

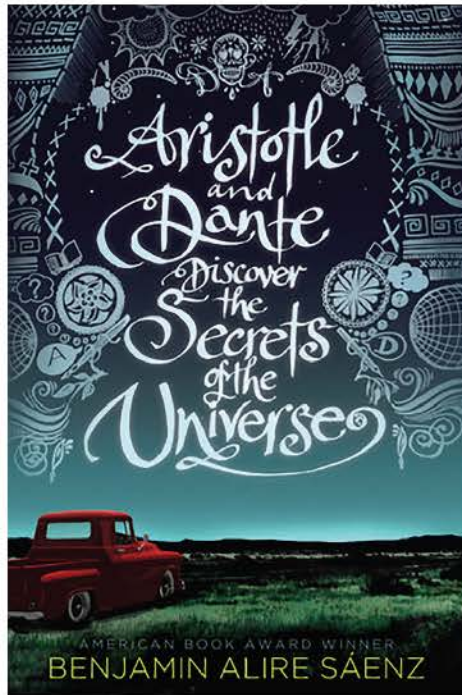
# Reading <sup>with</sup> Relevance<sup>®</sup>

Building INDEPENDENT READERS and THINKERS

YOUR STUDENT WORKBOOK FOR

## *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*

A novel by Benjamin Alire Sáenz



This workbook belongs to:

# About the Book

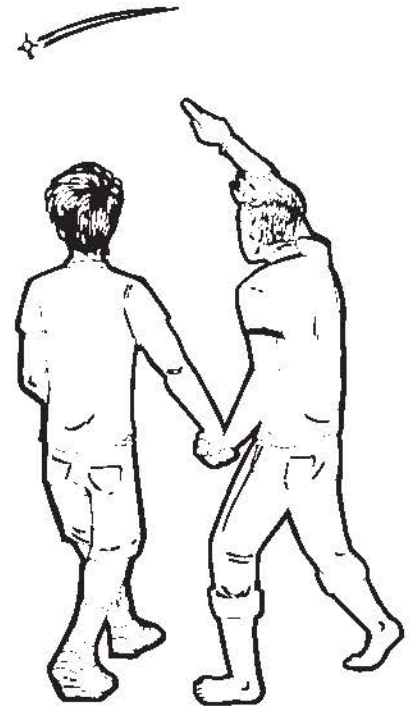
## *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*

### Story Summary

***Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* traces several months in the life of Aristotle, a lonely 15-year-old boy growing up in El Paso, Texas, during the 1980s.** One summer Aristotle, who goes by Ari, meets Dante, and his whole world changes. Suddenly, he has a friend! But Dante is not your average boy: this smart, funny, and sensitive young man cries, saves hurting birds, hates shoes, and, as Ari eventually discovers, likes boys. Over the course of the novel, Ari must come to terms with his own identity, his complicated relationship with Dante, and his family's silence around his brother's imprisonment for a violent crime. *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* is a story of the two boys and their developing friendship, which blossoms in ways neither of them saw coming.

Benjamin Alire Sáenz is a poet, essayist, novelist, and children's book writer. He grew up on a cotton farm in New Mexico, and spoke only Spanish until he started elementary school. His education took him to Denver, Belgium, Iowa, and California. He eventually settled in the border area between Texas and New Mexico — an area that is central to his writing. He currently teaches at the University of Texas, El Paso. *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* was published in 2012 and won several awards, including the Lambda Literary Award and the Stonewall Book Award.

### About the Author



# Session 1

## Theme: *Loneliness*

**Guiding Question:** Describe loneliness. What does it feel like? Do you experience it only when you are completely alone? How do you cope with feelings of loneliness?

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## Vocabulary

Write a complete sentence for each of the following vocabulary words. Use the definitions provided to make sure you are using these words correctly!



**optimist** (pg. 7): n., someone who sees the bright side of situations

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**precise** (pg. 18): adj., careful about details

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**inscrutable** (pg. 28): adj., mysterious

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## Story Setup

*Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* is the story of two boys, Aristotle and Dante, who grow and face challenges as friends. It was published in 2012 and written by Benjamin Alire Sáenz. It is set in Texas in 1987.

# Read pages 1-31



As you read, keep track of unfamiliar words, inspiring quotes, and questions you have.

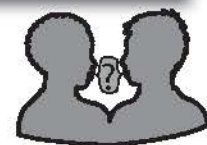
**Reading Context:** Consider researching these three musical references to experience the work of each artist.

**William Tell Overture** (pg. 5): a piece of classical music

**Richie Valens** (pg. 6): A singer in the 1950s who was the forefather of the Chicano rock movement; he died suddenly in a plane crash.

**Carlos Santana** (pg. 9): A Mexican American musician who was popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

## Discussion Questions



Write your response to each question below using a complete sentence.

- The inscription for the first chapter reads, "The problem with my life was that it was someone else's idea." What does this suggest about the story's narrator?

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- Can you relate to Aristotle's feelings of boredom at the beginning of the chapter? How do you keep occupied during your summer break?

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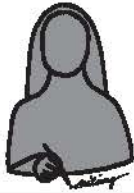
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- What was Aristotle's life like before Dante? How do things change after he meets Dante?

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Choose one of these prompts to respond to in at least one full paragraph of writing.

### FRIENDSHIP

At the beginning of the chapter, Aristotle describes himself as lonely, miserable, and isolated. However, all of this changes one summer day at the pool, when he meets Dante, and they instantly connect.

**Write about the moment when you first met your closest friend.**

- » What happened? How did you meet this person?
- » What experiences or traits helped you make such a connection?
- » Make a prediction: do you think that Aristotle and Dante will remain close throughout the book?

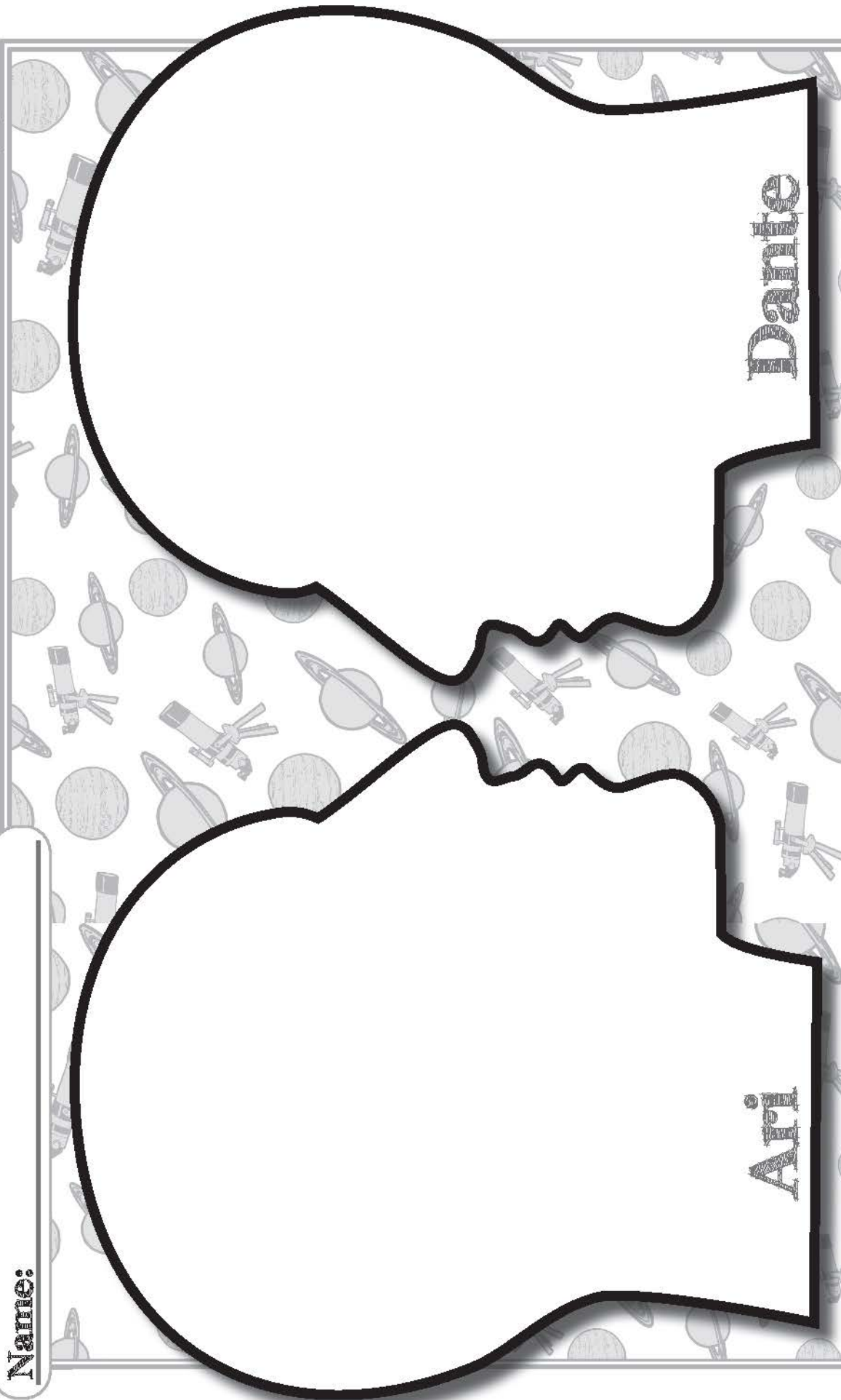
### FAMILY CONNECTION

When Ari talks about his father, he says, "Sometimes I think my father has all these scars. On his heart. In his head. All over."

**What can you infer from this quote about Ari's relationship with his father?**

- » How do you think their connection is different than what Ari would really like to have?
- » How does his father's pain affect Ari?
- » What do you think might help someone heal scars on their mind and heart?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



As we begin the book, we are introduced to our two main characters: Aristotle and Dante. In this activity you will begin to document what you've learned about their respective personalities, strengths, and mindsets through your reading. In each of the silhouettes above, list the qualities, important events, feelings, and quotes that help you understand the characters. Be sure to consider what the author tells us explicitly about the characters, and what is revealed indirectly through their behaviors, dialogues, and interactions.

**Our Strengths**

The background of the page is a repeating pattern of stylized planets and telescopes. The planets include Saturn with its rings, Jupiter with its bands, and Mars with its polar ice caps. The telescopes are depicted on tripods, some with eyepieces and others with camera attachments. The entire pattern is rendered in a light gray, sketch-like style.

# Extra Activities for Exploring the Book

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Write about a time you were especially proud to identify yourself with one of the descriptors you used.

Write about a time it was especially hard to be identified with one of your descriptors.

Each of us is multi-dimensional, and it is important to be able to define your own identity and to challenge stereotypes. Write an important aspect of your identity in each of the "I am" planets. This can include anything: Asian American, female, sister, athlete, singer, animal lover, or any descriptor with which you identify.

## Secrets to My Universe