

# Painted Skies

by Carolyn Mallory • illustrated by Amei Zhao

EDUCATOR'S  
RESOURCE



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## About the Book

Leslie is new to the Arctic, and no one told her there would be so much snow, and so many interesting animals to see. Along with her new friend, Oolipika, Leslie soon discovers one of the Arctic's most unique and breathtaking natural wonders, the northern lights. Having never seen such lights before, Leslie is understandably shocked by them. Oolipika, on the other hand, knows that the ancient lights are more than just colours, and that the mischievous, playful spirits that the northern lights hold can be dangerous. This contemporary narrative introduces young readers to an Inuit legend about the northern lights, followed by an epilogue that explains the science behind this amazing natural phenomenon.

## About the Author

Carolyn Mallory grew up in northern Ontario, raised her own three children in Nunavut, and has always considered herself a northern girl. She loves snow, animals, the tundra, wildflowers, reading, writing, and painting. She is the co-author of *Common Plants of Nunavut* and the author of *Common Insects of Nunavut*. She now lives in Nova Scotia with her dogs, cats, lizard, gerbils, frogs, fish, and a house-pig named Stella.

## About the Illustrator

Amei Zhao works in visual development and production design for TV and feature animation.

## Pre-Reading Discussion Questions

- Before reading the book out loud, hold it up and show the cover to the class. Ask students if they can guess what the book is about. Who are the two girls and what are they doing? Does the book's title give any clues to what the story is about?
- Tell students to raise their hands if they hear an unfamiliar word while you are reading the story out loud and stop to define these words. Point out the name of the author and the illustrator and define their roles in telling the story.

## During and Post-Reading Discussion Questions

The following questions and discussion points can be used during and after reading *Painted Skies*. Provide students with the chance to voice their own opinions, share their experiences, ask questions, or point out anything else they may notice about the book.

- What are the sky conditions that bring the best chance to see the northern lights? Can you see them from anywhere in the world? Where can you see them? What is their scientific name? What are some of the colours you can see?

- Do you think the illustrator of this book did a good job with her part of telling the story? Did her pictures make you remember looking up at the night sky? Do you think the colours she chose to use were a good match to show the northern lights? Would you like to have a job where you illustrated other people's stories, or would you rather write and illustrate your own stories?
- Have you ever seen the northern lights? If not, would you like to? If you have seen them, were you scared, as Leslie was? Was there someone with you to reassure you? Do you understand why Leslie would be afraid? Sometimes things can be scary and exciting at the same time. Have you ever felt like that? When?
- Early in the story, we find out that Leslie has recently moved to Oolipika's town. Is she fearful about the northern lights just because she hasn't seen them before? Do you understand what it's like to be afraid of new things? Does it help to have a friend or loved one reassure you? What new things have you been afraid of?
- Can you name some other reasons it's hard to move to a new town? Have you ever had to do this? If so, how did you make new friends there? What was the hardest part of moving for you? If you've never moved to a new place, how have you tried to befriend a newcomer to your town?
- The girls have different reactions when they first see the "painted skies." What does Leslie do? Why? Do you think her mother gave her good advice about what to do when she is scared? What does Oolipika do? Why? Which girl's actions seem most natural to you?



- What does Oolipika’s family call the northern lights? What is the story her grandma tells her about them? After hearing the story, Leslie says, “I can see them.” Have you ever looked at the nighttime sky or daytime clouds and imagined seeing shapes and stories there?
- Can you remember the scientific explanation for the northern lights? It’s very different than Oolipika’s story about the *anirniit* playing soccer. What’s your favourite part of both explanations? Can you think of another myth or story that also has a scientific explanation?
- Star constellations are another night sky phenomenon that people have stories about. Do you know any constellation stories? Why do you think ancient peoples had stories about the sky?

## Individual Activities

- Oolipika learned the story she tells Leslie about the spirits from her grandma. If you know a story from your grandparent, parent, or other Elder, write it down and then share it with the class.



- In the story, the author uses familiar Arctic animals in her descriptive language. Some examples are:
  - o “Leslie leapt off the steps, all arms and legs like a young caribou trying to keep up with the herd.”
  - o “They swept their arms and legs up and down as if they were ptarmigans trying to get off the ground and fly away.”

Write a short story about an adventure you had with a friend, and try using some descriptive language in the story.

- Oolipika’s legend about the spirits is only one of many stories that cultures have to explain the northern lights. Write your own original story that explains them.
- The very last double-page spread in the book has text that almost feels like a poem. Try writing your own poem about the northern lights—or write a poem about your best friend!
- Tape large sheets of paper to the walls of the classroom and paint the northern lights together! You can also add some Arctic animals to your mural.

