

Love, Stargirl Study Guide

Love, Stargirl by Jerry Spinelli

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Contents

Love, Stargirl Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
January 1 - February 22.....	4
February 28 - April 19.....	6
April 23 - June 28.....	8
June 21 - July 18.....	10
July 19 - August 10.....	12
August 11 - August 30.....	14
September 1 - September 29.....	16
October 5 - November 8.....	17
November 9 - January 2.....	19
Characters.....	22
Objects/Places.....	25
Themes.....	27
Style.....	29
Quotes.....	31
Topics for Discussion.....	32



Plot Summary

Love, Stargirl is the story of seventeen-year-old Stargirl Caraway's adjustment to her new town after leaving behind her friends in a move to Phoenixville, Pennsylvania for her final year of high school.

At the opening of the novel, it is clear that Stargirl is extremely lonely for her friends back home, particularly her ex-boyfriend, Leo Borlock. The entire novel is comprised of letters written to Leo from Stargirl in the wake of her move. Most of Stargirl's early letters are laced with longing for her life back home as she struggles to assimilate to the new town. Very soon in the novel, however, Stargirl begins to meet the characters that will become her closest friends. This includes Dootsie Pringle, the five-year-old pip who interrupts one of Stargirl's meditation sessions; Charlie, the man who passes his days by his wife's grave; and Perry Deloplane, the thug-turned-love-interest in Stargirl's life. Stargirl passes her days in a variety of ways from "mind washing" or meditating to writing poetry at various locations around town.

Throughout the novel, Stargirl is very connected with nature and her largest project comes when she decides to make a solar calendar similar to the Stonehenge in the woods near her home. Every morning, she wakes at 4:00 am to mark where the first sunbeam of the morning touches the earth. This project is so fascinating that soon, the entire neighborhood is involved, lighting their porch lights so Stargirl can walk through the darkness in safety. At the end of the novel, Stargirl hosts a massive Winter Solstice party. She doesn't think anyone will wake up early enough to attend and is shocked when more people than expected show up. It is clear that Stargirl has made a strong positive impression on the neighborhood and everyone clamors to show her how much they appreciate her individuality.

Stargirl's major personal conflict arises when she realizes that the boy she once found annoying and delinquent - Perry Deloplane - is actually a handsome, fascinating young man. Momentarily, Stargirl is conflicted in her emotions. Is she still in love with Leo even though he lives in Arizona, or is her heart changing? Is she falling for Perry? She struggles to come to grips about her feelings for Perry, but also to figure out the truth behind his tough exterior. Over time, she realizes that Perry is actually a caring, misunderstood young man, but by the time this realization occurs, Stargirl knows that Perry would make a better friend than lover and that her feelings for Leo will never change. At the end of the novel, Stargirl has a stronger grasp on her personal identity, and she has made a town full of new friends to embrace the new woman that she has become.



January 1 - February 22

January 1 - February 22 Summary

Stargirl Caraway starts writing letters to her "once (and future) boyfriend" Leo on January 1st. In this first letter, she tells him about the special place that she's found to meditate, the place she calls Enchanted Hill because when she meditates or "mind washes," the light from the sun seeps through her closed eyelids and she feels as if she is basking in gold. Nearby, there is a cemetery where Stargirl watches an elderly man, Charles, pass his time next to the tombstone of his wife, Grace. One day while Stargirl is mind washing, she opens her eyes to see a five-year-old girl staring back at her, nearly touching noses. The girl introduces herself as Dootsie Pringle before her mother runs up and apologizes her daughter's behavior. Stargirl doesn't mind, she finds Dootsie charming, especially Dootsie's belief that she can disappear: Dootsie closes her eyes, scrunches up her face, and, in her mind, vanishes from view. Because the Pringle and Caraway families live so close to each other, Stargirl invites Dootsie to come over anytime to play with her pet rat, Cinnamon. A few days later, Dootsie shows up at Stargirl's house at 6:00 in the morning, still wearing her pajamas. Her mother shows up a few minutes later, frantic, looking for her daughter.

Stargirl is home schooled and is often sent on strange field trips to write poetry. In this section, she visits the stone piles near her house. It is a terribly cold, lonely place. The only other person Stargirl sees there is a mentally-impaired man who walks around saying, "Are you looking for me?" There, Stargirl watches a single goose flying through the sky and wonders where the rest of his flock is. When Stargirl next visits Dootsie, Dootsie asks if Stargirl has a boyfriend. Stargirl says she used to, but not anymore. He broke up with her. Later, they visit Dootsie's other friend, a woman named Betty Lou. Betty Lou lives between Stargirl and Dootsie. She suffers from agoraphobia, which means that she cannot leave the house. Dootsie visits her almost every day because Betty Lou always has doughnuts - which she has delivered from Marge's Diner by the delivery girl, Alvina. A few days later, Stargirl visits Marge's Diner where she meets Alvina for the first time. The eleven-year-old girl is constantly getting into fights with boys, talking back to customers, and threatening to shoot people with her imaginary guns.

January 1 - February 22 Analysis

This section of the novel introduces many of the key players that will be important to the plot of the novel: Stargirl, Betty Lou, Dootsie, and Alvina. Stargirl has just moved to a new neighborhood and is struggling to figure out where she belongs, particularly because she has left behind the person she cares about most, her ex-boyfriend Leo. The reason for Stargirl's move is unknown, but it is clear that she is terribly lonely. In Stargirl's letters to Leo, she writes about seeing a lone goose flying through air and wondering where the rest of his flock is. She also details the cold, gray stones that lie in



piles near her house. Stargirl is drawn to these lonely images because they represent perfectly what she is feeling inside. It is interesting to note that many of the people Stargirl is drawn to are also extremely isolated and lonely: from Charles, the man who spends every waking moment at the graveside of his dead wife, to Betty Lou, the agoraphobic woman who hasn't left her home in nine years, to Alvina, the bully who has pushed away all the possible playmates in her class. Stargirl also frequently writes that she is crying and it is clear to the reader that she is heartbroken about her move. The main plot of the novel will surround Stargirl's journey to adapt to her new life in Phoenixville, embracing the motley crew of friends she will meet along the way.



February 28 - April 19

February 28 - April 19 Summary

The first snow of the year falls and Stargirl feels as if the Earth has created a gift just for her. The dazzling white of winter covers up all ugliness, making it look pristine and fresh. She wishes snow could cover her entire relationship with Leo. When the first crocus of the year peeks from under the snow, Stargirl cries. For weeks, Stargirl mopes in her letters, trying to figure out what went wrong, how Leo high-jacked her heart, and why she's broken-hearted now. She tries to convince herself that she is not the only person on the planet who's ever had a broken heart, so why is she acting as if she is? She goes to the cemetery to watch Charles - now there's a man who knows what heartbreak means - and imagines that each tombstone coincides with a memory about Leo she must bury in the earth. Meanwhile, winter turns to spring with the passing of the Vernal Equinox (March 21).

Stargirl returns to the stone pile in search of herself. When the man who mutters "Are you looking for me?" wanders past, Stargirl shouts, "I'm looking for me! Have you seen me?!" but the man keeps walking (p. 40). To help pass her depression, Stargirl begins joining her father for his early morning milk delivery run. She enjoys reading the customers' dairy lists and particularly enjoys the customers who still trust their small town enough to leave the doors unlocked so Mr. Caraway can put their milk straight into their refrigerators. While on the milk run one morning, Stargirl is shocked to see the eyes of a boy with dark hair peeking out from a dumpster as the milk truck drives by. A few days later, Dootsie falls ill with the flu. Stargirl doesn't think much of it until she realizes that no one has brought Betty Lou's doughnuts in from her front porch and that they've been sitting there for days. She is discussing this with Alvina when Alvina suddenly runs away, shouting at a boy stealing the doughnuts off Betty Lou's front porch. As Alvina chases the boy, Stargirl realizes that she recognizes him: he's the same boy that was hiding in the dumpster.

February 28 - April 19 Analysis

After Valentine's Day, Stargirl feels extremely depressed as she mulls over every detail of her relationship with Leo. Sadness consumes her even though she realizes that it is miniscule in comparison to the heartbreak others, like Charles, have suffered. This sadness, and the desire to connect with others, will motivate Stargirl later in the novel to reach out to these lonely souls and embrace them. But for now, she is nearly overcome with her own depression and can't see sunlight through the fog. To help combat her depression, Stargirl begins helping out in the neighborhood. She sees that even though she is new, she is still needed. She helps deliver Betty Lou's doughnuts, and tries to identify the poor boy dumpster diving in the early mornings. Although the effect hasn't been seen yet, it is clear that Stargirl is going to have a positive impact on her new community, and that she will discover much about herself in the upcoming year.



The symbolism of the sun's journey around the earth - as seen in the equinoxes and solstices presented in the novel - begin to take shape. Just as Stargirl's mood, particularly in relation to her emotionality about Leo - begins to change following her terrible bout with depression, the Vernal Equinox occurs, filling each day with more and more sun, symbolic of the way that now, each day in Stargirl's life will be filled with more and more happiness. Stargirl measures her happiness by a wagon filled with stones. Five stones in the wagon means complete happiness. Since she's been thinking about Leo, she's been taking a stone out each day. Now she's down to two stones, but the reader can safely assume that since Vernal Equinox has taken place, her stone pile will grow.



April 23 - June 28

April 23 - June 28 Summary

Stargirl takes Dootsie to the Dogwood Festival at Beamus Park. The girls pass the day people-watching and stuffing their faces with carnival food. At one point, Stargirl sees the boy from the dumpster stealing food from a concession stand. Stargirl is about to confront him when a fight breaks out nearby. Two kids wrestle in the dirt, kicking and punching each other. When the fight is broken up, Stargirl is not surprised to see that one of the fighters is Alvina. Alvina is cursing and threatening the blond boy she had been fighting, when Stargirl catches a glimpse of Alvina's fingers. One fingernail has been grown out and is painted in pink, glittery polish. She only sees the nail for a second before it is curled back up into a fist, but nevertheless, the image stays with her. When Dootsie says that she hates Alvina, Stargirl convinces her that it doesn't help the world to fill it with hate.

That evening, Stargirl and Dootsie visit with Betty Lou to tell her all about the festival because, of course, Betty Lou couldn't leave her house to attend. Betty Lou is saddened by Stargirl's lovely description of the festival because she fears she will never attend a party like that again. The next day, Stargirl and Dootsie throw a makeshift Dogwood Festival on the sidewalk, so Betty Lou can watch it from her kitchen window. They wear costumes, play music, and throw together a makeshift parade. Everyone is having a lovely time until Stargirl spots the boy from the dumpster talking with Dootsie, making her laugh. Terrible thoughts about how the boy is nothing but a thief fill Stargirl's mind and she chases him down the street to confront him. As they run, the boy steals two lemons from the fruit stand and tears them open, shoving the sour fruit into his mouth. When he reaches his house, a small gray cinder-block square, Stargirl shouts that she wants the boy to stay away from Dootsie. He barely acknowledges her and disappears inside his house.

The next day, Dootsie tells Stargirl everything she knows about the boy, Perry, while they eat doughnuts at Margie's diner. When Alvina comes in to sweep up the shop, Dootsie narrows her eyes and tells Alvina that she hates her. The two girls engage in a staring battle, which neither flinches out of. They raise their fists, never breaking their gaze, and threaten each other but still, neither looks away. Stargirl knows she is watching something transpire, but the spell is broken when Margie orders Alvina back to work. Meanwhile, Stargirl goes on a fieldtrip to Maiden's Leap where, rumor has it, a girl threw herself off the bluff after suffering a broken heart. Also, Stargirl has begun leaving doughnuts on Grace's grave for Charles to eat, in case he gets hungry. The first few days, Charles hurls the packages away from the tombstone, probably believing it to be trash, before he finally accepts Stargirl's gift.



April 23 - June 28 Analysis

Stargirl's confusion and frustration with Perry, the boy from the dumpster, grows. She has seen him stealing on three separate occasions now: from the dumpster, from Betty Lou's front porch, and from the candy apple stand at the Dogwood Festival. Now, she fears that he might be trying to steal Dootsie. Although this is an irrational fear, Stargirl is jealous of the way Perry can make Dootsie laugh, and of how quickly Dootsie cozies up to Perry after meeting him. Stargirl doesn't have many friends in her new town and she is protective of the relationship she's formed with Dootsie. It is interesting to see Stargirl chase Perry back to his house, filled with rage, because she's just given Dootsie a lecture about how important it is to show love rather than hate. Dootsie may be so territorial of Dootsie because she knows she is battling depression as she copes with Leo's break-up. Although Stargirl tries to keep things in perspective - Betty Lou and Charles are dealing with extreme forms of depression - she cannot shake the dark feeling that presses her to her bed in the morning, telling her she shouldn't leave the room. Dootsie is one of the only sources of joy in Stargirl's life, and if she loses that friendship, Stargirl is afraid she will disappear.

At the same time, Stargirl learns about the Lenape maiden who threw herself off a bluff when her father refused to let her marry the boy she loved. This story strikes a chord with Stargirl who feels that Leo is her soul mate, but she cannot be with him. Embracing the story of the Lenape maiden as gospel shows the reader how desperate Stargirl is to be loved. She fears that Leo was the only person who truly knew her, and therefore truly loved her. With Perry threatening to steal Dootsie's affection away, Stargirl's threat of depression rises, however momentarily. As Dootsie pulls away, Stargirl spreads her affection by reaching out to other isolated souls, from leaving gifts for Charles to including Alvina on her daily excursions.



June 21 - July 18

June 21 - July 18 Summary

June 21 marks the summer solstice and Stargirl is eager to celebrate this day with her best friend, Dootsie. Dootsie sleeps over the night before and Stargirl wakes her at 4:00 in the morning. The two girls walk out to the woods to watch the sunrise on what will be the longest day in the calendar year. The joy on Dootsie's face as she witnessed the sky turn from black to blue to gold stays with Dootsie for the rest of the week. The other unexpected bright spot in Dootsie's week is a letter from Archie, one of her friends from back home. Archie is an old man who smokes a cherry wood tobacco pipe. Stargirl comments on how Archie hadn't like Leo because Leo wanted Stargirl to call herself by her proper name, Susan. He didn't love Stargirl's creative energy or wacky behavior. He wanted her to be prim and proper, and for a while, Stargirl tried. According to the letter, those were the saddest days in Archie's life: when Stargirl wasn't acting like herself. Fourth of July passes with the Pringle and Caraway families celebrating together, and Stargirl undertakes a new project: creating a calendar by marking the sun's rays and shadows in the open field.

On a hot day in July, Stargirl tries to cool off by reading books at the air-conditioned library. Her concentration is broken by a plit, plit, plit sound, like someone spitting in the aisles. Before she even looks up from her books, Stargirl knows the sound must be coming from Perry. She sneaks around the corner and is not surprised to see him lounging on the floor, sucking on a lemon. Stargirl is slightly annoyed that he doesn't seem to recognize her. She is also annoyed that he is reading a play by a French author.

Meanwhile, Stargirl has started a new business calling herself the Garden Groomer. She weeds, waters, and cleans gardens in her neighborhood for a small fee. One of the houses that she is hired to garden at turns out to be Alvina's home. When she is there for the first time, Stargirl breaks up a particularly nasty fight between Alvina and her little brother, Thomas after Thomas clipped off Alvina's glittery fingernail. After cleaning up the wounds from their fight, Stargirl is given a tour of the home. She is shocked to see Barbie dolls lined up neatly in Alvina's bedroom, as well as nunchucks and other fighting tools. Stargirl also notices a tiny school portrait of the blond boy Alvina fought at the Dogwood Festival on Alvina's door. Alvina tells Stargirl all about Arnold, the guy who walks around asking "Are you looking for me?" and about Perry. Alvina says that Perry is a criminal who was sent away to boot camp boarding school for stealing. Stargirl doesn't understand why her heart starts beating faster whenever she sees or talks about Perry.



June 21 - July 18 Analysis

June 21 marks a new solstice, and therefore a new turning point in Stargirl's emotional journey. She seems to have left behind the depression of winter and embraced the sun's positive energy in her life. Her small community of friends is growing as she further explores her relationships with Dootsie, Alvina, and Betty Lou. Stargirl also reaches out on various occasions to Perry, although Stargirl isn't sure why. It is clear to the reader, even though it is not clear to the characters, that Stargirl has a crush on Perry. Despite Perry's obviously negative character traits, Stargirl still finds herself drawn to him. This may be because Stargirl hopes she can reform him, because she wants to make Leo jealous, or because she is attracted to someone the complete opposite of herself. Even at the end of the novel, Stargirl's motivations will remain unclear, making this a fascinating relationship to discuss.

The play Stargirl catches Perry reading, *Ondine*, is about a mermaid fished up by a handsome man's fishing boat. The two characters fall madly in love, but the rest of the world doesn't understand their relationship. Filled with revulsion, the people banish the mermaid back into the sea and her lover dies of a broken heart on the shore. After she reads it, Stargirl decides that it's the best book ever written, so it further annoys her that Perry seems to have impeccable taste in literature. The mermaid in *Ondine* is clearly symbolic of Stargirl, fished up out of her home in Mesa, Arizona, and forced to live in a new, unfamiliar environment. As *Ondine* is a story about eternal love, similar to the story of the Lenape maiden, readers will have to decide for themselves if Hans is a symbol for Perry or for Leo.



July 19 - August 10

July 19 - August 10 Summary

Stargirl opens this section by telling Leo that there is no way she will mail this letter to him. The only way he would read it is if she hands it to him, which means they would have to be in the same room, which means that he would forgive anything unseemly she has to say, particularly about Perry, anyway. This is why she feels free to tell him everything, regardless of how inappropriate it may seem. She writes about an Ondine dream that she had in which she was the mermaid and Perry was Hans, and she writes about Betty Lou's flower, the night-blooming cereus. On July 31, after monitoring the flower's growth, Stargirl is overwhelmed by its beauty when the cereus blooms. She and Betty Lou hold hands through the opened screen door (Betty Lou is inside while Stargirl is outside) and smell the sweet fragrance of the flower. Both cry, knowing they are experiencing nature at its finest together.

Life in the neighborhood ambles on for Stargirl. She feels a much stronger connection to Arnold, the mentally-impaired man who walks around asking the same question over and over, "Are you looking for me?" Stargirl feels lost herself and therefore feels a kindred spirit to Arnold, wondering if anyone, particularly Leo, is looking for her. Someone has hung up posters advertising the upcoming Blobfest. The movie "The Blob" filmed a few scenes in Phoenixville and now, every year, there is a festival where the movie is replayed and everyone dresses up on costumes to attend the screening. Still, Stargirl is very lonely and after hearing that Perry sleeps on his roof on hot nights, she wakes in the middle of the night to search for him. She finds him sleeping on the roof, just as Alvina said he would be. Boldly, Stargirl walks up to him and makes conversation. Perry is quite aloof, having just been woken up, but it is clear that he is intrigued by Stargirl's confidence. The two talk about many things, from Ondine to Alvina's bullying ways, to Blobfest. For the most part, Stargirl does all the talking while Perry answers monosyllabically. When she orders him to ask her some questions, to get to know who she is, too, Perry doesn't hesitate before asking her about Leo. Stargirl is shocked and embarrassed that Perry knows about Leo, particularly that he dumped her, and falls silent. To change the subject, Stargirl tells Perry about her new solar calendar and invites him to help her build it. Surprisingly, Perry accepts.

July 19 - August 10 Analysis

The night-blooming cereus is an important symbol in the novel. The cereus is a high-maintenance flower that blooms for only one evening, after the sun has set. Many gardeners might think that this is too much work for too small a reward. In a way, this is also how many people in the neighborhood feel about Betty Lou, having a friendship with her is simply too difficult, given her condition. But just as Stargirl embraces Betty Lou, she also embraces the strange flower. To her, the one evening of blooming is well worth the wait, just as Betty Lou's moments of bravery are well worth the wait. The



flower can also be seen as a symbol for Stargirl. The cereus has been uprooted from its home - it belongs in the desert - and as a result doesn't always bloom. This is similar to Stargirl, who, in her new town, struggles to find the sunlight. It is interesting to note that Betty Lou says, "The cereus insists on sunlight - that's why it must be at the end of the yard. And yet it saves its flowers for the moon. The sun never sees what it fathers" (Page 104). This is clear foreshadowing to the solar calendar Stargirl will build later in the novel. This project will bring the entire community together, and on the evening of Winter Solstice, Stargirl will, symbolically, bloom.

Stargirl's conversation with Perry on the rooftop is an interesting one. Perry doesn't really seem interested in what Stargirl has to say, and it could even be argued that he is downright rude to her. Many readers may complain that they don't understand Stargirl's motivation in her relationship with Perry. Why is she drawn to him? Why is she attracted to a boy who steals and who litters and who treats her poorly? These questions will never truly be answered, so readers will have to investigate Perry's draw for themselves. Clearly Stargirl feels a kindred connection to Perry, perhaps because they are both outsiders. Although Perry is gruff in his responses to Stargirl's many questions, at the end of the conversation, it appears that Stargirl and Perry have reached a new level of friendship. Perry appreciates Stargirl's unique qualities - his statement about Stargirl not being "a typical girl" should be viewed as a compliment - and Stargirl once again feels like she has a friend she can open up to.



August 11 - August 30

August 11 - August 30 Summary

Stargirl opens this section by writing a letter to Archie asking him for advice about her relationship with Perry. She says that she doesn't know what she feels for him - a crush? more? less? - but she definitely feels something. The main conflict she feels is whether she is drawn to him as a way of making Leo jealous, because she is lonely, or because she feels a genuine connection to him. Later that week, Stargirl rushes to Calendar Hill to meet Leo, and is sorely disappointed when he doesn't show up. Immediately, Stargirl begins making excuses for him - she didn't explicitly invite him so why would he show up? She quickly places her marker and walks home. Stargirl is clearly depressed after this, comparing herself to a cup of coffee that's spilled all over the floor: she's a mess. A mockingbird has moved into Stargirl's backyard and she recognizes her own voice in the bird's song, "as if the very heart of itself - its song - is breaking into pieces and flying off in a hundred directions" (p. 136). To keep her mind off things, Stargirl throws herself into her gardening work.

August 14 is Charlie, the man at the tombstone's birthday. Stargirl knows this because she read it on that very stone. She feels terribly that Charlie must spend his birthday alone, so she purchases him a small gift and then takes Dootsie with her to help deliver it. As soon as she walks up to the cemetery, Stargirl begins to second-guess herself. Will Charlie be offended? Appreciative? Confused? When she tries to talk to Charlie, she quickly realizes that he cannot hear. When he finally puts in his hearing aid, Charlie says that he likes the silence; he can hear Grace better through it. The threesome pass a short, pleasant conversation before the girls leave to give Charlie more time with his wife. Later that week is the Blobfest. Dootsie wins the costume contest and Stargirl takes her out for pizza to celebrate. There, she runs into Perry with a group of beautiful girls. These girls are known as "the harem" and all sport a bumblebee tattoo to show their allegiance. What binds them together is the mutual love for Perry Deloplane. Despite the fact that they are all competing for the same boyfriend, they get along amicably and even invite Stargirl to be part of their clique. Although Stargirl is intrigued by the invitation - what has Perry said to these girls to let them know that she is interested in him - the thought of sharing her boyfriend with other girls reviles her.

August 11 - August 30 Analysis

There are many strong symbols introduced in this section, the first is the mockingbird. Initially, it seems like the mockingbird borrows its identity from other birds in the area - it makes fun of their songs by imitating or "mocking" them - and that it is more of an annoyance than a blessing. The more time Stargirl spends with the bird, however, shows that she appreciates its uniqueness. There is no other bird on the planet that can search out the beauty of its winged neighbors - their songs - and combine the beautiful songs in one place. The other strong symbol is gardening. Of her job, Stargirl says, "I've



become pretty good at telling weeds from not-weeds. But every once in a while I have my doubts. I come across an especially difficult root. I pull and it doesn't come out. I pull again. It resists. I dig my gloved fingers into the soil and grab it with both hands and pull yet again. It begins to come out, but I can see it's going to take several more hard pulls. And that's when the doubts begin. I begin to wonder: Have I made a mistake" (Page 137). The same could be said about Stargirl's judge of characters. She is particularly drawn to people in her community that others have neglected: the elderly, the infirm, and the poor, for example. Through her friendship, Stargirl weeds out the negative characteristics that are choking the beauty from these people (their loneliness, depression, fears, etc), leaving a beautiful community of flowers in her wake. Stargirl's thoughts about the strong weed can be seen as a reference to Perry. Is she pulling out the right parts of his personality, or has she made a mistake? Will Perry be a flower in her "garden" or will he be a giant weed?

September 1 - September 29

September 1 - September 29 Summary

Alvina has been fired from her job at Margie's for having too many fights with the customers. Margie offers Stargirl the job, but Stargirl declines. Meanwhile, Stargirl receives a phone call from Alvina's mother asking her to take Alvina under her wing. Alvina's mother recognizes how stable Stargirl is and how much Alvina looks up to her. She worries that Alvina is never going to grow out of her bullying phase and hopes that Stargirl can help mentor her onto the right path. For their first outing, Stargirl takes Alvina and Dootsie to the mall. There, the girls bicker constantly and Alvina gets into a massive physical fight with the same blond boys she fought with at the Dogwood Festival. Stargirl also takes Alvina on a milk run with her father, which she seems to enjoy even though she pretends to be bored.

September 1 - September 29 Analysis

This section functions solely to flush out Alvina's character. She is clearly a confused little girl caught between loving her dolls and loving boys. Her parents are worried that she may never grow out of her bullying phase, but Stargirl sees the beauty in Alvina's spirit. Alvina is confused and out of place within her body, but she isn't a bad kid. When the fight at the mall breaks out, Stargirl tells Alvina about the counting coup, a Native American tradition in which the strongest warriors would sneak up on each other and simply tap their enemy's shoulder. This nonviolent act shows the enemy that they could have caused bodily harm but chose not to. In Native American tradition, a counting coup was seen as a higher honor than actually killing the enemy warrior. Stargirl hopes this mentality will rub off on Alvina. It is interesting to note that during one conversation, Alvina admits that she is a rotten kid. She hopes that she will be the reverse of most teenagers, who start out as wonderful kids and morph into monsters when they are teenagers - in that she will be a wonderful, loving teenager. It breaks Stargirl's heart to hear that Alvina thinks she is a terrible kid, and vows to boost Alvina's self-esteem, encouraging her to embrace all that is lovable about herself.



October 5 - November 8

October 5 - November 8 Summary

During her morning meditation session, Stargirl is startled to open her eyes and find Perry sitting across from her, mimicking her meditation style. Stargirl isn't sure if he is mocking her or learning from her. When she asks, Perry says that he needs meditation to help him escape his "crappy life" and that he wasn't mocking her. The two share a flirty, quippy conversation, and Perry admits that he finds Stargirl interesting. When he says that he is drawn to spending more time with her, Stargirl jumps on the opportunity to officially invite him to Calendar Hill, next Thursday at 4:00 am. He promises to be there. Thursday arrives and Perry is nowhere to be found. Stargirl has officially been stood up and her heart is broken. She feels offended and lied to. She quickly plants her marker for the calendar and rushes to Betty Lou's house, pounding on the door until she wakes her neighbor up. Inside, Stargirl bursts into tears and tells Betty Lou all about her heartbreak. Betty Lou is an excellent listener and gives Stargirl wonderful advice: "Live today. Not yesterday. Not tomorrow. Just today. Inhabit your moments. Don't rent them out to tomorrow ... Today is calling you, trying to get your attention, but you're stuck on tomorrow and it trickles away like water down the drain" (p. 195).

Margie has hired a new woman to help her in the diner. The woman, Neva, is very pregnant and not very sociable. Alvina finds out that her parents hired Stargirl to spend time with her and explodes with anger. While marking her calendar for the week of November 1, Stargirl witnesses a house fire at a cabin in the woods. Throwing caution to the wind, Stargirl runs to the house hoping to warn the inhabitants. She calls 9-1-1 before smashing through the front window screaming for the homeowners to wake up and run to safety. In the process, she breaks her ankle and suffers from smoke inhalation. After passing out, she wakes up in the hospital attached to an oxygen tank. There, she receives the devastating news that Cinnamon has gone missing. For days, Stargirl is too depressed about her pet rat to take any visitors, but on the third day, Dootsie comes to visit. Dootsie brings the newspaper, which chronicles Stargirl's bravery on the front page. On the fourth day, Alvina and the Honeybees visit. On the fifth day, Stargirl is surprised to see Perry walk through the hospital room door. They argue about whether or not Stargirl is a true hero since it was revealed that there was no one actually living in the cabin that burned down in the woods: in Stargirl's mind, her bravery, and the loss of Cinnamon, was for nothing.

October 5 - November 8 Analysis

Stargirl's relationship with Perry has reached a new level. It is clear to everyone, including Stargirl, that Perry has developed a crush on her. He has even counted the freckles on Stargirl's nose: eleven. In private, Perry treats Stargirl with affection and tenderness, so Stargirl believes that she is special to him. She truly believes that their relationship is developing, which is why she has such a volatile, negative reaction when



Perry stands her up at Calendar Hill. Stargirl has made herself vulnerable for the first time since Leo, and Perry's rejection is a huge blow to Stargirl's newfound confidence. In a way, Perry's rejection forces Stargirl to relive her emotions about Leo's breakup: isn't she good enough for love? Why is she deserving of this treatment? Why do boys feel like they can love her and then drop her? Although it is a painful lesson for Stargirl to learn, as Betty Lou says, she must find validation in herself, not in a boy's affection.

In a way, the fire in the woods is a symbol for a fresh start in Stargirl's life. It forces Stargirl to re-evaluate her life after having almost lost it. She realizes what relationships are most important to her, and vows to dedicate herself to the experiences that will yield her the best results. She decides to embrace what gives her the most joy, and hopes that like fire, that joy will spread through her community.



November 9 - January 2

November 9 - January 2 Summary

This section opens with the wonderful news that Cinnamon has been found. Arnold, the mentally-impaired young man, found Cinnamon wandering through the streets and picked him up. When the newspaper article about Stargirl's act of valor in the woods mentioned that she was missing her pet rat, Arnold's mother put two-and-two together and returned Cinnamon to his rightful owner. After being released from the hospital, Stargirl visits all her close friends and is pleased to see that even Neva has begun to cheer-up after seeing Stargirl's recovery. When they see Stargirl again, Neva, Charlie, and Betty Lou all jabber away about what Stargirl has missed. Charlie tells Stargirl about the first time he met Grace: they were six-years-old and at the fish market with their parents. The two mothers were both there to purchase the same piece of fish, but neither wanted to take it from the other. Charlie claims that from that moment on, he knew he and Grace were meant to be together and that they would be together forever.

When Stargirl visits her solar calendar for the first time since mid-October, she is shocked to see that three weeks worth of markers have been added to the chart even though she wasn't there to complete the calculations. A few minutes after she arrives, Perry arrives, and it is clear that he has been completing the work in Stargirl's absence. This touches Stargirl greatly, and the two share a tender kiss. While they are kissing, however, Stargirl realizes that she was lured in by the romance of the moment rather than her feelings for Perry. She knows that the two will be friends and nothing more. Now, Stargirl feels that it is SHE, not Perry, who has led the other on. When she sees Perry in Margie's diner with Neva, she avoids him. All her energy goes into preparing for the Winter Solstice party she hopes to throw on Calendar Hill. With Dootsie and Alvina's help, she writes initiations to everyone she knows and builds a massive tent to hold the guests. When Perry doesn't try to contact her in over a week since their kiss, Stargirl is flooded with embarrassment, maybe he realized their romantic connection was lost that night, too. Or maybe he was never attracted to her to begin with. Rather than wallow in these emotions as she would have done in the past, Stargirl pushes forward, choosing to focus on herself and her projects. Now, each week when she visits the calendar, she sends a special telepathic message to Leo through the first beam of sunlight, asking if they will ever be together again.

A new front-page news story breaks on December 10 when the blue blanket used to wrap baby Jesus in the town nativity scene is stolen. Instinctively, Stargirl knows that Perry has stolen the blanket. Who else could it be? Her suspicions are confirmed a few days later, when she sees Perry pushing a baby carriage down the street and a blue blanket peeking out from the side. He is pushing Clarissa, his new baby sister. Stargirl is shocked to find out that Neva - the woman from Margie's diner - is Perry's mother.

The day of the Winter Solstice finally arrives. Stargirl is nearly crippled with fear that despite her preparations, no one will show up to her party. Why would they want to



wake up so early just to watch the sunrise? Her fears melt away when the night before Solstice, her parents surprise her with a visit from Archie, her best friend from Arizona. As always, Archie calms Stargirl's fears, reminding her to trust in herself and live a life that is pleasing to her without worrying whether it pleases anyone else. The next morning, Stargirl walks proudly to the calendar, her greatest accomplishment. Dootsie holds one hand and Archie holds the other. Stargirl's parents are there, and soon, the entire town joins for the celebration. Stargirl is deeply moved. The Honeybees show up, Margie, Charlie, the Huffelmeyers, and Perry and his entire family. Alvina is there with the group of boys she once tormented, and even Betty Lou has ventured out of her house for the first time in nine-years to partake in the celebration. When the sun rises, there isn't a dry eye around. Everyone is overwhelmed by the awesome beauty of the sunlight. As a final gift, Archie presents Stargirl with a letter from Leo. On the piece of paper is a single word: Yes. He has been receiving Stargirl's weekly telepathic messages. Her heart soars: "Your answer has been a new sunrise for me, my own personal Solstice, the dawn of a season that I will, as Betty Lou would say, inhabit one day at a time. I will sail into the future on mystery's wings and I will not look back" (p. 274).

November 9 - January 2 Analysis

This section functions to flush out Perry's character and solve many of the mysteries surrounding his behaviors. It is Margie who fills Stargirl in on all the details: Neva is prone to depression and an abusive relationship with Perry's father. Perry hates the man and in a way, hates his mother for always taking him back. When Perry's father comes around, Perry sleeps on the roof to get away from him, not because it's hot. Perry was never in boot camp as he claimed, but was staying with his aunt in another town, working three jobs to help support his mother. Also, Perry steals from the neighborhood shops because he is so poor. Many of the merchants have taken pity on his situation and turn a blind eye when he takes what he needs. This, Margie says, is part of the community spirit. Perry has become a complex and sympathetic character. He shows an unexpectedly tender side when dealing with his infant sister, and most readers will forgive Perry for his negative behaviors throughout the novel now that they understand his upbringing.

When all of Stargirl's friends begin jabbering away about what Stargirl has missed during her time in the hospital, Stargirl makes a realization: "As he jabbered on, I began to understand that [Charlie] was doing more than talking, more than simply remembering. He was reliving, in a way that can only be done by sharing with someone else" (p. 219). In a way, this is exactly what the novel is doing. Stargirl is reliving the events of her first year in Phoenixville by sharing them with her perfect audience, Leo. When Stargirl realizes this, she also realizes that Perry is not her soulmate. He is not the person she wants to share her thoughts with, Leo is. With this, Stargirl knows with certainty that Perry can only be a friend to her. The kiss they share in the woods is romantic because of the setting. With Leo, Stargirl's heart fluttered wherever they were: setting didn't matter, the company did. Her stars always have been, and always will be,



aligned with Leo's, just as Charlie's stars always were and always would be aligned with Grace's.

Stargirl's Winter Solstice party is a smashing success. This confirms for everyone the impact Stargirl has had on her new neighborhood. Stargirl proves that one person truly can make a difference. She has brought together this group of misfits and outcasts, uniting everyone into a community that appreciates, for the first time, the raw beauty of the world. Many are so overwhelmed by this discovery that they weep as the sun rises. Meeting Stargirl has been a life-altering experience. Had Stargirl not entered their lives, it is arguable that each of these characters (Alvina, Betty Lou, Charlie, etc) would succumb to their loneliness and live the rest of their lives in abject isolation. As a direct result of their relationships with Stargirl, Dootsie learns self-control, Betty Lou leaves her home for the first time in nine years, Alvina sees herself as feminine and pretty, Perry learns how to trust, Charlie is able to leave Grace's graveside, Arnold makes his first friend, and many other characters are changed in small but life-altering ways. The message that Stargirl spreads is that the world is a better place when you love the person you are in it. In a way, this novel is coming-of-age novel about Stargirl's journey into womanhood, but it is also a story of self-discovery for everyone she comes into contact with along the way. The brilliant light seen at the close of this novel is symbolic of the hope and love shed on the entire community.



Characters

Stargirl Caraway

Stargirl Caraway is the unique protagonist of the novel. She is a seventeen-year-old home-schooled teen who has just moved to Phoenixville, Pennsylvania after leaving behind all her friends and comfort in Mesa, Arizona. The most important person Stargirl left behind is her ex-boyfriend, Leo, whom she wrote this entire novel to. Stargirl is not given much physical description and is characterized almost solely by her personality, particularly her acts of kindness. When Stargirl arrives in her new neighborhood, she seems to recognize loneliness in others and reach out to them, perhaps because she is battling loneliness herself. Stargirl's friends are a motley crew of outsiders, but Stargirl manages to wrangle everyone into a close-knit community. Throughout the novel, Stargirl partakes in many strange behaviors, solely because they bring her joy: from starting a gardening business to helping her father on milk runs, to building a solar calendar to mark the solstices. Throughout the novel, Stargirl's main conflict involves her feelings surrounding the two love interest in her life: Leo, the boyfriend she left at home, and Perry, the mysterious trouble-maker she meets in her new neighborhood. After sharing a kiss with Perry, Stargirl realizes that she will always love Leo and that she will wait for him as long as she doesn't have to change herself.

Perry Deloplane

Perry Deloplane is a teenage boy who is roughly around seventeen-years-old, about Stargirl's age, that Stargirl meets when she moves into her new neighborhood. When he is first introduced to the reader, he is seen dumpster diving near Mr. Caraway's milk run. Stargirl also sees Perry stealing doughnuts from Betty Lou's porch and candy from the town fair. He also has a tendency to suck lemons, spitting the seeds wherever he goes. He litters, which annoys Stargirl, and he has a harem of girls - the Bumblebees - who are all in love with him. Despite these negative traits, Stargirl still finds herself drawn to him. This may be because Stargirl hopes she can reform him, because she wants to make Leo jealous, or because she is attracted to someone the complete opposite of herself. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Leo is not the delinquent he is made out to be. Rather than going to boot camp as everyone believes, Perry was really staying with his aunt, working three jobs, helping his mother make ends meet. When his little sister is born, he shows a surprisingly caring, gentle side, and is extremely protective. These things redeem Perry for the reader, but Stargirl realizes that she is still in love with Leo and that she only wants to be friends with Perry.

Dootsie Pringle

Dootsie Pringle is the spunky five-year-old neighbor Stargirl meets while she is meditating in the woods. Very quickly, the two girls become best friends despite their



ten-year age difference. Dootsie is extremely precocious and has few boundaries in her personal relationships. Like many young children, Dootsie has many attention-seeking behaviors, such as pretending to be invisible.

Leo Borlock

Leo Borlock is Stargirl's ex-boyfriend from Mica, Arizona. The novel is actually "the world's longest letter" that Stargirl has written to Leo as a way of keeping him posted about her activities since moving away from him after their break-up.

Margie

Margie is the owner of Margie's donut shop where Alvina works and Stargirl frequents. She is most famous for her crazy doughnut inventions, like donut pie and donut soup.

The Huffelmeyers

The Huffelmeyers are an old couple that Stargirl's father delivers milk to. The couple always orders the same thing: 1 quart of buttermilk and 1 quart of chocolate milk. Stargirl is particularly drawn to the couple because they trust the neighborhood enough to leave their front door open for the milkman to make his delivery.

Betty Lou Fern

Betty Lou Fern is Stargirl and Dootsie's neighbor who suffers from agoraphobia. Since her divorce nine years ago, Betty Lou hasn't left the house. Her agoraphobia is clearly tied to her depression because it first began when she felt like she didn't want to plant her flowers. That spread to not wanting to buy groceries at the grocery store and soon, not even wanting to get out of bed. She has doughnuts shipped to her house each week from Marge's Diner to lure Dootsie over for visits. Dootsie is in charge of bringing in the mail each day and cheering Betty Lou up when she is feeling low.

Charles

Charles is the man who sits by his wife's tombstone everyday at the city cemetery. Stargirl is somewhat obsessed with the love this man must have for his wife, and his seeming inability to go back into his house. It is as if the man cannot imagine living without his wife, the woman he loves, a concept that is very interesting to Stargirl.

Alvina

Alvina is the neighborhood bully. She is eleven-years-old, not afraid to fight boys, and as rough and tumble as a high school footballer. She wears clothes torn from her tussles, has wild flyaway hair, and a filthy mouth full of insults and threats. Despite all this, Stargirl is drawn to Alvina for her fearlessness.



Objects/Places

The Enchanted Hill

The Enchanted Hill is Stargirl's favorite place to meditate or "mind wash." It's a vacant hill next to a white, stucco building and a one-minute bike ride from Stargirl's house. The first time she meditated there, the sun shone through her closed eyelids giving her the feeling that she was basking in gold.

Cinnamon

Cinnamon is Stargirl's pet rat. He has a beautiful brownish-red coat, which is the color of cinnamon, beady eyes, and a perfect nose for kissing. He is constantly in Stargirl's pocket and a bonding agent for many of the friendships that Stargirl forms.

Margie's Diner

Margie's Diner is where all the characters in the novel get their doughnuts. It is a tiny diner with four counter seats and a few small tables. The place is run by a pudgy woman named Margie, who bakes all the doughnuts herself.

Summer Solstice

Summer Solstice, June 21, is the day that officially marks the beginning of summer on the vernal calendar. On this day, the sun rises at its earliest time, making June 21 technically the longest day of the year.

Calendar Hill

Calendar Hill is where Stargirl is building her sun calendar to mark the equinoxes by marking the journey of the sun and the shadows that it casts on the ground. This is also where Stargirl builds the solar calendar to mark the Winter Solstice, which the entire neighborhood comes out to witness at the end of the novel.

The Pink Fingernail

The pink, glittery fingernail is Alvina's most prized possession. Although she is a rough and tumble girl, that many would call a bully, she is surprisingly attached to the one fingernail she has allowed to grow. The nail is dearly cared for, filed and painted with pink, glittery polish. When Thomas, Alvina's little brother, clips of the fingernail while



Alvina is sleeping, she is overwhelmed with anger and sadness, showing the first glimpse of vulnerability that Stargirl has ever seen in her.

Ondine

Ondine is the book that Stargirl catches Perry reading at the public library. The French play, is about a mermaid fished up by a handsome man's fishing boat. The two characters fall madly in love, but the rest of the world doesn't understand their relationship. Filled with revulsion, the people banish the mermaid back into the sea and her lover dies of a broken heart on the shore. After she reads it, Stargirl decides that it's the best book ever written.

The Bumblebees

The Bumblebees are a group of girls that are all in love with Perry Delopane. They each have a wash-off tattoo of a bumblebee on their bodies to signify their membership to the club. Despite the fact that these girls are all competing for the same boyfriend, they get along very well.

The Blue Blanket

The blue blanket is a part of the Phoenixville nativity scene each year at Christmastime. The year Stargirl moves to town, however, the blue blanket disappears, making the local news. Many people suspect that Perry has stolen the blanket, and these suspicions are confirmed when Stargirl sees him pushing a baby carriage, with his new baby sister wrapped snugly in the blanket.

The Night Blooming Cereus

The cereus is a high-maintenance flower that blooms for only one evening, after the sun has set. Many gardeners might think that this is too much work for too small a reward, but Betty Lou and Stargirl embrace the flower's fickle temperament.



Themes

Building Community

Many of the characters in *Love, Stargirl* are isolated. Stargirl, for example, has just moved to a new town. She is home-schooled and so she doesn't have a strong community of friends at school and must build one in her neighborhood. At various times in the novel, Stargirl admits to herself, and to Leo, that she is lonely. To combat her own loneliness, Stargirl befriends a motley crew of outcasts and misfits. Alvina is the neighborhood bully, Charlie spends his day in solitary grief, mourning the loss of his wife, Grace. Betty Lou is perhaps the best example of isolation as her condition - agoraphobia - prevents her from even leaving the house to interact with the world. In their own way, each of these characters is miserable in their loneliness: Alvina turns to violence, Stargirl to moping, Betty Lou and Charlie to depression. Had Stargirl not entered their lives, it is arguable that each of these other characters would succumb to their loneliness and live the rest of their lives in this abject isolation. Stargirl proves that one person truly can make a difference. The first person she befriends - or who befriends her - is Dootsie Pringle, who introduces her to Betty Lou Fern. From there, Stargirl meets Alvina, Perry, and Charlie, all of whom she leaves an indelible mark on. Because Stargirl takes these new friends exactly as they, quirky character traits and all, a true friendship blooms between them. These new friends come to trust Stargirl and begin to come out of their shells. Slowly but surely, a community of friends forms between a society of what was once misfits and outcasts.

Courage / Taking a Leap of Faith

The theme of taking a leap is first introduced when Stargirl visits the Maiden's Leap where the Lenape girl threw herself off the bluff overlooking the steel mill when her wouldn't allow her to marry the boy she loved. Although the girl's death was tragic in the eyes of the town, Stargirl views it is somewhat heroic. The girl gave her life for what she loved most, and Stargirl recognizes the value of giving everything you've got for what you believe in. This becomes Stargirl's mantra, and the inspiration for many around her, as she faces many of her fears head-on. The foremost concern in Stargirl's life is figuring out her emotions about Leo. Rather than run away from her fears - such as her fear that Leo no longer loves her - Stargirl confronts them in her letters, demanding answers from Leo even if she demands them in a hypothetical way. Stargirl has no qualms about exploring her interests even when they seem peculiar or strange to outsiders. This is a brave characteristic in a seventeen-year-old girl, and this bravery inspires many around her, including Betty Lou Fern, the agoraphobic neighbor who ventures out of her home for the first time in nine years to attend Stargirl's solstice party. Stargirl encourages Betty Lou to take a leap: to embrace life again, and Betty Lou accepts the challenge. Similarly, Alvina embraces her femininity, Dootsie embraces self-control, and Perry takes a leap in embracing affection and trusting others in his relationship with Stargirl. Even though Stargirl's efforts don't always yield perfect results,



her presence inspires bravery in others, and for a moment, each of the characters feel the wind under their wings when they muster up enough courage to leap.

Self-Love

Stargirl's defining character trait is her self-love. Most teenage girls are afflicted with low self-esteem, self-loathing, and fears that they will never be good enough. Stargirl is different in that she is self-confident and embraces things in her personality that others find strange or weird. Everything from Stargirl's attire to her choice of friends is unique, and that is what makes her memorable character. Many of the friends Stargirl comes into contact with struggle with depression, self-doubt, and self-pity, but Stargirl's confidence rubs off on them. As a direct result of their relationships with Stargirl, Dootsie learns self-control, Betty Lou leaves her home for the first time in nine years, Alvina sees herself as feminine and pretty, Perry learns how to trust, Charlie is able to leave Grace's graveside, Arnold makes his first friend, and many other characters are changed in small but life-altering ways. The message that Stargirl spreads is that the world is a better place when you love the person you are in it. She receives some lovely advice from her friend Betty Lou who says, "Live today. Not yesterday. Not tomorrow. Just today. Inhabit your moments. Don't rent them out to tomorrow ... Today is calling you, trying to get your attention, but you're stuck on tomorrow and it trickles away like water down the drain" (Page 195), but Stargirl knows that you can't live your life until you know who you are. In a way, this novel is coming-of-age novel about Stargirl's journey into womanhood, but it is also a story of self-discovery for everyone she comes into contact with along the way.



Style

Point of View

Love, Stargirl has a first-person and limited omniscience narration from Stargirl Clement's perspective, which means that the audience is held very close to Stargirl's thoughts and emotions throughout the novel. The novel is written as a series of letters to Stargirl's ex-boyfriend, Leo. The letters function not only as a way for Stargirl to keep Leo posted on her life since she moved away from him, but also as a diary-of-sorts. As she writes to Leo - it becomes clear early on that Stargirl has no intention of actually sending the letters to Leo - she is able to work through many of her residual issues about the relationship on paper. Writing to a specific audience forces Stargirl to ask herself many tough questions, as if she is anticipating the objections Leo might have about their relationship, and to figure out the answers. Because Stargirl knows she will never actually send Leo the letters, she is free to express herself openly and honestly, without holding embarrassing emotions back, which allows the reader unprecedented access to Stargirl's emotional growth. Also, the point-of-view of the novel also allows Stargirl to reflect on years of history, emotion, and relationships, which create a complex world for the reader to inhabit alongside her. The story is told mostly through exposition, with scenes of dialogue. The story is completely filtered through the thoughts and emotions of Stargirl, so the reader sees the world through her unique perspective. Because Stargirl has a tendency to look at the world slightly off kilter, the reader is forced to reevaluate their own interactions with the world around them.

Setting

This novel is set in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. The city name is symbolic of the way that Stargirl feels she is, like a phoenix, rising up from the ashes after leaving behind all her friends and memories in Mica, Arizona. There isn't much description of the town given in the novel, but it is clear that Stargirl lives in a close-knit, middle-class, safe neighborhood. There is no problem for Stargirl when she wakes up at 4:00 in the morning each day to lay the marker on her solstice calendar and the neighborhood is quick to support each other in their creative endeavors, such as Dootsie's parade and Stargirl's solstice display. Safety in the neighborhood is also highlighted by the Huffelmeyers' trust in leaving the front door of their house open so the milkman can make his weekly delivery. The most "dangerous" member of the community is Perry Deloplane who has a tendency to steal, although it is revealed later in the novel that all of the shop owners turn a blind eye to his petty crimes because they know he comes from a poor family. Despite the fact that everyone lives comfortable lives, they live in relative urban isolation. When Stargirl moves into the neighborhood, she begins working to form a cohesive community between the neighbors, befriending everyone from the owner of the doughnut shop to the agoraphobic woman that hasn't left her house in years.



Language and Meaning

As the novel is written for teenage readers, the language tends to be very conversational and easy to follow. The novel is clearly geared toward modern teenagers and is written in modern teen-speak. Adult readers may be confused by some of the teenaged vernacular, but are given ample contextual clues to understand its meaning. The sentences are constructed in a way that is not only easy to follow, but also gains momentum as the reader reads on. The sentences are constructed to entice the reader to turn the next page, and often this structure works. The structure of the novel not only entices readers to carry on to the next chapter by utilizing cliffhanger phrases, each paragraph propels the reader on with its present-tense action written with the sense of urgency. Stargirl's letters, and therefore the novel as a whole, are written to a particular audience: Leo Borlock, so there are a handful of references that would mean something to Leo, but mean nothing to the reader. There are also many references to events that took place in the first novel in this series that audience members reading *Love, Stargirl* without having read the previous novel may be confused by. Overall, Spinelli does an excellent job of grounding the reader and of clarifying events that have happened in the back-stories.

Structure

This novel is written as a series of journal entries or as "the world's longest letter." The sections tend to be very short and full of action, as Stargirl quickly transcribes major events, thoughts, or occurrences that have happened to her throughout the day. At the opening of the novel, Stargirl is deeply saddened to have left Leo behind in Arizona, and she is feeling very much rejected by him since their relationship ended. As the novel progresses, the reader sees Stargirl reflecting on these intense emotions and they no longer take center-stage in the novel's plot. The entire novel spans one year in Stargirl's life, essentially the first year of her life in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. The novel also spans, roughly, Winter Solstice to Winter Solstice. This is important to note because at the beginning of the novel, Stargirl is obsessed with her relationship with Leo. At the end of the novel, she realizes, "Your answer has been a new sunrise for me, my own personal Solstice, the dawn of a season" (p. 274). Overall, the structure is written in a straight-forward letter style, however, there are a few instances in which Stargirl imagines dialogue with Leo and these fantasy conversations are written in the style of a script.



Quotes

"I mean, when I'm really doing it right, getting myself totally erased, I'm the opposite of nothing - I'm everything. I'm everything but myself. I've evaporated like water vapor into the universe. I am no longer Stargirl. I am tree. Wind. Earth" (p. 4).

"If you start by hating one or two people, you won't be able to stop...A little hatred goes a long, long way. It grows and grows. And it's hungry" (p. 56).

"Tell me I didn't imagine it, Leo. Tell me that even though our bodies were in separate states, our star selves shared an enchanted place" (p. 72).

"I don't know how long I stood there, trying to compose myself. I've never felt so brittle, so defenseless. It was all I could do not to burst out bawling. Until then I hadn't realized what a fragile state I was in" (p. 114).

"I've become pretty good at telling weeds from not-weeds. But every once in a while I have my doubts. I come across an especially difficult root. I pull and it doesn't come out. I pull again. It resists. I dig my gloved fingers into the soil and grab it with both hands and pull yet again. It begins to come out, but I can see it's going to take several more hard pulls. And that's when the doubts begin. I begin to wonder: Have I made a mistake" (p.137).

"Live today. Not yesterday. Not tomorrow. Just today. Inhabit your moments. Don't rent them out to tomorrow...Today is calling you, trying to get your attention, but you're stuck on tomorrow and it trickles away like water down the drain" (p. 195).

"As he jabbered on, I began to understand that he was doing more than talking, more than simply remembering. He was reliving, in a way that can only be done my sharing with someone else" (p. 219).

"It was as if I were hearing his eternal question for the first time. Was I looking for him? Had I been looking for him all along and I didn't know it...His eyes seemed empty and unfocused, but I knew that was not true. They were simply seeing another place, another time" (p. 245).

"Your answer has been a new sunrise for me, my own personal Solstice, the dawn of a season that I will, as Betty Lou would say, inhabit one day at a time. I will sail into the future on mystery's wings and I will not look back" (p. 274).



Topics for Discussion

This novel is composed of many short letters or "the longest letter in the world" from Stargirl to her ex-boyfriend, Leo. What does this structure tell you about Stargirl's character and her relationship with Leo? Do you think Stargirl planned to send this letter to Leo as she was writing it? How can you tell? Overall, do you think this structure worked for the novel? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Many of the characters in this novel have one defining personal accessory that Jerry Spinelli uses to develop their characters. For instance, Dootsie adores ketchup and Alvina wears a necklace with Winnie the Pooh dangling from it. Choose at least three characters in the novel and describe their starring character trait. How does this trait inform their character growth and struggles? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Throughout the novel, Stargirl struggles to come to terms with her life in the new neighborhood. First, compare / contrast Stargirl's life in Mesa with her life in Phoenixville. What is the same about the two cities where she lived? What is different? Where do you think Stargirl was happier? How can you tell? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe Stargirl's journey from loneliness to community in the novel. How does Stargirl's emotional state at the beginning of the novel compare / contrast with her emotional state at the end of the novel? What do you think caused this change? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

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). How does this directly tie into Stargirl's decision to remove all the clocks from her home, and into her decision to build the solar calendar in the woods? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

What is the significance of Archie coming for the solstice celebration? How does his news about the students at Mica High alter Stargirl's relationship with her new friends in Phoenixville? How does this news affect Stargirl's opinions of herself? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

There are several poems written by Stargirl on her various field trips in the novel. What is the significance of these poems? How do these poems add characterization and depth to the novel? Are they necessary? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.