

# BLOSSOM & ROOT

INTEGRATED LANGUAGE ARTS // LEVEL 6

## *Creativity & Community*

INDIVIDUAL NOVEL STUDY

LESSON GUIDE



A KIND OF SPARK  
BY ELLE MCNICOLL



[www.blossomandroot.com](http://www.blossomandroot.com)

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# *Blossom & Root*

Integrated Language Arts,  
Level 6:

## *Creativity & Community*

A Hands-On, Secular Language Arts Curriculum

**Individual Novel Study For:**

***A Kind of Spark***  
**by Elle McNicoll**

**Blossom & Root Integrated Language Arts**  
**Level 6: Creativity and Community**

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# Blossom and Root Novel Studies

## Level 6

### Important Note to Parents and Guardians

Level 6 novel studies are designed to be done independently by students. However, while some learners will be ready to work independently at this level, others will still need (or prefer) the guidance of an adult. Please consider the options on the following page, and decide which one fits your family best. Regardless of the option you choose, please follow these guidelines:

1. **Always screen any and all films, website links, and books before allowing your student access to them.** Some of these will not be appropriate for every family.
2. **This guide is designed for a parent or guardian to oversee their student's work, even if they are using the independent option.** Please take time to look over this lesson guide at the beginning and end of each week. Decide what your learner will and won't be expected to complete, as there are many optional activities. Decide which links you want them to access or skip. Mark the guide as needed to help your learner understand what to do and what to skip.
3. Please always sit with (or supervise) your student when they're using the internet for research, to access links, etc. Please note that ads on some websites, commercials before certain videos, and comment sections can sometimes feature content that will not be appropriate. This is a good age to start teaching your learner how to navigate the internet safely and responsibly.

### Scheduling Options

Weeks 1 - 3 are the heart of the curriculum, but we have included a fourth week to provide additional breathing space, review, and deep dives for families that prefer a more relaxed pace.

- **Three-Week Schedule:** Complete Weeks 1 - 3. Omit Week 4, or select desired activities from Week 4 to fold into the third week.
- **Four-Week Schedule:** Complete Weeks 1 - 4.
- **Beyond Four Weeks:** If your family loves deep dives and rabbit trails, please take as much time as you like to complete this novel study. The scripted daily schedules are only suggestions.

# Options for Use

## Adult-Led Option

If your child is not ready for independent work, or you prefer to do the work together, please use this guide as a parent guide. You will read the literature books to them, guide them through the lessons as written, oversee the assignments, etc. Treat this lesson guide as you would a parent guide from previous levels. Even though the guide is written to the child, you can easily use it as a framework for instruction. Please note that you do not have to follow the schedule for each week as written. We provide a daily framework in this level to help guide independent learners, but it is only a suggestion. Please feel free to adapt it as needed to work for you and your family.

## Transitional Option

If your child is ready for some independent work, but not all of it, or if they are ready to do some of the assignments independently but they aren't ready to read the literature to themselves, or if they're ready to work independently but you still want to do the read-alouds as a family, you can use the transitional option. Assign and oversee the work you want your child to complete independently, and lead the rest yourself. You can pass this lesson guide back and forth, note what you want them to complete alone or together with you, etc. Please note that you do not have to follow the schedule for each week as written. We provide a daily framework in this level to help guide independent learners, but it is only a suggestion. Please feel free to adapt as needed to work for you and your family.

## Independent Option

If your child is ready or wanting to complete the work independently, they can use this guide as a lesson guide for themselves. **You will still need to oversee their work to some degree, help them to understand what to do and what to skip from the week's various options, and screen ALL links, books, and websites before allowing them to watch or access them.** This curriculum was not designed to be handed over to a child without parental supervision and screening. If your child wants to work independently but cannot read the literature selections alone just yet, audiobooks are a great option. Please see the following page for more information on the independent option. Please note that you do not have to follow the schedule for each week as written. We provide a daily framework in this level to help guide independent learners, but it is only a suggestion. Please feel free to adapt as needed to work for you and your family.

## Tips for Use: Independent Option

- Think of this option as a "teamwork" option. You are still the coach, but your student has more freedom to work independently. You are still overseeing them, screening links and books, and helping them learn how to manage their time and follow a framework, but they are completing the bulk of the work itself on their own.
- Before handing anything to your student, read over this lesson guide when you first receive it. Get familiar with the layout. Note any extra resources you'll need to acquire from the book and supply lists at the beginning. Decide if you want them to follow the daily layout as written, or if you want to allow them to complete things in any order they like.
- Take a few minutes before beginning this unit to walk your student through the guide, and show them which assignments correspond with pages in their notebooks. Show them how to mark assignment checkboxes (one slash for "in progress", two crossing slashes in an "X" for "completed"). Show them the "catch up" day on day 5 of each week. We do not recommend that you give the child access to the clickable links PDF. Rather, we recommend you setting up the links you've approved for them as needed. If you would prefer your child to access the links themselves, please show them how you will mark links approved for them to watch or visit and how you will mark those they may not watch or visit in the lesson guide. **ALWAYS SCREEN every single link. Not every video or website (or book) will be appropriate for every family.**
- We highly recommend taking a few minutes the night before a new week begins to screen the next week's links, cross out any links or optional activities you'd like them to skip, write a "T" next to any assignments you want to complete together, etc.
- Sit down with them for a quick moment at the beginning of the week and go through the week ahead with them, using the lesson guide. Show them where you crossed out any assignments or links you want them to skip. Show them where you marked a "T" next to anything you want to do together, so they won't complete it without you. If you want them to follow the daily schedule as written, let them know. If you don't care what order they complete things in, let them know that they may complete the assignments in any order they want over the course of the week.
- Optional: At the beginning of Day 5, look over the past 4 days with your student. Is there anything unfinished that needs to be finished? Help them learn to manage their time and their assignments by providing guidance and support.
- If your student wants to read the literature independently, but they are not quite able to yet, audiobooks are a great option! And you can always read the literature together as a family read-aloud, even if they're using the independent option.

# Make It Yours

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## How to Teach This Curriculum

"You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have."

- Maya Angelou

### **Part One: Exploring Literature**

Your student will spend time each week reading the literature selections, or you can read them together. After reading, they'll explore elements of story through short prompts provided in the curriculum. They will then explore the literature through journal prompts, narrations, and a variety of activities, from hands-on projects, to rabbit-trail options, and more. Please note that we continue to provide space for drawings and illustrations in this level, but it is completely optional. Students who do not enjoy coloring and drawing need not feel pressured to do so every week.

Before having your student read any of the novels in this curriculum, we highly suggest you read ahead. Some stories may contain elements, words, or imagery that are not appropriate for your family's values, or perhaps too intense for your child's individual sensitivities. Some stories may also contain references to alcohol or drug use, adult situations, violence, racism, peril, gambling, or cruelty.

### **Part Two: Vocabulary, Writing, Grammar, and Punctuation**

#### **Vocabulary**

Your child will explore new vocabulary through a variety of exercises, or by writing an original sentence, poem, meme, joke, song lyric, billboard, or whatever else they can think up, using provided vocabulary words. Sometimes, the vocabulary lesson uses match-up prompts instead. All vocabulary words from this novel study are reviewed in Week 4.

### **Part Two, cont.**

#### **Copywork, Dictation, and Grammar**

We have provided copywork prompts and passages each week in the student notebook. These are meant to help children practice handwriting, spelling, and punctuation, and to explore grammar concepts. If your child needs more room (or larger lines) for their copywork, feel free to use a separate notebook or loose pages created for middle-grade writers. Our copywork includes grammar prompts to complete first. Some weeks also include an optional dictation exercise. You will read the dictation passage slowly out loud and they will write it down. You may need to read it several times. When they finish, give them the passage from the lesson guide to check their work and make any corrections to their own passage. Cursive copywork pages have been included at the back of this guide and can be switched out for the regular print copywork if you wish.

#### **The Super Secret Notebook Guide**

The Super Secret Notebook Guide replaces the Creative Extensions Guide (from Levels 2 and 3) in Levels 4 and up. This guide is designed to get your child playing with words, sentences, paragraphs, short essays, and stories in a gentle and creative way. It is the primary writing portion of this curriculum. These prompts are designed to be done by your student independently, but you are welcome to adapt them to be parent-led instead if that fits your needs better. Please refer to the guide itself for further details.

Please note that Super Secret Notebook prompts are contained in a separate PDF.

#### **Independent Reading**

We recommend that most Level 6 students read from a level-appropriate book for at least 40 minutes per day. We highly recommend letting them choose their own books for independent reading at this level, from both fiction and non-fiction sources.

#### **Part Three: Social Studies Prompts**

Each week includes an optional social studies prompt that ties into the literature selection. ALL social studies prompts in this curriculum are completely optional. Do not feel pressured to complete them all.

# Scope & Sequence:

## Novel Study for *A Kind of Spark*

### **"Elements of Story" Focus:**

- Exploring how storytellers can use punctuation, dialogue tags, and word choice in dialogue to “show” us more about the characters and action of the story
- Investigating point of view
- Using evidence from the text to compare and contrast three interwoven subjects in the novel

### **Literature Projects:**

- Listening to and recording dialogue
- Creating a dialogue based on overheard conversations
- Creating an original dialogue from a fairytale or folktale

### **Grammar Focus:**

- Verbs: action verbs, linking verbs, helping verbs
- Active vs. passive voice
- Subject-verb agreement
- Verb tenses

### **Punctuation Focus:**

- Comma usage with nouns of direct address

### **Super Secret Notebook Project:**

- Creating an informative display (organizing and presenting information visually)

### **Social Studies Tie-Ins:**

- The Witch Hunts in Scotland
- Neurodiversity
- Memorials

### **Additional Topics Explored:**

- Author Elle McNicoll
- Cultural references from the novel (music, film, and theatre)



# Week No. 1: A Kind of Spark

## Day 1

### In the student notebook, complete the journal prompt: "Where Do You Feel Peaceful?"

Read the full prompt in the student notebook, then write and illustrate your response.

### Elements of Story: Unveiling a Character Through Dialogue

An author can use many tools to show us who a character is without having to tell us outright. They can show us through actions, thoughts, reactions, background information, physical descriptions, idiosyncrasies, objects, possessions, and spaces. Another powerful tool an author can use to unveil a character is dialogue. In *A Kind of Spark*, author Elle McNicoll frequently employs the use of dialogue to tell us about a character. The words characters choose to use, the rhythm and pacing of the character's words, the punctuation, and strong verbs are used to bring their dialogue to life and to give us clues about their personalities. Let's take a look at a few different passages of Ms. Murphy's dialogue from the beginning of the book:

- "This handwriting is utterly disgraceful."
- "Do not *ever* write so lazily again!" she shouts.
- "A girl your age knows better than to write like that; your handwriting is like a baby's."
- "Tell me that you understand!" Her shouts are so loud and the moments after are so quiet.

Right from the beginning of the book, we know some important things about Ms. Murphy, just by reading the dialogue. In the very first chapter, she uses the words "utterly disgraceful," "lazy," and "like a baby" in reference to Addie. What do these word choices tell us about Ms. Murphy and her feelings toward Addie? Does she speak to anyone else in the class like that?

The author ends two of the passages with exclamation points. What does this punctuation reveal to us? How do you imagine Ms. Murphy to sound when she is speaking to Addie?

In the corresponding pages in the student notebook, begin keeping a record of important bits and pieces of dialogue spoken by several characters. Maintain this log as you read the book during weeks 1 - 3. In week 4, you'll reflect back on these bits of dialogue in another prompt. As you record pieces of dialogue, be sure to include the specific punctuation (like the emphasis on "ever" and the exclamation points in the passages above) and the verbs the author uses to show us the action of the dialogue (like "shouts") as well.

### Start the literature project: Listening In

This week, you will complete a short exercise called "Listening In." The purpose of this exercise is to practice listening to the way people speak. At several intervals throughout the week, sit down with a piece of paper and a pencil (or, if you prefer to type, a tablet or computer) and record several minutes of dialogue as you hear it. Try to record a bit of dialogue from all of the following sources during the week:

- A conversation between two people overheard in your home (don't spy on your family--make sure they know you're listening)
- A conversation between two people overheard in a public place (in the checkout line at the store, at the park, etc.)
- A conversation between two people from a podcast interview or an interview on a news program
- A conversation between more than two people

### Optional **Independent reading for 40 minutes or more**

# Week No. 1: A Kind of Spark

## Day 2

- In the student notebook, complete the first prompt on the copywork page.
- Begin the prompt for *A Kind of Spark* Week 1 in the Super Secret Notebook Guide.
- Continue the literature project: Listening In.
- Optional **Independent Reading for 40 minutes or more**

## Day 3

- In the student notebook, complete the **vocabulary page**: Read the instructions and complete the activities in the student notebook. This week you'll explore several vocabulary words in context.
- In the student notebook, complete the second prompt on the copywork page.
- Continue working on the prompt for *A Kind of Spark* Week 1 in the Super Secret Notebook Guide.
- Continue the literature project: Listening In.
- Optional **Independent Reading for 40 minutes or more**

## Day 4

- In the student notebook, complete the **narration page**. Illustrate and retell an event from this week's literature selection.
- In the student notebook, complete the **third prompt on the copywork page**. Today you will copy the passage (or a portion of the passage) in your best printing.
- Continue working on the prompt for *A Kind of Spark* Week 1 in the Super Secret Notebook Guide.
- Finish the literature project: Listening In.
- Optional **Independent Reading for 40 minutes or more**

# Week No. 1: A Kind of Spark

## Day 5 (optional)

- In the student notebook, complete the dictation exercise.** Ask an adult to read the dictation passage in this guide out loud to you a few times, slowly and clearly. As you listen, copy the passage onto the dictation page in your notebook. When you are finished, use the dictation passage in this guide to check your work. Correct any spelling, punctuation, or grammar mistakes as needed.
- Finish the prompt for *A Kind of Spark* Week 1 in the Super Secret Notebook Guide, if you have not finished it already.**
- Catch up on any work from the week, if needed**
- Optional **Complete this week's bonus activity: Meet the Author**

Use the links below to get to know author Elle McNicoll. An adult should always screen first.

- From Yo Samdy Sam, "A Kind of Spark: author interview (autistic children's book)":  
[https://youtu.be/Cu8x\\_9k9Kqk?si=lgLh4WUS8PCzoEC\\_](https://youtu.be/Cu8x_9k9Kqk?si=lgLh4WUS8PCzoEC_) (**Screen first**--this interview is geared more toward an older audience and touches on gender, sexuality, ableism, and racism. There is also some very mild adult language.)
- Author's Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ellemcnicollofficial/> (**adult screening required**)
- From The Literary Consultancy, "WHY I WRITE: Elle McNicoll": <https://youtu.be/mUzzeAr4HU4?si=67NmRTIGDuXMjVcG>
- From Books and Chokers, "Elle McNicoll FAQ": <https://youtu.be/FJ3T4z21sNc?si=4bUS2qH9G3OPSxns> (There is a little bit of a spoiler in this one around the 5:50 mark, so you may want to stop before that point.)
- An excellent interview with Inklusion Guide: <https://www.inklusionguide.org/blog/elle-mcnicoll-interview-1>
- From CBBC, "Neurodivergent Author Elle McNicoll talks all things A Kind of Spark | CBBC":  
<https://youtu.be/qH-pEJm2q-Y?si=IBT-JD9M6OgzI7ex> (This focuses mostly on the television show inspired by the novel, which we recommend in Week 4's bonus activity.)

**IMPORTANT: Clickable links from every lesson in this curriculum can be found in the Clickable Links PDF that came with your purchase!**

- Optional **Complete Social Studies Prompt for the Week**  
See next page for details.

# BLOSSOM & ROOT

INTEGRATED LANGUAGE ARTS // LEVEL 6

## *Creativity & Community*

INDIVIDUAL NOVEL STUDY

**STUDENT NOTEBOOK**



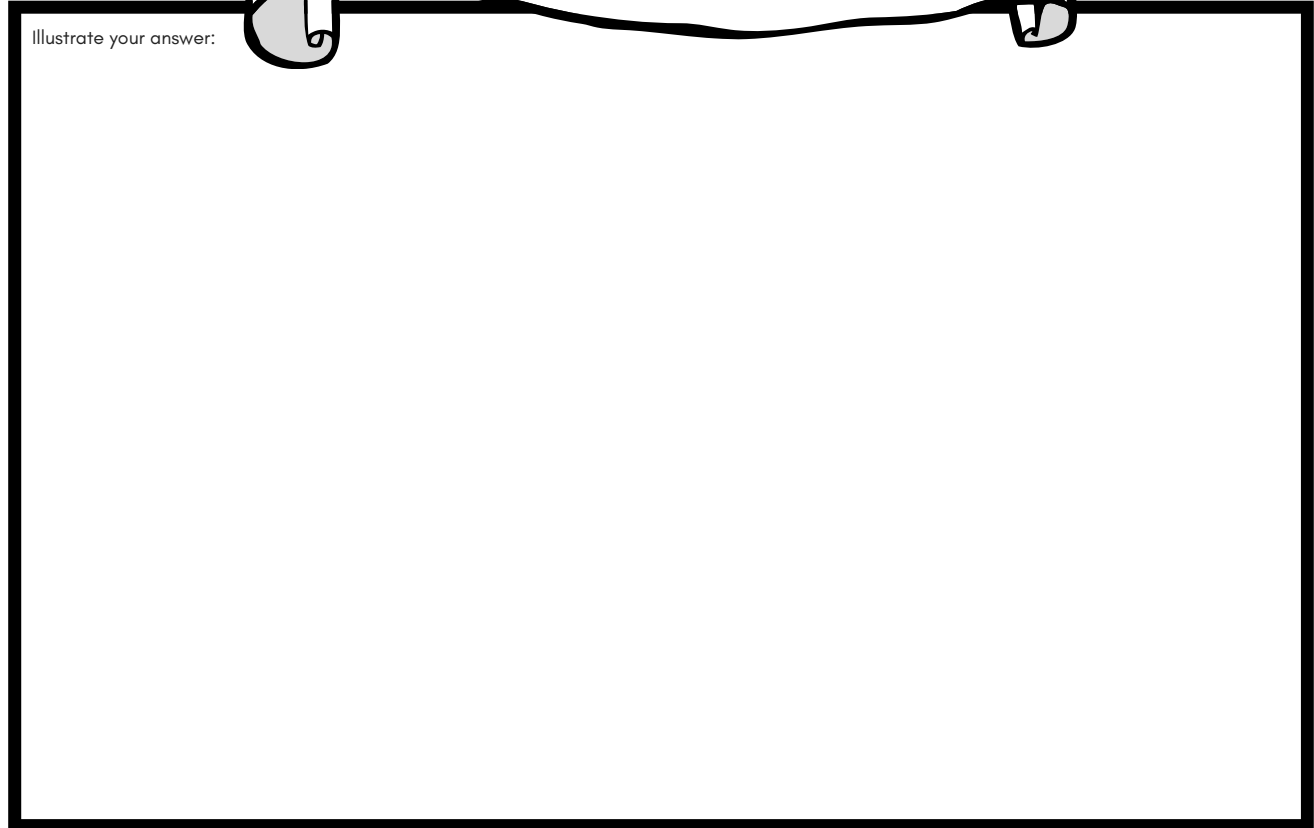
A KIND OF SPARK  
BY ELLE MCNICOLL

Integrating Creativity, Social Studies, Reading, and Writing with Fiction, Non-Fiction, and Poetry

Week 1

# Literature Journal

Illustrate your answer:



**Where Do You Feel Peaceful?:** At the beginning of *A Kind of Spark*, Addie shares that she feels calm and peaceful when she’s at the library. The library is quiet and organized, and the open space is a respite from the chaos and noise of the classrooms and school hallways. The librarian, Mr. Allison, supports and encourages Addie’s interests and he “never asks boring questions.” The act of reading itself is a relief to Addie, with the words following reliable rules, the pictures stimulating (but not overwhelming) her, and the opportunity to take her time without anyone hurrying her along. Think of a place where you feel calm and peaceful as soon as you arrive. Describe the place in detail and explain why it makes you feel that way. If you don’t have a specific place like that in your life right now, you are welcome to imagine one.

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## Recording Dialogue from *A Kind of Spark*

See the "Elements of Story" prompt in the lesson guide for instructions.

Examples of dialogue spoken by Ms. Murphy:

Examples of dialogue spoken by Mr. Allison:


## Recording Dialogue from *A Kind of Spark*

See the "Elements of Story" prompt in the lesson guide for instructions.

Examples of dialogue spoken by Keedie:

Examples of dialogue spoken by Emily:


**Read first:** According to the lesson guide, you will complete prompt 1 below on Day 2, prompt 2 on Day 3, and prompt 3 on Day 4. The corresponding passage can be found on the "copywork passage" page.

**Prompt 1:** All of the words in the entire world can be sorted into eight categories called the parts of speech. They are nouns, pronouns, adjectives and articles\*, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections. (\*In this level, we will group articles with adjectives.) In this novel study, we are going to focus on verbs.

Verbs tell us what a noun or pronoun is or does. Every complete sentence must have a verb. Some verbs are action verbs. They tell us what a noun or pronoun is doing in a sentence. Examples: Jacob *swam* across the creek. Melody *threw* the basket on the ground. Everyone *gasp*ed. Trevor and Mina *sold* their homemade preserves at the farmer's market. He *collaps*ed in pain. She *shiver*ed. They *came* to the house yesterday.

Some verbs are linking verbs. Linking verbs act like a little equal sign (=) connecting a noun or pronoun to an adjective or another noun or pronoun. Examples: This office *smell*s strange. The new neighbor *seem*s friendly. Victor's mother *is* a doctor. You *look* exhausted. Benny *was* the best dog ever. Handerberg *is* a sleepy town on the edge of a shallow lake.

Some verbs are helping verbs. We will talk about those in week 2.

On the following page, play with adding verbs in the blanks. When adding an action verb, try to use strong and descriptive verbs that really bring the sentence to life. (Answers will vary.)

**Prompt 2:** Sometimes, linking verbs can look like action verbs. It is important to remember that action verbs are performed by a noun or pronoun but a linking verb connects a noun or pronoun to an adjective, noun, or pronoun. Here is an example:

- I looked out over the frosted fields.

In this example, "looked" is an action verb. The pronoun "I" is performing the act of looking.

- Reina looked furious.

In this example, "looked" is a linking verb. It is equating "Reina" with the adjective "furious."

In the passage for prompt 2 on the following page, practice identifying action verbs vs. linking verbs. Mark action verbs with "AV" and linking verbs with "LV." (Answers can be found in the lesson guide at the bottom of the dictation page for week 1.)

**Prompt 3:** Today, you will copy the copywork passage (or a portion of the passage), using your best printing. Can you spot the verbs in the passage? Highlight or underline them, and check your answer against the dictation page in the lesson guide.



Prompt 1: Add verbs in the blanks below.

**Caleb \_\_\_\_\_ to the corner store with coins  
bouncing around wildly in his pocket.**

**If you \_\_\_\_\_ one more time, I'm going to  
\_\_\_\_\_!**

**The helicopters \_\_\_\_\_ above their heads like  
wasps.**

**Maybe we should \_\_\_\_\_ tomorrow instead of  
\_\_\_\_\_.**

**Did you see what your brother just did? He \_\_\_\_\_  
and \_\_\_\_\_ right into the fountain!**

**They all \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
when they saw what waited inside the gates.**

Prompt 2: Write "AV" above all actions verbs and "LV" above all linking verbs below.

**Elif woke with a start and gazed around the room in confusion. For a moment,  
she forgot she was alone and called out to her sister. When her eyes finally  
adjusted, she remembered. This was her grandfather's home in the city.  
Outside, cars honked and people chattered on the sidewalk. She suddenly felt  
very small.**



I walk through the Juniper woods and pretend that I have magical powers. I cast spells on the trees and on the water. My large headphones are playing music while I spin and stim through the trees. I wonder if any of the witches walked this path. If they tried to escape into these woods to avoid capture.

**Parents:** Cursive copywork / dictation passages can be found in the Cursive Copywork and Dictation Passages at the end of the Lesson Guide PDF.

Blank lined area for writing practice, consisting of 15 horizontal lines.

**clamor**

feeling or showing acceptance that something unpleasant will happen or will not change

**encyclopedia**

not easily noticed or seen; not attracting attention

**engrossed**

to move with a violent twist

**resigned**

giving all of one's attention to something

**wrench**

to beg urgently, to make an earnest request

**masking**

loud and confused noise

**implore**

efforts of a neurodivergent person, whether conscious or unconscious, to change their external behavior to blend into neurotypical social situations

**inconspicuous**

a book or set of books giving information on many subjects or on many aspects of one subject

**Exploring Words in Context****Step One:**

This week, you'll explore some vocabulary words in context. These are all words that appear in *A Kind of Spark*. Look at the clues on the next page, then come back to this page and match the words in the first column above with their definitions in the second column above. If you need a little more context to discern the meaning of a word, open your copy of the book to the page listed after the provided quote. (Some copies of the novel will have different page numbers than those listed.) You can also consult a dictionary to help you.

**Step Two:**

Create a doodle, comic, song lyric, dialogue, slogan, poem, etc. using one or more of the vocabulary words provided above. Try to choose words that you're not familiar with yet and use this exercise to help you memorize their meanings in a fun way. A blank page has been provided for you to use after the following page.

**clamor**

context:

"They get too close, they push and clamor, and it makes my neck hot and my heart too quick."  
(page 3, Chapter 1)

**encyclopedia**

context:

"An encyclopedia is a book that tells you a lot about one subject, or one area of study. This one is all about sharks."  
(page 4, Chapter 1)

**engrossed**

context:

"He moves back to his desk and I become engrossed in the book. Reading is the most calming thing after an overly loud and unkind classroom."  
(page 5, Chapter 1)

**resigned**

context:

"He cannot hear the scrape of her chair, the whirring of her camera lens as it retracts, or the resigned click of her bedroom door closing. But I can." (page 7, Chapter 2)

**wrench**

context:

"Nina gets up and goes to the fridge, then wrenches it open to grab a bottle of juice."  
(page 8, Chapter 2)

**masking**

context:

"Won't it be harder, masking full time?' I ask her. Masking is when I have to pass as a neurotypical person, as someone who is not like me. I have to ignore the need to stim, to self-soothe, and I have to make firm eye contact." (page 14, Chapter 2)

**implore**

context:

"I stare at her imploringly, desperate to hear more." (page 19, Chapter 3)

**inconspicuous**

context:

"The only way for the women in this village to be safe was for them to be as inconspicuous as possible.' 'What does that mean?' Emily asks. I want to tell her it means being ordinary and unremarkable, but I don't. I'm too overstimulated." (page 21, Chapter 3)

*Week 1*

## Vocabulary Part Two

Use the space below for your doodles, comics, song lyrics, dialogues, slogans, poems, etc.



*Week 1* Dictation

Ask an adult to read the dictation passage in the lesson guide out loud to you a few times, slowly and clearly. As you listen, copy the passage below. You may wish to write on every other line, so you can correct any mistakes on the lines between. When you are finished, use the dictation passage in the lesson guide to check your work. Correct any spelling, punctuation, or grammar mistakes as needed.

Lined writing area consisting of 20 horizontal lines.