This new edition of *Near-Star Planets* is designed to make the series an even more satisfying experience for struggling readers ages 11-18+. Featuring sophisticated covers and illustrations by former Disney artist José Pardo to attract readers and support the text, these books are precisely leveled and suited for use at either the independent or the instructional level. Each book has 70-75% decodable text and 20-25% sight words (Fry 300 and Dolch second-grade word lists), with no more than 5% challenge words. Figurative language and idioms are minimized. Text is highly cohesive (that is, the text makes connections for the reader, because we do not expect struggling readers to both decode and make jumps of reasoning).

**For Independent Level:** If your student can decode one- and two-syllable phonetically regular words and has mastered the Fry 300 and Dolch 220 word lists, these books may be used for independent reading. You may choose to familiarize your student with the challenge words (see below) beforehand. The challenge words include words that may not be phonetically decodable at 2nd-grade level (“computer,” “recordings”), or are higher-order concepts (“Consul,” “Forum”), higher-level sight words (“friend,” “ahead”), or proper nouns (“Garvi”). (Because the comprehension questions are more complex than the content of the stories, they may be better utilized as a Think-Pair-Share activity or a class discussion.)

(see our Sound Out Skill Levels chart for details): [http://www.highnoonbooks.com/soundoutchart](http://www.highnoonbooks.com/soundoutchart)

**For Instructional Level:** This series can be used for either whole-class reading or paired reading. We suggest pre-reading exercises: Graphic organizers (such as story maps) can be very helpful to familiarize students with setting, characters, and plot. Students should be introduced to the challenge words and can be asked to predict characters or action based on the front and back covers, interior illustrations, and chapter titles. (The comprehension questions should be presented with scaffolding, such as reading the questions aloud as the students follow along, as a Think-Pair-Share activity, or as a class discussion.)

Older students may also be able to discuss aspects of the science fiction genre (for example, life on other planets, creatures that are like humans in some respects but with abilities humans lack, and unusual properties that rocks and other materials might have on fictional planets).

**Note:** The answers for the comprehension questions are not exhaustive. If students give other answers, we leave it to your professional judgment to determine whether they are correct.

**Advanced Exercises – All Books**

Perform the story as a play. Tell students that they can make a story vivid by reading it aloud as if it were a play. Note that plays include characters who speak dialogue; and that they often have narrators, people who are not involved in the action but who provide information about what is happening. Using examples from the Near-Star Planets books, show students how to recognize narration as well as character dialogue. Then assign a stronger reader or readers to take the part of the narrator, and choose others to take the parts of the story characters. Have the narrator read the text of the story, pausing to let the appropriate characters read the dialogue. Remind characters that their dialogue will be in quotation marks in the story. As they read, encourage students to use gestures and tones that their characters would use.

Write your own ending. Tell students that a plot is the series of events that make up a story, and that the climax is the exciting or suspenseful event that occurs right before the story’s ending. The heroes are trapped—will they escape? Will justice be served, or will the bad guys get away? Then have students find the climax of the story, and write a new ending to follow it. Guide them to brainstorm ideas for alternate endings, and then choose the one they like best. Use questions such as the following to help them plan new dialogue for the characters: “What would Rayk say to that?” “How would Jan feel when that happened?” “Could Captain Urch change and be sorry for what he did?”
Meeting the Common Core Standards

When your students have finished reading a book, you can assess comprehension using the questions and answers for each book below. If students are asked for quotes from the books, they are directed to the particular chapter that contains the answers.

We have included correspondences between comprehension questions and the new national Common Core Standards (commonly referred to as “CCRs,” College and Career Readiness). Although Near-Star Planets is at High Noon Books’ 2nd-grade reading level, the stories are aimed at older (middle school) readers. Therefore, comprehension questions cover selected Common Core Standards for a range of levels from Grade 1 through Grade 4.

The full text of the standards can be found at http://www.corestandards.org/.

Older students may enjoy doing the advanced group exercises (see previous page). These will require teacher preparation.

Note: We have limited questions that ask the reader to make inferences (Grades 4 and 5 CCRs), and we minimize figurative language in the Near-Star Planets stories. We generally do not expect struggling readers to meet these standards, as their cognitive resources are largely occupied by the decoding process at this reading level. However, you as the teacher are the best judge of your students’ capabilities. If you have students who can meet these higher-level standards, we encourage you to compose your own questions to help them make maximum progress through the standards.

Which CCRs Can Students Fulfill with Near-Star Planets Comprehension Questions?

The comprehension questions correlate with the following Common Core Standards for Reading and Literature. Standards are coded as follows:

- RL = Reading/Literature
- K/1/2, etc. = Grade
- 1/2/3, etc. = Standard Number
- Example: RL.1.1 = Reading, Literature, Grade 1, Standard 1

Reading: Literature K-5
Key ideas and details:

RL.1.1 Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

RL.1.2 Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.

RL.1.3 Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.

RL.2.1 Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

RL.2.3 Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

RL.3.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

RL.3.3 Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

RL.4.3 Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character’s thoughts, words, or actions).

Craft and structure:

RL.1.4 Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.

RL.2.6 Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

Integration of knowledge and ideas:

RL.1.7 Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.

RL.1.9 Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.

RL.2.7 Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

RL.3.7 Explain how specific aspects of a text’s illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

RL.4.1 Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
**Challenge Words**

- answered
- bowl
- captain
- computer, -s
- control, -s
- edge
- energy
- floor
- followed
- front
- gold
- hold
- human, -s
- looked, looking, looks
- metal
- million
- money
- opened, opening
- patrol
- pilot
- pirate, -s, -'s
- pulled, pulling
- shook
- submarine
- suit, -s
- tall
- they'll
- told
- walked
- walls
- wanted
- wet-suit, -s

**Comprehension Questions**

1. Why did the space pirates have to wear helmets? (Chapts. 1,2)

2. How does Rayk feel about giving Jan flying lessons? Find two sentences that tell you how Rayk feels. (Chapt. 1)

3. What did Rayk tell the pirates so he and Jan could get away from them? Why did this work? (Chapt. 5)
Space Pirates Answer Key

1. They lived underwater/had gills/breathed in water/They couldn’t breathe in the air. (Chapt. 1, pp. 5-6 about the people of Splaz; Chapt. 2, p. 11) (RL.1.1, 2.1)

2. Rayk does not want to give Jan flying lessons/He is bored by it/He doesn’t like Jan. Quotes: “Rayk did not want this job.” (Chapt. 1, p. 2); “Rayk just wanted this lesson to be over.” (Chapt. 1, p. 3); “Rayk was a bit mad at Jan” (Chapt. 1, p. 4) (RL.1.4, 1.7, 2.6, 2.7, 3.1, 4.3)

3. Rayk told the pirates that he and Jan were looking for the lost jewels of Jolene Chang. The pirates were greedy/wanted the jewels for themselves, so they let Rayk and Jan out of their sight. (Chapt. 5, p. 31) (RL.1.1, 1.3, 2.1, 2.3, 2.7)
Challenge Words

ago
answered
build, built
changed
coming
computer, -'s
dge
fall
feather, -s
followed
friend, -ly, -s
Garvi
hey
learned
ledge, -s
lived, lives
looked, looking
ones
opened

pilot
project, -s
pulled
signal
smiling
sorry
station
suit
table
talked, talking
today
walked
wanted
welcome
whispered
winged
woman
working

Comprehension Questions

1. Why didn’t anyone come to the Pire Peaks and Birdland before Jan and Rayk did? Find phrases in the story to explain this. (Chapt. 1)

2. What was so special about Slim’s plane? (Chapt. 2)

3. What made Jan, Rayk, and the others think that they would not be allowed to leave Birdland? Find two sentences that describe what they were thinking. (Chapts. 5, 6)
**The Bird People Answer Key**

1. It was cut off by the Pire Peaks/The Garvi wouldn’t let anyone through their land to get to the Pire Peaks. (Chapt. 1, p. 4) Quotes: “There’s no spot big enough to land a plane”/“And you can’t go there by land. The Garvi have taken care of that.” (RL.1.1, 1.3, 2.1, 3.1, 4.3)

2. It was both a plane and a (heli)copter/It changed from a plane to a copter/The plane wings folded back/A helicopter blade popped up (Chapt. 2, p. 11) (RL.1.1, 2.1)

3. Ozen was having a house built for them, which implied a long stay/Birdmen brought back Slim, without his plane, so they had no way to leave/Ozen told them so after they escaped from the Garvi. Quotes: “… You’ll live here two days. After that your house will be all set.” (Chapt. 5, p. 29)/“It’s Slim! Ozen sent the flyers after him. Now we have no way out.” (Chapt. 6, p. 36) (RL.1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 2.7, 3.1, 3.3, 4.3)
Challenge Words

across    onto
afternoon opened, opening
ahead    pilot
alarm    recorded, recordings, records
answered robot, -s
behind    salute
building, -s shook
control    sign
desert, -s signal, -s
doing    sold
door    soldier, -s
driven    sorry
early    tall
ever    today
told
energy    tomorrow
towards
tight
front    tomorrow
gold    toward
twelve
heard  video
keys    walked
long-range    wall
looked, looking, looks    wanted
major    welcome
mind, -s    woman
money
office

Comprehension Questions

1. When Rayk and Jan thought they were on the wrong road, why didn’t they turn back? (Chapts. 1, 2)

2. Rayk and Jan thought that May and Looth had friendly intentions. Compare what Rayk and Jan thought to what May really wanted. Find sentences that gave Rayk and Jan this feeling (Chapts. 3, 4), and then find sentences about May or Looth to explain how they really felt (Chapt. 6).

3. What small event led to Jan’s discovery of May’s real motives? (Chapts. 5, 6)
1. They were sure the sign had pointed them in the direction they had taken. (Chapt. 1, p. 8, Chapt. 2, p. 9) There was a rock slide that blocked their way. (Chapt. 2, p. 13) (RL.1.1, 1.7, 2.1)

2. Jan and Rayk’s point of view: May and Looth made them welcome. Quote: “Welcome, Rayk Hazen and Jan Clay.” (Chapt. 3, p. 22) and smiled at them several times. Quote: “May held out her hands. She smiled at Jan and Rayk.” (Chapt. 4, p. 25) Rayk and Jan felt lucky to be there. (Chapt. 3, p. 23)

May and Looth’s point of view: May and Looth were just using Rayk to get his ideas. Quote: “Those two fell for our tricks.” p. 36 and other quotes.(RL.1.9, 2.6, 4.1)

3. Jan climbed the tree/rescued May’s cat, and looked in the skylight. From there, she saw the plans for Rayk’s spaceship. (Chapt. 5, pp. 31-32; Chapt. 6, pp. 33, 35) (RL.1.7, 2.1, 4.1.)
TROUBLE AT THE SPACE STATION

Challenge Words

anyone
anything
bomb, -s
cafe
chief
college
coming
commander
company
computer, -s
control
diamond, -s
doors, -s
energy
factory
falling
hall
heard
hospital, -s
hears
hospital, -s
inter-planet
knob, -s
lava
level

looked, looking, looks
millions
module, -s
office, -r
opened
patrol
pause
pilot, -’s
pulled
research
station, -s
suit, -s
tall
today
tomorrow
trouble
walked, walks
welcome

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Jan go to Leem instead of telling her father to go? (Chapt. 1)

2. What did Jan and Rayk find out about boon gas at the mine? (Chapt. 3)

3. Tell in your own words how Jan and Rayk escaped from the locked module at the space station. (Chapt. 6)
Trouble at the Space Station Answer Key

1. She took the call for help from Commander Smith/Jan knew her dad had too much to do to go to Leem/She sneaked off without telling her dad about the call from Commander Smith. (Chapt. 1, pp. 2, 4, 5) (RL.1.1, 1.3, 2.1)

2. Boon gas pods were explosive; Leem had not been settled earlier because of the boon gas on the planet. (Chapt. 3, pp. 14-17) (RL.1.1, 2.1)

3. They put on the spacesuits they found there, went on a spacewalk, and came in another hatch/airlock. (Chapt. 6, pp. 34-38) (RL.1.2, 1.3; 2.3)
Challenge Words

aircycle, -s
animal’s
college
control, -s
cycle
evil
floor
front
laughed
lives
looked, looking, looks
Major
money
opened
patrol
pilot, -s
ribbon, -s
robot
showing
suit
table
Toby, -’s
walked, walking, walks
wanted
won

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Rayk not like Vork’s leader, Hoil? (Chapt. 1)

2. What made Rayk think there was something wrong about the way the race was set up? Find phrases in the book that tell you this. (Chapt. 3)

3. Reread from the last two lines of page 22 through the middle of page 23. Then look at the illustration on page 24. What does the illustration tell you about the relationship between Jan and Rayk that the story doesn’t say? (Chapt. 4)
The Evil Plot Answer Key

1. Rayk’s mother still lived on Vork, and he was worried about her safety. Also, he agreed with Jan that Hoil was a bad leader, and that Hoil’s Home Star Law would be bad for the Near-Star planets. (Chapt. 1, pp. 4-7) (RL.1.1, 1.3, 2.1, 3.3, 1.4)

2. Rayk knew Joss Barz was Vork’s best racer, and he had not come. All the racers from Vork were new, not the racers Rayk knew./Rayk called Joss and found out the old racing team had been cut. (Chapt. 3) Quotes: “Joss didn’t make the cut.” (p. 19) “All of us flew faster than he did.” (p. 19)

Quotes from Joss: “Those racers lied. My aircycle speed was the best on Vork.” (p. 21) “Hoil fired the whole racing team. He sent some army troops in our places.” (p. 22) (RL.4.1)

3. Jan doesn’t like Rayk telling her what to do/Rayk is jealous of Cal. You can tell because both have their hands on their hips and Jan is giving Rayk “attitude.” Also, other observers are watching them, so Rayk and Jan are probably talking loudly. (Chapt. 4, pp. 22-24) (RL.1.3, 2.6, 1.7. 2.7, 3.7)