



A Common Core State Standards Aligned
Discussion & Project Guide
for Grades 4–6

A Stitch in Time

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Written by Daphne Kalmar

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Synopsis: Donut is an eleven-year old geography buff who keeps her taxidermied mice hidden in her late mother's hope chest. Her pops passed away, leaving her an orphan. Aunt Agnes has moved in, bringing along her lumpy oatmeal, knitting, and a plan to drag Donut off to Boston forever. Donut stands to lose everything: her friends, her village, her home, the woods, and walks where the memories of her pops are stored up. While Donut dodges the ache of missing her pops, she and her best friend Tiny plan how to keep her where she belongs.



Kalmar's debut has an authentic voice that brings her protagonist vividly to life...

– Booklist, starred review



Kalmar introduces a delightfully intricate character in Donut...

– Publisher's Weekly, starred review



Guide created by Debbie Gonzales, MFA

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Meet the Author



Daphne Kalmar was an elementary and middle-school teacher for over twenty years. Exploring the natural world with kids was her passion as an educator—she owned seventy-five pairs of rubber boots so she could outfit each new class in September and lead weekly expeditions to local creeks and ponds. She has an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts. *A Stitch in Time* is her debut.



Discussion Questions

The shed had been closed up tight since the accident. Since her pops had died. Maybe it was a mistake to open the door. A piece of him that was stored up inside would float up into the clouds (pg. 7).

- The definition of a *metaphor* is something regarded as representative or symbolic of something else. Explore ways that the shed is serving as a metaphor for Donut's emotional state of being.
- Discuss why she is concerned that opening the door might be a mistake.
- Consider how the clouds mentioned in this quote might represent a metaphor of some kind. If so, what could it be?
- What does Donut really want and what is keeping her from getting it?

Aunt Agnes sighed. "All my life I've fought for women's rights and these girls. . . Well, we didn't march in the bitter cold and go on hunger strikes in jail cells so they could hem their skirts a few inches higher" (pg. 37).



Photo Credit: Wikipedia

- The hunger strikes and imprisonment Aunt Agnes endured were a result of her firm belief in equal rights for all women, even for Donut. What does her willingness to suffer in this way reveal about Aunt Agnes's character? Does Donut appreciate Aunt Agnes's sacrifice? Why or why not?
- Do you think that Aunt Agnes's determined efforts to take Donut to Boston is a result of the same spirit of sacrifice? Explain your answer.
- Compare Aunt Agnes's rigid tidiness and Sam's artistic disorganized way of life. Explore reasons why Donut desires to live with Sam rather than her aunt. Which home would you prefer to live in? Why?

Donut stared down at the Rand McNally World Atlas, third edition. She's been saving for more than a year now, only two dollars short of her goal. She'd only told Sam, Tiny, and her pops. Aunt Agnes has no business nosing around, uncovering her secrets and private hopes and stealing them (pg. 58).

- Explain why Donut is rejecting Aunt Agnes's gift.
- Explore the phrase "uncovering her secrets." List reasons why giving the new atlas as a gift is considered to be a threat to Donut.
- On page 59, Donut expresses that by purchasing the atlas, her aunt had "...found her deepest desire, and stolen it." Do you believe this to be true? If not, identify what Donut's deepest desire really is and how it has been stolen from her.



They wagged their tails in unison, and she gave them each a pat on the head. When a dog wagged his tail, a person knew for absolute certain his happiness was the truth. Smiles could lie. Aunt Agnes's smile was canned peaches (pg. 91).

- In this scene, Donut is telling Marcel that Aunt Agnes wants to take her to Boston to live. Examine his response. Tell why he says that Aunt Agnes is her “family now” (90).
- Lafayette and Rochambeau are typically ferocious when guests arrive. Yet, they wag their tails when Donut is present. Tell why this is so.
- Interpret the phrase “Smiles could lie.” Explain how Aunt Agnes is being untrue to Donut.
- Is Donut being deceptive by being friendly to Marcel in this scene? Is her smile lying, too?
- A can is a sealed container designed to keep the food enclosed inside good to eat. Make a connection with the canned peaches metaphor and Donut's father's shed that had been closed up since the accident that took her father's life.

She'd run away and lost her best friend. She should load all her gear back in the Nehi, go home, and find Tiny, keep saying she was sorry until he forgave her. But she couldn't or she'd end up in Boston. She'd made a mess of things.

“Can't fix it,” she said to herself. (pg. 99).

- Donut explains to Tiny that, because he is not a good liar (98), she left without telling him where she had gone. And yet, she assumes that Aunt Agnes's smile lies, that her aunt is being deceptive and cruel. Analyze the concept of being a “good liar” and a dishonest one.
- Determine why Donut is willing to sacrifice her friendship with Tiny to remain hidden from Aunt Agnes.
- To *fix* something means to mend, rebuild, or to repair. Sam has taught Donut to be a skilled taxidermist by demonstrating how to mend, rebuild, and repair dead animals to become lifelike once again. Discuss the difference between *fixing* relationships as compared to taxidermy skills.
- Explore reasons why Donut seems desperate to mend her relationship with Tiny.

The Durcharme boys were trouble, but they had no liking for grown ups and rules. Their dad snapped orders like he was spitting tacks, and they hopped to it. He was hard on his animals, too (pg. 109).

- Consider how Donut's actions suggest that she, like the Durcharme boys, rejects liking grown ups and rules. That being said, is Donut “trouble”, too? How so?
- Explain how the Durcharme boys's father differed from hers.
- Consider the role of animals in the story. Discuss how Icabod personifies death. Explain why Donut has no fear of the bear. Tell why Marcel's dogs show no contempt for Donut. Tiny's deep sense of loss with Winnie's passing. Discuss the importance of the notched mouse to Donut's character development. And, why knowing that the Durcharme boys's father was hard on his animals is an important detail to know.



The shot was loud, made them jump. Lottie had just dropped, crumbled like she'd emptied out. It was right then that Donut understood the difference between dead and live. Death wasn't some peaceful drifting off. It was a clap of thunder, a door slamming—Lottie, standing, swishing her tail, turned into a slack heap in an instant (pg. 143).

- Explore Donut's recollection of Lottie's passing. Make a connection with death's violent abruptness she describes and the mouse killed by the trap she set, or her father's accident.
- Is there any way to fix death? If not, what can a person do to come to terms with it?
- Authors use a literary tool called a *transition*, which signals that there is going to be a significant change about to take place in the story. Notice that Donut's remembrance of Lottie's passing occurs directly prior to the cabin bursting into flames, after she had drifted off to sleep. Explain the importance of this plot transition.

Donut gave up and cried in earnest, her whole body heaving and shaking with the weight of it all (pg. 152).

- The word *stoic* is defined as a person who can endure pain or hardship without showing their feelings or complaining. Though Donut has been stoic throughout the story, tell why she begins to cry when she felt the warmth of Aunt Agnes's hand on her dirty, scratched face.
- Prior to this moment in the story, Aunt Agnes's character could be described as being *stoic*. If so, consider what pain or hardship she's endured without showing her feelings or complaining.
- The word *earnest* means heartfelt, sincere, and honest. Explain why she surrenders and cries "in earnest" when Aunt Agnes knelt before her to wrap her in a full embrace.
- Interpret what the phrase "with the weight of it all" means. Identify the weight that Donut has been carrying. Has Aunt Agnes been burdened with "the weight of it all", too? How so?
- How does Aunt Agnes feel about Donut in this scene. Describe how she has felt about Donut all along.

Aunt Agnes laughed harder. Donut grinned at her auntie and her auntie grinned back with the all-out truthfulness of a dog's tail wagging. Donut knew right then that it was going to be okay (pg. 162).

- The word *honesty* means openness, confidence, and truthfulness. Consider how both Aunt Agnes's and Donut's willingness to be honest with each other brought about a feeling of openness and joy.
- Examine what both Aunt Agnes and Donut had to be willing to let go of in order to connect with one another in this way.
- Explore the dog's tail wagging metaphor. Discuss how using the same metaphor, featured on page 91, is interpreted differently in this scene.
- Determine why Donut now feels confident that "it was going to be all right." Identify what the *it* she's referencing in this statement. Do you agree with Donut? How so?



Book Cover Analysis

Objective: To recall and interpret relevant information by gathering information from a graphic resource.

Materials:

- *A Stitch in Time*, the book's jacketflap
- The Book Cover Analysis Template (Guide, pg. 7)
- The Book Cover Analysis Template Answers (Guide, pg. 8)
- Pencil
- Markers
- Art paper
- Computer scanner and or other technology

Procedure:

- Explore the importance of a well-crafted book cover. Explain that a book cover “is not only a billboard for the book, but, in a sense, the first page of the story” (Writers and Authors). The book cover communicates the mood and message of the story. The main purpose of the book cover is to make an emotional connection with the reader.
- Instruct students to consider the various illustrations featured on the front cover of the *A Stitch in Time* jacketflap. Discuss how the use of color and font choice help to communicate the message of the story. Explore ways that the book cover makes a suggestion about the historical setting in which the story takes place. Have students describe their emotional connection with the featured graphics.
- Using the **Book Cover Analysis Template** as a guide, identify the graphics highlighted on the template. Tell how each featured item played a key role in the story. Determine how each item connected with Donut's developing character. Consider its relevance in the emotional aspect of the story.
- Encourage students to choose a key scene from the story, one that they feel is most essential to Donut's emotional development. Tell them to describe the setting, the mood, and characters involved in the scene. Instruct students to use art materials to illustrate the scene as if it were a book cover. Identify the colors they would choose to communicate the emotional tone of the scene. Describe the placement of selected items on their book cover and tell why they made the artistic decisions that they did. Have students create a title for their covers based on the action taking place in their selected scene.
- Have students scan their drawings in a computer. Instruct them to use graphic tools to print their title onto the scanned book cover drawing.
- Instruct students to write a short essay describing their process. Have them explain why they felt their selected scene was integral to Donut's emotional growth.
- Have students share their work with the class.

Note: Cover design by [Karl James Mountford](#).

Reference: “Why Book Covers Are So Important.” Writers and Authors, www.writersandauthors.info/2013/07/why-book-covers-are-so-important.html.



Book Cover Analysis Template

Identify each designated feature of the book cover. Explain why it is significant to the story.



Book Cover Analysis Template Answers

Identify each designated feature of the book cover. Explain why it is significant to the story.



Character Analysis Foldable

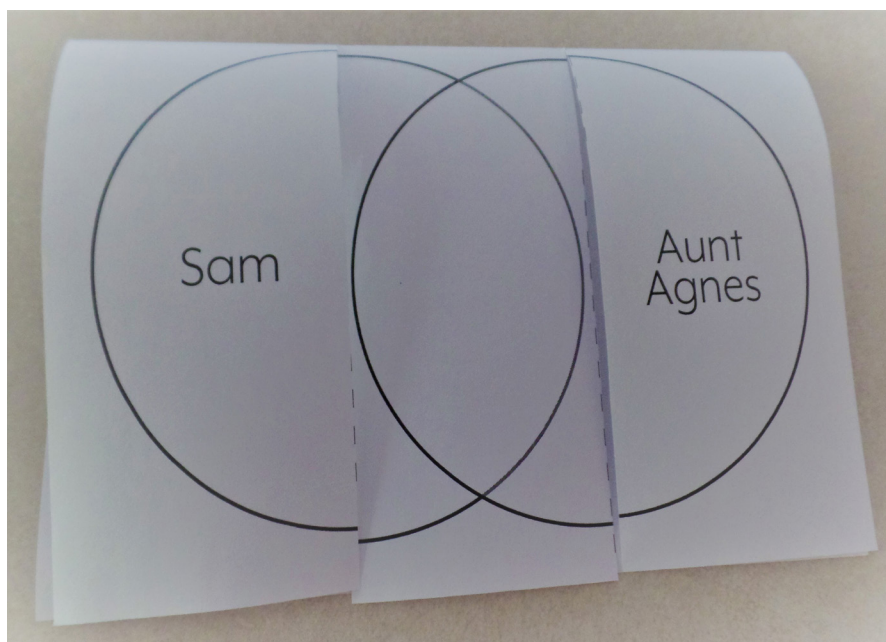
Objective: Compare and contrast the point of view of secondary characters as they relate the protagonist.

Materials:

- *A Stitch in Time*, the book
- Venn Diagram Foldable (Guide, pg. 12)
- Scissors
- Pencils
- Markers

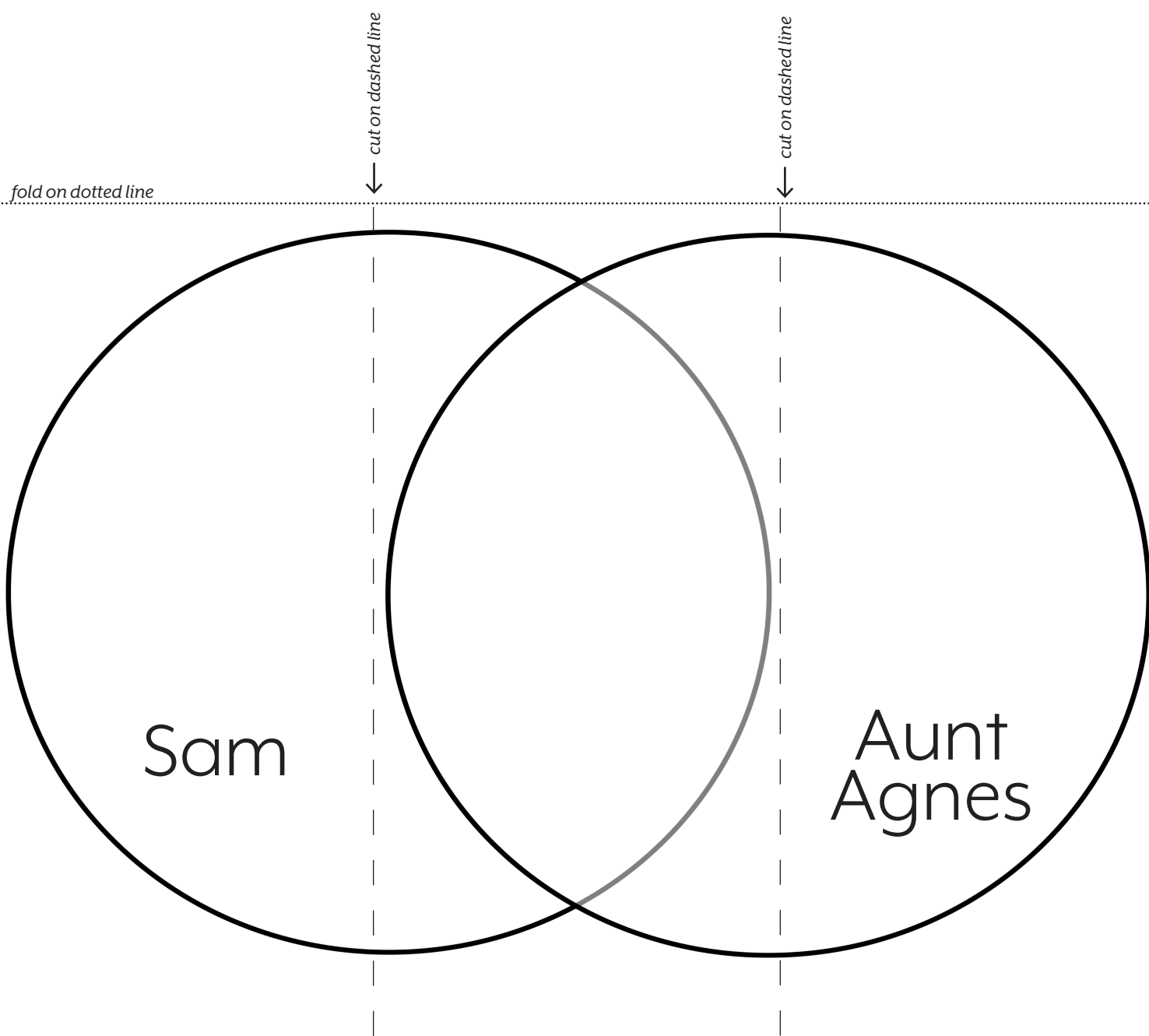
Procedure:

- Print a copy of the Venn Diagram Foldable.
- Fold paper in half along the dotted line.
- Use scissors to cut along the dashed line.
- List contrasting character traits for Sam and Aunt Agnes beneath the outer flaps of the foldable. Consider how they differ physically, professionally, and emotionally.
- Under the center foldable, list similarities of their character traits. Determine how their contrasting traits connect with Donut's character. Tell how she brings them together.
- Illustrate the Venn diagram flaps using the traits listed.
- Write a short essay exploring the similarities and differences of Sam and Aunt Agnes's character as they relate to Donut and her desires.



*Fold template in half along dotted lines. Create flaps by cutting along dashed lines.
List contrasting character traits beneath outer flaps. List comparing traits under center flap.
Illustrate Venn diagram according to listed similar and differing traits.*





Atlas Scavenger Hunt

Using an Atlas as a reference, write the letter of the correct match for each location listed.

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. _____ Pierre | a. A city in Cowley County, Kansas |
| 2. _____ South Dakota | b. Capital of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts |
| 3. _____ Hollywood | c. The home of the U.S. film industry |
| 4. _____ New York City | d. State named after the Lakota and Dakota Sioux Native American tribe |
| 5. _____ Chicago | e. City-parish located along the Mississippi River in the southeastern region of the state of Louisiana |
| 6. _____ Panama Canal | f. Major city located in Illinois on the shores of Lake Michigan |
| 7. _____ Boston | g. The capital of the U.S. state of Louisiana |
| 8. _____ Thunder Butte | h. City located in Toombs County, Georgia |
| 9. _____ St. Louis | i. The capital of the U.S. state of Montana |
| 10. _____ Memphis | j. An artificial waterway that connects the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific Ocean |
| 11. _____ New Orleans | k. A prominent butte landmark located in South Dakota |
| 12. _____ Baton Rouge | l. The most populous city in the United States |
| 13. _____ Vidalia | m. The capital of the U.S. state of South Dakota |
| 14. _____ Arkansas City | n. A major U.S. port in the state of Missouri |
| 15. _____ Helena | o. A City located along the Mississippi River in the U.S. state of Tennessee |



Atlas Scavenger Hunt Answers

Using an Atlas as a reference, write the letter of the correct match for each location listed.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. <u> m </u> Pierre | a. A city in Cowley County, Kansas |
| 2. <u> d </u> South Dakota | b. Capital of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts |
| 3. <u> c </u> Hollywood | c. The home of the U.S. film industry |
| 4. <u> l </u> New York City | d. State named after the Lakota and Dakota Sioux Native American tribe |
| 5. <u> f </u> Chicago | e. City-parish located along the Mississippi River in the southeastern region of the state of Louisiana |
| 6. <u> j </u> Panama Canal | f. Major city located in Illinois on the shores of Lake Michigan |
| 7. <u> b </u> Boston | g. The capital of the U.S. state of Louisiana |
| 8. <u> k </u> Thunder Butte | h. City located in Toombs County, Georgia |
| 9. <u> n </u> St. Louis | i. The capital of the U.S. state of Montana |
| 10. <u> o </u> Memphis | j. An artificial waterway that connects the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific Ocean |
| 11. <u> e </u> New Orleans | k. A prominent butte landmark located in South Dakota |
| 12. <u> g </u> Baton Rouge | l. The most populous city in the United States |
| 13. <u> h </u> Vidalia | m. The capital of the U.S. state of South Dakota |
| 14. <u> a </u> Arkansas City | n. A major U.S. port in the state of Missouri |
| 15. <u> i </u> Helena | o. A City located along the Mississippi River in the U.S. state of Tennessee |



Additional Research Topics

A Stitch in Time is steeped in rich historical references, many of which are listed below. Explore reasons why the author chose to include the historical reference as part of the story line. Write a brief essay summarizing how the references below serve to inform the reader, as well as enhance the plot.

Rand McNally Atlas

Henry Hudson

Lewis and Clark

The Wright Brothers

Encyclopedia Britannica

Ichabod Crane

The Silent Sentinels

Washington Irving

True Confessions Magazine

Theodore Roosevelt

Calvin Coolidge

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Prohibition

The American Revolution

The Court of Rochambeau Marquis of Lafayette

Napolean

Robinson Crusoe



Common Core State Standards Alignment

		Discussion Questions	Book Cover Analysis	Character Analysis	Atlas Scavenger Hunt	Additional Research
English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature						
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1	Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.	•	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.2	Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.	•	•			
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.3	Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).	•		•		
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text.	•			•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.6	Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.	•		•		
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.10	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, in the grades 4-5 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.	•	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.1	Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.	•				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2	Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.	•	•			
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.3	Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).	•		•		
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.	•			•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.5	Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.	•				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.7	Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text.		•			
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.10	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, at the high end of the grades 4-5 text complexity band independently and proficiently.	•	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.1	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	•				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.2	Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.	•	•			
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.3	Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.	•				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.	•			•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.5	Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.	•				



		Discussion Questions	Book Cover Analysis	Character Analysis	Atlas Scavenger Hunt	Additional Research
English Language Arts Standards »Writing						
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.		•	•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.		•	•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.6	With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of one page in a single sitting.		•	•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.7	Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.					•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.	•	•			
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.		•	•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.		•	•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.7	Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.					•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.	•	•	•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.		•	•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience		•	•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.7	Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.					•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.	•	•	•		•
English Language Arts Standards »Speaking & Listening						
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grade 4 topics and texts</i> , building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.	•	•	•		
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.4	Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.		•	•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.5	Add audio recordings and visual displays to presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.		•			
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grade 5 topics and texts</i> , building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.	•	•	•		
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.4	Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.		•	•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.5	Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, sound) and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.		•			



		Discussion Questions	Book Cover Analysis	Character Analysis	Atlas Scavenger Hunt	Additional Research
English Language Arts Standards »Speaking & Listening (cont.)						
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grade 4 topics and texts</i> , building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.	•	•	•		
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.4	Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.		•	•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.5	Add audio recordings and visual displays to presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.		•			

