

Stargirl

by Jerry Spinelli

From the day she arrives at Mica Area High School, Stargirl Caraway sparks a school-spirit revolution that enchants the students and wins Leo Borlock's heart—at first. But when everyone turns against her, what will he choose, *them* or her?

THEMES

love, peer-pressure, altruism, popularity, nonconformity, courage

I. PRE-TEACHING

A. Have the class define and discuss these terms:

elusive, veered, converging, blithely, morbid, paleontologist, bafflement, wry, ovation, splayed, oratorical, animated, charade, riveting, dormant, amorphous, alma mater, mortified, oblivious, hapless, infamous, render, mock, inquisition, maestro, impromptu, cascade, flailing, raucous, writhing, delusion, annihilated, gaudy, enchanted, promenade, humored, serenity, veered, paranoid, gloating, mahogany, masochistic, rapture, revel, psychedelic, obsessed, affirmed, morale, zeal

B. Before beginning the story, discuss the following questions with the class:

1. What does it mean to be popular at your school? How important is it to be part of a clique or group of popular kids? How do groups like this treat kids who are different?
2. If you received an anonymous gift, how would it make you feel? Have you ever given a gift without telling the person who it's from? How did that make you feel?
3. How would you feel about someone who went to a school game and cheered for both teams? Do you feel it's important to support your own team? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever liked someone who wasn't liked by other kids? How were you treated for being friends with this person?

II. PRESENTATION

A. Understanding the Story:

1. Begin with Chapters 1 - 11: In what ways is Stargirl different? Where does she go the day Leo follows her? What does she do at the football game? What is unusual about Archie? What does he teach the kids? How does he know Stargirl? How is Stargirl's cheerleading different? What kind of rebellion does Stargirl lead at school? What is the most remarkable feature Leo notices about her?
2. Advance to Chapters 12 - 22: How does Stargirl react to being on "The Hot Seat"? How does she get Leo to

talk to her again? How are the other kids treating them? In what ways is Stargirl "the opposite of cool"? Why is everyone giving Stargirl the silent treatment? What is Stargirl's "enchanted place"? What are some of the good deeds Stargirl does?

3. Complete the story with Chapters 23 - 33: How does Leo feel about the way the other kids are treating him? What do the other kids blame Stargirl for? Are they right? Why does Leo have mixed feelings about Stargirl? How does Stargirl "vanish"? Why doesn't this work? What happens when she wins the oratory contest? What happens at the dance? In what ways has Stargirl touched everyone at Mica Area High School? How has she touched Leo?

B. For Discussion:

1. Why does Stargirl cause such a stir at the high school when she first arrives? Why do they begin to imitate her? What makes them turn against her?
2. Why won't Leo answer Seó or Saguaro's question at first? What choice does he make? Looking back, would he have chosen differently? Why or why not?
3. How do the animals of the desert, including the mud frogs, the coyote, and the raven serve as symbols in the story? How do cactus and the bones of extinct animals serve as symbols? What part does light, including moon and star light, play in the story?
4. What does Archie mean when he says Stargirl "is us more than we are us"? What does he say is "the trouble with miracles"? In what ways do these statements prove true?
5. In what ways might Stargirl's experience parallel that of religious leaders like Gandhi, Buddha, or Jesus Christ?

III. EXTENDING THE LESSON

Give students the opportunity to work with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:

A. Language Arts:

1. Have students write about times when they have felt left out by the "in" crowd, or treated unkindly. How does it feel to be left out?

2. Have students go outside and look at ordinary things, then make up headlines the way Stargirl does. In what ways do we “walk in a gray world of nothings,” as Leo puts it?
3. Have students read the fillers or inside pages of the local paper and bulletin boards they see about town and make a collection of what they find. They might follow up by making a card or buying a small gift for someone they read about.
4. Have students listen to how Leo describes Stargirl, like saying, “She was the faintest scent of a cactus flower, the flitting shadow of an elf owl.” How does this imagery help us see Stargirl? How does it reflect the setting? How does it show how Leo feels about her?
5. Have students write a poem about an enchanted place.

B. Art and Music:

1. Have students select background music that is appropriate to some of the scenes. They could use ukulele music for the cafeteria scenes, “Singing in the Rain” for when Stargirl dances in the rain, “Blue Hawaii” and Mexican music for when Stargirl is trying to make friends; a clarinet sounding like a coyote call for the desert scenes, and the “Bunny Hop” for the dance.
2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. They might cover the board with black, use glitter for stars and constellations, include a miniature chair painted like the “hot seat,” add bones, flowers, especially a sunflower, homemade cards, cheerleading pompoms, a cardboard road runner, mica, a corny valentine, a back scratcher, and a porcupine necktie.
3. Have students wear something different to school one day and then talk about how others reacted to what they were wearing. How did this attention make them feel? Would they do it again? Why or why not?

C. Social Studies:

1. Leo finds it impossible to shut off his mind when Stargirl tells him to do nothing. Have students try this once a day for a couple of weeks. What is it hard to turn off our minds? What can we achieve by learning to do this?
2. Have students learn about home-schooling. Why do some parents elect to home-school their children?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of home-schooling?

3. Have students perform a small kindness every day for someone, then talk about how it made them feel. They might form a “Sunflower Club” at school. How would this change the atmosphere at school? How might it make a difference in the world?
4. Have students learn more about the Amish practice of shunning.

D. Science and Math:

1. Have students read *The Immense Journey* or essays from *The Undiscovered Universe* by Loren Eiseley and compare his ideas with concepts in *Stargirl*, especially with the character of Archie.
2. Have students add lyrics to Stargirl’s song about the isosceles triangle. They might then make up other songs about geometry or other subjects.
3. Have students learn about the great American desert. What animals live there? What plants grow there? How much rainfall does it get a year? What is the temperature range?
4. Have students learn about paleontology. What can we learn from the bones of extinct animals?
5. Archie, echoing Carl Sagan, says, “We are star stuff.” Have students find out what this means.”

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