

CURRICULUM GUIDE

DOWN TO EARTH

BY BETTY CULLEY



Grades: 3-7

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HENRY BOWER has always been fascinated by rocks. So, when a giant meteorite falls in his family's field, who better to investigate than this rock enthusiast—along with his best friend, James, and little sister, Birdie.

The small town of Lowington, Maine, is home to generations of Bowers, who use forked branches to search for underground water. When the water in town starts drying up, rumors spread that Henry's space rock might be the cause, and some people blame the Bowers.

Homeschooled Henry is determined to protect his newest discovery, but no amount of geology knowledge can prepare him for how much this stone from the sky will change his community, his family, and even himself.

Betty Culley's classic storytelling and lyrical prose merge science with wonder in this compelling novel about an inquisitive boy and the massive rock that came down to Earth to reshape his life.

★ "A captivating middle-grade novel." —*BOOKLIST*, starred review

A JUNIOR LIBRARY GUILD SELECTION

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Henry's adventure in *Down to Earth* was inspired by Betty's own fascination with meteorites, voyagers from another place and time. Betty Culley is the acclaimed author of the YA novel in verse *Three Things I Know Are True*, which was a Kids' Indie Next List Top Ten Pick and an ALA-YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults selection. She's also the author of the middle-grade novel *The Natural Genius of Ants*. Betty has worked as a pediatric nurse and lives in a small town in central Maine.



Sarah J. Truman

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-READING DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

- Most people get water from a faucet, but have you ever thought about the journey water takes before it reaches the sink? Do some research into where water comes from in your area. Is it a lake? A river? An underground well? Draw a diagram of how water in your area reaches your house or school and the stops it makes along the way.
- Look at the cover of *Down to Earth*. What does the cover illustration tell you about the setting? What details do you notice in the fireball? Based on the art, what do you think the book might be about?
- Is there a special skill or job your family or friends can all do? Can you do it, too? How do you feel when you can participate? How do you feel when you cannot?

WHILE YOU READ QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- What does Henry's family do for a living, and how does Henry feel about his family's profession?
- Henry tends to think of people and situations in terms of percentages: "I'm twenty percent wondering if dowsers are born with special hearing or smell senses that help them find water." (pp. 7) Can you describe something about a situation you've experienced in terms of percents?
- At the end of chapter two Henry feels a strange tug on his dowsing stick. How does the behavior of the dowsing rod foreshadow the action that is to come in chapter three?
- What unique sight does Henry witness when he climbs the ladder to the roof of his house? How does Henry feel in that moment?
- In the field Birdie names an object "Hat." Can you describe the object? Why does Birdie give it that name?
- What is one of the unexpected results that the meteorite landing has on the town of Lowington? Why are some people less excited about Henry's discovery?
- Do you think Mr. Ronnie would agree with Henry's grandmother when she said, "there are some things that aren't for sale"? (pp. 70) Explain what you think Henry's grandmother meant by this statement and if Mr. Ronnie might agree or disagree.

- Henry, his mom, James, and Birdie go to investigate the damage the flood caused. They are shocked to see that their house is gone. Henry and James had only ten minutes the night before to save some of the family’s belongings. If you were faced with an emergency, what would you save from your home? List one reason why you would save each item.
- Describe what you think Henry means when he says, “... the best thing that ever happened, the meteorite landing, also made the worst thing happen.” (pp. 80)
- What actions do Mr. Ronnie and his son take when they suspect the Bower family had something to do with the town’s water supply drying up? Why might Mr. Ronnie and his son react in this manner? What other actions could they have taken instead?
- Sometimes the worst situations can bring out the best in people. Cite examples from the story that show how the Bower family is supported through their hardships.
- The little stone Henry received from Dr. Morgan helped the Bower family find water for the town. Do you think that Henry is sorry for losing the rock? Why or why not?
- Henry faced many challenges in *Down to Earth*. What do you think is the main lesson Henry learned through his adventure in the story? How has Henry’s outlook on life changed since he found his meteorite?

The following Common Core State Standards can be used to support discussions and shape lessons inspired by *Down to Earth*:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.2
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.7
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.7
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.7
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.9
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.9
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.9
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.9
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.9
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.2
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.2
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.2
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.B
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3.B
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3.B
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3.B
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.B
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.7
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.7
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.7
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.7
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.7

The discussion questions, activities, and worksheets in this guide were created by Leigh Courtney, Ph.D. She teaches in the Global Education program at a public elementary school in San Diego, California. She holds both masters’ and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

“WHY DOES . . .?”

Henry keeps a notebook where he records the questions he has about the world, such as what makes a dowsing stick move to the water; if his meteorite broke off from an even larger rock; and how animals find watering holes. Fold three pieces of notebook paper in half hamburger style. Place three staples along the crease. You’ve created a notebook! Now label the front: “Wonder Questions.” Spend the next few days recording questions that cause you to wonder. After a few days, share your collection of wonder questions with a partner. Do you know the answer to any of their questions? Can they help you answer yours? Select one question from your booklet that interests you the most. Research for information that will help you answer your question. Organize your research into a report and share it with your class.

THE SUN IN YOUR UNIVERSE

Henry describes the meteorite as, “the new sun in my universe, the very center of everything, and I’m like its Earth.” (pp. 41) Think about what is most important to you in your life. What is the sun in your universe? Write a personal narrative about what is most meaningful thing or person in your life. Make sure to include sensory details.

LEARNING ABOUT AHNIGHTO

From a young age, Henry has been fascinated by rocks. How fortunate he was to have an enormous meteorite land on his property! Henry loved looking up information about famous meteorites in his encyclopedia. Follow Henry’s lead and do your own research on the history of the Ahnighito meteorite. If you get the chance to travel to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, you can see the meteorite for yourself! Compile your research into an informative report about this famous meteorite. Be sure to cite your sources!

POINT OF VIEW

Henry feels an instant connection to the meteorite that has fallen on his family’s land. In chapter seven, he visits the meteorite on his own, climbs to the top of it, and begins to record questions in his notebook that he wishes to ask the meteorite. Use the questions that Henry wonders about the meteorite as a starting place for a written piece from the meteorite’s point of view. How might the meteorite answer some of the questions that Henry poses? What could the rock tell Henry about its journey through the universe?

DRAW “HAT”

Create a detailed portrait of the meteorite in the Bower’s hayfield based on Henry’s description in chapter four on pages 21-24. Include the relative size, the surroundings, and color of the meteorite in your drawing.

Name: _____

INTERPRETING THE COVER

Look carefully at the cover illustration of *Down to Earth*. What items do you see in the fireball? Below, list these items and make predictions about their relevance to the story. After reading the novel, add their actual meanings.

ITEM IN THE FIREBALL ILLUSTRATION	PREDICTION OF WHAT YOU THINK IT WILL MEAN	WHAT THE ITEM MEANS (AFTER READING THE STORY)

After reading, think back to the story about other items from *Down to Earth* that could have been included in the fireball. List these new ideas and their significance.

NEW ITEM FROM THE STORY TO BE INCLUDED IN THE FIREBALL	MEANING OF ITEM

Name: _____

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Think carefully about the events and characters in *Down to Earth*. How can you connect this story to other books you've read, experiences you've had, or similar things that have happened in the real world?

TEXT TO SELF

Connections you can make between the story and your own life experiences

TEXT TO TEXT

Connections you can make to other things you have read—stories from a similar genre, characters you can connect to Henry or others in this novel, books with similar plot elements or themes, etc.

TEXT TO WORLD

Broader connections you can make between this story and something you've learned from television, films, or articles

Name: _____

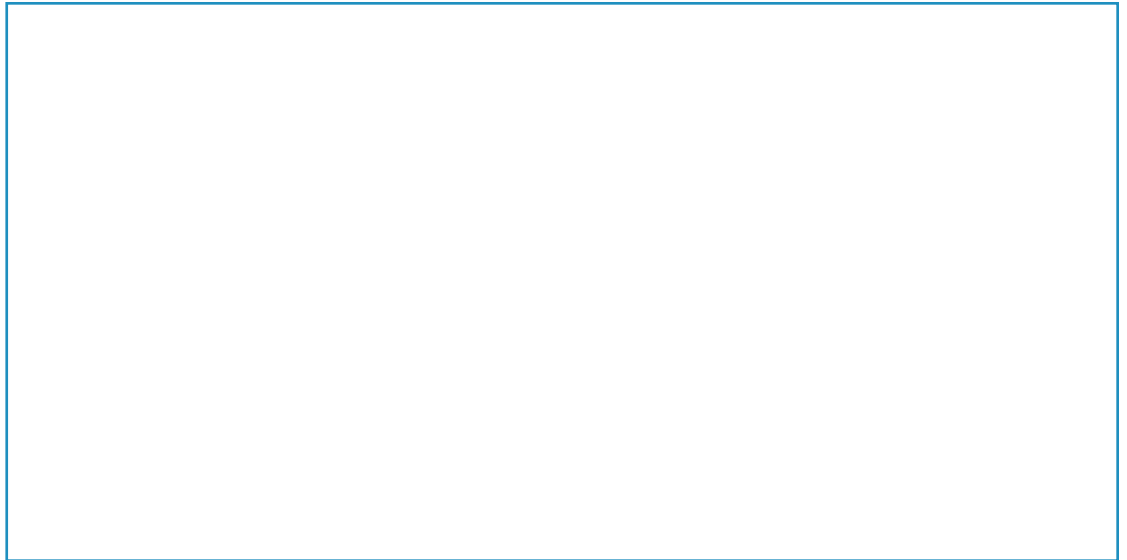
LOOKING CLOSELY AT THE SETTING

What is the primary setting of *Down to Earth*?

List three quotes from the text that describe the setting of the novel.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Based on the details provided in the quotes from the story, create an illustration of the setting.



What role does the setting play in *Down to Earth*?
