Background: During the Renaissance in Europe, scholars rediscovered the works of ancient Greek thinkers, including Aristotle. Many Renaissance scholars considered Aristotle’s theories to be accurate.

However, an Italian scientist named Galileo disagreed with Aristotle on many points. For example, Aristotle believed that heavier objects fall faster than lighter ones. Galileo claimed that all objects fall at the same speed. According to legend, Galileo proved this statement by conducting an experiment at the Leaning Tower of Pisa. As you read the following story, imagine that you are one of Galileo’s assistants.

The tower at Pisa already had a pronounced tilt when Galileo reportedly carried out his experiment.
our arms ache from carrying a heavy cannonball. You are jealous of the other assistant, Lucio, who is carrying a lighter ball. But the pain in your arms is nothing compared with the dread that you feel. After today, your friends, your relatives, and many scholars will probably consider Galileo a fool. They will make fun of you for being his assistant. Galileo has dared to disagree with Aristotle, one of the greatest thinkers of all time. Aristotle stated that heavier objects fall faster than lighter ones. But Galileo claims that all objects, regardless of their weight, fall at the same speed. And he has you and Lucio carrying cannonballs to the Leaning Tower of Pisa to prove his point.

You see the Leaning Tower loom ahead. Galileo walks confidently toward it. A group of well-known scholars have gathered at the tower’s base. They laugh mockingly. Ignoring the crowd, Galileo marches directly into the tower. You and Lucio follow. You look up. A steep, spiral staircase winds its way to the top. Galileo tells you not to look up while you climb, or you might lose your balance. You imagine yourself rolling down the stairs, still hanging onto the cannonball. Galileo, Lucio, and you start to climb. The stairs are worn, and occasionally you slip. Finally, you reach the top.

Galileo says to place the cannonballs on the ramp. Then he licks his finger and holds it up to test the wind. The air is calm. Below, the crowd looks up at the three of you. Galileo gives the command. You and Lucio let go of your cannonballs at the same time. The balls drop quickly toward the ground. Plunk. You hear a gasp from the crowd. Galileo smiles knowingly. The balls have hit the ground at the same time.

How do you think people watching your experiment will react?

1. READING: Plot  The second stage of the plot of a story is sometimes called rising action. The events described in this part of the plot tend to build suspense in the story. With a partner, identify how the writer of this story builds suspense. As you read other stories in this book, note how suspense is used.

2. WRITING: Narration  As you and Lucio head down the stairs after the experiment, you talk about what will happen next. Write a dialogue of this conversation.

CALIFORNIA STANDARDS: Writing 2.1  Write fictional or autobiographical narratives.