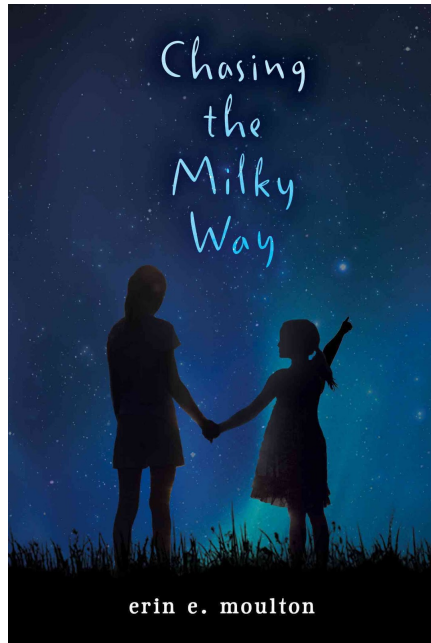


# *Chasing the Milky Way*

by Erin E. Moulton

## A Teaching Guide for Grades 6-8

Created by Tristan Upson M.Ed.



**Book Summary (from book jacket):** Lucy Peevy has one dream--to get out of Sunnyside Trailer Park and become a famous scientist. In fact, she and her best friend, Cam, have already figured out how to do that: build a robot that will win a prize at the BotBlock competition and use that money to start saving for college.

But when you've got a mama who's flying so high she can reach the stars one minute but is slumped over in a Meditation of Misery the next, it's harder to achieve those goals than one would think. And when, in a moment of desperation, Mama, Lucy, Cam, and Lucy's sister, Izzy, escape in the old Mustang, things get even harder. Lucy, Izzy, and Cam are good at sticking together, and better at solving problems. But even their best problem-solving skills might not help Lucy and Izzy prevent the one thing they dread even more than Mama's

moods: living without Mama at all.

### Essential Questions:

- How does love motivate the characters decisions in *Chasing the Milky Way*?
- The book starts with a quote from Robert Frost: "I have been one acquainted with the night." How does this quote apply to the characters? How does it represent the complexity of mental health in the novel?
- How does the author use figurative language, particularly regarding outer space, to influence the meaning and tone of the story?

Common Core Standards:

RL6-7.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RL6-7.2: 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. RL6-7.3: 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.

RL6-7.4: 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.

SL6-7.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

W6-7.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

W6-7.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

<p><b>Know</b> (particular facts/terms associated with the learning)</p>	<p><b>Understand</b> (limited # big ideas that recur across units)</p>	<p><b>Do</b> (transferable skills aligned with school-wide outcomes)</p>
<p>Various vocabulary words in context (see chapter questions)</p> <p>Metaphor</p> <p>Imagery</p> <p>Simile</p> <p>Theme</p> <p>Flashback</p>	<p>Literature may have several key themes. These themes help us develop a greater understanding of the text and make connections to our worlds.</p> <p>Speaking and discussion skills are essential skills</p>	<p>Students will choose relevant evidence to support their claims in writing and discussion. (RL6-7.1)</p> <p>Students will identify major themes and trace how they develop in a text. (RL6-7.2)</p> <p>Students will analyze how choices a character makes impacts a story. (RL6-7.3)</p>

	<p>for life and help students develop learning both independently and interdependently.</p> <p><b>Themes:</b> Love is complicated.</p> <p>Mental health is a complex issue that impacts people in a variety of ways.</p>	<p>Students will trace and analyze figurative language in the book and how it impacts meaning and tone (RL6-7.4)</p> <p>Students will discuss the novel using evidence to support their claims in order to construct understanding and meaning (SL6-7.1)</p> <p>Students will write an informative piece tracing the development of a theme in the novel and support their response with relevant evidence (W6-7.2, W6-7.9)</p> <p>Students will write an organized, coherent essay with a clear context, details, evidence, and conclusion that centers on a focus/thesis/claim (W6-7.2)</p>
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**Summative Assessment:** Choose one of the essential questions centered on the key themes of the novel. Write an essay or create an oral presentation that answers the question using specific and relevant evidence from the text to support your response.

**Chapter Discussion Questions:**

Chapters 1-3

Vocabulary: infinite      tragedy literally noble mental illness predisposition  
billow

Questions:

1. What mood does the author create with the first paragraph of the book? What words/phrases does she use to do so? (1)
2. What does “Mission Control Protocol for Optimum Achievement” tell you about Lucy and Cam’s characters? Support your inference with evidence from the text. (1)
3. Describe our first introduction to Mama. How does Lucy react? What does this tell you about their relationship? (2)
4. What do we learn about Mama’s character and the Peevy family in the flashback? Why do you think the author chose to use this method to reveal the information? (2)
5. “Some groan because they didn’t win and some groan because it is us that won.” What do you think this means? Use evidence to support your inference. (3)
6. Who is Sally Ride? Why do you think Lucy thinks of her as an inspirational person? Who inspires you and why? (3)

## Chapters 4-7

Vocabulary: liege invaded unique attributes void blind optimism salvageable evaluate nonchalantly compressed serendipity knoll luminary

### Questions:

1. How does Izzy celebrate Lucy’s birthday? (4)
2. What do you think the line “a little bruise blossoms right over my heart” means? Why? (4)
3. How does Mr. Blinks help them out? (5)
4. What do we learn about Cam’s home life in this chapter? What evidence from the chapter supports this inference? (6)
5. What plan do Cam and Lucy come up with for the laptop? Do you think this is a good plan? Why or why not? (6)
6. Where do the Peevys go on their midnight ride? (7)
7. What do you think Lucy means when she says, “Still, I hear her happiness float up from the water to the sky and for a second I wish I were part of it. I wish I could get even close to that kind of happy.” (7)

## Chapter 8-10

Vocabulary: mollusks botched misery gratitude disregard

1. What prompts Lucy's flashback? What do we learn in the flashback? (8)
2. Why do you think the author uses the line "birthday wishes get botched" instead of "birthday wishes don't come true"? How are the ideas different? (8)
3. What unexpected relief does Lucy experience when she makes it to school? Why is it a relief? (9)
4. "My hands seem to be jumping around on their own. Snapping and tapping my legs and acting all suspicious." What mood is the author trying to create with this description? How does it add to the anticipation of this chapter? (10)

### Chapter 11-13

Vocabulary: magnetized concussion incident quarks leptons warrant trauma delusional urgent corrupt imprint authorities affirmative crisis

Questions::

1. What does Lucy know about her dad? How do you know? (11)
2. What does the question, "Is she writing a warrant for my future" mean? Why do you think the author uses that language? (11)
3. Describe the scene when Mama comes to get Lucy. Use specific evidence from the text to support your description. (12)
4. There are four messages on the answering machine when Lucy gets home. How do these messages show multiple sides of Mama? (13)
5. What is Mama afraid of about Kensington? What is Lucy afraid of? What do you think Lucy means when she ends the chapter with "out the back"?

### Chapter 14-17

Vocabulary: silhouetted morph hives decipher jostled Amber Alert

Questions:

1. What does Lucy grab as they are getting ready to leave? What about Mama? What do their choices illustrate about their relationship and their differences? (14)
2. Review the author's language choices in the last four chapters. Choose four quotes that demonstrate how the author builds suspense and excitement leading to their escape from Sunnyside. Why do your quotes build suspense for a reader? (14)
3. What image does the line "I'm in a spaceship spinning out of control" give the reader? Why does the author use it in Chapter 16? (16)
4. What can you infer about Cam's statement that D-Wayne "wanted to make a donation"? What evidence supports your inference? (17)

## Chapter 18-21

Vocabulary: reconnaissance banquet protocol conduct affirmative specimen organic material

### Questions:

1. What happens at the end of Chapter 18? What do you think it means? (18)
2. Describe the incident in Chapter 19. Who do you think "Robert" is? (19)
3. What do you think the different types of cheese represent to Lucy? What evidence supports your inference? (21)
4. What truth does Lucy learn about moon shells on her 9th birthday? (21)

## Chapters 22-24

Vocabulary: impractical prone delusions tandem

### Questions:

1. Who is "Rob"? What do you think Lucy means when she says "to have someone who is inside your head all the time just pop out into the street"? (22)
2. Read Frost's poem, "Acquainted with the Night" and explain how the poem compares to Mama's current mental state. Why is this poem an appropriate choice for Mama? (22)
3. What does the line "I've made a promise bound for breaking" mean? (23)

4. What should Lucy do? Use evidence from the text (both this chapter and previous chapters) to defend your claim. (23)
5. What does Cam mean when he says, “The truth is, your mama was already running. We just made it easier.” Use evidence to support your response. (24)

## Chapters 25-28

Vocabulary: acquires commence initiate ignition periphery exasperated  
careen

Questions:

1. Who is Mama referencing when she says, “We’ve gone from poetry to Poe”? Do a little reading about Poe and read at least one of his short stories. Why is this an appropriate literary reference from the mood of the story? (26)
2. Why do you think Lucy remembers her 10th birthday being a turning point in her relationship with Mama? What does she mean when she says “like two magnets back to back”? (27)
3. What problem arises at the end of Chapter 28? (28)

## Chapters 29-32

Vocabulary: nonchalance dire delusional

Questions:

1. Why do you think the author uses the phrase “you get torn to pieces” describing Sunnyside rather than “you can’t get out” which she has used previously in the book? How does the change in phrase change the meaning? (29)
2. What’s in Mama’s pill bottles? What reaction does this realization cause for Lucy? (30)
3. Why do they decide to go to BotBlock anyway? (32)

## Chapters 33-36

Vocabulary: resounding consultation interject at liberty evaluating  
apprehension compliant deemed competent reintegration incarnated  
constrict anthology

Questions:

1. What surprise does Lucy get at the registration desk? What do you think happened? Who “actually cares”? (33)
2. How is the way Ms. Linda speaks different from the other characters in the book? Use specific examples. Why do you think the author has her speak differently? (34)
3. Who registered Lucy for BotBlock?
4. What do you learn about Lucy’s 11th birthday? Why do you think the author includes this flashback in this chapter? (34)
5. How did Mama save the money for BotBlock? How does that change the reader’s perception of her? (35)

Chapter 37-Epilogue:

Vocabulary: jostle void

Questions:

1. What does Lucy decide to do with Mama? Why? Use evidence from the text to support your response. (39)
2. Why does the author end the chapter with the line, “Chasing the Milky Way”? What does it mean? (39)
3. What does Lucy mean when she says “And I wonder if she gets it. If she sees I have a debt to repay. A promise I’m still doing my best to keep”? (40)
4. How does Lucy mean “surrender” in more than one way at the end of chapter 40? (40)
5. Looking back at the novel, how does love motivate the decisions the characters make throughout the story? Choose one character and reflect on the decisions that they made out of love of others in the book. Did the decisions they made work out in the end? Why or why not? (Epilogue)

**Book Club and Class Extras**  
**by Erin E. Moulton**



### S.T.E.M. Ideas

1) In CHASING THE MILKY WAY,, Lucy and Cam plan to compete in a robotics competition called BotBlock Challenge. They have created a junk robot named PingPing200. On a blank piece of paper design your own junk robot. What would it look like? What skills would it have? Would you use all junk? If so, where would you collect your pieces and what would they be? Would the body be made of a milk carton and the head a tennis ball? Do a little research on how you would make your robot move. What would you need to build or buy to make it happen? Make sure to label everything. And don't forget to give your robot a name!

2) At the beginning of the novel Lucy describes Sunnyside Trailer Park as “a black hole of a place. The gravitational pull is so strong, you never get out. At least not in one piece.” Do a little research on black holes. What are they and how do they work? You might find some cool information on black holes at Hubble site!

[http://hubblesite.org/explore\\_astronomy/black\\_holes/](http://hubblesite.org/explore_astronomy/black_holes/)

How is this metaphor fitting for Sunnyside and Lucy's predicament at the beginning of the story?

Explore, then draw your own detailed diagram of a black hole.

3) At the end of Chapter Twenty Six, Cam says, “And that's a star-spangled take off for flight 220.”

What mode of transport are they imagining they are taking? Take a look at some NASA launches to view actual shuttle launches and get a glimpse at the inside of a space shuttle!

Launch Video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gBBGb\\_isAs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gBBGb_isAs)

Watch NASA's website for their launch schedule and plan to watch one live. [http://www.nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/#.VK6ixCvF\\_84](http://www.nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/#.VK6ixCvF_84)

4) In Chapter Three, Lucy receives a picture of Sally Ride. Sally Ride was the first woman in space! In addition, she was a great scientist, educator, author and mentor. Do some research on women in science and technology.

Don't know where to start? Check Sally Ride's official website:

<https://sallyridescience.com/> or go straight to the white house:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/women-in-stem>

Once you have done a little research, put together a poster about your scientist and present to the group.

5) On page 21 Gramma is explaining to Lucy that Mama has something called Bipolar disorder. Lucy wonders “can I catch it, like a cold? What is bipolar disorder? Is it viral, bacterial, chemical, biological, psychological? A combination? Do a little research and make an argument for one or the other.

6) Learn about the history of mental illness in the U.S. using Breaking the Silence powerpoint(History of Mental Illness).

[http://www.btslessonplans.org/teaching\\_ppt.html](http://www.btslessonplans.org/teaching_ppt.html)

As a group, discuss how the history of mental illness has evolved with the help of science. Do you think it will continue to evolve?

### **Discussing Mental Illness**

Students are encouraged to discuss mental illness using People First language. That means that instead of referring to someone as “a schizophrenic,” you separate the person from the illness. Why, you ask? Just as a person might suffer from Cancer, so does a person suffer from Schizophrenia. You don’t see a cancer patient and say, “Oh, here comes George, he’s cancer.” Right? “There goes Ann, she’s a pneumonia.” Think of how silly that sounds! And yet, we do it all the time for mental illness, when in fact, mental illness is exactly to the brain what physical illnesses are to the body.

- 1) In Chapter Three, Destin Hoffstader, school bully, confronts Lucy, calling her Looney Lucy, and taking the card that she has received for her birthday. Read the scene and then use a separate piece of paper to re-write the scene casting yourself as an ally in the situation. What would you say to Destin? How would he respond? Would Lucy’s computer still get damaged or would it be a better scenario if someone had intervened?
- 2) In Chapter Eleven, Lucy has been to the Principal’s office. While she is there, Destin’s mom arrives and Lucy hears what she is saying through the door. “That girl is dangerous...surely you....entire family....dangerous. Delusional.” Is Lucy dangerous? What makes Mrs. Hoffstader believe that Lucy and her family are dangerous? Is her impression right or wrong? Have you or a friend ever been misunderstood? Write a brief paragraph

explaining the situation and how it made you feel. What did you want to do? Say? What would you do in the situation if you could do it again?

- 3) In the author's note, the author mentions the STIGMA of mental illness. What is stigma? Have a classroom conversation about the definition of stigma. What does it mean? What groups are often stigmatized? How has stigma affected Lucy's life? Have any students ever been impacted by stigma? How can they combat stigma on a regular basis? Does talking about it help? How about being an ally to someone who is being stigmatized? How could this change our culture?