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"The Last Dragon on Mars" Lesson Plan Guide

by Scott Reintgen

Unit Overview

Duration: 1 week

Grade Level: 6–8

Subject Integration: ELA, Science, Social Studies, Social-Emotional Learning

Essential Question: *What role do stories, myths, and hope play in human survival—and what happens when the impossible turns out to be real?*

Learning Objectives — Students will be able to:

- Analyze how Reintgen blends science fiction and mythology to explore themes of hope and survival
- Examine how the world-building of a dying Mars shapes character values and community dynamics
- Explore the function of myth and storytelling in human communities under extreme conditions
- Connect the novel's themes to real-world questions about hope, scarcity, and the power of narrative
- Express understanding through analytical and creative writing projects

ONE-WEEK LESSON PLAN

Day 1: World-Building — Life on a Dying Mars

Objective: Establish the setting of Lunar's Mars and how scarcity shapes its inhabitants

Materials: Book, world-building analysis chart, brief Mars science reference

Opening (10 min):

- Quick-write: "If you were born on a planet with scarce resources and no easy way out, what would you prioritize? What would you give up?"
- Partner share

Main Activity (35 min):

- Introduce Lunar Jones and the world-building of his Mars: the relocation clinic, scavenging economy, crew dynamics
- Examine the survival philosophy "Keep your eyes down and your feet moving"—what does it reveal about this society?
- Brief science connection: What do we actually know about Mars? What would real survival there require?
- Discuss: How does scarcity shape what people value, who they trust, and what they dare to hope for?

Closing (5 min):

- Exit ticket: "What does Lunar's world ask of its inhabitants that Earth doesn't? What does it take from them?"

Assessment: World-building comprehension, science connection, thematic framework building

Day 2: Lunar Jones — Hope as Danger

Objective: Analyze Lunar's survival philosophy and what it costs him to maintain it

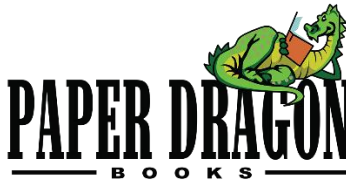
Materials: Book, character analysis chart

Opening (10 min):

- Think-pair-share: "Is it ever rational to stop hoping? When might that be a survival strategy—and when does it become a trap?"

Main Activity (35 min):

- Character deep dive: Why has Lunar been taught that hope is dangerous? Who taught him this—and were they wrong?



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- Analyze the scavenging crews: How does community function in this world? What holds people together when resources are scarce?
- Track the moment Lunar's philosophy cracks: What drives him into the restricted zone even against his own rules?
- Discuss: What's the difference between foolish hope and brave hope? Does Lunar's story help us distinguish them?

Closing (5 min):

- Quick-write: "What does Lunar risk by exploring the restricted zone? Why does he do it anyway?"

Assessment: Character motivation analysis, hope as theme, courage and risk-taking discussion

Day 3: The Dragon — Where Mythology Meets Mars

Objective: Analyze what the dragon's existence means for Lunar's worldview and the novel's central themes

Materials: Book, mythology and science fiction comparison chart

Opening (10 min):

- Discussion: "What does it mean for a creature from myth to exist in a sci-fi world? What does its presence change—not just plot-wise, but thematically?"

Main Activity (35 min):

- Introduce the concept of mythology in science fiction: Why do authors bring ancient stories into futuristic settings?
- Analyze the dragon's discovery: How does it rupture Lunar's understanding of what's possible?
- Discuss: What stories did humans carry from Earth to Mars? Why would they bring myths and legends to a dying planet?
- Connect to the real world: Why do humans tell stories in times of hardship? What do myths and legends provide that facts can't?

Closing (5 min):

- Exit ticket: "What does the dragon represent in the story? Defend your interpretation."

Assessment: Thematic analysis, mythology-in-fiction understanding, evidence-based interpretation

Day 4: Themes — Hope, Survival, and the Power of Narrative

Objective: Synthesize the novel's major themes and connect them to broader human questions

Materials: Book, theme synthesis chart, optional hopepunk genre reference

Opening (10 min):

- Partner discussion: "What does the novel ultimately say about hope? Is it weakness or power—or both?"

Main Activity (35 min):

- Theme synthesis: Map the novel's key themes—hope, survival, myth, community, discovery—and trace how they intersect
- Introduce the "hopepunk" concept: stories that insist hope is a form of resistance in the face of difficult circumstances
- Discuss: Does Reintgen earn his optimism—or is the ending too easy? What makes hope feel true vs. false in fiction?
- Writing prompt: "What does 'The Last Dragon on Mars' say about the relationship between the stories we believe and the world we create?"

Closing (5 min):

- Share one sentence from writing prompt; build a class theme statement together

Assessment: Thematic synthesis quality, genre awareness, analytical writing

Day 5: Creative and Analytical Response

Objective: Express thematic understanding through a creative or analytical project

Materials: Writing materials, project choice cards

Opening (10 min):



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- Preview project options; students select and begin

Main Activity (35 min):

- Option A: Write a myth that Lunar's ancestors carried from Earth to Mars—what story helped them survive the journey?
- Option B: Write an analytical paragraph — "How does Reintgen use the dragon to argue that hope is not a luxury but a necessity?"
- Option C: Write the scene from the dragon's perspective—what has it been waiting for, and why now?
- Share in pairs or small groups

Closing (5 min):

- Class closing: "One thing 'The Last Dragon on Mars' made me think about hope or stories differently is..."

Assessment: Writing quality, thematic synthesis, creative or analytical ambition

Differentiation

- **Advanced learners:** Research the hopepunk genre and write a comparative essay connecting the novel to another hopepunk text
 - **Students needing support:** World-building graphic organizer; character motivation chart; sentence starters for analytical writing
 - **English Language Learners:** Visual world-building supports; pre-teach vocabulary around scarcity, mythology, and hope; collaborative options
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Materials List

- Class set of "The Last Dragon on Mars"
- World-building analysis chart (Day 1)
- Brief Mars science reference for Day 1
- Character analysis chart (Day 2)
- Optional hopepunk genre reference for Day 4
- Theme synthesis chart (Day 4)
- Project choice cards and writing materials (Day 5)