

Connections

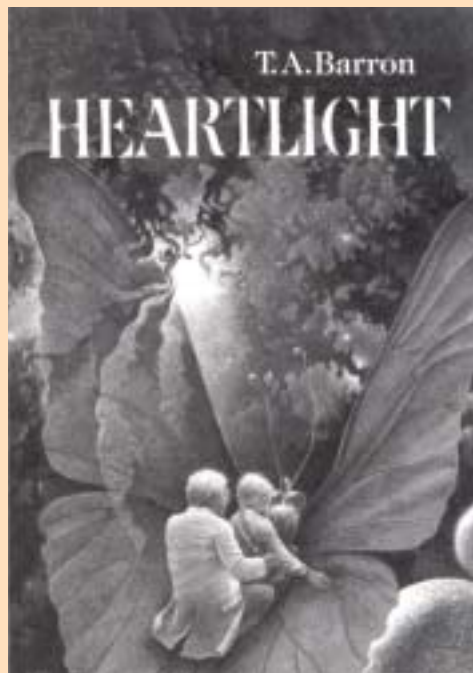
With
T.A. Barron

A TEACHER'S GUIDE

to

HEARTLIGHT

by *T. A. Barron*



"In each story I write, there must be a character, a relationship, a place, and an idea or question that I care about. Heartlight gave me the opportunity to explore the question "What difference does one life make?"



I believe that one life can make a difference in surprising ways. That is why Kate, the young hero of this book, discovers that even a small action can sometimes change the very course of the stars."

- T. A. Barron

HEARTLIGHT



HEARTLIGHT centers around a friendship—the special friendship between 12-year-old Kate, who is both intrepid and insecure, and her grandfather, Miles Prancer, a world renowned astrophysicist. As the story opens, Miles discovers that there is a kind of light in all living things, whether butterflies or humans, which can allow them to travel instantly to any part of the universe. He calls this light, which is akin to the light of stars but slightly different, "heartlight." Yet despite all his knowledge, Miles needs some of Kate's basic wisdom to pull him back from the brink of utter disaster—and also, by the way, to prevent the sun from collapsing and wiping out all life on Earth in only four minutes' time.

Connecting with the meaning

Note: In discussing these issues with students, responses could take many forms other than a large group discussion. Activities such as small group discussions, panel debates, persuasive speeches, and role playing should be encouraged.

1. Prior to beginning this book, ask students to list all things that have a beginning and an end. For instance, the alphabet, a book, a road, a song, and a life all have a beginning and an end. Then ask them to brainstorm all things that do not have a beginning and an end such as ideas, numbers, the universe, and depth of emotions. Finally ask

students to compare the two lists and discuss the differences. What kinds of things have boundaries and what kinds do not? Ask them what would happen if this were a world or universe where everything had no beginnings and no endings. Keeping that in mind, ask them if they see a purpose for boundaries, even when those boundaries mean some things must end.

2. Explain to students that when they read fantasy, which is by its nature made-up, part of what lets the book become real for them are the truths found in the book. With that in mind, ask the students to identify the parts of *Heartlight* that are true for them.

3. Have students read each statement below and mark their response on the scale. They should defend their ratings by discussing how the idea's presented below play themselves out in the book.



SD = Strongly Disagree

D = Disagree

SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

- Power corrupts, (p. 230.)
- "Hope is like a shadow, not easily lost." (p. 165)
- "To live is to struggle." (p. 165)
- "...this is just a lesson in how small and unimportant we are in the grand scheme of things." (p. 186)

4. Why does Miles tell Kate "If there is any quality I wish for you, it is perseverance" (p. 42)? Ask students what quality they most wish for themselves.

5. On page 81, Kate views the Earth from far above and sees it as "a single, unified organism...". This view helps her see the Earth without the boundaries humans have created between countries. Are these boundaries necessary? Poet Robert Frost writes that fences make good neighbors. Would Kate agree? What about Miles?

6. Miles keeps portraits of Albert Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci and Robert H. Goddard hanging

in his laboratory. He also keeps Aristotle's collected writings, and copies of *The Once and Future King* and *The Wind in the Willows* in his lab. Ask students to research who these people are and what the books are about. What similarities do the books share and what similarities do the people share? Do the books and people share any similarities? Knowing what things Miles keeps close to him, ask students to list other books and people Miles would admire.

7. Miles tells Kate "Most people allow themselves to be herded around like sheep, preferring a daily dose of predictable rules to the often unpredictable truth." What does this statement mean? Ask students if they agree with it. Are there places in the book where Miles allows himself to be herded around like a sheep?

8. Let students design a new cover for the book. Have them compare their cover designs to the one on the paperback *Heartlight*. How are they different? Then show students the cover of the hard cover edition. Ask students to explain which they prefer.

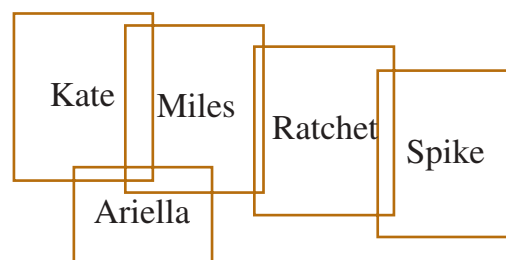
Connecting with literary elements

1. Put students into small groups. Have each group identify 5 crucial scenes from the book that could not be omitted and create a rationale for keeping that scene. Then let the groups share their lists. Try to reach consensus on which scenes must remain.

2. When students have finished reading *Heartlight*, ask them to choose what they consider to be the single most important word in the book. They should prepare a list of reasons that defends their choice. In small groups, let students share their selections. As responses will differ from reader to reader, give students time to reflect upon each other's choices. As a large group, list all the words chosen. Help students to see that the words capture the ideas Barron is trying to get across to the readers, or, in other words, the themes of the novel.

3. Reproduce the following diagram and ask students to study it. Tell them it indicates which characters share traits with other characters. For instance, this chart shows that Miles shares characteristics with Kate, Ariella, and Ratchet, but

not with Spike. Ask if they agree with these connections; if not, have them create a diagram that illustrates the connections that they see.



4. Butterflies play an important part in this book. A butterfly inspires Miles' discovery of heartlight. Later, butterflies transport Miles and Kate across the universe. Ask students to consider why Barron might have chosen butterflies for these important roles in this book. Make sure they consider the butterfly's ability to undergo metamorphosis. Where else do readers see a metamorphosis taking place? In each of the characters? In the stars? In what Miles' discovery means for science?

5. In a quest fantasy, the protagonist is the character who is trying to complete a seemingly impossible task. The antagonist is the character who attempts to foil the task. The protagonist generally receives some sort, of help from an outside positive force. Identify the protagonist, antagonist, and outside positive force in this novel.

6. Novels have either flat characters or round characters. Flat characters are not only one-dimensional, but they show no growth throughout the novel. Round characters, however, are multi-dimensional and show growth throughout the novel. Ask students to place Kate, Miles, Ariella, Spike, and Ratchet on the following chart and to use examples from the book for that placement.

Flat	Round
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7. Barron uses a recurring image of an eye throughout this novel. On pages 82 and 83, Kate is captivated by the giant honeycombed eyes of the butterfly Morpheus. Then on page 164, she gazes into the single, piercing eye of the Sage of Sauria. Finally, on page 246, she is hunted by the evil red eye of The Darkness. Barron combines this image of the eye or sight with the symbols of light for

goodness (heartlight) and dark for evil (The Darkness). How are the symbols of light and dark enhanced with the recurring image of the eye?

8. Symbols help readers create meaning. For example, Barron chose the name Miles Prancer because it symbolizes certain things about this character's personality and his quest. What does the element heartlight symbolize? Is it a physical substance, a universal quality, a spiritual concept, or more than one of these things?

Connecting with composition

1. Bring in several science journals (for example, *Discovery* or *Nature*) and several news paper articles that address scientific topics. Let students study both. Look how the tone, language, and explanations differ between the two. Now let students reread pages 264 and 265, the scene in which Trethoniel collapses. Assign students to rewrite this scene as it would be reported in a newspaper or in a science journal.

2. This book is full of foreshadowing of Miles' approaching death. Let students compose a letter written from Miles to Kate that she is to find after his death. What would it say?

3. Have students keep a response journal while reading *Heartlight*. As they come across passages containing ideas with which they particularly agree or disagree, have them note those passages and their opinions. Later, let them choose one passage and write a letter to Mr. Barron explaining their support or disagreement with his idea.

Connecting with T. A. Barron

"I have always cared about writing. When I was in fifth grade, I liked to tell stories so much that I started my own little magazine, called *The Idiot's Odyssey*. Later, when I was in charge of a business, I often found myself getting up at 3 a.m. to compose, writing during meetings, or scribbling in the back of a taxi. Finally I had to make a choice, to do what I love best, because life is too short not to follow your passions. So here I am, still telling stories. "For me, the hardest thing about being a writer is the discipline to keep writing when I'd rather be wrestling with my kids, making

homemade ice cream, going for a hike, or having more time with my wife. But the best thing, which comes from that discipline, is making a word, a place, a character, a dilemma or an idea come alive. Truly alive. For both writer and reader. Then I have a chance to with life—and with other people."

Other Books in this Series

The Ancient One, Tor Books (paperback) 1994; Putnam (hardcover) 1992.

The Merlin Effect, Tor Books (paperback) 1996; Putnam (hardcover) 1994



Study guides for these books are also available.

Study guides for T. A. Barron's books were written by Dr. Kyleen Beers. She teaches children's and young adult literature at Sam Houston State University in Texas.