

Stargirl

Written by Jerry Spinelli

Stargirl is a true celebration of nonconformity.

This oftentimes tense and emotional story explores the fleeting, cruel nature of popularity-and the thrill and inspiration of first love. The questions, discussion topics, and author information that follow are intended to guide readers and spark discussion as they begin to analyze the larger emotional, sociological, and literary elements of this exceptional and thought-provoking novel.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

She's as magical as the desert sky. As strange as her pet rat. As mysterious as her own name. From the day she arrives at quiet Mica High School in a burst of color and sound, the hallways hum with the murmur of "Stargirl, Stargirl." She captures Leo Borlock's heart with just one smile. The students of Mica High are enchanted. At first. Then they turn on her. Stargirl is suddenly shunned. And Leo, panicked and desperate with love, urges her to become the very thing that can destroy her: normal.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. As the saying goes, "love is blind." How is this truly the case with Leo and Stargirl? Looking back, how can you tell that Leo was falling for her? And does he stay in love with her, even after she moves away?
2. Professor Archie Brubaker is the voice of reason throughout the novel. Archie has many thoughtful insights into the personality of Stargirl, and at one point says about her: "You'll know her more by your questions than by her answers. Keep looking at her long enough. One day you might see someone you know." Now that you've finished the novel, what do you think Archie means by this statement?
3. While Stargirl is a guest on "Hot Seat," Kevin asks her why she changed her name. Do you accept her reason why she did this? How is "Stargirl" an ideal name for her? Think about the possibility of changing your name several times. Do you think your name is an integral part of who you are, or can you imagine yourself with another one?
4. In the beginning, Hillari Kimble seems to be the only person who openly dislikes Stargirl. But then others begin to feel the same way as Hillari. Do you think that groups of people need a leader, like Hillari Kimble, to turn opinions against another person?

5. Do you, as a reader, like Stargirl? If you were a student at Mica High, would you reach out to her like Dori Dilson, or reject her like Hillari Kimble? Do you think the students of Mica High are ultimately too harsh on Stargirl?
6. Popularity, fitting in, and "sameness" are all key themes in Stargirl. Find places in the novel that reinforce these themes and discuss. Do you think Stargirl ever wanted to be popular? How might she define popularity?
7. After Stargirl changes back to "Susan," Leo says "she looked magnificently, wonderfully, gloriously ordinary. She looked just like a hundred other girls at Mica High--I had never been so happy and proud in my whole life." How did you feel when you read this part of the novel?
8. Author Jerry Spinelli plays two major events in the novel off of each other: the basketball championships and the oratorical contest. After Stargirl wins the oratorical contest, Leo says that "the cheering is as wild as that of the crowd at a championship basketball game." Stargirl is the focus at both events but in very different ways. How is she rejected at one and accepted at the other? And how does this acceptance ultimately lead to rejection?
9. The Ocotillo Ball at the end of the novel represents a turning point. Do you think Stargirl made a deliberate attempt to say good-bye at the ball? What do you make of the students' behavior at the ball, and what does this tell you about the student body of Mica High as a whole?
10. Archie says about Stargirl, "Star people are rare. You'll be lucky to meet another." Do you think Leo was grown-up enough for his relationship with Stargirl? How about the students of Mica High? Will Leo ever figure Stargirl out?
11. What is the irony at the end of Stargirl? Is Stargirl popular after all? What happens to the "popular" kids in the story--do they stay popular?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jerry Spinelli is the author of more than a dozen books for young readers, including Maniac Magee, winner of the Newbery Medal; Wringer, a Newbery Honor Book; Crash; and Knots in My Yo-Yo String, his autobiography. He grew up in Norristown, Pennsylvania, where he once dreamed of becoming a major league baseball player. All of this changed at age 16, when his poem about a football game was published in the local newspaper. From then on, he wanted to become a writer. Jerry's first book for children was published when he was 41 years old. He still lives in Pennsylvania with his "Stargirl," his wife, Eileen Spinelli, who is also an author of children's books.