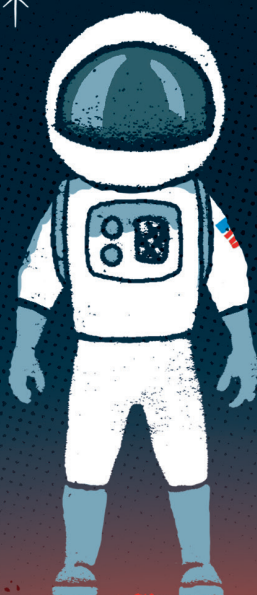


Three-Time Newbery Honor–Winning and New York Times Bestselling Author

JENNIFER L. HOLM

The
LION
of
MARS



EDUCATORS' GUIDE



THE LION OF MARS is a thought-provoking and exciting novel about community, courage, and how children shouldn't be held back by the fears of their guardians.

Bell knows barely anything outside of the enterprising and brave American settlement on Mars, where he lives. Every country's outpost on Mars is an island—no one talks to the other colonists, except once a year at trading time. They may be far, far away from the wars back on Earth, but the conflicts aren't so remote. When a viral outbreak in the community forces Bell and the other children to seek help, they learn that fear of the unfamiliar has kept them isolated and in the dark for much too long.



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JENNIFER L. HOLM is a *New York Times* bestselling author and three-time Newbery Honor recipient. She is a cocreator of the Babymouse series (an Eisner Award winner), the Squish series, and the Sunny graphic novels, which she collaborates on with her brother Matthew Holm. Visit her online at jenniferholm.com.



PRE-READING ACTIVITY

- Read about Mars on this website:
spaceplace.nasa.gov/all-about-mars/en/.

Then write a one-page paper that discusses why you would or wouldn't want to be the first American kid to explore Mars.

Correlates to Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.1; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 4-6.1, 4-6.2; Knowledge of Language L. 4-6.3.

GROUP DISCUSSION

- Each person in the settlement has a specific job. How were the adults recruited to Mars? Sai is the commander and runs the communications and observations rooms (COR). What is the purpose of the COR? Why do the adults call it the "Phone Booth"?
- Phinneus runs the algae farm. Why is algae important to survival on Mars? Bell likes working in the algae farm, and he forms a special relationship with Phinneus. What prompts Bell to ask Phinneus if he would like to return to Earth? Discuss Phinneus's answer.
- Explain why the people of the settlement live underground. Describe their living quarters. Why must they wear environmental suits if they go to the surface?
- Bell is eleven years old and the youngest child in the American settlement on Mars. How are the children a "living experiment"? Discuss the personality of each of the children. Describe Bell's relationship with the other children. When and how does Bell's relationship with Trey change? Why does Bell call Vera the bossiest person on Mars?
- Bell refers to the people of the American settlement as "family." How is Phinneus a father figure to Bell? Who is his mother figure?
- Discuss the rules of the settlement. Who makes the rules? Why are some of the rules difficult to follow? The kids take out one of the rovers, which is against the rules. Whose idea is this? Is this person the ringleader when the group breaks other rules? What are the children seeking when they go on this adventure? Explain Bell's reticence. Why does he agree to go with them?
- The children crash the rover, and Bell fractures his clavicle and is concussed. What is Phinneus's reaction to Bell's injuries? How does the accident prompt Phinneus to tell Bell how Lissa died?
- After the children disobey the rule and take a ride on one of the rovers, Sai and Phinneus have an argument. Explain what Phinneus means when he says "This wasn't meant to be a prison!" (p. 108) How is Sai the "warden"? Why does Phinneus think the children should be given freedom to explore? Debate whether Sai is afraid of what they will discover.
- Phinneus gives Bell a book titled *Animals of the World*. The lion is his favorite animal. Discuss the connection he draws between the lion and Sai. Foreshadowing is a literary device that involves readers being given a clue about events that come later in the novel. How does Bell's discovery about the lion foreshadow the conclusion of the novel?
- Other countries have settlements on Mars. How was the railway a joint project between the various countries? At what point did the relationship between the countries deteriorate? How do the strained relationships between settlements on Mars reflect the country's relationships on Earth?
- Why does Sai see the French settlement as an enemy? He doesn't want the children to study French. Discuss why he doesn't tell them the reason. Do the other adults agree with Sai on this issue? How? Explain how this contributes to Flossy's worry that the French can't be trusted. Describe Vera's suspicions. How does her attitude change when she meets Gaspard?
- Throughout the novel, Bell makes reference to fear. When is he most fearful? Sai insists that the children be isolated from other settlements. How does this create more fear? Explain how this isolation makes them more curious.



- When all the adults in the American settlement become ill, it falls to the children to seek help. Trey and Bell agree to take the train to the nearby Finnish settlement. What obstacles do they encounter? How does this journey improve the relationship between Trey and Bell? Explain what Bell means by “I had to be our voice now and get help.” (p. 172)
- How does Commander Sylvie Laurent, the commander of the French settlement, take control when Bell and Trey tell her that the adults in the American settlement are sick? Why do the children from the American settlement call staying at the French settlement “vacation”? Discuss why they are surprised to learn that the other settlements socialize.
- Bell mourns the loss of Phinneus after he dies of the mouse disease. How does Sylvie Laurent help him come to terms with his grief?
- Once back at the settlement, Bell has trouble sleeping. He can’t stop thinking about Lissa, Commander Laurent, Petyr, and Sai. Explain the following simile: “It was like a puzzle with a missing piece.” (p. 232) Bell says he knows what the outline looks like. Why is the middle confusing to him? At what point does he see the entire puzzle?
- What does *new frontier* mean? Draw a parallel between westward expansion and the American colony on Mars. Discuss how the concept of the new frontier is ever-changing. What other new frontiers are humans exploring?
- In the author’s note, Jennifer Holm says, “Though this book was written before Covid-19, the copyediting and final production happened during the pandemic. I could never have imagined how eerily relevant and poignant this fictional virus on Mars would become.” What parallels do you see between the virus in the book and the Covid-19 pandemic?

Correlates with Common Core State Standards in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 4-6.1, 4-6.3; Craft & Structure RL. 4-6.4, 4-6.6; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 4-6.1, 4-6.3; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 4-6.1; Knowledge of Language L. 4-6.3; Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 4-6.5.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

- Bell refers to the American settlement as “home,” a place he never wants to leave. Write a poem titled “Home” from his point of view.
- The Nanny Program is an international program to recruit young people to settle on Mars. Write a recruitment brochure for the Nanny Program that might be distributed to colleges and universities.

Correlates to Common Core State Standards in Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W.4-6.4.

Correlates to Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.2; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 4-6.7; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 4-6.1, 4-6.2; Knowledge of Language L. 4-6.3.

- Bell loves reading about Earth animals. He sees Darby and Eliana as wolves, Meems as the mother cat, Flossy as a peacock, Vera as a sneaky fox, and Trey as a loyal dog. He describes himself as Meems’s kitten. Bell grows up a lot and becomes braver as the story progresses. Write a short paper that discusses which animal might best describe Bell by the end of the novel. Use direct quotes and cite specific scenes to support your arguments.

Correlates to Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.1; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 4-6.1, 4-6.2; Knowledge of Language L. 4-6.3.

- At the end of the novel, Bell understands what Phinneus taught him about weeds. “Our settlement was overgrown with bad feelings—weeds—from long ago.” (p. 230) Write a paper titled “Weeds” that Bell might write for his English class. Include a concluding paragraph that describes the weed killer.

Correlates to Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.1; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 4-6.1, 4-6.2; Knowledge of Language L. 4-6.3.

- Think about why Phinneus documented Bell’s growth and development. Brainstorm the type of information that Phinneus might have recorded. (For example, Bell’s first word, favorite food, favorite toy, etc.) Then write an essay titled “This Is My Life” that Bell might write after discovering Phinneus’s documentation.

Correlates to Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.3; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 4-6.1, 4-6.2; Knowledge of Language L. 4-6.3.

- Vera loves fashion. Design a fashionable environmental suit that the kids of the French settlement might give Vera for her birthday. Write a paragraph that describes the features of the suit.

Correlates to Common Core State Standards in Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W.4-6.4.

- Write a short paper titled “Pride of Mars” and explain your interpretation. Cite specific passages and use direct quotes to support your thoughts.

Correlates to Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.1; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 4-6.1, 4-6.2; Knowledge of Language L. 4-6.3.

- As commander of the American settlement, Sai must send reports to Earth Command. Consider what Sai learns when the Americans go to the French settlement at the end of the novel. Write a two-page report that he might send to Earth Command. Include a paragraph about how he was wrong about Lissa’s death.

Correlates to Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.3; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 4-6.7; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 4-6.1, 4-6.2; Knowledge of Language L. 4-6.3.

VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

- The vocabulary in the novel isn’t difficult, but students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them, taking clues from context. Such words may include: *quadrant* (p. 1), *hydroponic* (p. 27), *diagnostic* (p. 57), *immobilized* (p. 58), *collegial* (p. 59), *schematics* (p. 137), *skeptical* (p. 139), *vectors* (p. 149), *bane* (p. 184), *conflicted* (p. 200), *conviction* (p. 219), and *inconsolable* (p. 229).

Correlates to Common Core State Standards in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 4-6.4.



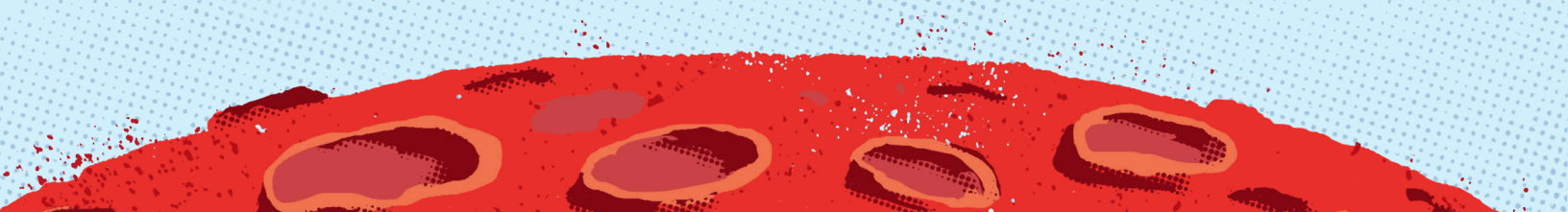
PRAISE FOR *THE LION OF MARS*

★ “Peppered with such intriguing scientific details as the pervasive nature of Mars dust, Holm’s absorbing speculative novel is...rendered with a keen sense of place grounded by identifiable sociofamilial relationships.” —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

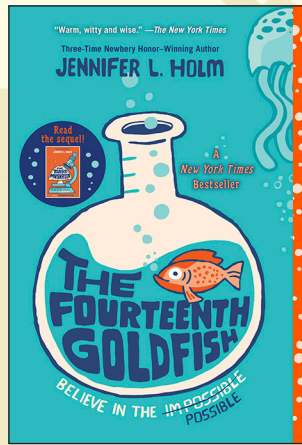
★ “The plot and setting are elegantly simple, yet the story proves completely engaging, driven by a charming cast of gentle characters and, more so, by Holm’s lean, measured prose, which moves briskly and seems to strike a resonant note on every page.

An unexpectedly cozy work of sf—celebrating science, community, and cooperation—that will have readers feeling right at home on Mars.” —*Booklist*, starred review

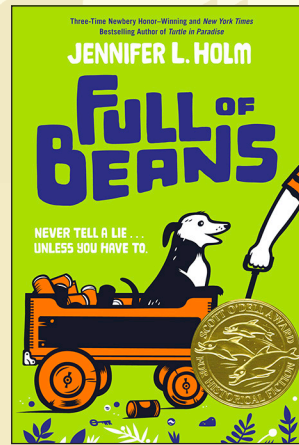
“A delightful space adventure.” —*Kirkus Reviews*



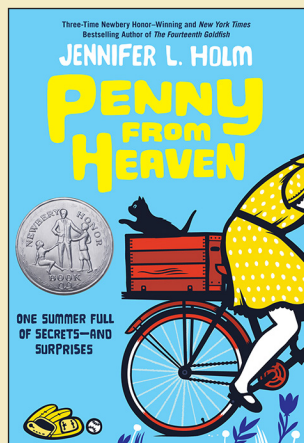
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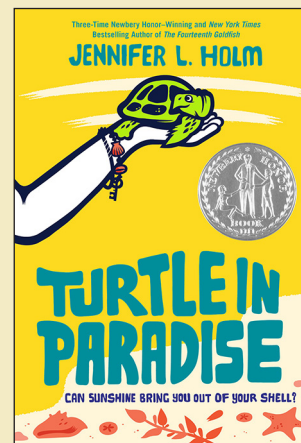
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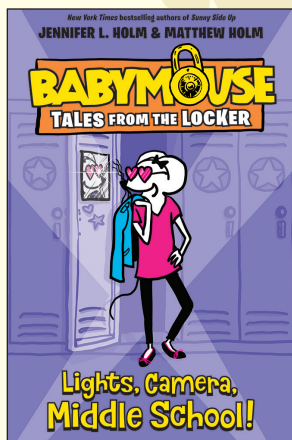
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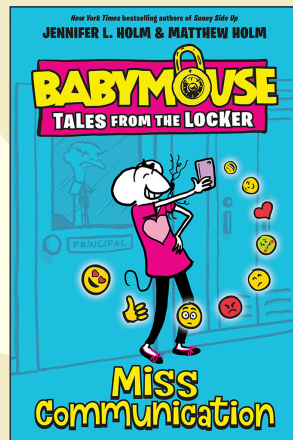
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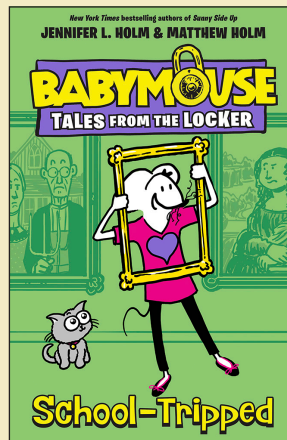
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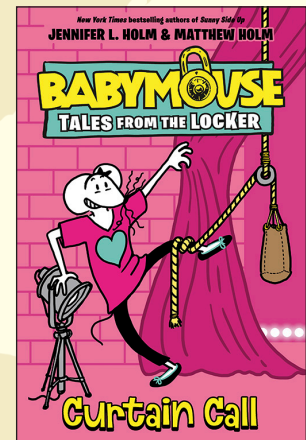
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