

Quintessence

A Teaching Guide

FOR USE
WITH COMMON
CORE STATE
STANDARDS



Ages 8 and Up + ISBN: 978-0374309763
e-book & audiobook also available

About the Book

Quintessence is an extraordinary story from Jess Redman about friendship, self-discovery, interconnectedness, and the inexplicable elements that make you you.

Find the Elements. Grow the Light. Save the Starling.

Three months ago, twelve-year-old Alma moved to the town of Four Points. Her panic attacks started a week later, and they haven't stopped—even though she's told her parents that they have. She's homesick and friendless and every day she feels less and less like herself.

But one day she finds a telescope in the town's junk shop, and through its lens, she watches a star—a star that looks like a child—fall from the sky and into her backyard. Alma knows what it's like to be lost and afraid, to long for home, and she knows that it's up to her to save the star.

And so, with the help of some unlikely new friends from Astronomy Club, she sets out on a quest that will take a little bit of science, a little bit of magic, and her whole self.

About the Author

Jess Redman is a former therapist, environmental educator, and award-winning author of children's books. Her books include *THE MIRACULOUS*, *QUINTESSENCE*, *THE ADVENTURE IS NOW*, and the picture book *SEASON OF LIGHT*. Her books have received several awards, including the NCTE Charlotte Huck Honor, and have been included on multiple state readings lists.

Visit her website, jessredman.com, for teaching guides, book trailers, character quizzes, and for information on bringing her to your school!



How To Use This Guide:

Quintessence is a story about friendship, connection, science, magic, and mental health issues. With short chapters, two point-of-views, a ten-part structure, STEM-topics, and mysteries that will keep readers turning pages, *Quintessence* is a perfect choice for a classroom read-aloud, whole-class/school text, literature club, book club, or summer reading list.

This guide is aligned with Common Core Standards for 5th grade, but it can be applied for grades 3-8. You will find pre-reading questions, questions for each part of the book, big picture questions, and extension activities that include creative writing, research projects, and visual arts.

Before You Read:

1. The word *quintessence* may be a brand new one for you. Look up the word in a dictionary, and discuss the different meanings given. Which do you think fits for this story? What do you think *quintessence* will be?
2. A tagline is a phrase that captures the tone of the story and hints at the plot. The tagline for *Quintessence* reads, *Find the Elements. Grow the Light. Save the Starling*. Based on this tagline, what do you think might happen in the story? What are the *Elements*? What might it mean to *grow the light*? And how would you *save a Starling*? Make predictions about the book based on this tagline.
3. At the beginning of the book, there is a map of the town of Four Points. What are some places on the map that stick out to you? Why do you think this book needs a map? What might happen in the story that would make a map useful?
4. Before the first chapter, there is a quote from a book called *Quintessence: An Elemental Primer for Star Restoration*. This is a book-within-a-book; that is, it is a book that Alma and her friends find and use. Read the quote and discuss what it might mean. Can you think of other books that have a book-within-a-book? Why might an author include one of these?

As You Read

PART 1: THE FLYER

1. Why do you think the author chose to begin the story at the Fifth Point instead of with Alma? Why do you think the shop is called the Fifth Point?
2. Discuss what you know about Alma so far. What has happened to her recently? How has she been feeling? How might you feel if you were Alma?
3. How does the flyer make Alma feel? Have you ever found or been given something special? What makes you feel inspired or excited?
4. The ShopKeeper is starting a new quest. What do you think the quest will involve? Notice the tasks he has completed. Who do you think the ShopKeeper is waiting for?

PART 2: THE QUINTESCOPE

1. Describe the inside of the Fifth Point. Is it a place you would be interested in visiting? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think the flyer and the quintescope make Alma feel brighter inside? What does that brightness help her to do?
3. Were you surprised when Alma didn't go to help the Starling? Why do you think she didn't? What would you have done?

PART 3: THE ASTRONOMY CLUB

1. Why does Alma want to believe that the falling Starling was a dream? Do you think it was a dream?
2. Describe Hugo, Shirin, and Dustin. Do you think they could end up being friends with Alma? Why or why not?
3. Why does Alma agree to be in the Astronomy Club, even after Dustin embarrasses her? Have you ever done something difficult even when you wanted to give up? How did you feel after? How does Alma feel after she attends the club meeting?

As You Read (continued)

PART 4: THE STARLING

1. Describe the Starling. What does she look like? How does she react when she sees Alma? How does Alma feel when she sees the Starling?
2. What do you think about Alma's decision not to ask Shirin for help? Why does she ask Hugo for his help? If you were Alma, whose help would you seek out?
3. Brainstorm ideas for gathering the four elements. Where could you get true water? How would you bottle wind? Do you have any ideas about what Alma and Hugo will do?
4. Make a prediction: What does Shirin have? How will she react to the crater and Alma's story of the Starling?

PART 5: WATER

1. What do you think about Alma, Shirin, and Hugo hiking around the woods in the middle of the night? Is this a safe idea? How does it add to the mystery and atmosphere of the story?
2. Shirin is now part of the quest to save the Starling. What does she add to the quest? How is she like the element she leads them to and bottles, water?
3. How does Shirin feel about her friends? Why did she join the Astronomy Club? Have you ever felt like you had to act differently in order to be liked?

PART 6: WIND

1. What did you learn about stars and elements during Hugo's lecture? Did anything surprise you or stick out as especially interesting?
2. What do you think about Dustin's behavior during Hugo's lecture? How do you think Hugo was feeling?
3. Alma has a panic attack during this section of the book. What happens to her when she has a panic attack, both physically and mentally? Why does she hide it from her friends and her family? What is Alma afraid will happen if she tells them?
4. What does Hugo add to the quest? How is he like the element he bottles, wind? What is Hugo learning from his friends?
5. Talk about what you know about the ShopKeeper so far. Were you surprised to learn that he is fallen star himself? What has his journey here on Earth been like? What is his life mission?

As You Read (continued):

PART 7: EARTH

1. Why do you think Alma's parents want her to see the school psychologist? Why do you think Alma doesn't want to go? What advice would you give to Alma?
2. This is the second time that Alma sees the Starling but is not able to help her. What does she notice about the Starling's light? Why does Alma feel connected to the Starling?
3. Were you surprised that it was Dustin who saved Alma? What can Dustin add to the quest? How is he like the element he finds, earth? What can he gain from a friendship with Alma, Shirin, and Hugo?
4. What do you think of Dr. Parry? Why does Alma tell him the truth about her panic attacks? Why do you think he calls her *Alma of the Growing Light*?

PART 8: FIRE

1. Discuss how Alma ended up being burned by the fire. Was it anyone's fault? Why didn't they find true fire?
2. Explore Alma's relationship with her parents and brother. What does Alma do in her conversation with them after the fire that she wasn't doing before? What do her parents do that they haven't been doing? How do you think they can help one another moving forward?
3. Were you surprised that Dustin had the fire container all along? Why does he give it to Alma?
4. Explain how Alma finally finds the Starling and gets the final element, fire. How does she figure out where the Starling has been hiding? How does she bottle the fire?
5. Make a prediction: What is going to happen at the Fifth Point?

As You Read (continued):

PART 9: QUINTESSENCE

1. The ShopKeeper has been disguised as many characters in this story. Were you surprised to learn that he was Susie, Celcy, and Dr. Parry? What other new information did you learn about him?
2. How did you think quintessence would be created? How did Alma, Hugo, Shirin, and Dustin grow their lights? What did they each contribute to the quintessence?
3. How do you think the Starling felt when she was revived and stood to face Alma? How did Alma feel?
4. Why did the ShopKeeper want to explode as a supernova? What did you think about his *glorious fate*?

PART 10: THE FIFTH POINT

1. Why does Alma ask to see a therapist? What has she learned about herself and her anxiety at this point in the story?
2. Discuss the significance of all the families coming together at the end of the story. Why does this bring Alma so much happiness?
3. What do you think will happen with the Fifth Point? Will another ShopKeeper come? Will more stars fall in Four Points? What does the future hold for Alma, Hugo, Shirin, and Dustin?

After You Read:

1. After reading the whole story, why do you think the author chose to begin the story with the ShopKeeper's perspective rather than Alma's? What do the ShopKeeper's chapters add to the story? What hints are hidden in these chapters about the quest that Alma and her friends will go on?
2. What was Alma keeping a secret throughout the story? Why do you think Alma kept this secret? What do you think would have happened if Alma had been honest with her parents about her panic attacks? What advice would you give Alma?
3. *We need one another* is a phrase repeated several times in the story. In what ways do Alma, Hugo, Shirin, and Dustin need one another? What positive qualities and what needs does each person have? How do they help one another *grow their light*?
4. Each of the four friends was responsible for finding and gathering an element. How was each one like their element (e.g. how was Hugo like wind)? How did the journey of obtaining the element challenge and change them?
5. How did you feel about Dustin when you first met him? Why do you think he behaved the way he did? Did your feelings about him change as you learned more of his story? How can understanding more of a person's experience shift our perspective of them? How did Dustin change?
6. Were you surprised that the ShopKeeper was a fallen star? Were you surprised that he was Susie the librarian, Celcy the busdriver, and Dr. Parry the school psychologist? Explore the ShopKeeper's role in the saving the Starling and how he completed that role.
7. Although we see the Starling several times throughout the story, we don't have any chapters from her perspective. As a class, tell the story of the Starling, starting with her fall. Where does she go? What makes her come out of hiding? How does she feel about Alma?
8. Discuss Alma's relationships with her family members. In the beginning of the story, how does Alma feel about the Discussions? Do you think her parents are doing their best to help her? How do Alma's relationships with her mother, father, and James change by the end of the book?
9. Like Alma, you are new to Four Points, but you learn a great deal about the town as the story unfolds. Why is the town called Four Points? Why is the ShopKeeper's shop called the Fifth Point? What makes the town special? What do you think about Alma's observation that it is *amazing how much there is to learn about everyone and everywhere*? What makes the place you live special?
10. At the end of the book, the Fifth Point is empty but the shop seems to be *waiting, waiting for what would come next*. What do you think will come next? What will happen to the Fifth Point? What will happen to Alma? What will happen to the Astronomy Club?

Reading Activities:

1. BOOK WITHIN A BOOK

At their first late night meeting, Hugo shows Alma *Quintessence: An Elemental Primer for Star Restoration*. This book acts as their guide, teaching them about the elements and fallen stars.

If you were a ShopKeeper writing instructions for Elementals going on quests, what would you say? Choose one of the sections from the book-within-a-book (e.g. *Quintessence*, *How Stars Fall*, *Earth*, *Wind*, etc.) and rewrite it. Include your own illustrations.

2. STAR-GAZING

Alma, Hugo, Shirin, and Dustin are part of the Astronomy Club. While they don't get to do much traditional star-gazing, they do learn a lot about the stars! Now it's your turn. Choose a constellation. Research the names of each star in the constellation, as well as how far they are from Earth. What kind of star is each one (red dwarf, blue giant, etc.)? Do you think any of them are going to become a supernova anytime soon? Can you see this constellation from where you live? If so, at what time of the year?

3. ELEMENTAL SCIENCE & ART

The quest to save the Starling involves gathering elements—classical, not chemical, as Alma and her friends find. Research the classical elements. Who first came up with the idea of four elements? Who first mentioned quintessence? Who was the real Paracelsus?

Now design your own symbols for each of the elements—Water, Wind, Earth, Fire, and Quintessence. Use what you've learned in your research to inspire your artistic interpretation of the elements.

4. AFTER THE END

At the end of *Quintessence*, the Starling returns to the sky, and the ShopKeeper explodes in a supernova. When Alma, Hugo, Shirin, and Dustin return to the Fifth Point weeks later, the shop is deserted. Do you think it will remain empty? Will a new ShopKeeper come to the town? What else might happen? Write an “after the end” chapter to explore one possibility.

5. COVER WORK

The cover for *Quintessence* was illustrated by Matt Rockefeller and designed by Elizabeth Clark. The cover is the reader's introduction to the story, setting the tone and giving hints about what is to come. How do you feel when you look at the cover of *Quintessence*? What details do you notice? What parts of the story does the cover tell?

Now it's time to design your own cover! What elements of the story will you include?

6. PERSPECTIVE SHIFT

Quintessence is written in third-person limited perspective but from two separate points-of-view. This means that Alma does not narrate the story, but we only hear her thoughts in her chapters. Likewise, the ShopKeeper does not narrate the story, but we only hear his thoughts in his chapters. Which character's story do you wish you knew more of? Choose a scene from the story to write from another character's perspective. What do you learn when you view the story from someone else's eyes?

7. MAP MEANING

In this story, Alma and her friends go all over the town of Four Points. Create your own map of the town and track their quest. Where do they start? Where do they end? What is special about the town?

Further Common Core State Standards Information:

Before You Read:

CCSS.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.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.

As You Read and After You Read:

CCSS.RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.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.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.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.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.RL.5.6 Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

Reading Activities:

CCSS.RI.5.6 Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

CCSS.RI.5.7 Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.

CCSS.W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.W.5.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

CCSS.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.RL.5.9 Compare and contrast stories in the same genre (e.g., mysteries and adventure stories) on their approaches to similar themes and topics.

For more information on specific standards for your grade level, visit the Common Core website at www.corestandards.org.

PRAISE FOR *Quintessence*



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This guide was created
by the author, Jess Redman.
Visit her at www.jessRedman.com



“A wildly imaginative tale full of wonder and hope that is grounded in our everyday world and the very real problems that today’s children face.”

—Megan Frazer Blakemore, author of *THE STORY WEB* and *THE FIREFLY CODE* series

“A magical, wondrous book. . . The story is beautifully written and gave me chills almost constantly—with that magic-just-around-the-corner feeling.”

—Gillian McDunn, author of *CATERPILLAR SUMMER*

“As bright and magical as a falling star, *Quintessence* is a beautifully told story that collided with my heart and set it aglow.”

—Heather Kassner, author of *THE BONE GARDEN*

“*Quintessence* shimmers with the perfect amount of magic...Redman’s deft, sympathetic portrayal of anxiety...blends with scientific references to astronomy that are sure to engage young readers.

—Sarah Baughman, author of *THE LIGHT IN THE LAKE*

