acceptable?
- Why does Junie become angry when she discovers the truth? What does each character accuse the other of failing to understand?
- What causes Moonie to recognise that she has not considered what Junie wanted?
- How do Moonie and Junie work together to rescue Egg? What strength does each character contribute?
- What does Egg turn out to be, and how does Duck-Duck save the girls?
- How do Moonie and Junie begin to repair their friendship? What do Moonie’s apology, the rescue and their shared adventure contribute?
- Why do Mr and Mrs Holmes invite Moonie and Duck-Duck to join the family vacation?
- How have Moonie and Junie each changed by the end of the novel?

Literacy

GRAPHIC NOVEL STORYTELLING

- Katie Kordesh uses panels, speech bubbles, lettering, facial expressions and visual pacing to communicate action and emotion. Many pages contain very little narration, requiring readers to infer meaning from the images and page design.

- Select a page with no dialogue and annotate the visual clues that help readers understand what is happening. Consider character movement, gaze, framing, colour and the space between panels.
- Compare a quiet exchange of letters with the fast-paced rescue of Egg. How do panel size, page turns, sound effects and lettering change the pace?
- Rewrite one page as prose. What information must you add that the illustrations previously communicated? Then compare which version creates greater immediacy.
- Create a six-panel comic in which a message travels somewhere unexpected. Include at least two panel shapes, a sound effect and a character reaction that is shown rather than explained.
- Create parallel character maps for Moonie and Junie. Add actions, dialogue and visual evidence that demonstrate each trait rather than simply naming it.
- Construct a double timeline showing moments when Moonie moves too quickly and moments when Junie's caution is helpful. Add moments when each character steps outside their comfort zone.
- Re-enact the argument at the crater as a freeze-frame. Give each character an internal monologue explaining what she needs and why she feels hurt.
- Write an additional scene in which their contrasting strengths help solve a new problem during the family vacation.

LETTERS, FIELD NOTES AND VOICE

- The graphic novel combines dialogue-driven comics with letters, lists, maps, scientific notes and field-guide entries. These text types reveal the characters' distinct personalities while moving the story forward.
- Compare Moonie's first letter with Junie's first response. Identify differences in greeting, vocabulary, sentence structure, presentation and tone. What does each letter reveal about its writer?
- Sort examples from the book into qualitative and quantitative observations. Conduct a short observation of the school grounds and record at least three of each.
- Examine Junie's formal sign-offs and Moonie's conversational style. Rewrite the same piece of news in both voices without naming either character. Can a partner identify the writer?
- Design a field guide entry for Duck-Duck. Include a labelled illustration, habitat, physical features, behaviour, diet, a qualitative observation and a quantitative measurement or estimate.

CHARACTERISATION AND CONTRAST

- Moonie is impulsive, energetic and desperate for company; Junie is cautious, methodical and anxious about face-to-face interaction. Their differences create conflict, but ultimately make them a stronger team.

Final reflections:

- Moonie wants closeness, while Junie needs space and time. What does the novel suggest about respecting different ways of being a friend?
- Was Moonie's plan to bring Junie to the moon understandable? Was it fair? Explain the difference between understanding a choice and excusing it.
- Junie tells Moonie, "If you were REALLY my friend, you would have respected that." (p. 111) What boundary has Moonie crossed, and how could she have acted differently?
- What does Junie risk or overcome while helping Moonie rescue the creature they call Egg? Before accepting the invitation to join Junie's family vacation, what does Moonie do differently?
- How do the characters move from colleagues, to friends, to best friends? Identify the turning points in their relationship.
- What do you think Moonie and Junie will discover on their next adventure?

Creative activities:

- Invent a character living somewhere else in the solar system. Write their first letter to an unknown pen pal, explaining where they live, what their daily life is like and what they hope to find in a friend. Exchange letters with a classmate and respond in character.
- Choose a planet, moon or imagined world and create a two-page field-guide entry. Include a map, labelled drawings, environmental conditions, notable flora or

fauna, useful equipment and safety advice. Clearly distinguish researched facts from invented details.

- Moonie relies on a message in a bottle, printed letters and walkie-talkies. Design a device or system that could carry messages across space. Draw and label a prototype, explain how it works and identify one problem the design must overcome.
- Retell the arrival at Casa De La Lune twice: first as Moonie, who is excited about meeting her friend, and then as Junie, who realises she has been tricked. Use a different colour palette, thought bubbles and panel arrangement to reflect each perspective.
- Create an honest travel brochure for a destination from the novel or one of your own inventions. Include attractions, scientific features, accommodation, a packing list and clear warnings. Unlike Moonie's brochure, make sure every claim is truthful!
- Working in groups, create a guide for communicating well with friends. Include advice about listening, asking before making plans, respecting boundaries, apologising and finding compromises. Illustrate each tip with a small comic inspired by the graphic novel