



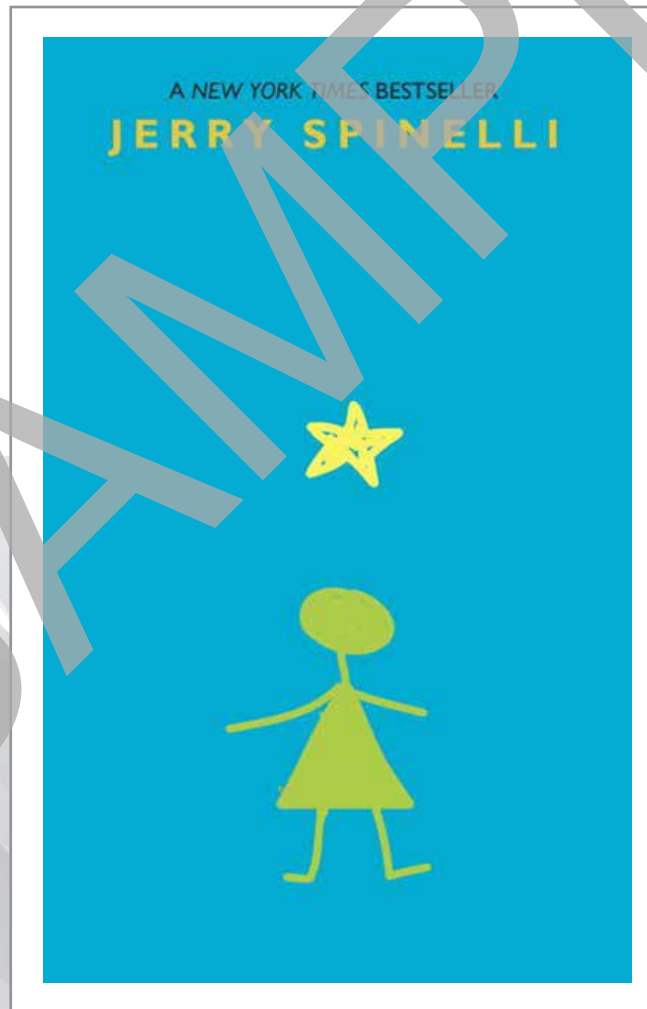
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Stargirl

Jerry Spinelli



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Stargirl

Jerry Spinelli

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Research, compare/contrast, pros/cons, analysis, creative thinking, critical thinking, brainstorming, predicting

Comprehension

Cause/effect, summarization

Writing

Poetry, essays, journal entries, speeches, letters

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation, public speaking

Vocabulary

Word maps, definitions, parts of speech

Literary Elements

Setting, conflict, simile, metaphor, theme, characterization, foreshadowing, point of view

Across the Curriculum

Art—collage, caricatures, sculptures, painting;
Drama—reenactments;
Music—dance, song lyrics;
Math—manipulatives, songs;
History—research; Science—research, archaeology

Genre: young adult fiction

Setting: Mica and Phoenix, Arizona; Mica Area High School

Point of View: first-person narrative

Themes: nonconformity, fear of rejection, first love, self-discovery

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. self; both main characters search for acceptance from others and selves

Tone: informal, upbeat, candid

Summary

In a typical high school where popularity is measured by one's ability to conform, Stargirl stands out like a water lily on the desert sand. Until she manages to achieve cheerleader status, her only friends are Cinnamon (a pet rat that she carries in her sunflower bag) and Dori Dilson. Leo, the story's narrator, is fascinated by Stargirl and eventually begins to date her. Though Stargirl becomes popular for a brief while, her popularity is short-lived, especially because of her propensity to cheer for both teams when at football or basketball games. Her continual challenges of the status quo at Mica Area High School wind her (and Leo) through cycles of acceptance and rejection, while the students at Mica High are discovering more about who they really are and who they want to be.

About the Author

Jerry Spinelli was born in Norristown, Pennsylvania. He attended Gettysburg College and Johns Hopkins University. He and his wife, Eileen (who is also an author), have six children and eleven grandchildren. Jerry Spinelli began writing when he was 16 years old. When a poem he wrote after a baseball game was published in the local newspaper, his dreams turned from professional ballplaying to writing. After writing four adult novels that were never published, he began writing for children. Among Spinelli's books are *Who Put That Hair in My Toothbrush?*, *Maniac Magee* (the 1991 Newbery Medal winner), *Crash*, and *Wringer* (a Newbery Honor book in 1998). Spinelli says that he gets his ideas for books from students and other real-life situations. His autobiography, *Knots in My Yo-Yo String*, was published in 1998.

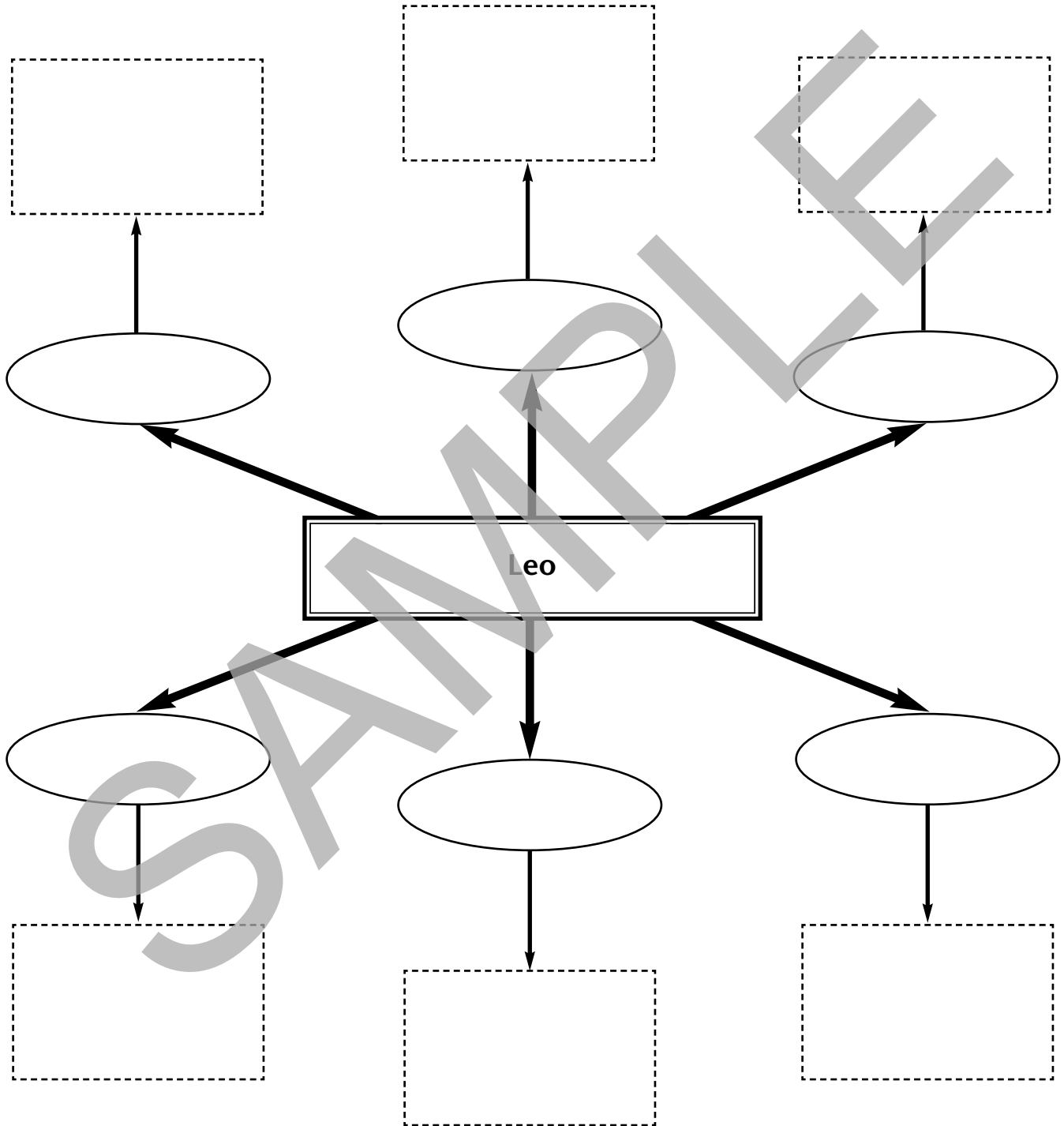
Major Characters

Leo Borlock: narrator; high school junior; fascinated by Stargirl and eventually becomes her boyfriend; producer/director of *Hot Seat*

Stargirl (Susan) Caraway: the new girl in school; high school sophomore; eccentric; enjoys celebrating others; excellent orator; carries around a pet rat named Cinnamon

Characterization

Directions: In each oval, write an adjective that describes the character's personality. Then fill in each rectangle with a detail about the character that illustrates that part of the character's personality.



Porcupine Necktie—Chapter 2, pp. 1–12

The narrator, high school junior Leo Borlock, is introduced. The school year begins, as does a buzz about the newest student—Stargirl. Stargirl’s lack of conformity and her kindness to others make her an enigma to the rest of the student body, who begin to debate about whether or not she is “real.” Hillari Kimble emerges as Stargirl’s most grievous enemy at Mica High.

Vocabulary
flourish (1)
quills (2)
milling (3)
keener (3)
marooned (4)
plaited (8)
serenaded (10)

Discussion Questions

1. What happens in the opening chapter that attracts the reader’s attention? (*Answers may vary, but should include the discussion about a porcupine necktie, the mystery gift, or the statement that someone is watching the narrator. pp. 1–2*)
2. When Stargirl arrives at Mica Area High School, there is a “buzz” in the hallways. Describe what happens at your school when a new person arrives. (*Answers will vary.*)
3. Why do the students believe Stargirl is a “fake”? Do you think she is a fake? Why or why not? (*Answers will vary, but could include her strange clothes, strange hairstyles, that she carries around a pet rat and a ukulele, dances in the rain, sings “Happy Birthday” to complete strangers at lunch, twirls around the lunchroom, says “Hi” even to seniors in the halls, asks questions about trolls in history class, makes up songs in math, etc. Answers will vary.*)

4. Do you agree or disagree with Kevin that Stargirl will not survive at the high school without changing in some way? Why or why not? (*Answers will vary. p. 10*)
5. Why do you think Leo comes to the conclusion that Stargirl is “real” (p. 12)? (*Answers will vary.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. **Characterization:** Have students begin filling out their Character Analysis charts (see page 8 of this guide). They should continue to add to the charts as they read the book.
2. **Literary Devices:** Have students keep a list of similes and metaphors as they read. They should add to their list as they read the book. **Similes**—“looked like Heidi. Or Bo Peep” (p. 8); “face...red as...ribbons” (p. 9); “we quickly snapped back into place, like rubber bands” (p. 10); “the fabulous purred on my snow-white sheet like some dark cat come in from the desert” (p. 12) **Metaphor**—“hair was the color of sand” (p. 4)
3. **Math/Music:** Stargirl writes a song about isosceles triangles (p. 11). Have students write their own songs about two other shapes (square, circle, oval, rectangle, diamond, etc.).

Chapters 3–5, pp. 13–26

Rumors continue to fly about Stargirl, though Leo becomes fascinated by her and follows her one day after school. Kevin and Leo argue about whether or not to ask Stargirl to appear on *Hot Seat*. In the meantime, Wayne Parr appears on the show. Stargirl makes a very expressive appearance during halftime at the school's football game. The next week, many people attend the game to see her, but she does not appear. Finally, Mallory Stillwell, the captain of the cheerleaders, asks Stargirl to join the squad. Stargirl accepts.

Vocabulary

saguaro (14)
balking (14)
amok (14)
perpetual (15)
flitting (15)
aviary (16)
ambition (20)
disdainful (21)
converging (23)
antic (26)

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Leo refuses to recruit Stargirl for the Hot Seat? Do you agree or disagree with Leo's point of view? Why or why not? (*Answers will vary. p. 13*)
2. Review the students' theories about Stargirl on page 14 of the novel. How many do you believe are true about her? Discuss why the students create these theories about Stargirl and then list any of your own theories. (*Answers will vary.*)
3. Why does Leo follow Stargirl one day after school? What does he learn about her during that time? (*Answers will vary. pp. 16–18*)
4. How does Leo describe Wayne Parr? Does Wayne remind you of anyone you know? (*not outstanding in anything but appearance, the grand marshal of the daily parade; Answers will vary. pp. 19–21*)
5. Why do so many people flock to the football game after Stargirl's first appearance on the field? (*Answers will vary, but could include a reference to people's fascination with what is different or out of the ordinary. To the citizens of Mica, her potential appearance would have been a form of unusual entertainment. p. 24*)
6. Why do the students seem to be enjoying Stargirl's presence toward the end of Chapter 5? Why are they still keeping their distance? (*Answers will vary, but could include comments about people's desires to be celebrated and the fear of the unknown. pp. 25–26*)
7. **Prediction:** In what way(s) might Stargirl challenge Wayne Parr?
8. **Prediction:** Will Stargirl leave Hillari alone on her birthday?

Supplementary Activities

1. **Career/Future:** In the book, Leo wants to be a sports announcer, Kevin a talk show host, and Wayne Parr a male model. Ask students to brainstorm a list of careers that interest them. Ask them to list some ways they could prepare for a future career while they are still in elementary or middle school.
2. **Writing:** Have students compose a journal entry Stargirl may have written the night after she leaves the football stadium.
3. **Literary Devices:** Have students add to their list of similes and metaphors. Have the students evaluate the literary devices to determine why the author chooses specific analogies to describe people or events. **Similes**—"cactus looked like Ping Pong paddles with whiskers" (pp. 13–14); "pin her to a corkboard like a butterfly" (p. 15); "observed her as if she were a bird in an aviary" (p. 16); "swirled like a dust devil" (p. 22); "marched stiffly like a wooden soldier" (p. 22) **Metaphors**—"She was the faintest scent of a cactus flower, the flitting shadow of an elf owl" (p. 15); "he was grand marshal of our daily parade" (p. 19)