

amanda appiarius | Motion Process for *Constellations*

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## **Objective**

The basis of this class project was to create a motion piece that reflected some of our personal qualities. From the surface, a story about a star constellation and a girl seem to have nothing to do with me, but in reality I have deeply woven myself into this simple story line. The diffidence and timidity of the girl and the lion's tendency to be vain and overconfident are all small pieces of my personality.

## **Personal Objective**

I am a person who is always full of whimsical ideas and random inspirations. When reading about this project in class I knew I had to take the opportunity to embrace my storytelling abilities and take them to their limits. I decided to challenge myself by creating an abstract self-portrait. Although open to interpretation, the imagery and plot of the lion, stars and girl are meant to reflect aspects of my personality by evoking childlike emotions and delving into metaphor.

# amanda appiarius | Motion Process for *Constellations*

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## **The Initial Written Concept**

The lion, extroverted, vain, creative, and loyal, will be the main character of my story who possesses all the traits of the zodiac sign Leo. He will start out as an astrological constellation, but because of his need to outshine everyone, his stars will burn too brightly and accidentally knock all the stars out of the sky. When Leo's constellation hits the earth, it will turn into its physical form, a lion. After this Leo comes across a small, introverted girl collecting the fallen stars. Together they figure out how to return the stars to the sky and in the end Leo and the girl restore what he destroyed.

I want to approach this story with a whimsical and simplistic style. To keep a more fanciful tone I will use muted colors and earthy textures for the background and characters. The simplicity I'm aiming for lends itself to vector illustrations, which will make the lion and girl easier to animate in Flash.

Although this isn't a traditional self portrait it is still a projection of myself into two different characters. My astrological sign is Leo, and while I possess most of the sign's traits, I have an introverted side that also complements them. In this story the quiet, nature-loving girl is purely good. She is meant to help Leo hold back his need to prove himself and adapt those qualities needed to be balanced and happy working together with other stars to light the night sky.

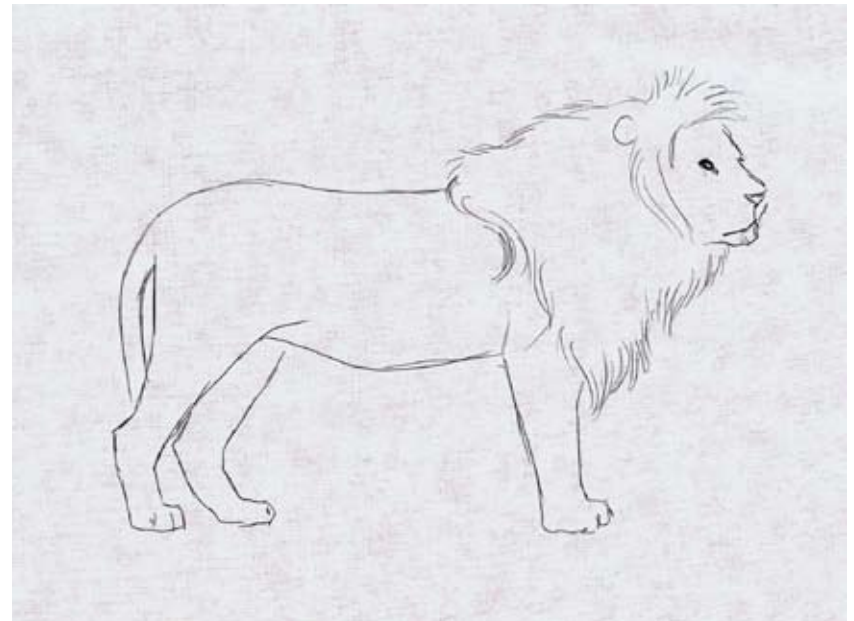
\*See the end of the document for an extended writing exercise done in order to explore the characters in a different medium.

# amanda appiarius | Motion Process for *Constellations*

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## Preliminary Design Research

Knowing that I wanted to make this piece in Flash and keep the characters simple, it was easy to narrow down design choices. Despite knowing this, the lion was a challenge to style for the motion piece. I wanted him to be grand and proud but not differ too much from the girl who would definitely take on a very simple form based on limited shapes. On the right are only a few of the lion images I found, as well as one I drew, in order to hone in on the look and feel of Leo.



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## Final Concept Board

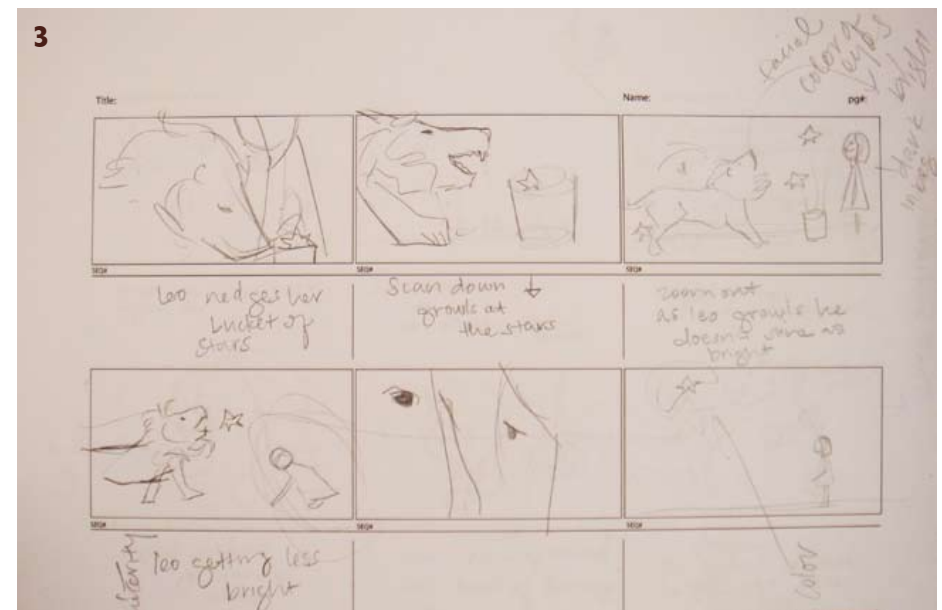
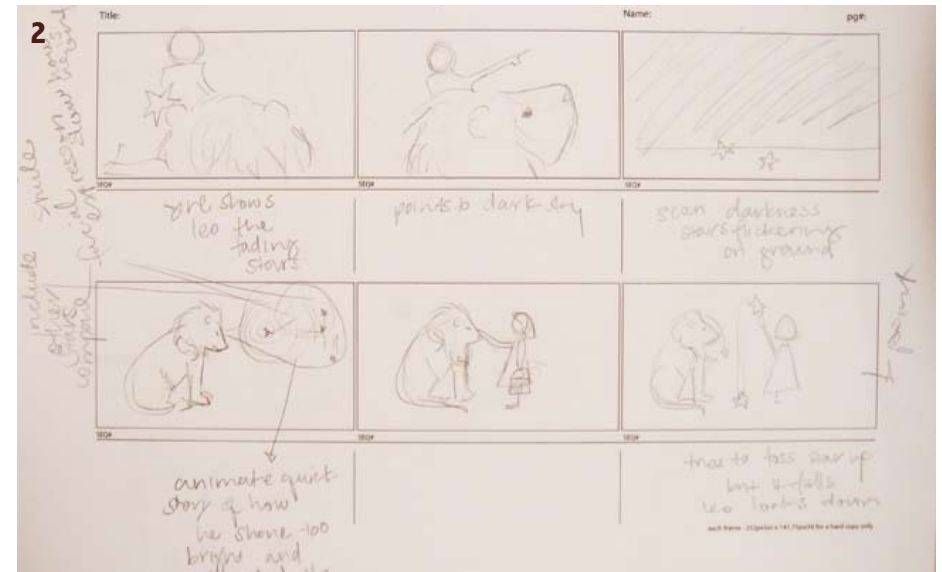
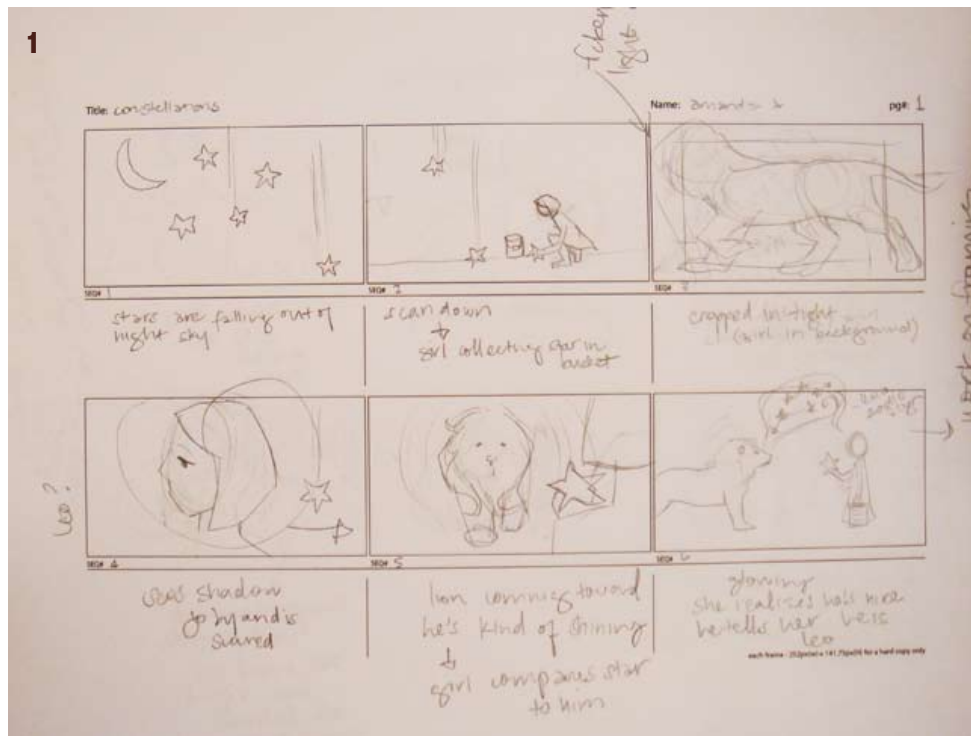
This is the final design of the motion piece. The Lion's mane, although retaining some of the curl and grandeur of medieval drawings, is greatly simplified to go with the childlike theme and whimsical feel of the piece. The girl follows suit with a touch of texture in her dress. The rose fabric symbolizes her growth throughout the story and her plain features reinforce her timid personality.



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## Preliminary Storyboards

After extensive writing exercises the storyboards were relatively easy to sketch out. Below is the first step toward putting my story into visual language. After reviewing these boards I knew special attention had to be paid to facial expressions and body language of the characters. The variety of scenes, from wide to close up as well as their framing, were also in need of refinement.



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## Final Storyboards

These final storyboards are tightly refined and closely represent what the motion piece is meant to portray.

A few changes were made as the animation process continued in order to improve the story. Most importantly, instead of the girl tossing stars in order to help Leo, she sings. This not only proves to be a turning point for the character as she sheds her shyness, but it also makes more sense that her voice, like Leo's, should also raise the stars back into the night.



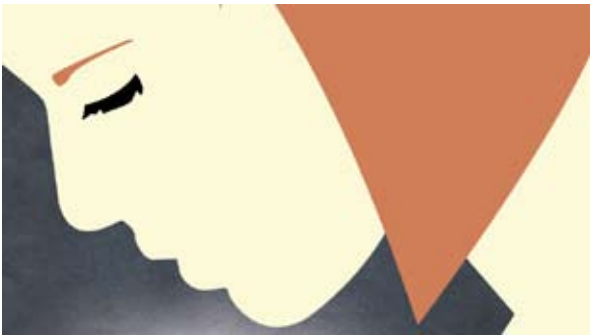
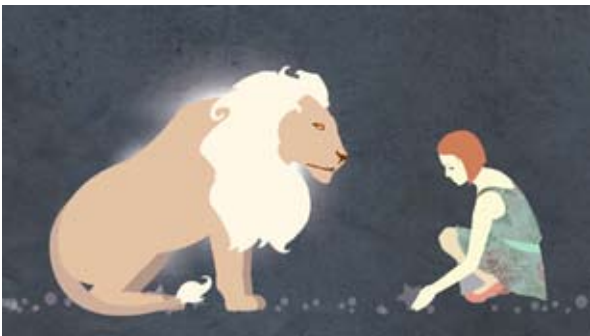
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## **Music Choice**

Since I wanted to make this a predominantly visual story, I refrained from doing voice over and instead set to work finding the whimsical sound track for my piece. I wanted a sound that would emulate the shining of stars and their intermittent twinkling while supporting the emotional line of the story with some sad as well as more joyful lines for the ending. I thought the track “Main Titles“ from *Chocolat* by Rachel Portman worked in well with its woodwinds, piano and strings. The song has that perfect “twinkling” sound I was looking for. With a little bit of editing, the track soon fell in place with the visuals.

## **Additional Writing Exercises (Story on the Next Page)**

I am minoring in Creative Writing and so I thought it would be extremely helpful and appropriate to develop my characters through writing as well as through visuals. I wrote a rough draft story as well as some explorational exercises for the characters and the environment involved.

## **The Animatic and Final Motion Piece**

After endless preparation with the storyboards and critiques from professors and classmates, the transition from the animatic (which included initial flash animation and effects) to the final rough cut of the motion piece was a smooth process. As a final addition to the piece, simplified text was integrated in order to increase understanding and encourage interpretation by the viewer.

This entire process was aided by the existence of a preproduction calendar. In order to keep track of Flash and After Effects animation schedules as well as music development and time for visual adjustments, a calendar became essential. All dates from the concept to the rough animatic were planned and recorded making for a successful delivery date.

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## *Constellations* | **A Written Version**

*\*This is an unfinished draft and the story line is not identical to the motion piece.*

The skies have a vow of silence. The stars don't utter a word; they speak through their thoughts. Not even the moon has the privilege to make a sound. The quiet of the night depends on them and all of their energy is spent on shining. During the late winter evenings and into spring Leo's constellation is the brightest. Not only does he have the greatness in light, but his main star is also one of the 'Guardians of Heaven' that marks the South, the culminating point of the sun, the embodiment of glory and power.

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Leo flexed his brightness, making the surrounding sky burn white and ultramarine.

*Do you have to do that?* Asked a smaller collection of stars.

*Why shouldn't I?* Leo's brilliance vibrated a little stronger.

*If you go any brighter the rest of us will fade, can't you just be normal?*

*Being normal doesn't get you anywhere. How do you think I earned my spot up here? By being normal?*

*No you were murdered by a man, skinned, and thrown into the sky as a trophy. That's nothing to be proud of.*

Leo sent a telepathic growl to the dull constellation. If only he could show his real power. He had been tempted to go over his allotted brightness before, but today the convenient placement of the sun burned energy into him and the unappreciative murmurs from his neighboring constellations encouraged him to test his limit.

A couple of flashes crossed the sky as he absorbed the warmth and power he felt from the sun and transferred it into his own luminance.

*Hold back Leo, you know there are consequences for what you are doing. Please. It's against the rules, what if something bad happens? You're lighting the entire sky, we're nearly invisible to the mortals now!*

The stars' voices and their blindness to Leo's greatness caused him to pulse harder and the intenseness of his light increased into a swelling ball of light.

*It looks like you're going to explode. Quit trying to prove yourself, we know what you can do. This isn't smart. Holy starlets, it's getting brighter! What are we going to do?*

# amanda appiarius | Motion Process for *Constellations*

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The energy Leo now held was unmanageable. After a short struggle he couldn't help ripping a roar that rattled the sky and the light suddenly burst forth from his effulgent ball in a tide of glaring heat. One by one the stars were knocked out of the sky.

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As soon as all of Leo's stars fell to the ground, he felt his constellation's cracking spine as it morphed into his mortal form. His paws felt solid on top of the dirt, wide and steady. He dared to look up and see the rest of the plunging stars. Streaks of burning white heating the sky, and within a couple seconds glowing stones landed, flickering from the shock of earthly air, steaming in the grass.

He didn't know if the other constellations took physical form, but he didn't like it. The fine fur felt like rooted weeds on his back and the scent of burning grass, wet, sickening leaves, old bark, dirt, and musky saliva aggravated his senses. The only way to block the onslaught of smell was to breath through his mouth, in which case he had to leave his mouth wide open as a welcoming home to fruit flies and mosquitoes.

With each plummeting rock of light, the sky darkened and the roots of fur on Leo's back seem to twist and wring his newly formed organs with ferocity unknown to him. How could he have let himself get so out of hand?

Leo began to walk through the field. He didn't know how to get back to the sky,

and even if he did, would he be allowed to return? He continued through the tall grass, trying to concentrate on the swaying of his haunches and the way the stirred air sometimes waked his mane. He watched a few more lights fall and after the last star's muffled thud onto the grassy field, only the thin rim of the moon remained stark against the blackness of the night.

Ahead he saw a small human. He crouched in the grass, afraid that he might scare her in his new physical form. Every breath seemed like a boulder cracking and careening down a cliff, but she remained preoccupied with picking up fallen stars, unaware of his presence. The crystal lights in the slight palm of her hand lit the roundness of her face as she collected them from the ground and whispered the tune of an old pagan song. Grapefruit and honey curls glowed gold against her white body and blue floral dress. Dirt creased her knuckles as she picked up stars and dropped them in a tin bucket. What was she doing? There were hundreds of stars in the field, what made her think she could do anything? Leo let out an unintentional growl. The girl immediately stopped moving, her limbs went limp, and the glowing rocks weighed down her hand.

"Please, please don't hurt me." She took a step backward and looked down at her bare feet.

"I won't, I'm not a real lion."

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“Then what are you? Are you a part of all this? The stars just started falling, I’ve never seen anything like it and I’ve never seen a lion before.”

“I fell out of the sky.”

“But you’re a lion,” the girl said, “and if you’re from the sky, why don’t you look something like this. I didn’t think living, breathing, creatures could live up so high.” The small girl held out her tin bucket full of dimming light shards, his fellow neighbors.

“No, I’m not a lion. I’m a constellation, a legend, a zodiac. I’m Leo.”

“Sounds like you’re a king or something. Why are you down here? Can you help me get all the stars back up?” She bent down to pick up another glowing stone and dropped it into her bucket.

“I wish I knew how.”

“It can’t be that hard. Do you know why they fell?”

Leo’s head dropped close to the grass, “That would be my doing.”

She stood still, waiting for elaboration.

“I’m not king, not anything like it,” Leo said, “This chaos is my fault. I wanted to show the others how powerful I was, I wanted to be the royalty of the sky, and then this happened. I destroyed the kingdom. Aside from the moons, there isn’t supposed to be a ruler of the skies. I wanted to stand out, shine bright, but I broke the rules trying to do it. I broke the silence by roaring. I couldn’t help it, and I didn’t think it would do anything, but then one by one we started to drop to the earth.”

With short, hesitant steps the girl approached him, set down her bucket, and reached out to stroke behind his ear. “Your roar shook you from the sky,” she said, “that’s real power.”

“Power that ruined the night.”

“For now, but don’t you want to get back up there?” She gazed up into the darkness with nothing but the slivered moon to reflect in her eyes.

“I’m not sure I’d be allowed, and besides I don’t know how.”

“We can figure it out.”

“Either way, I’m sure I’ve been banned.”

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“You didn’t mean to cause this though. And we can fix it, we can put them all back where they belong.” She took a pebble-sized star from her bucket and tried to toss it up to the heavens, but it just thudded back to the grass. After that she jumped and tried to stick it to the sky as if it were Velcro.

“I don’t see how.”

“The stars are fading the longer they’re down here. I hate the darkness.” She shivered and the bucket flickered transparent light into the atmosphere. Leo could see the energy being carried away, twirls of twinkling smoke, never to be recovered. He had created a blinded, blackened darkness. The starry night would soon be a forgotten realm. He watched as the bucket quivered with weak pulses of luminosity. His friends were dimming.

“Can you help?”

“Maybe.” Leo sat on his haunches, and looked straight up into the black. If this mortal girl thought she could restore the sky, why couldn’t he? The Almighty Leo. If it had been his power that shook them out of the sky, couldn’t that same power return them? The sun had been at the perfect angle and its energy combined with his strength had blazed his stars into burning orbs on the simple command of a roar. If he wanted to recreate that, it would have to

be from his own energy. He’d have to spend his brightness to create the same ignition power as before. He would lose luminance. “I’m not sure I can do it.”

“Do what? So you know a way? You have to, you have to try!” She held the bucket to him, her silky arms stretched out with an offering of sky diamonds. But they were turning into rocks.

“We have no time!” The girl snatched a star from her tin, threw it into the sky, and chanted a few words of old magic. It hovered in space for a while, but as soon as she quit speaking the words it came rushing back to her palms. A few facets continued to sparkle, but in a couple more minutes the star would die.

Leo settled into a low prowling position, trying to feel the heat of the ground with every square inch of his paws. He would no longer be the all-effulgent Leo; his constellation might fade in the off seasons, but at least he could save the others. The earth seemed to wind its way through the sinews of his forelegs and through to the center of his eyes. He wanted to burn in the sky, see the life below, and feel the immortality and privilege of the ancient realm. His roar slashed the air as the girl tossed the contents of her bucket up and shards of winking glamour were pitched into the night.

# amanda appiarius | Motion Process for *Constellations*

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## *Leo* | Defining Character

*\*This is unconnected to the previous story and is a stand alone piece of explorational writing done in order to study the characters' personality.*

1. Heavy mane that frames his angular muzzle with strands of chestnut and mahogany. Oversized paws with hints of his retracted claws showing. Yellow eyes with hazel specks in them and a large black pupil that grows and shrinks with his roars. Overall lean and predator-like body. Frightening, but kind after you realize he is not violent. Ancient yet young.

2. Leo wants to show that he's the leader, that he is better than all the rest of his star neighbors. He doesn't want to harm them, but the idea of him being the greatest, brightest star is too hard to resist when he knows he has the most power of any other constellation in the surrounding sky. The young girl he meets after his fall from glory becomes a friend to him. He remembers seeing her from the sky as the girl who was always outside planting seeds or picking flowers or doing other things to help nature. She tells him that it's okay to make mistakes so long as you're sorry for them. Together they help set everything right again.

3. Leo's career is shining as a constellation in the sky. For pleasure he watches the earth and thinks about how he can be leader of the stars. For the most part he is unhappy with his situation because he is just like every other star out there. This makes him overly ambitious, but by then end of the story he becomes satisfied with shining as bright as he can and realizing that he is a unique constellation.

4. He is most afraid of fading away and looking like any old star in the sky. After he has knocked all of the other stars out of the sky, he is afraid of not being accepted as a constellation anymore.

5. He wants to be the best star in the sky. After his mistake all he wants to do is fix the sky. He realizes that it's empty without them all up there. He can't light the sky alone.

## *The Girl* | **Defining Character**

*\*This is unconnected to the previous story and is a stand alone piece of explorational writing done in order to study the characters' personality.*

1. The girl is pale and gangly. She always had dirt under her fingernails and its starting to stain the creases in her knuckles. Her hair is shoulder length, a frizzy strawberry crème color that gives her face an even softer complexion. She has large grey blue eyes that are set above a thin nose and straight lips. Her yellow eyelashes are nearly invisible, making her eyes stand from the roundness of her cheeks. She is wearing a white dress with a blue floral pattern on it. It hangs loosely on her figure and is tied with a large bow in the back. She's barefoot.

2. The girl has an important relationship to the earth. She nourishes people, friends, and the earth and is constantly planting, watering, pruning, walking, and enjoying the outdoors. She is more of a wanderer, and although she has a family, they're not important to this story.

3. She spends he time outside sometimes with friends, sometimes alone. She reads books under trees and likes to plant and nourish flowers and other things.

4. She is afraid of things dying and failing. She is mostly afraid for the earth, that's why she takes care of it. She is afraid for other people more than for herself.

5. She wants the stars to be returned to the sky and she wants Leo to be happy.

*The environment* | **Explorational Writing**

*\*This is unconnected to the previous story and is a stand alone piece of explorational writing done in order to study the characters' place in the world.*

The night air is swelling with the scent of burnt grass as stars, one by one, fall from the sky. The air is still and only the wisps of grass stir beneath small breaths of wind. When a star falls, the streak of burning white heats the sky, and within a couple seconds a glowing stone lands, flickering from the shock of earthly air, steaming the grass. The sky continues to empty, and grows darker with each plummeting rock of light. After the last star's muffled thud onto the weathered field, only the thin rim of a moon remains stark against the blackness of the night.