

# BOOKNOTES

READERS GUIDE

## thematic connections

**Friendship**  
**Intergenerational Relationships**  
**Community • Self-Esteem**  
**Emotions & Feelings • Conformity**  
**Grades 7 up**

## about the books

Jerry Spinelli's bestselling novel *Stargirl* is a deceptively complex tale about love and loss, about fitting in and standing out, about speaking out and being quiet. High school narrator Leo Borlock chronicles the impact just one new girl can have on an entire Arizona town. *Love, Stargirl* finds Stargirl again transplanted—this time farther east. In letter format, *Stargirl* herself breaths life into the odd and poignant minutiae of life and love.

## 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, and *Stargirl*, a *New York Times* bestseller and an ALA Top Ten Best Book for Young Adults. He made his picture book debut with *My Daddy and Me*, a loving tribute to fathers and sons. He lives with his wife and fellow writer, Eileen, in Wayne, Pennsylvania. While they write in separate rooms of the house, the couple edits and celebrates one another's work together. Their six children have given Jerry Spinelli a plethora of clever material for his writing.



Laurel-Leaf PB • 978-0-440-41677-7 (0-440-41677-9)  
Alfred A. Knopf PB • 978-0-375-82233-9 (0-375-82233-X)  
Alfred A. Knopf HC • 978-0-679-88637-2 (0-679-88637-0)  
GLB • 978-0-679-98637-9 (0-679-98637-5)  
Unabridged CD • 978-0-7393-3897-1 (0-7393-3897-8)



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GLB • 978-0-375-91375-4 (0-375-91375-0)  
Unabridged CD • 978-0-7393-5623-4 (0-7393-5623-2)

## about STARGIRL

**One glance and students know that the new girl at Mica High School is not your ordinary high school student. Stargirl Caraway is a free spirit. She has a pet rat named Cinnamon, plays the ukulele in the cafeteria, and refuses to wear the requisite jeans and t-shirts. Leo Borlock is both fascinated and horrified by Stargirl's disdain for fitting in. As he falls in love with her, he still longs for her to be more "normal." But maybe he should be careful about what he wishes.**



## questions for group discussion

- “Star people are rare,” Archie tells Leo at the end of *Stargirl*. “You’ll be lucky to meet another.” (p. 177) What is Archie telling Leo both about the nature of his relationship with Stargirl and about Stargirl herself?
- When Stargirl decides to use her given name, Susan Caraway, how else does she change? How can the simple act of using a different name cause a change in behavior and personality? How does this refute the old saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me”?
- Peer pressure plays a significant role in the story of *Stargirl*. Discuss how the students of Mica High try to change Stargirl to suit their idea of what a “normal” person is. How does peer pressure change other characters in the story, most notably Leo?
- Two scenes offset one another in the story. Both involve Stargirl. One scene is Stargirl’s debut as a cheerleader; the other has Stargirl competing in the oratory contest. How are these two scenes alike and different? How does each serve to show the different facets of Stargirl’s personality?
- How do the pebbles in Stargirl’s wagon help reveal the true nature of her feelings over the course of the novel?
- Setting the novel in the desert area around Mica, Arizona, allows Spinelli the chance to have Leo and Stargirl explore this arid world. Additionally, Archie and Senor Saguario provide important life lessons. How would this story be different if it were set in another place, particularly one with a different climate?
- Stargirl and Leo both fall in love for the first time over the course of the novel. What will they take away from this experience? Is love indeed “blind” or does love filter what they see in one another and in the world around them?

★ **“A magical and heartbreaking tale.”**

—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred

★ **“Part fairy godmother, part outcast, part dream-come-true, [*Stargirl*] possesses many of the mythical qualities of *Maniac Magee*.”**

—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred

**An ALA Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults**

**A *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year**

## about **LOVE, STARGIRL**

**Stargirl Caraway explores her new neighborhood with an eye for the unusual. She notices the agoraphobic neighbor, the seemingly homeless young boy, and others who do not fit in easily. Stargirl, never one with an inclination to conform, empathizes with the outcasts, making many of them her new friends. In the "longest letter ever" to her old boyfriend, Leo, Stargirl explores the magic in her new home and her decision to mark time in her own unique way.**

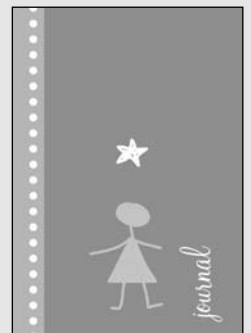


## questions for group discussion

- Spinelli develops characters effectively in many ways. One method of developing characters is through extensive use of details about each person. For instance, Dootsie adores ketchup and Alvina wears a necklace with Winnie the Pooh dangling from it. What details help to reveal more about these characters: Perry, Betty Lou, Stargirl's mother and father, Stargirl herself.
- Stargirl writes to Leo early in the novel that nothing is empty. Even when she is sitting alone on the hill, she feels as if she is at the center of the universe. What does this observation reveal about Stargirl and her sense of herself?
- At first, Stargirl is reluctant to tell Leo much about her new home. Why is she a bit secretive? Why does she eventually relent and tell Leo more and more about her new location?
- Trace the references to emptiness and loneliness in the novel. For example, Stargirl observes a lone goose in flight and wonders where the rest of the flock is.
- Dootsie, Alvina, Perry, and Betty Lou share some similarities though each is a distinct character. Discuss the commonalities shared by these four characters from the novel.
- On her field trip to the clock on the Morning Lenape Building, Stargirl reflects about clocks and time. What does this poem suggest about how differently each person measures time? (p. 126) Based on the content of the poem, what would be the time for each of the following characters: Leo, Stargirl, Dootsie, Alvina, Betty Lou.
- When Archie comes for the solstice celebration, he tells Stargirl that the students in Mica did the bunny hop again at the Ocotillo Ball. What is the significance of this event?

***The Stargirl Journal,***  
**full of inspiring**  
**quotes from both**  
**books and plenty**  
**of room to record**  
**one's very own**  
**starwisdom**

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# writing activities

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- Discuss with your class the difference point of view can make in the way one comprehends a novel. For instance, whereas *Stargirl* is told from Leo's point of view, *Love, Stargirl* is narrated by Stargirl. Ask students to select one passage from each of the novels. Have them rewrite the passage from *Stargirl* using a different character's point of view. They could elect to use Stargirl, Archie, Hillari, or Kevin. Ask them to do the same for the passage from *Love, Stargirl*, writing from the point of view of Alvina, Betty Lou, or another one of the characters.
- Point out to students that *Stargirl* opens with a passage about porcupine neckties, and *Love, Stargirl* mentions the man sitting in a chair near a gravestone wearing a yellow and red plaid scarf. Ask students to note parallels such as this from the two novels. Have them select one of these parallels and write a paragraph that explains its significance to the continuing story of Stargirl.
- In both books, Stargirl is encouraged by her parents and by Archie to explore subjects of interest to her. Let students loose to design their own "shadow curriculums" like Stargirl's! Prompt them to explore some of the nontraditional subjects they would elect to explore on their own. Ask them to write a lesson plan for one of the topics. Suggest extra credit for students who put their plan into action over the weekend and create journal reports of their experience.
- There are several poems written by Stargirl on her various field trips in *Love, Stargirl*. Select one of the poems and rewrite the poem as a field report that contains facts about where Stargirl has visited. Conversely, select a key scene (e.g., her interview on the Hot Seat, the Ocotillo Ball, etc.) from *Stargirl* and write it as a poem.

# how to start a stargirl society

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Stargirl Societies are currently underway in both middle schools and high schools. Inspired by the novel and its main character, the societies offer everyone a chance to become "Starkids" in their own right.

## Suggested Objectives

- Promote individuality and self-confidence as an alternative to brand-name conformity
- Foster a sense of community in and out of school
- Inspire and role model for elementary-age students (and younger—one faculty advisor brought her two-year-old to a meeting!)
- Promote tolerance for everyone
- Encourage and practice sensitivity to others

## Suggested Activities

- Read and discuss the books, *Stargirl*, *Stargirl's* vision, your vision
- Write and perform skits inspired by the stories

- Plan and carry out school and/or community projects (create constellations rather than committees)
- Have a shindig! Stage skits, games (losers get the biggest cheers), refreshments, and crafts—just be sure to come dressed as you've always wanted to dress
- Hold an Inner-Beauty Pageant
- Create *Stargirl* totes, Happy Wagons, people cards, and/or porcupine neckties
- Drop spare change
- Write, plan, and perform a *Stargirl* musical
- Recite Stargirl's Pledge of Allegiance
- Discover enchanted places
- Have a yoga and yogurt party
- Visit a planetarium or observatory
- Visit [www.jerryspinelli.com/stargirl.htm](http://www.jerryspinelli.com/stargirl.htm) for more great ideas!