

# MIA

AND THE

## LIGHTCASTERS



Teaching Resources for ages 9+/KS2  
Written by Scott Evans

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### About the Book

Mia's home was plunged into a forever night years ago by the shadowy Reaper King – a figure that now only appears in nightmares.

Outside the city walls the umbra roam – powerful beasts with golden eyes. Only a special few can tame the umbra and help to keep the city safe.

Safe, that is, until a surprise attack changes Mia's life forever. With her parents and the rest of the umbra tamers captured, Mia and her little brother, Lucas, are the city's only hope of survival . . .



### About the Author



Janelle McCurdy is an author and fully-fledged gamer. Having started writing and querying at only sixteen years-old, she joined JULA in her early twenties. After graduating from Royal Holloway University with a Criminology and Sociology degree, Janelle moved back home to London, and began writing middle-grade fantasy.

In her free time, you can find Janelle holed up in her room, gaming and watching anime (some of her favourites being *Inuyasha*, *DragonBall Z* and *Death Note*), or attending numerous comic cons and gaming events.

Her FAB Prize winning story *Mia and the Lightcasters* was acquired by Faber in a major auction.



# Umbra Tales: Introduction & Prologue

(pages 1–20)

## Comprehension Questions

- Predict who the unknown author might be, and how the story of the Umbra Tales might play out in the rest of the book.
- What is a prologue? How does Janelle McCurdy set the scene in this opening?
- Who is telling the story? What do we learn about them? Why don't they want to go beyond the walls again?
- What is the name of their city? What has happened to it in the past?
- Why do you think the umbra that Mia saw in the Nightmare Plains had red eyes instead of gold, like the others do?

## Writing Opportunities

Create a character profile of each of the characters in the story so far (Mia, Miles, Mum Dad, etc.). Write down what you know about each of them already – add more detail as you read.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### SCIENCE

The chapter ends with a warning of a blood moon. Find out more about a blood moon in our world, which is another name given to a total lunar eclipse when the Earth moves in between the Sun and the Moon and write an explanation about why it happens.

### LITERACY/HISTORY

How is the moon important in folklore, storytelling and spiritual beliefs through history?



# Chapter One

(pages 21–53)

## Comprehension Questions

- What does Dad do on page 23 when he doesn't agree with Mia but he doesn't want to say it?
- Why have Miles, his parents and other families left Nubis?
- Find a word on page 25 that means the same as 'a person or thing that is different from what is usual'. (*anomaly*)
- What kind of work is Mia's mum doing in the laboratory?
- What is the name of Mia's teacher? Why is she a star tamer in Nubis? Who does she say that the record of staying in the third form belongs to on page 47?

## Writing Opportunities

Plot an emotions graph to record Mia's changing thoughts and feelings throughout this chapter. Refer to key events like: going to tamer training; seeing Mum at the lab; TJ not showing up; and being chosen by Jada at the end.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### SCIENCE

Consider the significance of light in the story. How is the theme of 'light' (and its opposite, 'darkness') explored in the book?

### ART

Draw what you imagine an umbra to look like.





# Chapter Two

## (pages 54-70)

### Comprehension Questions

- Why is TJ late to tamer training?
- Is Mia successful in her quest to take one of Ruby's feathers?
- What prize does Jada give to Mia?
- How would you describe the friendship between Mia and TJ? Summarise their relationship in three words.
- What news does Mum deliver to Mia? Why do they have to go?

### Writing Opportunities

At the end of this chapter, we learn what their family promises are. Adapt these into a classroom version and write your class promises.

### Cross-Curricular Activities

#### DRAMA

Work in small groups to act out the exchanges between Mia, Mum and Dad at the end of this chapter. Think about body language, expression and tone to convey emotion. Freeze frame at different points and reflect on what each character is really feeling.



# Chapter Three

## (pages 71–91)

### Comprehension Questions

- Read to the end of page 71. Should Mia go into her dad's office? What would you do?
- What does it mean to not 'snitch' on page 72?
- List at least three things that Mia sees in her Dad's office.
- What are the names of the two cities that haven't been taken by the Darkness?
- How long has the city of Nubis been dark for?

### Writing Opportunities

What advice would you give to Mia if you could speak to her? Write down some words of wisdom about helping her parents if you were in her situation.

### Cross-Curricular Activities

#### P.E.

Learn about a range of martial arts including karate, taekwondo, jiu-jitsu, aikido and tai chi. Develop a range of movements and techniques, as well as self-defence awareness.

#### GEOGRAPHY

Using the descriptions of the cities in this chapter, create a map of the area.





# Chapter Four

## (pages 92–100)

### Comprehension Questions

- What can you tell about Mia's parents from the way they are acting when locked in the cage?
- Pick out words and phrases that show Dad's anger in this chapter. What do you think of his behaviour?
- What do you think is packed in the bag that Mia has been told to take only in the case of an emergency?
- Why does one of the guards call Mia 'the one' on page 99?
- What do you predict might happen to Mia and Lucas next when they recognise Miles?

### Writing Opportunities

Write a diary entry from the perspective of Mum and Dad about their experiences of being locked inside this cage. Consider how to show their thoughts and feelings.

### Cross-Curricular Activities

#### DRAMA/MUSIC

Recreate the scenes of this chapter by reading it aloud or re-enacting it in groups. Consider how you can use music and props to create atmosphere.

#### PSHE

Mia is described as the 'one'. Write down a list of your own unique qualities. What sort of hero or heroine would you be in your own story?



# Chapter Five

(pages 101–117)

## Comprehension Questions

- What memories are triggered in Mia's mind when she sees Miles for the first time in a long time?
- How has Miles changed from the last time that Mia saw him?
- Where has Mia seen Shade before?
- What is Mia's favourite word to use as an insult? (*gutterslug*)
- Why does Mia say that they will come back 'even for Miles'? What does this show about her character?

## Writing Opportunities

Write a short paragraph explaining what an umbra is in your own words. Use words and phrases from the text to help you.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### SCIENCE

Constellations have been mentioned over the last few chapters. Recognise some famous constellations and discover the myths behind them. Create your own presentations of constellations and creations of night sky artwork.





# Chapter Six

(pages 118–136)

## Comprehension Questions

- How does the author immediately create suspense from the beginning of this chapter with the descriptions of the setting?
- Where is the emergency pack situated in the Nightmare Plains? Why is this a significant location?
- TJ says on page 132 that ‘everything happens for a reason’. What is meant by this saying, and do you agree with it?
- Who do you think Miles means when he says that the ‘true king’ is rising again?
- Act out the look that Jada does on page 134 when Mia says that she doesn’t like the look in her eyes.

## Writing Opportunities

Write a note from Mia’s parents to Mia wishing her luck on her journey to Stella. What advice would they give her? How would they try to make her feel better?

Read *The Taming of the Umbra: A Guide* at the end of this chapter and list three top tips from it.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### SPEAKING AND LISTENING

It seems that Mia will have to be the one to save her parents and the others by going to Stella. Discuss with a partner if you think you would make a good hero or heroine. What are your strengths? What weaknesses might you have?



# Chapter Seven

(pages 137–158)

## Comprehension Questions

- What does it mean if something is ‘devoured’ on page 137?
- Why doesn’t TJ talk about his trial and instead makes a joke or changes the conversation when someone asks about it?
- What are ‘lightcasters’?
- Read to the end of page 145. Do you think Mia will be able to fight Miles if she has to?
- What do you think will happen to the city that’s really bad at the end of the countdown?

## Writing Opportunities

In this chapter, we are told of the tale of the Reaper King. Have a go at writing a story or poem about the Reaper King beginning with the lines on page 150:

*‘Beware of the reaper creeper, creeping in the night. When innocent children meet the maleficent end of their short little lives.’*

## Cross-Curricular Activities

P.E./P.S.H.E./R.E.

Teach how to practise meditation through breathing, visualisation and full body scan. Learn about why it plays a key role in religions around the world such as Buddhism.





# Chapter Eight

(pages 159–175)

## Comprehension Questions

- Summarise in one word how TJ is feeling when he is described as ‘pacing back and forth’ on page 159?
- What is the connection between the blood moon and the umbra?
- Why does Mia tell Lucas that TJ is ‘sleeping’ when he is performing his spirit calling?
- What nickname does TJ call Mia?
- What is different about the umbra that Mia has summoned?

## Writing Opportunities

In this chapter and some of the ones before, Mia can’t believe what she is seeing. Thinking of a dream (or nightmare) that you’ve had, write your own dreamlike scene.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### P.S.H.E

Note down at least three qualities that make TJ a good friend to Mia.

### ART

Illustrate what your umbra would like if you could choose it.



# Chapter Nine

(pages 176–212)

## Comprehension Questions

- What are the names of the twin umbra?
- Why does Lucas stand his ground about their first family rule?
- What does it mean to be a ‘pushover’ on page 191?
- What is Jada’s backstory? Who inspired her to want to become a tamer?
- Who do you think is controlling Miles’ mind?

## Writing Opportunities

On page 206, Jada recalls the positive words that Mia’s mum told her. Write positive affirmations for other children in the class in the style of Mia’s mum.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### P.E./ART

Mia describes her twin umbra as yin and yang in the last chapter. Learn more about the symbolism of these black and white interlocked shapes. Draw them, with children including one thing that they need to do a little less of in their life in one half, and one thing they could do a little more of in order to bring more ‘balance’ to their lives in the other half.





# Chapter Ten

(pages 213–221)

## Comprehension Questions

- How does the author, Janelle McCurdy, create a sense of panic about the disappearance of Lucas?
- Why are some of the sentences in this chapter written in italics? What does this show?
- What literary device is being used when Mia repeatedly asks herself questions beginning with ‘What if...?’ on page 216? (Rhetorical questions)
- Who are the Elite?
- How have the Elite used the old man to get to Mia?

## Writing Opportunities

Make a list of five questions that you have about the story at the end of this chapter. What are your predictions for Mia, Lucas, the others and the Elite?

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### DRAMA

In groups of 4 or 5, recreate the scene where Mia sees that the old man has Lucas with the Elite behind them. Use music and sound effects to create fear and tension. You could even try adjusting the tone and volume of your voices for effect.



# Chapter Eleven

(pages 222–242)

## Comprehension Questions

- Why do you think the umbra thought that their tamer wouldn't be a kid?
- What are 'minions' on page 228?
- Read to the end of page 230. Should the children go down the secret doorway with 'Beware' on it?
- Pick out the phrases that the author uses to show us that the dark hole is deep.
- Why are their illustrations included within the chapters?

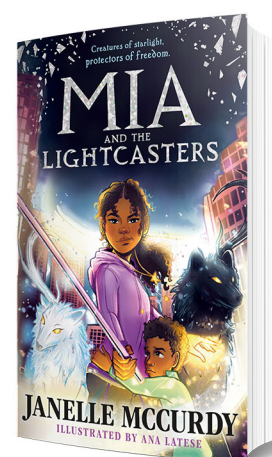
## Writing Opportunities

Write a character profile for Lucas. What are his personality traits, his strengths and his weaknesses? How does he inspire Mia? Include key quotes and descriptions from the text to help you.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### P.S.H.E.

Consider the theme of bravery in the book. What is bravery? Who is brave?



# Chapter Twelve

(pages 243–275)

## Comprehension Questions

- What was the name of the girl who used to live with the umbra in the cave?
- Why doesn't Mia want to be different on page 247?
- How do umbra always find their tamers?
- How does Mia save TJ from being eaten?
- What is revealed about Mia towards the end of this chapter? How does she feel about being a lightcaster?

## Writing Opportunities

Is it actually wrong to bond with an umbra? Write a balanced argument about whether you think umbras should be tamed or not, arguing both sides and drawing up a conclusion.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### SCIENCE

In this chapter, the Elite use vibrations to distract Mia and the others. Investigate how sound is made and how we hear it through a range of practical demonstrations and experiments, and record your findings.





# Chapter Thirteen

(pages 276–314)

## Comprehension Questions

- Where are the children put to wait for the queen? What is an interrogation room? Why does this seem strange to Mia?
- How do Lux and Nox overcome the guard on page 285?
- Which memorable landmark does Mia remember being in front of their Nan and Grandad's house?
- Where are Mia's grandparents? Why?
- Why does the author include reports and extra information at the end of some of the chapters? What do we learn from it?

## Writing Opportunities

Consider Lux's statement on page 310: 'It's best to try and to fail, than to fail without trying at all.' In pairs, discuss these words. Do you agree? Why is it better to fail than to give up?

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### MATHS

Compare and contrast the similarities and differences between Nubis and Stella using a Venn diagram.



# Chapter Fourteen

(pages 315–331)

## Comprehension Questions

- Use a dictionary to define what the queen's gold 'insignia' is.
- What type of umbra does the queen have?
- How does the author use the mood and the new environment to create a sense of danger?
- Why does she say that she can't help the children directly? Which of her prized possessions does she give them?
- How did no one else but Mia hear the scream that signalled the arrival of the Elite?

## Writing Opportunities

Write a proposal to the queen arguing why she should go with Mia to help her parents. Consider all the reasons you can.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### HISTORY/ART

Look at symbols of insignia used throughout history such as the EIIR initials, known as the Royal Cypher of Queen Elizabeth II, and the Royal coat of arms. Create your own unique insignia using a monogram logo of your initials.



# Chapter Fifteen

(pages 332–355)

## Comprehension Questions

- What does it show about Mia when she makes the decision to leave Lucas with TJ at the beginning of this chapter?
- How does Mia try to reassure Lucas when she tells him that she can't go with him?
- What does it mean when Mia says her breath 'hitches in her throat' on page 340? Act this out to show your understanding.
- What simile does Miles use to compare the sense of Mia to on page 345? (like a shark smelling blood)
- What is the significance of the crystal in The Founders of Lunis tale included at the end of this chapter?

## Writing Opportunities

Using the 'Umbra Tales' as inspiration, create a tale of your own.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### LITERACY

Consider the important themes in the novel so far, e.g. fantasy, action, adventure, home, family, friendship, light. Can you add any more? Create a 'Theme Sheet' to record any ideas as you read the end of this story.





# Chapter Sixteen

## (pages 356–379)

### Comprehension Questions

- What sights, smells and sounds greet Mia on her return to Nubis?
- What reaction does Mia give to Miles' parents?
- What has happened to all the people who have gone missing during the previous Blood Moons?
- Why does Miles become worried about what will happen to Mia on page 366? Does this show he still has some emotion left inside of him?
- Does Miles do the right thing towards the end of this chapter? Do you think he should return to live with his parents?

### Writing Opportunities

Write a short summary of the events in this chapter and why they are important.

Retell this scene from Miles' viewpoint. Consider everything he is feeling at the moment, and why he threw the crystal to destroy the Reaper King against his parents' wishes.

### Cross-Curricular Activities

#### ART

From the descriptions and illustrations provided in this chapter, draw your impression of what the Reaper King looks like. Decide what features you will highlight and discuss your reasons for doing so.

Imagine you are recreating the events of this chapter for a film. Create a storyboard to show how the action unfolds.



# Chapter Seventeen

(pages 380–391)

## Comprehension Questions

- How long did it take to start to rebuild their city?
- When did Mia's parents discover that she was a lightcaster?
- What does the Queen invite the children to do? Why does Mia refuse the chance to train as part of the Queen's Guard?
- What reason does TJ give for refusing to train under the queen? How does Mia make him change his mind?
- What do we learn about the origin stories of each city?

## Writing Opportunities

Mia says that she can't imagine her life without Lux and Nox. Write a paragraph to describe the bond that Mia has with her umbra, and how it has grown throughout the story.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### SCIENCE/HISTORY

Could being a lightcaster be an inherited characteristic? Look at the concept of inheritance – what does this mean? Create a family tree of your own and think about what you might have inherited from them.



# Epilogue

(pages 392–394)

## Comprehension Questions

- How do we know that rain is a rare sight on the Nightmare Plains?
- What nickname or term of endearment does Mia use for Lucas? (pipsqueak/Lu-Lu)
- What does Mia say is the first lesson of being a tamer?
- Who do you think is saying the words ‘I will return’ at the end?
- What do you think will happen next to Mia, Lucas and the other characters?

## Writing Opportunities

Write a book review including your own thoughts about the story and its themes, and why others should read it.

Write a short sequel continuing what happens to some of the characters.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### LITERACY

For each of the main characters in the story, write a sentence summarising how they have developed or draw a timeline to show what they have learned about themselves.

### ART

After reading, decide what elements you’d like to highlight and design an alternative cover.

