

Summer Reading for Incoming Sophomores, Fall 2022

Sarah Stewart Johnson *The Sirens of Mars*

ISBN-10 : 1101904836 ISBN-13 : 978-1101904831

From the IMSA English Team

To prepare for Literary Explorations I in the upcoming semester, please purchase and read a copy of Sarah Stewart Johnson's *The Sirens of Mars*. The book will be the center of an early unit in the class. Students will analyze it stylistically and rhetorically, think through the questions about life, science, knowledge, and meaning it raises, and use it as the basis of discussions, arguments, and projects in the class. This text will center a unit in which we explore other related texts, both non-fiction and fiction. Some of the questions the text and the unit will explore:

- Why have people long been fascinated by the prospect of life on Mars? What does searching for and thinking about life beyond Earth tell us about life on Earth? How have scientific and literary authors imagined life on Mars?
- How have we come to develop knowledge about the presence or absence of life on Mars? How have scientists developed knowledge of a distant planet? How does a history of scientific error contribute to our current scientific knowledge of Mars?
- How does a young scientist make her way into a fulfilling scientific career?

From the Publisher

In this beautifully observed, deeply personal book, Georgetown scientist Sarah Stewart Johnson tells the story of how she and other researchers have scoured Mars for signs of life, transforming the planet from a distant point of light into a world of its own.

Johnson's fascination with Mars began as a child in Kentucky, turning over rocks with her father and looking at planets in the night sky. She now conducts fieldwork in some of Earth's most hostile environments, such as the Dry Valleys of Antarctica and the salt flats of Western Australia, developing methods for detecting life on other worlds. Here, with poetic precision, she interlaces her own personal journey—as a female scientist and a mother—with tales of other seekers, from Percival Lowell, who was convinced that a utopian society existed on Mars, to Audouin Dollfus, who tried to carry out astronomical observations from a stratospheric balloon. In the process, she shows how the story of Mars is also a story about Earth: This other world has been our mirror, our foil, a telltale reflection of our own anxieties and yearnings.

Empathetic and evocative, *The Sirens of Mars* offers an unlikely natural history of a place where no human has ever set foot, while providing a vivid portrait of our quest to defy our isolation in the cosmos.

Preparing for Literary Explorations I

Please purchase the text over the summer from a local or online bookseller. As you read and enjoy the text, read actively, take notes, and prepare to participate actively in discussions about it and related texts early in the Fall semester. Questions? Please contact Dr. Eric Rettberg, Team Coordinator for English, erettberg@imsa.edu.

