

A Common Core Curriculum Guide to

# THE Flying Girl



How  
Aída de Acosta  
Learned to  
Soar

Margarita Engle



Illustrated by Sara Palacios





### *The Flying Girl:*

*How Aída de Acosta Learned to Soar*

Written by Margarita Engle

Illustrated by Sara Palacios

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## **Background/Summary**

The year was 1903, a time when women were not expected to pursue their dreams—especially their wild dreams. Yet Aída de Acosta, a young Hispanic girl from New Jersey, did pursue her wild dream. She longed to soar in a motorized airship, an invention she first saw while visiting Paris. As she watched its inventor, Alberto Santos-Dumont, soar above the city, she knew that she, too, wanted to fly.

First, she took lessons on the ground from Alberto, and then she insisted on flying the airship alone. After soaring above the city, she successfully landed in a green field where a polo match was under way. While many people disapproved of her behavior as too bold and too strange, Alberto did not. He declared her a hero and an inspiration to girls everywhere. And she was.

Margarita Engle’s poetic writing brings this inspiring true story to life using descriptive language and techniques such as rhyme, repetition, and similes. Sara Palacios’s mixed media illustrations capture Aída’s feelings as they change from frustration to exhilaration as she fulfills her dream. Together, the words and illustrations celebrate Aída’s dramatic success.

# Discussion Questions/Activities

## Key Ideas and Details

The discussion questions and activities below draw on Common Core State Standards for reading informational text (RI) that ask children to ask and answer questions about key details in a text (RI.K.1–RI.3.1), identify the main topic and key details that support it (RI.K.2–RI.3.2), and describe the relationship between a series of events, concepts, or ideas (RI.K.3–RI.3.3).

1. **Make a prediction.** Look at the endpapers before reading, which are located inside the front and back covers of the book. Use the illustrations on the endpapers to predict what the book is about, filling in the spaces below. After reading, see if your predictions were correct.



Illustrations by Sara Palacios

**CLUES:** What evidence do you see that helps you predict what the book is about?

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My Predictions:

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2. What was Aída’s wild dream? Was she right to go after it?
3. Explain the steps Aída took to make her dream come true. Tell more about the following:
  - Taking flying lessons
  - Convincing Alberto that she can pilot the airship
  - Flying alone
  - Successfully landing the airship
  - Encouraging children to follow their dreams

4. If you could ask Aída questions about her dream, what would they be? Use the words listed below to begin your questions:

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- How?

How do you think she would answer your questions? Write additional questions to ask Aída's mother, Alberto, and children and adults who watched her land. Discuss how these people would answer your questions, and use the activity sheet on page 5 to imagine what each person would say about Aída's dream.

5. What does the author think about Aída's flight? How do you know?
6. Aída said, "Sometimes, all it takes to change the whole world is one wild dreamer's soaring example." Do you agree? Can dreamers change the world?
7. What dreams do you have? What would you like to do?



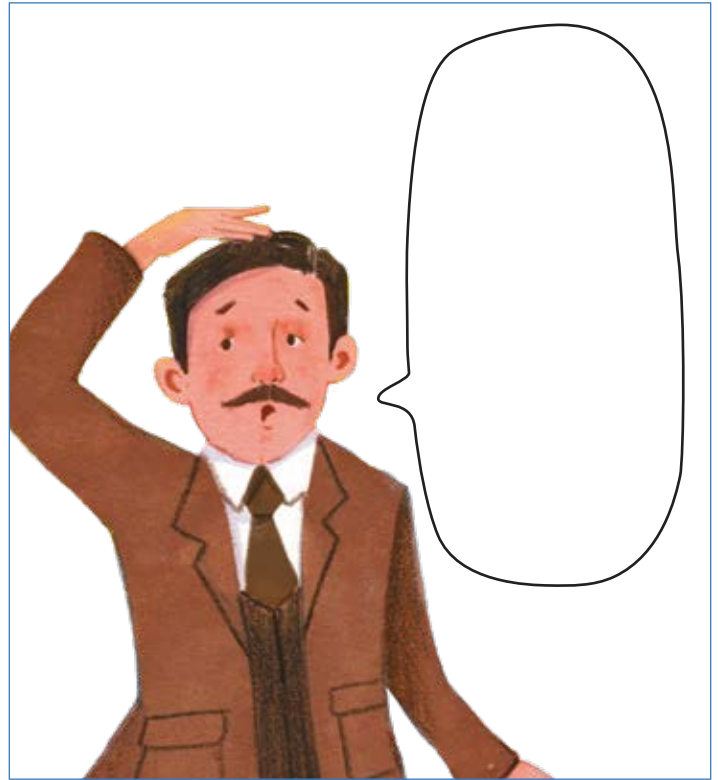
Illustration by Sara Palacios

# SPEECH BUBBLES ACTIVITY SHEET

What would each of these people say about Aída's dream?



Aída's Mother



Alberto



Children who saw Aída land



Strangers who saw Aída land

## Craft and Structure

To learn about craft and structure, the CCSS asks us to help students learn and understand vocabulary words and phrases (RI.K.4-RI.3.4), think about the features of nonfiction text (RI.K.5-RI.3.5), and assess the author's point of view (RI.K.6-RI.3.6). The questions and activities below emphasize these understandings.

1. **Well-crafted language.** The author uses several techniques to make the language she uses memorable and appealing. Samples of three techniques—repetition, rhyme, and simile—are given below. Read each example aloud and then discuss how the language makes you think and feel about Aída's dream. Then find additional examples of each technique.

- **Repetition**, or repeating of words and phrases, provides emphasis and rhythm.

The author uses it here to emphasize Aída's mother's strong feelings:

Aída's mother scolded, "No, no, no,  
silly girl, don't be so bold. Ay, ay, ay,  
no one will ever marry a girl  
who dares to fly!"

Later in the book, Aída uses the same words to show her own strong feelings:

When Alberto invited Aída to ride while he  
drove an airship, she cried, "No, no, no!  
Ay, ay, ay, I won't be a passenger.  
I only want to be  
the pilot!"

- **Rhyme**, or the use of words that end in the same sound, makes the language pleasant to hear. Here is how the author uses rhyme in the middle of a line and at the end of a line:

"If that man can fly, so can I," cried Aída.  
"All I need are some lessons  
and a chance to try!"

- **Simile**, the use of language to compare two different things, often uses the words like or as to make the comparison. Similes make the language interesting and add emphasis.

Here is how the author compares the polo ponies to dancers:

. . . a green field  
where swift polo ponies  
twirled and leaped  
like dancers.

Try using repetition, rhyme, and simile in your writing.

2. In the author's note at the end of the book, readers are given more information about the people mentioned in the text. What new information did she tell you about:

- Alberto Santos-Dumont
- Aída's mother
- Aída's father
- Aída

Why do you think the author included this information at the end of the book?

Why do you think she included a photograph of Aída?

3. **Using words and illustrations to figure out word meanings.** Sometimes you can figure out the meaning of vocabulary words by using the clues in both the words and illustrations. See if you can figure out the meaning of each underlined word on the next page.



Illustration by Sara Palacios

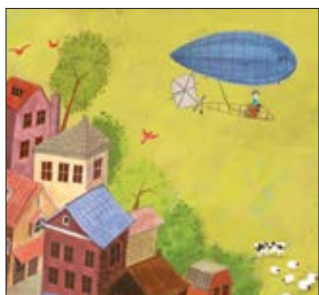
# USING WORDS AND ILLUSTRATIONS TO FIGURE OUT WORD MEANINGS



Below the balloon, an air boat dangled, and inside, there was a man.

What I think the underlined word means:

What clues I used to figure out the meaning:



Like a whale-shaped moon, the airship's enormous balloon soared about the busy city and out to the countryside.

What I think the underlined word means:

What clues I used to figure out the meaning:



Alberto got tangled in a thicket of trees and fell far behind.

What I think the underlined word means:

What clues I used to figure out the meaning:



Aída tried to watch the horses, but angry strangers surrounded her, shouting, scolding, calling names, saying she was too bold, too brave, too different, too strange.

What I think the underlined word means:

What clues I used to figure out the meaning:



“You did it!” he shouted. “You flew! You’re a hero, such a brave inspiration for all the girls of the world!”

What I think the underlined word means:

What clues I used to figure out the meaning:



## Writing

CCSS emphasizes writing informative and explanatory text in the early grades. The writing activities below provide experience writing to give an opinion (W.K.1-W.3.1), to inform (W.K.2-W.3.2), and to explain a sequence of events (W.K.3-W.3.3).

1. **Imagine that you are Aída.** Describe your experience piloting the airship to the children who greeted you at the polo field.
2. **Imagine that you spent a day with Aída.** Write a short story about what you did together. Here are some ideas that you could write about:

- When you and Aída first saw an airship
- When you accompanied Aída to her first lesson with Alberto
- When you and Aída had an “aerial” dinner with Alberto
- When you were a passenger on Aída’s first flight
- When you and Aída landed

3. Select an illustration in the book and bring it to life by writing the conversation the people might be having. Here are some examples of what you could write:



- Write the conversation between Aída and her mother when Aída first sees an airship.



- Write the conversation Aída had with Alberto when he was giving her a lesson in flying the airship.



- Write the conversation that Aída had with Alberto once she landed the airship.

4. An *inspiration* is a person who changes how other people think and act. Alberto described Aída as a “brave inspiration.” What is your opinion? Do you agree or disagree? Is she an inspiration to you? In writing, explain your reasoning.
5. What is your dream? What would you like to do in the future? Draw a picture of yourself achieving your dream. Then write about it, explaining your dream and the steps you are taking now, or plan to take in the future, to make your dream come true.

## Extending the Experience of Reading the Book

### 1. Read books about other women aviators:

- *Talkin' about Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman* by Nikki Grimes
- *Night Flight: Amelia Earhart Crosses the Atlantic* by Robert Burleigh
- *Daredevil: The Daring Life of Betty Skelton* by Meghan McCarthy
- *Soar, Elinor!* by Tami Lewis Brown
- *Flying Solo: How Ruth Elder Soared into America's Heart* by Julie Cummins

### 2. Read other books written by Margarita Engle:

- *All the Way to Havana*
- *Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl's Courage Changed Music*
- *Bravo! Poems About Amazing Hispanics* (This book has a poem about Aída de Acosta.)
- *The Sky Painter*
- *Orangutanka: A Story in Poems*

### 3. Read other books illustrated by Sara Palacios:

- *Lola's Rules for Friendship*
- *Lola Knows a Lot*
- *The Princess and the Frogs*
- *Henry Holton Takes the Ice*



Illustration by Sara Palacios

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