

## Teacher's Guide

Guide written by Veronica Kim

Includes Discussion Questions, Classroom Activities, and Links to Resources



Hardcover • ISBN 9781454948681 • 224 pages • \$18.99

## ABOUT JULIA AND THE SHARK

---

*There are more secrets in the ocean than in the sky. . .*



Ten-year-old Julia loves the mysteries of the ocean and marine biology, just like her scientist mother. Her family is spending the summer on a remote island where her mom is searching for the elusive Greenland shark, a creature that might be older than the trees, and so rare that it's only been seen a few times. But the ocean is reluctant to give up its secrets, and Julia tries not to worry as her mother returns disappointed at the end of each day. Determined to prove that the shark is real, Julia sets off on a quest to find it herself, armed with a set of coordinates, a compass, and her trusty rain jacket. She soon realizes that there are some journeys you shouldn't go on alone. As Julia comes face to face with the dark and wondrous truths of the sea, she finds the strength to leave the shark in the depths and kick up toward the light.

This lyrical, deeply moving middle-grade novel about one family's fierce love and resilience is perfect for starting conversations about mental health and how it's okay to not be okay.

## PRAISE FOR JULIA AND THE SHARK

---

"Deep beautiful, and true—a classic from cover to cover."

—#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Eoin Colfer

---



"Written in the first person with a compelling dry wit, this story addresses the tough topics of bullying and bipolar disorder with poise and empathy. The potent illustrations, rendered starkly in black, white, and yellow, put it in a class by itself....Outstanding."

—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review

---



"A tempest-tossed race to locate an ancient Greenland shark upends a family in a heart-wrenching novel reminiscent of *The Line Tender*...Wry first-person prose by Millwood Hargrave drives Julia's burgeoning, age-appropriate understanding of her parents as fallible but wholly lovable people in a story."

—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review

---



"Pensive and poignant, *Julia and the Shark* falls readily in line with Ali Benjamin's *The Thing about Jellyfish* and Kate Allen's *The Line Tender* in its examination of grief and mental health. Poetic shifts in the text and collage-like illustrations—grayscale with yellow accents—add to the story's loveliness."

—*Booklist*

---



"The narrative tone and the gorgeous artwork...come together to present an authentic, compassionate look at a girl flailing in rocky familial waters. Honest but still hopeful, this makes a strong readalike for Allen's *The Line Tender* or *Kelly's Song for a Whale*."

—*The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

---



# ABOUT THE CREATORS

**Kiran Millwood Hargrave** and **Tom de Freston** met in 2009, when Kiran was a student and Tom was artist-in-residence at Cambridge University. They have been a couple and collaborators ever since, but *Julia and the Shark* is their first novel. Kiran is the award-winning, bestselling author of novels including *The Girl of Ink & Stars*, *The Way Past Winter*, and *The Deathless Girls*, and Tom is making his illustrative debut, having worked as an acclaimed artist for many years.



# DEAR JULIA

*I had found the impossible shark, but it hadn't been the answer Mum was looking for. Only she could find those, inside herself, by herself. It wasn't up to me to fix anything, to fix her. Now I was ready to find something of my own. Something mine. Something new. (p. 189)*

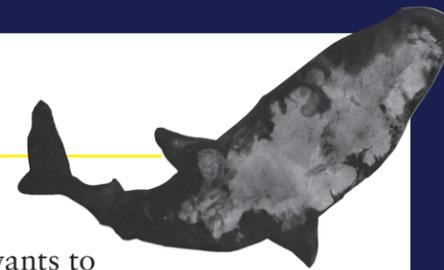
For much of the novel, Julia feels hurt and confused by the changes in her mother's personality and behavior. The mom she loved and admired is no longer within reach. It isn't until much later that her dad explains what her mom's condition is: bipolar disorder. Only after they have an honest conversation about her mom's mental illness does Julia begin to make sense of things. When she realizes that Mum has an illness, and that she can be helped by professionals and other adults, she feels a weight lifted. She no longer feels that her mother's problems are hers to fix. More important, Julia is not her mother; she is her own person. Taking on the voice of Julia, write a letter to yourself about what you have learned about yourself this past summer at the lighthouse. What are your likes and dislikes? What are your strengths and weaknesses? What have you learned, and what do you want to learn more about? Include a drawing or collage of Julia depicting her hopes, dreams, and goals. As an extension activity, make a drawing or collage of your own hopes, dreams, and goals.

# JULIA AND THE SHARK MOTIFS

A motif is a recurring image or idea that helps to develop the theme in a story. In *Julia and the Shark*, the major motifs are the sea, the shark, the lighthouse, and starlings/murmuration. Complete the chart below by finding evidence (examples and quotes from the book), providing your analysis, and stating what theme the motif supports (there can be more than one). The first motif is done for you

Motif	Evidence	Analysis	Themes
Sea	"Perhaps it was because she loved being on the sea, which was always changing anyway and never the same water under you . . ." (p. 28)	The sea is vast and changing, like our thoughts and emotions. Julia's mom is drawn to the sea, and it reflects her changing moods.	Hopes and Dreams, which can be limitless and exciting but also dangerous for Julia's mom.
Shark			
Lighthouse			
Starlings/ Murmuration			

# ENDANGERED SHARKS



Julia's mother is a marine biologist, and her parents show great care for the environment through their lifestyle and daily choices. Julia's mom wants to find the Greenland shark to study it and learn from it to ultimately help others. There is much to learn from these ancient creatures. Unfortunately, the Greenland shark is listed as vulnerable, and many other sharks are endangered, or in danger of becoming extinct. To learn more about these sharks and others, read the articles below and complete the KWHL chart.

- ▶ [a-z-animals.com/blog/10-of-the-most-endangered-sharks-in-the-world/](http://a-z-animals.com/blog/10-of-the-most-endangered-sharks-in-the-world/)
- ▶ [nationalgeographic.com/animals/fish/facts/greenland-shark](http://nationalgeographic.com/animals/fish/facts/greenland-shark)
- ▶ [discoveryuk.com/sharks/why-are-sharks-endangered-and-which-shark-species-are-most-at-risk/](http://discoveryuk.com/sharks/why-are-sharks-endangered-and-which-shark-species-are-most-at-risk/)

	K What we know	W What we want to know	H How I will learn it	L What I learned
Greenland Shark	-they can live up to 400 years and weigh up to 1.5 tons -they live in cold waters, move and grow slowly -age is dated through their eyes, which have a parasite that blinds them	-how much can they grow each year? -can they eat larger animals? -do they only live near the Arctic? -how far can they swim?	<i>Julia and the Shark</i> -online research of articles -library research of books and articles -school resources such as <i>Scholastic News</i>	-they have been found in warmer Caribbean waters and as far south as Belize! -evidence shows that they can eat large animals like polar bears, horses, and reindeer
Great White Shark				
Whale Shark				
Great Hammerhead Shark				



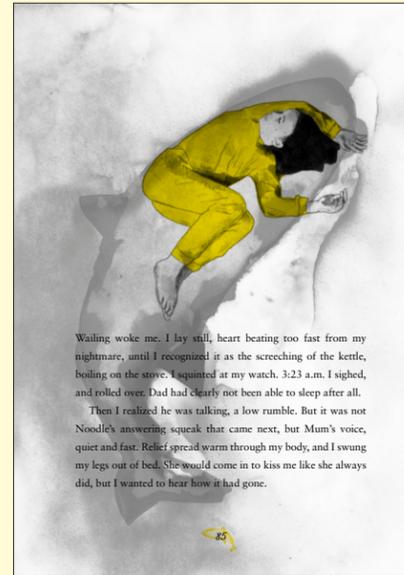
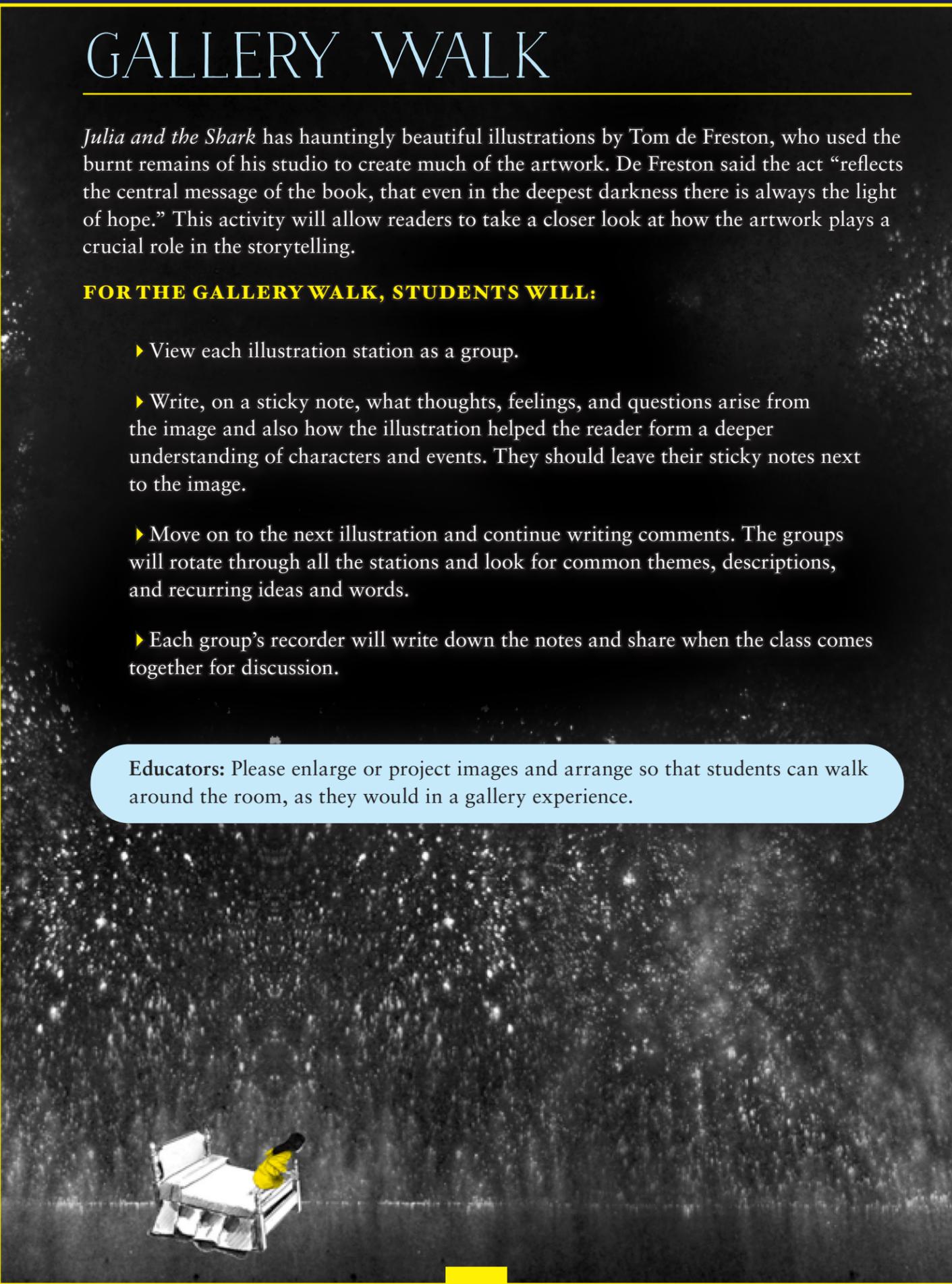
# GALLERY WALK

*Julia and the Shark* has hauntingly beautiful illustrations by Tom de Freston, who used the burnt remains of his studio to create much of the artwork. De Freston said the act “reflects the central message of the book, that even in the deepest darkness there is always the light of hope.” This activity will allow readers to take a closer look at how the artwork plays a crucial role in the storytelling.

## FOR THE GALLERY WALK, STUDENTS WILL:

- ▶ View each illustration station as a group.
- ▶ Write, on a sticky note, what thoughts, feelings, and questions arise from the image and also how the illustration helped the reader form a deeper understanding of characters and events. They should leave their sticky notes next to the image.
- ▶ Move on to the next illustration and continue writing comments. The groups will rotate through all the stations and look for common themes, descriptions, and recurring ideas and words.
- ▶ Each group’s recorder will write down the notes and share when the class comes together for discussion.

**Educators:** Please enlarge or project images and arrange so that students can walk around the room, as they would in a gallery experience.



page 85

Wailing woke me. I lay still, heart beating too fast from my nightmare, until I recognized it as the screeching of the kettle, boiling on the stove. I squinted at my watch. 3:23 a.m. I sighed, and rolled over. Dad had clearly not been able to sleep after all. Then I realized he was talking, a low rumble. But it was not Noodle's answering squeak that came next, but Mum's voice, quiet and fast. Relief spread warm through my body, and I swung my legs out of bed. She would come in to kiss me like she always did, but I wanted to hear how it had gone.



page 173



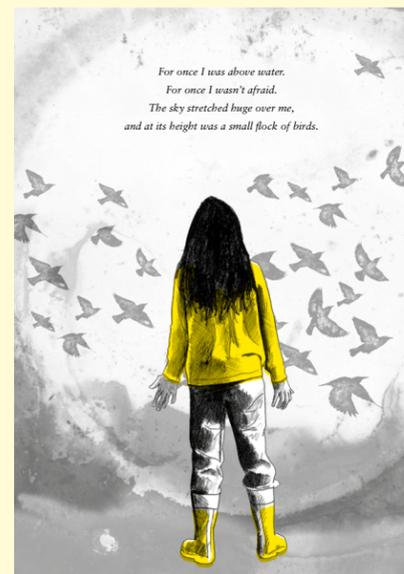
page 127

Noodle got bored and leapt out of my arms, sinking back inside. I waited a bit longer, and the sky started to spark. Bright points of light began to streak across the sky, one or two at first, and then one or two a minute. I picked up the crab net, waving it over the railing, imagining a hot white piece of starlight landing in it. It would burn right through.



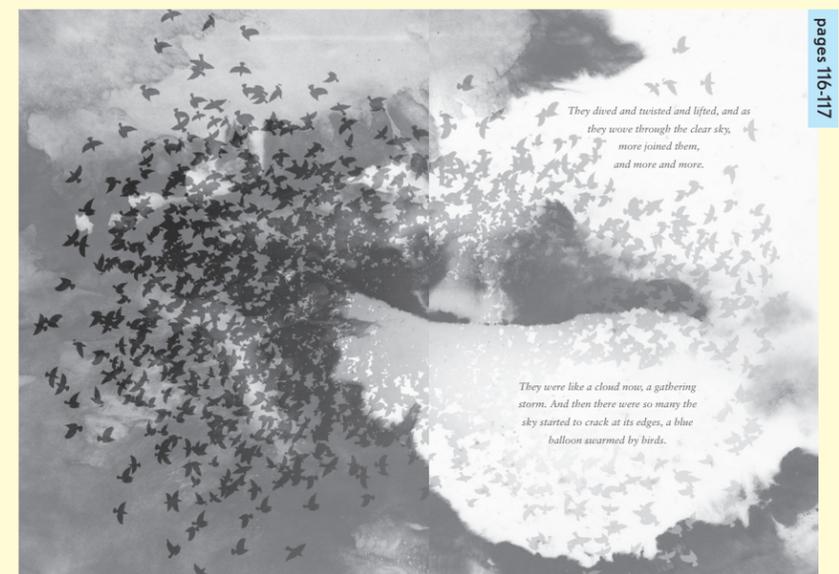
pages 178-179

And though I did not want to, though I wanted to hold onto the coat like it was Mum, and haul it to the surface, I let it slip over my shoulders.



page 113

For once I was above water. For once I wasn't afraid. The sky stretched huge over me, and at its height was a small flock of birds.



pages 116-117

They dived and twisted and lifted, and as they wove through the clear sky, more joined them, and more and more.

They were like a cloud now, a gathering storm. And then there were so many the sky started to crack at its edges, a blue balloon swarmed by birds.

# JULIA AND THE SHARK

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BY CHAPTER

### One

*There are more secrets in the ocean than in the sky. Mum told me when the water is still and the stars prick its surface, some of the sky's secrets fall into the sea and add to its mysteries. When we lived in the lighthouse, I hauled my long-handled crab net over the balcony railing and tried to catch them, but I never did. (p. 1)*

- ★ What kind of tone does the first sentence establish?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ Have you ever felt that the ocean and the sky contain secrets and mysteries?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ What does it tell you about the main character that she tried to catch falling stars with a crab net?  
\_\_\_\_\_



*That's another thing about words: there's space in them. They change according to whose mouth they're coming out of....There's no room for that with numbers. Even the "language" of numbers, which my dad works with, is called "binary code"....Two things. Right and wrong. True and false. Where's the space in that? (p. 5)*

Julia considers words to be more powerful than numbers, but also more malleable and creative than numbers.

- ★ Do you think there is more room or space with words or with numbers?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ Which do you prefer working with?  
\_\_\_\_\_



*[Mum] wrote a very long essay about a whale that goes around the world alone because it sings at a different frequency than other whales. It can hear them,*

*but they can't hear it. I understand a little how that whale feels. Ever since Mum got ill, I feel like I've been screaming inside. Yet her favorite animal in all the world wasn't a whale, but a shark. A Greenland shark. And because it was hers, that summer it became mine too. (p. 6)*

Julia has spoken more about her mother than herself.

- ★ What does that tell you about Julia?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ What does it mean that she can identify with a whale that sings at a different frequency than other whales?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Two

*Mum often did this: dispensed amazing facts like she was reeling off a shopping list. Her knowledge was something she wore as easily as her coat.... My brain felt like it was stretching, and I made myself remember these facts to put in my yellow book. (p. 14)*

- ★ How does Julia feel about her mother?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ What effect do her mother's words have on her?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ Do you think this is why Julia feels that words are more powerful than numbers?  
\_\_\_\_\_



*"This is going to be an adventure" said Dad.*

*"A great one," said Mum.*

*They laughed and kissed, so I made a yuck sound and followed Noodle up the stairs. (p. 19)*

- ★ How does the reaction from Julia's parents compare with hers?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ How is the mood and tone set for their summer at the lighthouse?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Three

*But she was in one of her silly moods and knelt down behind me, spreading my arms and singing that song that goes all warbly, from that film where the boat sinks and nearly everyone dies. And then Dad was behind her, and they were both singing, and Noodle was in the doorway, looking at us like we were mad. She had a point. (p. 24)*

- ★ What is the relationship like between Julia's parents?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ What is the dynamic between Julia and her mother versus Julia and her father?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Four

*One evening was all Mum needed to settle in. Perhaps it was because she loved being on the sea, which was always changing anyway and never the same water under you, that she managed to feel at home wherever she was. That is why she was what Dad called confident, and I called nuts. She just didn't care that much what other people thought. (p. 28)*

- ★ How would you describe Julia's mom?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ Would you call her "confident" or "nuts"?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ Is it a strength or a weakness that she doesn't care much about other people's opinions?  
\_\_\_\_\_



*I'm somewhere in between Mum and Dad on things like germs. I wouldn't eat it off the floor like that, not without washing it. But Mum always seemed a bit invincible. Or at least, that she had better things to do than worry. (p. 31)*

- ★ Julia considers herself in between her mom and dad on the subject of germs. What about her personality?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ Is she more similar to her mom or her dad?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Five

*"Not long," said Mum confidently. "The sightings are recent, and southerly. I wouldn't be really surprised if I find one on my first outing."  
"Don't get all Dad about it," said Mum, jabbing me in the ribs, and I rubbed the spot, feeling bad for questioning her. (p. 40)*

Julia's mom seems confident about finding the Greenland shark but when Julia asks, "Really?" her mom's resolve falters for a moment.

- ★ How does that make Julia feel?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ Should we feel sorry for having a genuine question or concern about our parents or loved ones?  
\_\_\_\_\_



*"Maybe," she said in a small voice. "It'll work. And other families won't have to lose their loved ones so soon."  
I snuggled into her side. My friends back home thought it was strange how much I loved my mum, how proud I was of her, but you can see why, can't you? (p. 43)*

Julia directly addresses the reader here.

- ★ How does this help you to understand and sympathize with Julia and the way she feels about her mother?  
\_\_\_\_\_



*"And some of them are dead already. But their light keeps going because they're so far away it takes them forever to reach us."  
"Dead?" I squinted at them. I had never seen something that looked more alive. I had the same feeling in my brain, the same stretching one I felt when Mum told me a fact I wanted to write in my yellow book. (p. 50)*

Kin has knowledge of the sky in a way that Julia's mom has knowledge of the sea.

- ★ Why do you think Julia is drawn to both of them?  
\_\_\_\_\_

★ What does that tell you about Julia?

---

## Six

*But [Kin's] family always stayed, because "the laundromat was more important to the local infrastructure." He'd looked proud when he said this, the way I must when I talk about Mum. (p. 53)*

Kin and Julia are both close to their families. Their respective families are a source of love, support, and strength for these friends.

- ★ How can having the support of family help young people, especially in the face of obstacles and hardships?

---
- ★ Consider how Kin faces discrimination and bullying, and how Julia has faced bullying in the past. How has having family or community helped them?

---

## Seven

*Mum had her first day on the boat too, but where Dad seemed tense and quiet, Mum was like a coiled spring, ready to go. Dad sighed. He didn't like it when Mum was impulsive, and didn't tell him the plan. "I think Bjorn Johansson is the one who should be worried." (p. 61)*

Mum has invited the boat's captain over for dinner.

- ★ Why is Dad less than happy about this?

---
- ★ Julia's parents are complementary opposites, but when do you think this might cause tension?

---



*I wanted to tell [Dad] about Adrian, and what Kin had said about Vikings not swimming, and how I felt like I'd done something wrong, and I didn't know*

*how to put it right. But then we'd have to have A Conversation, and I didn't really want to. (p. 62)*

In the midst of Mum's project and all the excitement that surrounds it, Julia begins to experience her own difficulties.

- ★ Why do you think she doesn't feel like she can share with her dad?

---

Also consider why she doesn't think about sharing with her mom.

- ★ Have you ever had a problem that you wanted to solve but didn't know how to talk about it?

---
- ★ What helped you in that situation?

---



*I felt my own hand clench as hers flexed on the table, and Dad laid his own over it. (p. 66)*

Julia and her parents band together to face challenges.

- ★ How can their love and support help Julia's mom in the face of uncertainty?

---
- ★ Do you see any downside to the family's unwavering support of Mom's dreams?

---



*I was already learning the lighthouse, where to step so the stair didn't creak, the slick patches where my slippers had no grip, and it was already becoming less extraordinary to me. (p. 67)*

In the way that the lighthouse is becoming familiar to Julia and she knows how she should walk around it, Julia is also becoming familiar with her mom. Please explain what you believe Julia is discovering about her own mother and how it is affecting her behavior and thoughts.

## Eight

*I threw myself onto the bed, trying not to listen to Mum and Dad hissing at each other below me, and reached under my pillow, pulling out my yellow notebook. (p. 70)*  
*I had to believe it as hard as Mum, or else I'd be letting her down as badly as Dad. (p. 71)*

Julia looks up to her mother and feels that she must support her fully; otherwise, she would be as traitorous as her father.

- ★ Is it wrong for us to tell someone we love that we see things differently?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ If Julia feels so close to her mom, why can't she tell her the truth?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Nine

*I thought about what [Captain Bjorn] said, about never seeing a Greenland shark himself. How Mum might not find one at all. The shadow that had moved under Mum's face when he said it, like a fin cutting just under the surface of water. It had been exactly like Kin's expression when he'd seen Adrian at the laundromat window. (p. 81)*

A simile is a comparison of two different objects using the words *like* or *as*. Julia noticed that a shadow moved under her mom's facial expression at Captain Bjorn's words, and it was "like a fin cutting just under the surface of water," and that it was like Kin's expression when he saw Adrian.

- ★ What does this simile mean?  
\_\_\_\_\_



*The bed was a boat, and the sheets turned to foam under my fingers. The whole room was rocking, and above me the roof was gone, replaced with lightning lashing the low, thick clouds, long tongues of fire furling and unfurling, tracing*

*veins of burning silver—but silent. It raged and raged, without a sound. And there was something in the water. (p. 83)*

Describe Julia's nightmare.

- ★ What do you think was in the water?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ What does this tell you about Julia's thoughts and feelings, specifically her fears and worries?  
\_\_\_\_\_



*"I won't. I'm not—I'm sorry. I just want this to work, Dan. I need this to work." "And I know you'll do everything you can. But your health is more important. Are you taking your pills?" (p. 87)*

- ★ What are the signs that Julia's mom is struggling with her mental health?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ How is she feeling now?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ Has she been taking care of herself?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ★ How do you think Julia feels as she overhears her parents' conversation?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Ten

*Kin and the stars were almost enough of a distraction from Mum's leaving, and I was getting good at remembering the star names. He was teaching me about quadrants, and how the same star sometimes had a hundred different myths. In return, I was telling him about my mum's research, which sounded as far-fetched to him as his stories did to me. (p. 89)*

Because of Julia's first-person narration, we are biased and supportive of her mom; we love her because Julia loves her.

- ★ How do the words of Captain Bjorn, Kin, and even Julia's dad give us a better perspective of her mom's behavior?  
\_\_\_\_\_

- ★ At this point, are you supportive of Julia's mom?



*She emerged for dinner so late it was almost fully dark outside, talking about sightings on Norwegian fisherman forums, and grant applications, and not at all about me or Dad. Her brain was obviously still at sea, searching for the shark, and when she did eventually ask me questions, her eyes were sort of glassy and far away. I knew she was brilliant, and that her brain was very clever, but she wasn't good at focusing on more than one thing at once. (p. 91)*

Julia's mom does not ask about Julia or her dad anymore; her personality has changed.

- ★ Has her interest in the shark turned into something else?
- ★ How do you think Mum's condition is affecting her family and herself?



*I looked to Dad, expecting a reassuring remark or a rueful grin, two of his usual reactions to Mum's plans, but his face was creased with worry. I squeezed my arms tighter. I didn't want to listen to another argument. Loosing my hands, I snatched up my yellow notebook and slid it into my pocket. (p. 94)*

Dad can't comfort Julia this time and it worries her even more. Expecting another fight between her parents, she leaves the house to see Kin.

- ★ We see a change in Mum's behavior, but is there also a change in Julia's behavior? Why is it significant that she leaves her parents? Would she have done this at the beginning of the story?



*My thoughts cycled hard as my legs. The brightness of Mum's eyes, the worry in Dad's voice, and in my chest the increasing feeling of nervousness whenever we talked about the shark. At the beginning, that hadn't been there at all. In the*

*beginning, I had been as excited as Mum. But her excitement had an edge to it now, like desperation. (p. 94)*

Describe the shift that has taken place within Julia's family.

- ★ What has the initial excitement changed into, especially for Mum?
- ★ How are the three family members exhibiting their fears and worries?



*It was strange, but somehow familiar, like I'd seen her like this before. . . . Under all this was the worst thought: the traitorous thought. That maybe Dad was right about the boat being a bad idea. Which meant Mum was wrong. (p. 95)*

Although Julia states at the beginning of the story that she doesn't like binary thinking, she displays it when she compares her parents. Mom is brilliant and she shows this through her words; Dad is a "fusspot" and he prefers numbers. If Dad is right about the boat, then Mum is wrong, and this pains Julia because it feels like she's betraying her mom.

- ★ Is it healthy for Julia to feel like she must always side with her mom, even when she's showing cracks in her judgment and sensibility?

## Eleven

*[Mum's] voice broke. I knew it was my fault. My eyes smarted too, the lighthouse blurring behind her, the damp warping and spreading until it was all I could see. It was like the shark was bleeding through it, making everything shimmer and come loose. (p. 105)*

A motif is a recurring image, idea, or symbol within a story. The shark, which seemed elusive and hidden deep within the Arctic, has now come to the forefront. As Mum breaks down, Julia feels deep guilt and sadness from what she has done, and the lighthouse seems to blur like "the shark was bleeding through it."

- ★ Compare what the shark symbolized at the beginning of the story with what it symbolizes now to the family.



*She turned, then. The camera was clutched to her chest, and her eyes were glassy as she looked at us. She looked like something from a sad film, the light seeming to settle gray and heavy over her shoulders, her skin mottled as the shark's. . . . Mum stepped forward and hugged me, but it felt spiky and strange, when normally Mum's hugs were like jumping into a warm bed. I couldn't hug her back, not properly. (p. 106)*

Julia's mom, who was vibrant and stood out brightly like a human banana against the backdrop of quiet Unst, has now become gray like the town. Eerily, her skin has become mottled like that of a shark's, and her hug no longer feels warm and soft but "spiky and strange." Again, we see the shark motif but it has now become part of Mom's physicality.

- ★ How do you interpret this change?

## Twelve

*"I'm going to find the shark. I just need people to believe in me." There was a horrible, plummeting sensation in my tummy. I hadn't believed in her lately. My yellow notebook, with its lines of crosses and coordinates, was proof. I'd become like Dad, looking at the numbers. I needed to be more like Mum. I used my words. (p. 112)*

There is such a thing as "mom guilt," which is when a mother or caregiver feels guilty for not having done their best for their child.

- ★ Why do you think this is reversed with Julia and her mom, and what does it reveal about their relationship dynamic?
- ★ Is Julia thinking in black and white when it comes to her parents, fearing that she's becoming too much like her dad (a "numbers guy") and wanting to be just like her mom, who has a way with words?

- ★ Words can certainly be powerful, but can they also be dangerous?

## Thirteen

*"To be fair it must be disappointing." I felt powerful, staring at him on the cliff in the dark, his face very pale, his eyelid fluttering. I pulled the thread further out. "To have such a loser for a son." (p. 124)*

Bully-victims are those who have been bullied but have also bullied others.

- ★ Why do you think Julia felt powerful as she belittled Adrian?
- ★ We know that Julia was bullied in the past by classmates, but do you think she has suffered from any other bullying?

## Fourteen

*"I guess. But she never stays in bed all day. Is she really sick?" I could tell Dad wasn't saying something, and I pushed on. "Is it what Grandma had?" (p. 135)*

*"Mum is brilliant, yes? Her brain is brilliant. It's also complicated, and sometimes, things go wrong. Sometimes she feels happy, but it's almost too happy. Like that day with the boat, remember?" I nodded, recalling the flowers, the wine, Mum's too-bright smile. "So then the opposite happens. She gets sad." (p. 136)*

- ★ How does this honest conversation with Dad help Julia to feel better about her mom?
- ★ Do you think Julia's dad explained her mom's condition clearly?
- ★ Is he as bad with words as Julia thinks?

## Fifteen

*“I have to go.” My voice was drowned out by the roaring sound in my ears, like waves smashing a beach, my vision blotchy and blurred as sharkskin. . . .*

*“I want to go now.” Salt was in my throat now too, like the sea was spilling out from inside me, filling me. The walls began to warp, like I was stuck in one of my dreams. The shark was here. The shark had found me. (p. 145)*

Julia’s vision becomes as “blurred as sharkskin,” and before, her mother’s skin looks mottled like a shark’s.

- ★ Why are both Julia and her mother being compared to sharks?

## Sixteen

*Never Again*

*All the breath rushed out of me. Here it was, the proof I didn’t want to find . . . did she mean having a baby? Did she mean me? (p. 149)*

- ★ What is the significance of the words “Never Again”?
- ★ Why does this seem to prove Julia’s horrid thought?
- ★ How does it make you as the reader feel that Julia could feel so unwanted and unloved by her own mother?

## Seventeen

*My mind kept circling back to Mum, cutting through the surface of every other thought like a fin, and I wrestled it back down each time. If I could find the shark, and tell her so, then she would be all right. She would be happy again. She would be Mum again. (p. 155)*

Children often want to make their parents feel better when they see they are troubled. As her daughter, Julia desperately wants to bring her mother back to health; she simply wants her mom.

- ★ If you could speak to Julia as a friend, what advice would you give her?



*But even as my mind started to stop, it found another answer. . . . It was something blind and beautiful and terrifying, nosing its way through the dark, through history, through our lighthouse and my dreams. It was the answer to Mum’s darkness, the thing that had led her there, and could lead her out of it. And now, it was here to do the same for me. (p. 176)*

The idea of the shark and the obsessive search for it led to Mum’s darkness, during which she tried to take her own life. In her manic episode, she had a high level of energy and productivity. In her depressive episode, she had low energy and lost interest in many things, including her own family.

- ★ If the shark brought Mum to darkness, how can it now lead her out of it?



*And though I did not want to, though I wanted to hold onto the coat like it was Mum, and haul it to the surface, I let it slip over my shoulders. I let it go. And I kicked towards the light. (p. 179)*

- ★ How can the shark lead Julia out of the darkness?
- ★ What is symbolic about Julia letting go of her mom’s heavy coat and kicking toward the surface light?
- ★ What could have happened if she had continued to hold onto the coat?

## Eighteen

*Before, I’d probably have been disappointed to not be exactly like Mum, but now I was glad Dad liked numbers and certainty and solidity. It meant the ground beneath my feet was stable, even if I loved being at sea. (p. 185)*

Julia has a newfound appreciation of her dad.

- ★ Why does she feel thankful that she has some of her father's personality and character?

---
- ★ What is she learning about binary thinking and her own biases?

---
- ★ What has served her well and what does she no longer need?

---



*I realized then what I'd really found by finding the shark. Remember at the beginning of the story, how I said I lost my mum? Really, what I meant was I lost my idea of Mum. The idea she was perfect and invincible and always right. But as well as the shark, I found the real Mum, with her complications and tangles and tears, and I love her just as much as ever. More, maybe. I told you to watch out for words, they are tricky. (p. 187)*

It is normal for children to feel that their parents or caregivers are “perfect and invincible and always right.”

- ★ How is this kind of thinking helpful?

---
- ★ Can it also be harmful? Now that Julia has found her real mom—meaning, she has discovered her imperfections—how does she feel toward her?

---
- ★ Has this lesson in a person's duality helped Julia realize that words can also be “tricky”?

---



*I also said what I was trying to get to was Mum. But now, I think that was a mistake. I think by spending all this time worrying about her, and caring about the things she cared about, I was losing myself. Mum and me aren't the same person and that's all right. (p. 188)*

Perhaps the most important lesson isn't Julia finding out that her mom is imperfect; perhaps it is that she and her mom are not the same.

- ★ How do you think this will help Julia find happiness and healthier relationships?

---



*I had found the impossible shark, but it hadn't been the answer Mum was looking for. Only she could find those, inside herself, by herself. It wasn't up to me to fix anything, to fix her. Now I was ready to find something of my own. Something mine. Something new. (p. 189)*

## Nineteen

*Mum takes my hand as the birds shimmer like a scarf, lifting and lowering, like waves. Until, finally, they find a safe place to land. (p. 195)*

Kin and Julia's family reunite at Gretna Green to watch a murmuration, or thousands of starlings taking flight together before they roost for the night.

- ★ Have the Farriers also found a “safe place to land” with a flock of their own?

---



*Cold is biting my ears, and the rushing, tweeting sound of the starlings is enormous, like walking through a windswept forest in full leaf, or plunging into a freezing ocean. (p. 192)*

The massive sound of the murmuration reminds Julia of when she plunged into the icy sea. Water traditionally symbolizes rebirth and healing.

- ★ How was Julia reborn through her near-death experience with the Greenland shark?

---

# MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR YOUTH

---

## NAMI (NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS)

Essential information and resources intended to help young people get the mental health support they need.

[nami.org/Your-Journey/Kids-Teens-and-Young-Adults](https://nami.org/Your-Journey/Kids-Teens-and-Young-Adults)

## MY LIFE IS WORTH LIVING

The first animated series for teen mental health.

[mylifeisworthliving.org/watch/](https://mylifeisworthliving.org/watch/)

## ACTIVE MINDS

A nonprofit organization promoting mental health for young adults.

[activeminds.org/](https://activeminds.org/)

## YOUTH ENGAGED 4 CHANGE

Youth-focused resources and opportunities.

[engage.youth.gov/](https://engage.youth.gov/)

## YOUTH VOICES

A blog by youth and young adults from the National Clearinghouse on Homeless Youth and Families (NCHYF).

[rhyclearinghouse.acf.hhs.gov/youth-voices](https://rhyclearinghouse.acf.hhs.gov/youth-voices)

## THE JED FOUNDATION

A nonprofit that gives teens and young adults skills and support for emotional health.

[jedfoundation.org/mental-health-resource-center/](https://jedfoundation.org/mental-health-resource-center/)

## TEENSHEALTH

An organization that gives tools and confidence to young people to make the best choices for their overall health.

[teenshealth.org/en/teens/your-mind/](https://teenshealth.org/en/teens/your-mind/)

## MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

Committed to creating and delivering the highest quality mental health literacy.

[mentalhealthliteracy.org/](https://mentalhealthliteracy.org/)

## MINDFULNESS FOR TEENS

Helping teens live more mindfully to experience life more fully.

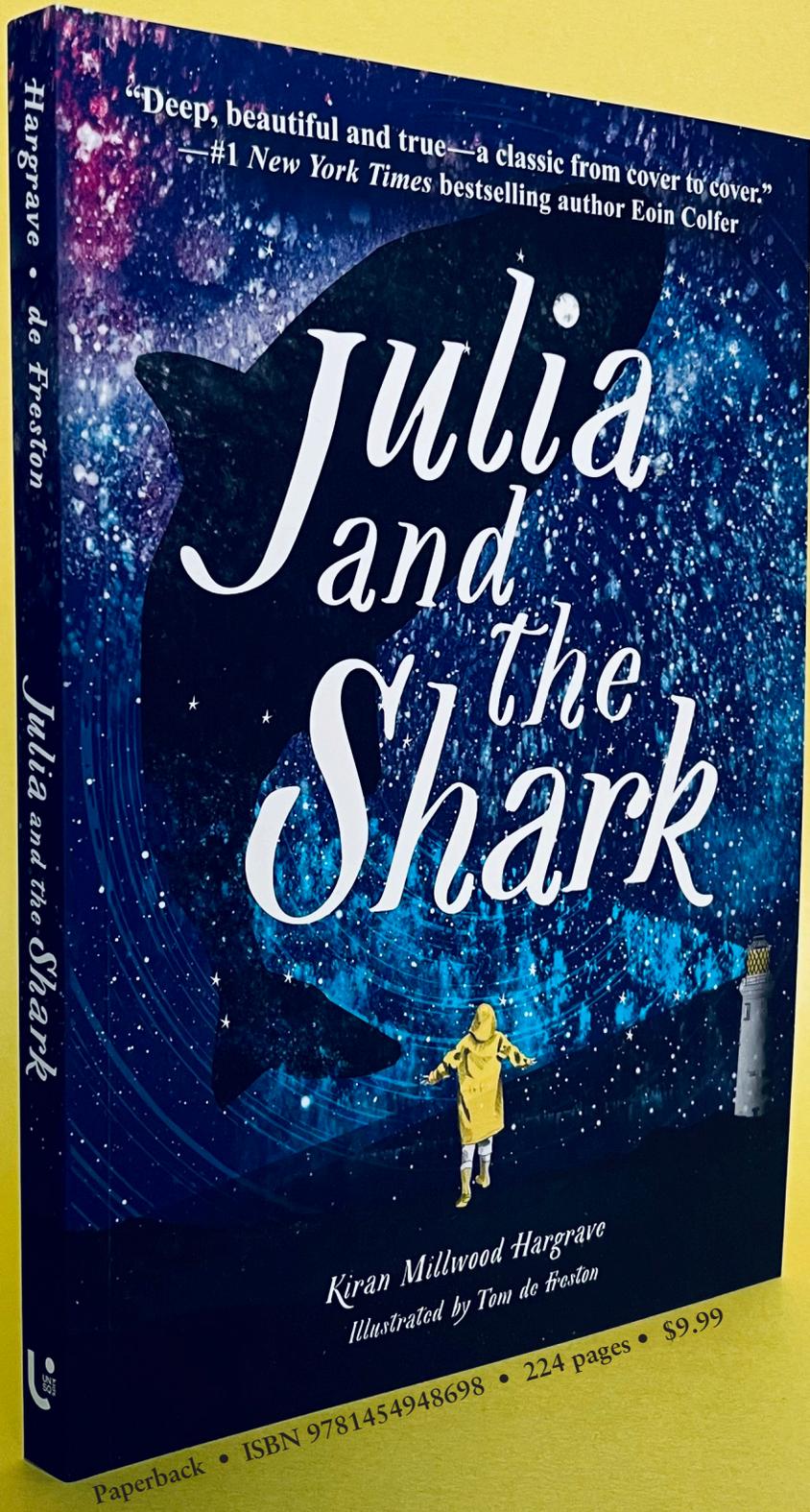
[mindfulnessforteens.com](https://mindfulnessforteens.com)



## About the Author of this Teacher's Guide

Veronica Kim was born in Seoul, Korea, and raised in New Jersey in a bilingual, bicultural home. She graduated from Johns Hopkins University where she focused on East Asian Studies and Writing, and she holds an MAT from Fairleigh Dickinson University. She is an ESL teacher and enjoys working with her young students and learning about their diverse backgrounds. She loves reading multicultural, inclusive work with her children and looks forward to seeing their generation find their authentic voice.

Credits: Text excerpts from *Julia and the Shark Is* © 2021 Kiran Millwood Hargrave; Cover and interior illustration and design © 2021 Tom de Freston



“Deep, beautiful and true—a classic from cover to cover.”  
—#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Eoin Colfer

# Julia and the Shark

*Kiran Millwood Hargrave*  
*Illustrated by Tom de Freston*

Paperback • ISBN 9781454948698 • 224 pages • \$9.99

[unionsquareandco.com](http://unionsquareandco.com)    @unionsqandco

