

# The Year We Fell From Space

## AMY SARIG KING

ISBN 9781922268853

RRP AU\$16.99

Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 8+

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### CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.

### SYNOPSIS

Liberty likes to draw star maps. She is going to change the way people see the universe. Well...she was going to change it. But now her parents have split up and she can't seem to make sense of the stars anymore. In fact, she can't make sense of anything. Her sister is refusing to go outside, her father is refusing to visit, and her mum is doing everything to hold them altogether. Liberty feels angry all the time and the only thing that makes her feel any better is talking to her meteor—her meteor offers really great advice, but she can't tell anyone that.

Starting high school is never fun, but it is especially hard if your whole family has just fallen from space and nothing is the same as it used to be. Amy Sarig King's new novel, *The Year We Fell from Space*, follows Liberty as she tries to make sense of a life split between two homes and a star-promised future that isn't working out as planned. If you've ever had feelings that you can't put into words, this story is for you.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amy Sarig King is the author of *Me and Marvin Gardens*, a *Washington Post* Best Book of the Year. She has also published many critically acclaimed young adult novels under the name A.S. King, including *Please Ignore Vera Dietz*, which was named a Michael L. Printz Honor Book, and *Ask the Passengers*, which won the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize. After many years farming abroad, she now lives back in southeastern Pennsylvania with her family.

### BEFORE READING

1. How do you interpret the following quote by Jack London, which appears as an epigraph in *The Year We Fell from Space*: 'I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than be a sleepy and permanent planet'?
2. Luxembourg, Spain and France have the highest rates of divorce in the world, while India, Chile and Colombia have the lowest. THINK, SHARE, PAIR possible reasons for these countries being at opposite ends of the divorce rate scale.
3. 'Exceptions are more exciting than rules.' As a class, line up in a continuum from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with each person standing in the line at a point that reflects their response to this quote from the novel.

### WHILE READING

1. In chapter 1, we find out that 'Jilly was funny'. Why is this in past tense and why is 'was' written in italics?
2. What is a feminist and why would growing up in the Nolan's house mean the boys don't know what it means?



3. On page 59, Liberty tells the rock, 'I guess we're [both] new here.' Where is she referring to and what does she mean?
4. On page 107, Liberty opens her father's nightstand drawer and immediately wishes she hadn't. What do you think she saw in the drawer? After the drawer discovery, Liberty names a list of things she was really glad she didn't find in the drawer. Why do you think she made this list?
5. Jilly thinks that it was silly of the school to separate the girls and boys when they were being taught about girls getting their period. She wonders why boys can't learn about girl stuff and why girls can't learn about boy stuff. She questions, 'Wouldn't it be better to know about each other?' Do you think she is right or wrong? Why?
6. In chapter 31, Liberty wonders whether she should just let her mum be whatever she is rather than expecting her to be 'my mum'. Liberty's mother is her mum; so, what do you think she means by this?
7. Why does Liberty think that the future of her family depends on her giving the ring back?
8. Liberty's mother thinks that guilt is the most powerful feeling in the world. Do you think she is right? Consider a time when you have felt guilt and what that feeling did to you.
9. On page 226, Liberty pours her heart out to her father. She says that she never used a curse word but that it felt like everything she said was a curse word. What does she mean by this?
10. The meteor stops talk at the end of the novel. Why is this the case?

## AFTER READING

### CHARACTER

1. What connections can you make between Liberty and the second epigraph, 'It is not great telescopes that make great astronomers' by Max Ernst?
2. There is old Jilly and new Jilly. Describe the differences between these two versions of Jilly and provide an explanation for the differences.
3. What is wrong with Liberty's father? List evidence from the text to support your answer.

### STYLE & STRUCTURE

1. At the end of chapter 9, Liberty personifies the sky. Write down what she says about the sky and explain what you think she means by this description.
2. 'Falling from space' is a metaphor. What do you think it means?
3. Each chapter in the novel has a distinct title and a date. What is the purpose and effect of the date? Select three chapter titles, skim over those chapters again and describe the significance of each chapter title.

## THEMES

### Family

1. By the end of the novel, Liberty and Jilly have reconceptualised their understanding of their family. Write a paragraph that describes the evolution of the girls' family and their understanding of the concept.
2. Construct a venn diagram that compares and contrasts the two households in which the girls now live.
3. The Nolan boys are experiencing a family breakdown as well. What sorts of similarities and differences can you see between Finn's and Patrick's behaviour and Liberty's and Jilly's behaviour in the wake of their parents' divorces?

### Mental health

1. Detail all the evidence in the text that suggests Liberty is not coping with her parents' divorce. What impact does her belief that she is a broom that cleans up everyone else's mess have on her mental health?
2. 'Jilly is a girl who has stopped going outside and who, at the age of nine, carries a stuffed tiger with her everywhere even though she's too old to do that.' What does this evidence from the text suggest about Jilly's state of mind? Why do you think she has reverted to this type of behaviour?

### Choices

1. What motivated Liberty to steal Leah's ring? Does the fact that she gave it back and admitted her guilt mean that she shouldn't be punished for the theft?
2. On page 255, Jan talks to Liberty about making excuses for people's bad behaviour. Liberty realises that she needs to stop doing this because there are no excuses for the bad behaviour that people choose. Do you think that people can always choose their behaviour, or do you think that sometimes people have no choice over how they behave? Explain your answer using examples from the novel.

## RESPONDING

1. Liberty's father suffers from depression. He receives treatment for his illness that consists of medication and therapy. Write a script for a therapy session that takes place between Liberty's dad, Jack, and his therapist. Include his reflections on his behaviour and his insights into his illness. He would likely discuss his relationship with his children, his new relationship and the demise of his marriage.
2. Write a response to the following question: To what extent is Liberty's drawing of star maps a creative outlet for her? Consider her state of mind when she can and when she cannot draw the maps.