



---

# *Between Sky and Sea: A Family's Struggle*

An Educational Resource

---



---

**The purpose** of this resource is to aide in classroom integration of *Between Sky and Sea: A Family's Struggle*, specifically in the discussion of its narrative, characters, themes, and conflicts. This is a free resource and has been written to align with the following Common Core Standards:

**Key Ideas and Details:**

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1  
Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2  
Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3  
Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1  
Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2  
Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3  
Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

## **Craft and Structure:**

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4  
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5  
Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5  
Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

This resource is broken down into three major sections, with each section dedicated to a specific part of the novel. Each of the three sections contain tasks and questions to help with close reading of the text, tasks and questions to prompt class discussion, a self-reflective assignment/activity for students, and an optional writing project.

Before beginning the discussion of the text, students should have a clear understanding of the following literary terms: characters, protagonist, antagonist, supporting/secondary characters, motivation, plot, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution, conflict, and theme. It may be helpful to assign a short “no points” quiz to gauge their knowledge and/or refresh their memory in regards to the aforementioned terms.

## Section One: Kā‘eo

---

The following questions should be completed prior to the class discussion (in relation to the reading assignment) or as part of a small group/in-class activity. Review these questions to “warm up” the class and prepare them for the questions and tasks for large class discussion. Students should provide textual evidence to support their answers and be encouraged to use literary terms when applicable.

### I. Tasks/questions for Close-Reading:

- Who are the main character(s) and secondary characters in this section? For each of the characters, describe who they are and/or their relationship to each other. Identify the protagonist and antagonist (if any).
- What is the major conflict (or conflicts) of this section? How do these conflicts inform (motivate) the actions of the main character(s)?
- When does this section take place? What key words or phrases does the author use to establish the setting (time and place)?
- What is the overall plot of this section? Write a brief, one-paragraph summary of the important events that take place, taking care to explain how they contribute to the plot.
- What theme or themes does this section introduce? For each theme, provide textual evidence to support it.

**For pp.15-31:**

- What is it about Mr. Haywood's class, and other classes at Kā'eo's high school, that Kā'eo finds uninteresting or leads him to "get by instead"? How does Ms. Carvalho's class differ?
- How would you describe Kā'eo's relationship with Tūtūpapa? How, or in what way, does that relationship change after the summer that Kā'eo spends with him? Why?
- Kā'eo keeps a photograph pinned to his corkboard. What is the significance of the photograph, and how does it tie into the opportunity that Ms. Carvalho presents to him and his subsequent decision to take it?

**For pp. 32-52:**

- How would you describe the relationship between Kā'eo, Chloe, and Alaka'i?
- In what ways are each character similar to each other and in what ways are they different?
- What is the significance or meaning behind Kā'eo's hihi'o/vision? How does it relate to his personal conflict and/or to the events in this part of the story?
- Why do you think Kā'eo's family is so concerned about his interest in 'awa? How does this concern lead to conflict between Kā'eo and his family, especially between Kā'eo and Tūtūpapa?

**For pp. 53-67:**

- What advice does Kā‘eo give to Elani? In what way or ways is this advice connected to his decision to move out on his own?
- How would you describe the relationship between Kā‘eo and Junior? In what ways are each character similar to each other and in what ways are they different?
- While away from home, what realizations does Kā‘eo come to? Does Kā‘eo find what he’s looking for?

**For pp. 68-79:**

- Why does Kā‘eo initially stay away from his family after hearing about what happened to Tūtūpapa? Why does he decide to return?
- When Kā‘eo says: “All I know is da kine: fo sing *Hawai‘i Pono* ī wit my Pidgin tongue and my English first name. *Robert*, dey wen call me, and I tell dem jus like I wen tell Haywood or any of da oddah fuckahs in high sku: *Kā‘eo*, like I really wen know what dat name mean,” what is he trying to explain to his father?
- What is the significance of termites, if any, in this part of the story, or what do they represent?

## II. Tasks and Questions for Class Discussion:

When discussing the following questions, ask students to think about their previous answers and events in the novel. You might also encourage them to think about their own experience and to also discuss what they've learned in other classes.

- The beginning of this section opens with a Hawaiian proverb: *Ke hi'i la 'oe i ka pauku, waena, he neo ke po'o me ka hi'u*, or *you hold the center piece without its head and tail*. What do you think this proverb means? In what ways does this proverb contribute to the meaning of this section or how does it relate to the events of this section? Ask students to identify other proverbs and their significance.
- What role or importance does Hawaiian knowledge have in this particular section? Ask students to identify the different forms that this knowledge takes in the novel.
- The word "truth" is used many times by Kā'eo and others throughout this section, define or explain truth as discussed by Kā'eo and others. In addition, consider the meaning of "truth" in an everyday context, what is "truth"? Is there more than one kind of truth?
- Kā'eo is referred to as Robert, as Kā'eo, and as 'Eo. Early on he also makes it a point to find out what his name means, although he doesn't quite know why he was given it until the end of this section of the novel. Why do you think Kā'eo cares so much about his name and about what he's called? Are names an important part of a person's identity? What does your name mean? Do you go by any nicknames? Where does it or they come from? Who gave it to you?

### **III. Reflective writing assignment/activity:**

After a discussion of the text, ask students to do the following in a journal, notebook, or on a piece of paper. You might ask students to take this assignment home to complete it, but it works best as a “free write” assignment. If deciding to assign the latter, be sure to let them know that the assignment is not graded and that they should feel free to express themselves openly. After the assignment/activity is completed, encourage them to share with the class.

- Write about any practice or cultural tradition specific to your cultural or ethnic background that is important to you or your family. What are your earliest memories of the tradition? Does everyone in everyone in your family practice it? Why do you or your family do so? If you don't have a practice or cultural tradition, write about practices/traditions that you have encountered or that you have heard about, and the importance or reason for the practice/tradition.

### **IV. Optional Writing Project:**

Our family and our loved ones are an important part of who we are, and knowing our family histories can also help us get a better sense of ourselves. For this optional homework assignment, you will interview a family member of your choosing about an important event in her or his life. First, brainstorm a list of questions that you plan to ask your family member. It may help to write each question using the five W's (Who, What, Where, When, and Why), for example: who was involved, what happened, where did it happen, when did it happen, and why was it an important event. After you have brainstormed your list of question, arrange a time to talk to your family member and conduct your interview. During the interview, be sure to keep notes and don't be afraid to ask more questions. Do your best to get the details. When you've finished with your interview, write about the event using the details from the interview, being sure to communicate why it was important to the reader.



## Section Two: Mark

---

The following questions should be completed prior to the class discussion (in relation to the reading assignment) or as part of a small group/in-class activity. Review these questions to “warm up” the class and prepare them for the questions and tasks for large class discussion. Students should provide textual evidence to support their answers and be encouraged to use literary terms when applicable.

### I. Tasks/questions for Close-Reading:

- Who are the main character(s) and secondary characters in this section? For each of the characters, describe who they are and/or their relationship to each other. Identify the protagonist and antagonist (if any).
- What is the major conflict (or conflicts) of this section? How do these conflicts inform (motivate) the actions of the main character(s)?
- When does this section take place? What key words or phrases does the author use to establish the setting (time and place)?
- What is the overall plot of this section? Write a brief, one-paragraph summary of the important events that take place, taking care to explain how they contribute to the plot.
- What theme or themes does this section introduce? What theme or themes does it continue to build on from the previous section? For each theme, provide textual evidence to support it.

**For pp. 83-96:**

- How would you describe Mark's character? What qualities or characteristics does he have? Now that you are seeing the story from his point of view, has your impression of him changed?
- Following events at the hospital, Mark decides to tell his father that he plans to move out. What are Mark's reasons for moving out and do you think that his father understands?
- How would you describe Mark's attitude toward Kā'eo at the beginning of this part of the novel? Does he feel the same way in the end? How has his feelings toward his brother changed? Why?

**For pp. 97-109:**

- Do you think that Mark and Pops feel the same way about Kā'eo? How do their opinions differ or how are they the same? If different, what is at the root of their disagreement?
- When Mark encounters Junior at the gas station, what do you think it is about the encounter that leaves Mark so shaken?
- At the end of this part of the novel, Mark makes a decision "for his family and for himself," what is the decision that he makes and why do you think he decides to do so?

**For pp. 110-120:**

- Who does Mark meet at church? What do you think this person is trying to explain to Mark or what does this person want him to understand?
- On the way to the emergency room, Mark recalls an event from his childhood. What is the significance of this memory or what does it reveal?
- When Mark takes Kā'eo to see their father, what do you think Mark hopes will happen?

**For pp. 121-131:**

- When Mark tells himself, “One week at one time...one week at one time,” what does he mean? Do you think that he has changed in any way? If so, how?
- What does Mark learn from the family meetings? Why are these meetings important for him?
- At the end of this part of the novel, Mark decides to share his family's story, why? What do you think doing this means for him? What do you think that he has learned?

## II. Tasks and Questions for Class Discussion:

When discussing the following questions, ask students to think about their previous answers and events in the novel. You might also encourage them to think about their own experience and to also discuss what they've learned in other classes.

- When you first realized that the point of view had changed, what was your reaction? Why do you think that the author chose to put you in Mark's shoes, at times even showing you the same events from a different perspective?
- "Choices" are a constant concern for Mark—the choices that Kā'eo makes, the choices that their father makes, and the choices that Mark makes. What does Mark realize when it comes to making choices? Do you think that it's possible to always make the right ones? Ask students to discuss the various choices made by the characters throughout this section as well as the consequences and results.
- This section opens with another Hawaiian proverb: Heaha ka hala i kapuhia ai ka leo, i ho'okuli mai ai? Or *what was the wrong that forbade the voice, that caused the deafness?* What do you think this proverb means? In what ways does this proverb contribute to the meaning of this section or how does it relate to the events of this section?

### **III. Reflective writing assignment/activity:**

After a discussion of the text, ask students to do the following in a journal, notebook, or on a piece of paper. You might ask students to take this assignment home to complete it, but it works best as a “free write” assignment. If deciding to assign the latter, be sure to let them know that the assignment is not graded and that they should feel free to express themselves openly. After the assignment/activity is completed, encourage them to share with the class.

- Have you ever experienced events similar to those that Mark has gone through, for example a death in the family or a loved one who is suffering from an addiction? How did you or members of your family deal with the events? What would you tell someone who was going through a similar experience?

### **IV. Optional Writing Project:**

The choices we make, both good and bad, can and do often shape who we are. For this writing project, brainstorm a list of tough or difficult choices that you’ve had to make in your life. After making your list, narrow it down to a few that you think have had the biggest impact on your life, taking into account the results of your choices. Once you’ve done so, choose one of the choices that you’ve made and write about the time that you had to make that decision, why you made it, and why you feel it has had an impact on your and/or your life. In order to get all the details, it may be helpful to talk to others who may have known you at the time, such as family or friends, but remember that this account is coming from your perspective and so it’s important that your project remain true to your experience. Don’t be afraid to be honest.

## Section Three: **Elani**

---

The following questions should be completed prior to the class discussion (in relation to the reading assignment) or as part of a small group/in-class activity. Review these questions to “warm up” the class and prepare them for the questions and tasks for large class discussion. Students should provide textual evidence to support their answers and be encouraged to use literary terms when applicable.

### **I. Tasks/questions for Close-Reading:**

- Who are the main character(s) and secondary characters in this section? For each of the characters, describe who they are and/or their relationship to each other. Identify the protagonist and antagonist (if any).
- What is the major conflict (or conflicts) of this section? How do these conflicts inform (motivate) the actions of the main character(s)?
- When does this section take place? What key words or phrases does the author use to establish the setting (time and place)?
- What is the overall plot of this section? Write a brief, one-paragraph summary of the important events that take place, taking care to explain how they contribute to the plot.
- What theme or themes does this section introduce? What theme or themes does it continue to build on from the previous sections? For each theme, provide textual evidence to support it.

**For pp. 135-146:**

- Why does Elani feel so conflicted about leaving for college? How is his decision complicated by the events of the novel?
- What is Elani's attitude toward Kā'eo? Is it similar to or different from Mark's?
- Based on their conversation, when Mark asks "You sure you want dis, Elani?", how do you think Elani will respond?

**For pp. 147-160:**

- How does Elani react when Mark calls to tell him that there was a possibility that Kā'eo had been staying at a shelter?
- How would you describe Elani's relationship with Josie? Do you think their relationship is a positive or negative one, why?
- When Elani gets the news about Kā'eo, why does he react the way that he does? What do you think motivates his actions or why do you think he ends up at the bridge?

**For pp. 161-174:**

- What does the conversation between Elani and Mark in the car on the way home reveal about their current states? What role is Mark taking on for Elani?
- Why is the discovery at the farm so significant for Elani and Mark? Why does the revelation that “he was clean” matter?
- What do you think Kā‘eo means when he writes “I get one family, I get one purpose, I not alone,” and why do you think it is repeated over and over again? Is there a connection between what Elani finds in his brother’s notebooks and what Kā‘eo had told him?

**For pp. 175-185:**

- Why is memorializing his brother so important to Elani and why do you think he chooses to do it in this way?
- At the end of the celebration of life, Elani writes a message in his brother’s notebook. Why do you think he writes this message? What do you think has contributed to this change in his character?
- What do you think is the significance of the novel’s ending?



## II. Tasks and Questions for Class Discussion:

When discussing the following questions, ask students to think about their previous answers and events in the novel. You might also encourage them to think about their own experience and to also discuss what they've learned in other classes.

- This section begins with the proverb: Heaha ka puana o ka moe? Or *what is the answer to the dream?* What do you think is the significance of dreams and/or visions in this section and in the novel? What do they reveal about the characters?
- What role does memory and time play in the novel? Do you think that you always remember things as they happened? How does looking back at the past help you to make decisions about your present and your future?
- In the final part of this section, Elani brings up the concept of 'makawalu'. In what ways if any, do you think this concept applies to the novel as a whole? Do you think that seeing the story from three points of view made a difference in how you read the story? Do you think it would have been more effective had it only been from one of the perspectives? Why or why not?

### **III. Reflective writing assignment/activity:**

After a discussion of the text, ask students to do the following in a journal, notebook, or on a piece of paper. You might ask students to take this assignment home to complete it, but it works best as a “free write” assignment. If deciding to assign the latter, be sure to let them know that the assignment is not graded and that they should feel free to express themselves openly. After the assignment/activity is completed, encourage them to share with the class.

- If you or someone you knew were to create a mural that depicted who you are or the important parts of yourself, what would you include or what do you think the other person would present? What parts of your identity would you want to emphasize? What parts would you not want others to see? Why?

### **IV. Optional Writing Project:**

At the conclusion of the novel, the story returns to where it first started, leaving the reader to wonder, what happens next? For this writing project, choose one of the remaining characters and write a story that answers that question from that character’s point of view. To help with your project, brainstorm and make a list of the details and characteristics of the character that you’ve chosen. Think about the character’s motivations, actions, and conflicts throughout the novel, how will this impact what happens next for them? Remember you have full creative freedom when it comes to this project, but you want to remain as true to the character as possible.