

Stargirl Study Guide

Stargirl by Jerry Spinelli

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Stargirl Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Introduction.....	7
Chapter 1.....	8
Chapter 2.....	9
Chapter 3.....	10
Chapter 4.....	11
Chapter 5.....	12
Chapter 6.....	13
Chapter 7.....	14
Chapters 8 - 9.....	15
Chapter 10.....	16
Chapter 11.....	17
Chapters 12 - 13.....	18
Chapter 14.....	19
Chapter 15.....	20
Chapters 16 - 17.....	21
Chapter 18.....	22
Chapter 19.....	23
Chapter 20.....	24
Chapter 21.....	25
Chapters 22 - 23.....	26
Chapters 24 - 25.....	27
Chapter 26.....	28



[Chapters 27 - 28..... 29](#)

[Chapter 29..... 30](#)

[Chapter 30..... 31](#)

[Chapter 31..... 32](#)

[Chapters 32 - 33..... 33](#)

[Conclusion..... 34](#)

[Characters..... 35](#)

[Objects/Places..... 40](#)

[Themes..... 42](#)

[Style..... 45](#)

[Quotes..... 48](#)

[Topics for Discussion..... 50](#)



Plot Summary

It was the first day of school at Mica High School and the halls are buzzing about the new girl who calls herself Stargirl Caraway. To say she is different is an understatement.

Her clothes are different as are her mannerisms, and she has a pet rat she carries around in a bag that has a picture of a Sunflower on it. Leo Borlock learns about Stargirl from his best friend Kevin Quinlan. During lunch, while Leo and Kevin are sitting together, Stargirl pulls out a Ukulele and begins to strum on it and dance around the lunchroom. Day after day she does this focusing on one particular person to whom she sings Happy Birthday. It is unclear how she knows that someone has a birthday. Hillari Kimble says she thinks Stargirl is a "plant," someone put in the school by the administration to get students interested in school, to create school spirit.

Leo and Kevin (best friends) are fascinated with this new girl. They decide to interview her for the Hot Seat, a local cable television program they have launched. Still, Leo balks at the idea sensing it might not be the right thing to do. As days go by, Leo and Kevin get into a disagreement about putting Stargirl on Hot Seat. There are some clear indications that Leo just might be falling in love with her.

Many of the teens in the neighborhood gather occasionally at A.H. (Archibald Hapwood) Brubaker's house, a place where they learn from "Archie," who is a retired college teacher/paleontologist; a friend, sounding board, and philosopher for many of the teens who gather there. Archie has a favorite specimen, the skull of a Paleocene rodent. He also has an old Tattered Saguaro Cactus on his property which seems to be standing watch over them all.

While most people do not want to associate with this odd girl, she does make friends with a ninth grader named Dori Dilson. Dori and a few of the unpopular kids sit with Stargirl in the lunchroom. Others are intrigued with Stargirl and watch for and expect her weird but entertaining behavior. They don't get too close or invite her into their group of friends .

During a school football game, Stargirl takes it upon herself to be an unofficial cheerleader. She cheers and flips with grace and enthusiasm. Her antics get her so much attention she is invited to become a cheerleader. At that point her popularity becomes the talk of the school. Stargirl is noticed and accepted by the "in-crowd," and things seem to be going well for her. Leo continues to be intrigued by her, and it looks like love. .

As Leo is getting to know Stargirl he discovers that she does random acts of kindness by scouting newspapers and reading bulletin boards, where she discovers birthdays and other key events that people are celebrating, or mourning, which she then finds some considerate way to acknowledge.



Despite Stargirl's kindness and talents, eventually her popularity "goes south." Her first big mistake is to sing happy birthday on Hillari's birthday, even when asked by Hillari not to do so. When she finally appears on Hot Seat, the students selected to ask the interview questions, led by Hillari, get angry and hostile toward her. But Stargirl maintains her cool and even shines. Still, there are rumblings of discontent in school with Stargirl. Stargirl then makes a more fatal mistake: she begins to cheer for both teams at the game and even runs to the aid of an injured player on the visiting team. When Mica's team begins losing, Stargirl is the blame. Along with that she is overheard saying her own words to the Pledge of Allegiance and is considered un-American.

While all this is happening Leo and Stargirl continue falling in love. Although they are close outside of school few know they are a couple. When Stargirl puts a note on the school bulletin board proclaiming her love for Leo, things start to fall apart for him. Leo begins to be ostracized along with Stargirl...guilt by association, and instead of being proud of his love for her, he continues to try to hide his connection to her.

Leo begs Stargirl to "become normal." Almost overnight, she changes. She comes to school looking like the other girls and calling herself Susan (which is her actual given name.) Her one and only true friend Dori Dilson is upset with her for changing, but Leo thinks it's great, at first. They all soon discover the students still don't accept Stargirl completely.

They know she is different. She has been labeled different. She can't escape the label. Near the end of the novel we get great insight into her feelings about life in a speech she gives at a contest in Phoenix. In the speech she talks about the complexities of life, what we should notice, what we hold dear, and what we might see and hear if we pay attention. She called her speech "I Might Have Heard a Moa."

When Stargirl decides to form a singing group Leo and Kevin believe she is getting "goofy" again. It is a big joke at school. Stargirl and Dori, the only two in the group, do a duet in the courtyard. And, even though they are good, the others make fun of them.

The night of the Ocotillo Ball arrives, and Leo has not invited Stargirl to go with him. He can't resist watching the Ball from a distance. Stargirl did go to the Ball however, and students and parents were enchanted again. Ordinary boys asked her to dance. Others joined in and did the bunny hop, but Stargirl disappeared that night, forever. Later that summer Leo tried to find Stargirl, but found only the For Sale sign in front of her house.

At the end of this novel, it is fifteen years later and Leo goes to see Archie. Leo asks Archie if he will ever see Stargirl again. Archie gives him cryptic answers. "Star people are rare. You'll be lucky to meet another." He goes on to say that, "...every once in a while someone comes along who is a little more primitive than the rest of us, a little closer to our beginnings, a little more in touch with the stuff we're made of."

Next Archie takes Leo to Stargirl's "workroom" which was an old tool shed on Archie's property. Inside they find maps and photo albums containing pictures and stories about ordinary citizens and students at Mica High. Then, later, on his last visit with Archie (as



Archie seems to be aware of his impending death), Archie asks Leo to take him out into the foothills where he picks out a hole in a rock in which he places his prize Paleocene rodent along with a slip of paper. The reader is not told what is on the slip of paper.

In the conclusion of the novel (written like an addendum) entitled "More Than Stars" the reader is given an update on many of the characters. Kevin is an insurance salesman. No one knows what happened to Wayne Parr. The high school has a new club called the Sunflowers and to join you have to promise to do something nice for someone every day.

When Leo visits Mica he always drives by Stargirl's house. When he reads the newspaper he looks for the fillers, the articles about random acts of kindness. He thinks of Stargirl often, of her acts of kindness. Then out of the blue, just one day before his birthday, he received a gift-wrapped package in the mail with a porcupine necktie in it, and he knows she is still out there.



Introduction

Introduction Summary

In the introduction we are introduced to the main character Leo Borlock who is also the narrator of the story. He is twelve-years-old and about to move from his home in Pennsylvania to Mica Arizona. On moving day his Uncle Pete gives Leo his porcupine quill tie (which Leo always liked and admired). Leo decides he is going to collect porcupine quill ties. Fast-forward two years and the story moves to Mica, Arizona. Leo is now fourteen-years-old.

It is a custom of the local newspaper to write a brief article on those celebrating birthdays. Leo's name appears with a line about his desire to collect porcupine ties. Later that day Leo finds a gift on his porch, a tie with three porcupines on it.

Introduction Analysis

This Introduction does three things: it introduces the rather casual and personable voice of the main character, Leo, (a likable, down-to-earth voice) and it also serves to foreshadow something rather strange or mysterious is going to happen in the story. Thirdly, it tells us a bit about Leo's past and places him in a new setting.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

When the chapter opens it is the first day of high school in Mica, Arizona, Leo's friend Kevin asks him, "Did you see her?" Kevin is referring to the new girl who is all the buzz. He tells Leo about the new girl with the strange name of Stargirl Caraway. When Kevin finally sees her in the lunchroom he can't believe his eyes. She is wearing a long off-white gown with ruffles around the neck and hem and she is carrying a ukulele (a small four-string Hawaiian guitar), and a canvas bag with a sunflower design on it. Kevin tells Leo that Stargirl is in the 10th grade and has been home schooled until now.

Stargirl sits alone eating her lunch as the whole lunchroom focus their eyes on her. Kevin has the brilliant idea to write an article about Stargirl for the school paper called Hot Seat. The paper mostly does interviews of honor students and athletes, but Kevin thinks Stargirl would make a perfect subject for the paper.

Suddenly, Stargirl gets up from her seat and begins to play the ukulele and singing. She is strumming and singing "I'm Looking Over A Four Leaf Clover," dancing and twirling around as she does. As she passes Leo's table he gets a good look at her and notices she is different. Unlike the other girls, she is not wearing any makeup at all. He also takes note of her freckles and her very big eyes, describing them as big as "deer eyes." The boys decide to write an article about Stargirl Caraway.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter serves to introduce the main characters and the setting, Mica Area High.

We are also starting to get to see the unusual and very bold character of Stargirl.

A few predictable things happen in this scene. The new girl sits alone in the lunchroom. She is the subject of gossip and speculation, but she confirms she is different by getting up and playing her odd instrument and singing a song that is very old, and very traditional. The song is "I'm Looking Over a Four Leaf Clover," significant because Stargirl is that rare "four leaf clover" herself.

The tension in the story begins right here. We are as curious about Stargirl as is Leo and Kevin. We too find her odd and intriguing. We can only hold our breath to see how she fares in this environment of conformity and cliques.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The chapter starts with Hillari Kimball "holding court at the door" of school, and telling Leo and Kevin she believes that Stargirl "is not real...that Stargirl is a plant." Hillari believes that Stargirl has been hired by the school to try to encourage school spirit. Kevin tends to agree and says that they can use the newspaper to expose her, and that if they do, paper ratings will go sky high.

The second day of school Stargirl comes dressed in a "Heidi costume" complete with pigtails, freckles added to her already freckled face and little circles of rouge on her cheeks. In the lunchroom Stargirl takes her time looking around and staring at each person, one at a time. As she comes to the table where Leo and Kevin are sitting Kevin looks at her and says, "Hi Stargirl." She does not reply, but instead goes over to a senior, described as a "pudding" of a boy and sings happy birthday to him. A discussion ensues in which the boys conclude that she can't be real. If she is real, they agree, she will not survive.

Day after day Stargirl comes to school with something unusual on. A flapper dress one day, a kimono another, an Indian outfit, but her "normal" attire is a pioneer dress.

Her behavior continues to be very odd. For example: In class, Stargirl asks questions that seem to have nothing to do with the lesson at hand. In Geometry she makes up a song about a triangle, which she sings to the teacher. She joins the track team and runs in the wrong direction at a meet and is eventually dismissed. And, she causes quite a stir when the students discover that she has a pet rat in the canvas bag she carries to school each day.

Still, Leo spends a considerable amount of time thinking about Stargirl. In fact, each evening as he is falling asleep, as the moonlight drifts into his room, he thinks of Stargirl.

Chapter 2 Analysis

This chapter continues to portray Stargirl as odd, unique, anything but a conformist. But, at this point there is curiosity about her more than anything else. Many believe, like Hillari suspects, that she is a plant, someone hired to get their attention, an actress perhaps. Leo is aware that Stargirl has "knocked us off balance." And, we begin to suspect that Leo is the one knocked off balance the most. He seems to be spellbound, taken with Stargirl. Could he be falling in love? Yet, we also sense he is worried about her. He is sure that she is too different to survive Mica Area High. This chapter clearly foreshadows the problems that will befall Stargirl and Leo later in the novel. It also sets up Hillari as a troublemaker, someone who wants to control and lead the way.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Conflict begins between Leo and Kevin in this chapter, as Kevin is upset with Leo for not setting up an interview with Stargirl for Hot Seat. We learn about how much Kevin and Leo have in common, so their conflict over this issue is worrisome. It seems to suggest that Leo is falling away from the normalcy and stability that Kevin offers. Meanwhile Stargirl continues her eccentric behavior. She laughs when there are no jokes. She dances when there is no music. She tells people she has no television. When Stargirl comes near to Leo he feels warm all day. He is clearly smitten with her. Hillari's theory about Stargirl changes. She guesses that Stargirl might be trying out for a movie, or that Stargirl is an Alien, or that she belongs to the circus. There is a growing sense that Hillari is going to be trouble for Stargirl simply because she can't figure her out. Hillari likes to know everything, likes to be the center of attention, likes to be correct, and likes her instructions followed. Stargirl does none of these things. A quote from the narrator puts the inability to figure out Stargirl this way: "She was elusive. She was today. She was tomorrow. She was the faintest scent of cactus flower, the flitting shadow of an elf owl. We did not know what to make of her. In our minds we tried to pin her to a corkboard like a butterfly, but the pin merely went through and away she flew."

At the end of this chapter we see Leo following Stargirl on an evening walk. He sees her drop off a gift in someone's mailbox and watches her veer off the highway and seemingly walk directly into the setting sun.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Clearly we see a building conflict between Hillary and Stargirl (unintentional on Stargirl's part). We also sense that Stargirl is being described (and is beginning to be seen by the narrator) as someone not only mysterious, but somehow connected to the beauty that is the earth. There are many descriptions in this chapter that compare her to the natural environment. For example: "For a minute the mountains were the same dusky lavender as her sand-skimming skirt." There is also a growing sense of concern for Stargirl on the part of Leo. He says he wants to warn her of something, but he does not know what that "something" is. The readers sees Stargirl as not just an odd person here, but someone who is more a part of the beauty of the natural setting than a part of any clique. There is the hint that there is beauty in difference, beauty in the desert if we look closely.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

We are introduced to Hillari Kimble and Wayne Parr. Hillari is described as a hoaxter and complainer. Her boyfriend, Wayne Parr is the opposite. He is quiet, and known for his good looks. He is described as Gorgeous. The narrator calls him "The Grand Marshal of our daily parade." Wayne is interviewed for Hot Seat and we learn his goal in life is to be a model in Gentleman's Quarterly Magazine.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Both Hillari and Wayne represent the kind of students we all know. Hillari is annoying, bossy, and we sense she is trouble and wouldn't want to get on her bad side. Wayne is worshipped simply because of his good looks. Still, we have to question why the others buy into the power these two have in the high school culture. The reference to Wayne as Grand Marshall suggests that the students just march along behind Wayne simply because it has become the thing to do. No one is questioning why anymore, as if his good looks and affiliation with Hillari is enough to make him someone important.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Kevin calls Leo and tells him to hurry to the football game. When Leo arrives he sees Stargirl on the field cheering and doing strange antics all over the field. She is clearly entertaining the crowd as they cheer her on. Still, the referee is not amused. He orders her off. The police appear to be willing to remove her. But, then Stargirl gets the hint and runs off of the field as the audience cheers. Thousands of people show up for the next game expecting to see Stargirl cheer. But she doesn't show up. Several days later Mallory Stillwell, captain of the cheerleading squad sits with Stargirl at lunch and invites her to become a cheerleader. Stargirl says yes. Stargirl seems to be getting more popular, and yet few want to really get close to her.

Chapter 5 Analysis

This is an important Chapter because we learn that once Stargirl gives the school community something they want, that is, once she improves school spirit (and some suggest that is why their football team is now a winning team), they are willing to accept her. But, looking more closely there are hints that many will not really accept her as they do others. The narrator puts it this way, "At the same time we held back...because she was different. Different? We had no one to compare her to, no one to measure her against. She was unknown territory. Unsafe. We were afraid to get too close."



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Hillari approaches Stargirl in the lunchroom and tells her not to sing Happy Birthday to her the next day (on Hillari's birthday), and Stargirl says she won't. The next day the tension in the lunchroom is obvious as everyone waits to see what happens. As Stargirl stands up and begins strolling and strumming, she walks over to Leo and sings Happy Birthday to Hillari (instead of directly to Hillari). At the end of the song the students applaud. Hillari stomps out of the lunchroom. Later, when Kevin asks Stargirl why she sang to Leo instead of to Hillari, she says, "He's cute." Kevin and Leo then agree it is time to visit Archie.

Chapter 6 Analysis

It is clear now that Stargirl has outsmarted Hillari and has made a fool of her as well. This spells danger for Stargirl. Because we know how crass and controlling Hillari is this foreshadows trouble. It is also important that others now know that Stargirl "likes" Leo, thinks he is cute. The situation is too complex for the boys to figure out without help. They agree to go to someone they know is a good sounding board, an adult friend and philosopher of sorts. They go to Archie.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

We are introduced to the character of A.H. (Archibald Hapwood) Brubaker (Archie) who lives in "a house of bones." He is a retired University Professor/ paleontologist who has collected bones from all over the American West. Standing near his house is an Old Saguaro he calls Senor Saguaro. The Old Cactus is tattered and an owl nests in his chest. The students visit Archie to talk about science and have formed a group they call The Loyal Order of the Stone Bone.

Leo and Kevin visit Archie and ask if he knows Stargirl. He does. Archie agrees that Stargirl is different, yet he does not express his opinion about her. The boys also learn that Stargirl comes from a normal home, with normal parents. Kevin mentions that he wants to put Stargirl on Hot Seat. The three talk until dark and say adios to Senor Saguaro on their way out.

Chapter 7 Analysis

This chapter introduces Archie as a sounding board, not someone who judges others. He tends to let the students who visit him figure things out for themselves. Perhaps the author is suggesting that life is the best teacher. Archie is also someone who seems to appreciate things most people do not. The old Saguaro is a symbol of that appreciation. Archie knows and has accepted Stargirl too. He does not really see her as odd in a dangerous or disturbing way. He calls her a "Rara avis," or rare bird. He ends his discussion with the boys telling them they should look at Stargirl until they see someone they know. He is suggesting that they may see bits of themselves as well as others.

Chapters 8 - 9

Chapters 8 - 9 Summary

By December, Stargirl has become the most popular person in school. The narrator speculates as to the reasons. Some think it is cheerleading, others think it is Hillari backlash. When a crowd gathers at the top of a stairwell, Leo goes to check it out and sees Hillari holding Cinnamon (Stargirl's pet rat) over the railing as if to drop him. A voice in the crowd says, "Don't, Hillary," and she drops Cinnamon at her feet, on the floor. We also meet Dori Dilson, an average-looking young lady who carries around a notebook full of poems, but she is Stargirl's friend.

Things seem to be changing all over Mica High. Students begin to copy Stargirl's good deeds. Cliques seem to disappear. Individuality erupts. Stargirl wins an oratory contest with a speech about the Elf Owl. Leo tells Archie that the transformation is like a miracle.

Chapters 8 - 9 Analysis

When we look at Chapters 8 and 9 together we can see the change that is happening at Mica High. We sense that something will go wrong as this is out of character for a high school population. We can't imagine the cliques dissolving so quickly. We get a glimpse, however, of what the environment can be like. Some of the students have taken on Stargirl-like behavior. But, the narrator foreshadows what will happen when he says, "It was a golden age, those few weeks in December and January. How could I know that when the end came, I would be in the middle of it?" The reference to a golden age suggests that the change is miraculously peaceful, but perhaps it is an illusion that will pass as every "age" does.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Leo agrees to put Stargirl on Hot Seat. It was set for February. Things seemed to be going good for Stargirl, and for the school community, and then things change again. Stargirl is overheard saying a bizarre version of the Pledge of Allegiance and some are offended even though they are not patriotic.

Then Stargirl visits the wake of Anna Gridale's grandfather. Anna seems annoyed by this because Stargirl didn't know her grandfather. Stargirl leaves a bicycle for a terminally ill boy who is returning home from the hospital. This odd behavior is noted, and yet her popularity continues to grow.

Chapter 10 Analysis

When we look closely at this chapter we realize that people in the school and community at large are not use to being treated with the kindness that Stargirl gives them. They suspect her of wanting more, having ulterior motives. Still they continue to accept her primarily because they need her to cheer for the basketball season. The fact that the community is described as not particularly patriotic, yet offended is important here. This would be a good time to discuss nationalism (blind belief and knee-jerk reactions to the hint of anyone steering from that belief). The school functions as a microcosm of what happens in this country and throughout the world when such beliefs (even in jest) are questioned.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Stargirl continues to get attention for her cheerleading. She not only cheers for her team, but cheers no matter who makes a basket. Off the court, she cheers everything anyone does that seems to her to need cheering. She embarrasses some people with her cheering, while others just laugh at this and for the most part accept her, at least on the surface. The basketball team has an amazing winning streak and the school spirit became not just the desire to win, but also the need to win. At an away game the house is packed. Mica fans expect a slaughter. The need to destroy the other team causes Stargirl to leave the gym. Then the cheerleaders trick her into missing the bus back to Mica.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The mob mentality of winning is the focus of this chapter. Stargirl wants none of it. It seems she can't be happy, or cheer unless everyone is somewhat happy. Winning is ok, but the need to slaughter them is distasteful to her. She doesn't understand this furious need to win at all cost. She is more centered in peace and harmony, kindness and acceptance.

Chapters 12 - 13

Chapters 12 - 13 Summary

We learn about the history of Hot Seat and the first close up cameraman named Chico. The procedure for Hot Seat was that a host and "victim" (interviewee) are both set up with a clip-on mike. Then a jury of students passes around a hand- held mike and ask questions. The questions are intended to stir things up, probing in a personal way. Stargirl is the guest on Hot Seat. The students who had asked to be on the jury were more aggressive and rude than normally. At first Stargirl froze, like cornered prey, but then reacted as if she were actually in a flaming hot seat. She screamed, and then pantomimed being burned. It was a great performance. As Kevin takes over the interview and things seem to be back to normal, he questions her unusual name. They seem to be having a normal interview when members of the jury begin a full frontal, personal attack. They gang up on her. Stargirl's eyes fill with tears and the teacher-in-charge pulls the switch on the show.

Chapters 12 - 13 Analysis

Just when we think Stargirl is in trouble we see she can laugh at herself. She can take a difficult moment and make light of it. We can only concur that she, once again, has gotten the upper hand. The jury had plans to burn her. She played along and ended with the upper hand,. We see her strength of character here and begin to think she is invincible. We get a false sense of security, or do we? When the jury, lead by Hillari, begins a personal attack, and tell Stargirl to leave the school, her eyes fill with tears, but we are not sure if the tears are for herself or for the students who persecute her. Clearly they take pleasure in the persecution. We are left to wonder why. We see things slipping away for Stargirl.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

After the Hot Seat ordeal Stargirl goes back to doing good deeds, being kind to others, giving little gifts. At the basketball game that evening she did not cheer for the other team. The home team (Electrons), were out-ranked by Sun Valley, mostly because of a big student named Ron Kovac. When Kovac is injured, it is not just his team members and cheerleaders who run to his aid, Stargirl does as well. Without Kovac, the Electrons win. But, two nights later the Electrons lose to Glendale. Everyone seems downhearted except for Stargirl. She cheers anyway. Until someone hit her in the face with a tomato -which caused everyone to laugh. The next morning Leo found a card tucked in his notebook. It was from Stargirl declaring her love, signed in a graphic of a star with a girl.

Chapter 14 Analysis

This is the turning point in the story. The tomato in the face was an expression of real hatred and when the crowd laughs at Stargirl's misfortune we know she has many enemies. The rather crude graphic on the Valentine she gives Leo suggests she is innocent in intent and in her love. Her love seems pure, like that of a child. We wonder what Leo will do with this declaration of love.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

At lunch the next day Stargirl sits with her friends. She did not sing or play her ukulele. Instead of leaving the lunchroom when she was finished, she walks over to Leo and says "Hi Leo." This throws him off. He acts stunned. Later, hiding in his bedroom, he thinks of her as he is falling asleep. In the morning Kevin and Leo go to visit Archie. Archie already knows what happened to Stargirl. He listens to the boys complain about the game and indirectly gives advice.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Archie has already demonstrated he serves as a philosopher for the boys. In this chapter, when they complain that their team lost a basketball game, Archie uses a skull of a extinct animal to give the boys a lesson about winning and losing. He tells them that in the game of life, the skull was annihilated, not in high school, but forever. Gone. This puts the problems the boys face in perspective.



Chapters 16 - 17

Chapters 16 - 17 Summary

At lunch the next day, Stargirl walks over to Leo and says, "You're Welcome." He assumes she means for the card he did not acknowledge. When she leaves, Kevin declares that Stargirl is in love with Leo. After school Leo walks to her homeroom, to the bus, everywhere, but can't find Stargirl. He overhears a group of girls saying that Stargirl has been kicked off the cheerleading squad. The girls also tease Leo and call him Starboy.

Later in the evening Leo goes to see where Stargirl lives. As he is standing outside of her house she exits the front door. They talk. They tease each other. Even the pet rat, Cinnamon shows some affection for Leo. As they say goodbye Leo wishes he could stay right there.

Kevin confirms to Leo that he is in love with Stargirl. Stargirl asks Leo if he believes in enchanted places and offers to take him to such a place. They walk out into the desert where Stargirl shows Leo the beauty of the desert through her eyes, the amazing plants, the washes and gullies; the Maricopas are lavender in the distance. Stargirl does cartwheels and then takes Leo's arm and tells him to scream. He does not. Stargirl tells Leo she has learned how to erase herself. When they get to her special place they sit very quietly in lotus-style together. Leo becomes aware of his own breath and heartbeat but never feels like he truly erases himself, never really blending into the desert. They wait until nightfall then leave the desert hand-in-hand.

Chapters 16 - 17 Analysis

In these two chapters Stargirl and Leo express their love for each other. But, in order to understand each other and be in sync they need to get away from the normal environment of school and home. Stargirl takes him into the desert hoping she can share her love of the beauty of nature with him. Cinnamon seems to have an easier time meditating than Leo does. And we wonder if, in being so normal and so human, if Leo has lost something that Stargirl and Cinnamon have.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Stargirl and Leo are in love. They are so focused on each other that it takes Leo a few days to realize they are being shunned. No one speaks to them or even nods their way. They are so ignored that Leo tells Kevin he feels invisible. Kevin tells Leo that it is not he, but his association with Stargirl that is causing this, that Stargirl is getting "the silent treatment." Leo tries to defend Stargirl asking why the good things she does doesn't count for something.

Leo grows paranoid and is very aware of the cold treatment he is getting from others. Stargirl doesn't seem to notice.

Chapter 18 Analysis

The placement of this chapter is important. It comes right after Stargirl and Leo's visit to the desert. Stargirl tries to help Leo meditate, becoming one with the desert, "erasing" himself. Now Leo has been erased by the others simply because he loves and appreciates Stargirl. Stargirl has learned how to just exist, in and apart from what others do and think. Leo can't do this and is in emotional pain over the shunning. He can't seem to actually divorce himself from wanting to be accepted in the school culture. We see a weakness (which is a normal weakness) in Leo in this chapter.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Leo goes to talk with Archie about what is happening to him and Stargirl at school. It is then he hears the word shunning for the first time. Archie explains that the Amish in Pennsylvania shun those who violate the dictates of their culture. Archie tells Leo that the solution is easy; he can stay away from Stargirl. Leo asks Archie if he believes in enchanted places and Archie says "Absolutely." The two of them go to stand before Senor Saguro and Leo tells Archie that Stargirl seems to be in touch with something the rest of us are missing. Archie tells Leo we are all at that place, that more primitive place, just as we are coming out of sleep in the morning before we become something else. Archie explains Leo's situation to Senor Saguro (in Spanish). Then Archie answers for Senor Saguro suggesting that Leo has to decide whom he values more, Stargirl or the others. The chapter ends with Leo in bed thinking about the decision he has to make.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Many interesting things happen in this chapter that point to the theme of the novel. Archie gives Leo an intense philosophy lesson along with some practical advice. He tells Leo this situation is not new, that many cultures shun people who don't follow the rules, who take their own path. Archie also uses the natural objects around him, particularly Senor Saguro to give advice thus hinting that many of the answers lie in nature, and in close examination of the frail, human condition. We see the struggle that Leo is having as the chapter ends. He admits to understanding what Archie is asking. He also says he doesn't want to make a decision between Stargirl and the others. Again, Leo seems so much like the rest of us. He embodies the quandaries our various groups and "cultures" put us in.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

The basketball team finals are posted on Roadrunner and Mica's team is not listed. The school is bitter about that fact. Meanwhile, Stargirl has qualified for the state finals in the oratorical contest and when her qualification is announced over the P.A. Leo stops himself from cheering as he hears others boo her. They are still a couple however. Stargirl practices her speech in front of Leo. They ride bikes together, then walk and talk. Leo learns how to see things through Stargirl's eyes. He learns how to revel and wonder about the beauty around them. They look at simple things, normal things and wonder and appreciate them together: the color of someone's front door, the strength of an ant carrying something across the sidewalk. When Leo tells Stargirl he wants to be a T.V. director, she tells him she wants to be "a silverlunchtruckdriver," because people get so excited when the truck pulls up. Stargirl also shares information about how she knows who to give gifts to, who to surprise with a good deed, and tells why she doesn't leave her name on the gift. At the end of Chapter 20 Leo looks at Stargirl and sees her as if she is a photograph from a hundred years ago.

Chapter 20 Analysis

We get a clearer sense of Stargirl's pure intentions in this chapter. She does not want to be someone famous or important in the sense that others might think as important. She just wants to do something that makes others happy. We also learn about how focused on doing good deeds Stargirl is, and we learn that getting credit for those deeds is not what motivates her. When Leo looks at her and she appears to be someone from the past, the author is telling us that even if we think of ourselves as having made great progress over the centuries, we may have lost our more giving nature, our selfless nature along the way.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Leo and Stargirl work together delivering gifts to unsuspecting strangers. Stargirl also finally tells Leo how she knows when it is appropriate to give someone a gift. She shows him how she reads bulletin boards for information, and also how she scans the paper to find unusual bits of information. Leo and Stargirl go into a pizza parlor together and she shows him what she learns from the bulletin board. She then challenges Leo to a game to test what he has learned and they observe a woman. The chapter ends as Leo calls Stargirl the "Johnny Appleseed of loose change," as he witnesses her tossing coins here and there, leaving them on shelves for other people to discover.

Chapter 21 Analysis

We learn even more about Stargirl's generosity and selflessness in this chapter. She takes the time to look for someone who needs cheering up, someone who should be recognized and when we observe her dropping coins here and there, leaving them for others to discover, we can equate her to someone like Johnny Appleseed who planted seeds in the hope that he was giving something to future generations, people he would never know.



Chapters 22 - 23

Chapters 22 - 23 Summary

Leo goes to dinner at the Caraway's house and is surprised at how very normal they are. He is given a tour of Stargirl's room and is surprised how normal and ordinary it is. They talk about Archie briefly and Stargirl says she thinks of Archie as a grandfather.

Then Stargirl reveals two unusual things in her room: A wooden bowl containing her own hair that she says is nesting material for the birds. She also shows Leo her "happy wagon" and explains that when she is happy she adds a stone to the wagon. When she is sad she takes one away. After dinner Stargirl points out her five-year-old neighbor, tells Leo she is doing a picture biography taking ordinary pictures so he will have more than the posed shots of his life when he grows up. The evening ends with their first kiss.

Clearly Leo and Stargirl are in love. They do all of the things that teens in love do. They walk and talk together. They share pizza and banana smoothies. They never talk, however, about the shunning in school, even though that shunning is growing more and more obvious. Leo finally reveals his discomfort with what is happening to them at school.

Some of the students have begun to call Stargirl names. Among the names are, "Spotlight Hogger," and "Phoney." Most disturbing is the fact they are now blaming her that the Mica Electrons Basketball Team is not in the championship finals. Leo wants to stand by her side —until she does something that makes everything worse for both of them.

Chapters 22 - 23 Analysis

On the surface Stargirl's life is quite ordinary. She lives in an ordinary house with ordinary parents, which confuses Leo. Even her room is ordinary until Stargirl shows him the unique things she has hidden there. The room can be a symbol for how it is that we must sometimes look beyond the surface of things to see the extraordinary. The author is suggesting we might find such these things in the lives of others.

Also we can see that Stargirl has become a scapegoat for the failures of others, their failure to shine, to be themselves. They extend their suspicion of her; make her the easy blame for their losing team as well.



Chapters 24 - 25

Chapters 24 - 25 Summary

Several days after their first kiss Leo hears people whispering about Roadrunner. When he goes to see what the buzz is about he can see, even from a distance, what is on the bulletin board. Centered inside of a large red heart are the words, "Stargirl Loves Leo." Leo knows this cannot be good. He knows he has already "suffered" from his friendship with and love for Stargirl and so he tries to distance himself from her, beginning with trying to avoid her. Leo ignores her for days, even going the other way when he sees her, but she does not give up on him. She corners him and asks that they talk. Leo then confronts the issue, telling Stargirl that something has got to change. He goes on to explain all of the things that she does that has led to their unpopularity. Their conversation about acceptance and conformity goes on for several days. When Leo finally makes it clear he wants Stargirl to change, to be more normal, she seems to vanish from school.

Chapters 24 - 25 Analysis

Here we see Leo giving into peer pressure. Even though he is clearly in love with Stargirl he is admitting now he believes her individuality is not worth the pain. He takes the coward's way out, as many of us would. She shows her strength of character when instead of getting angry with him and breaking up, she insists they talk it out. We know Stargirl is planning something when we discover she is not very visible at school.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Leo does not see Stargirl in the usual places at school. He does see Dori in the lunchroom, but Stargirl is not with her. Instead Dori is sitting with someone else. Later he hears Stargirl's voice in the hall and turns to where the voice is coming from. He then looks closely and sees Stargirl has transformed herself into someone who looks like every other popular girl in school. She wears fashionable clothes, earrings, even makeup. When Leo approaches her and says her name, she corrects him and says her name is Susan. Leo likes the change and describes their relationship as "gloriously ordinary." Instead of going about doing good deeds and acts of kindness Stargirl begins to love to shop, to do and say ordinary things. When there is a decision to make Stargirl asks Leo what "Evelyn Everybody" would do in a similar situation.

What seems odd to them both is that despite the changes others still do not totally accept Stargirl. Stargirl then decides to enter the State Oratorical Contest that is a week away.

Chapter 26 Analysis

When Stargirl and Leo are happy we can't help think that Stargirl has transformed to prove a point. She is satirical when she refers to herself as "Evelyn Everybody." She doesn't seem at all bothered by the fact that others still do not accept her. She goes on with her own plans, looking beyond the crowd.



Chapters 27 - 28

Chapters 27 - 28 Summary

Mr. McShane, the faculty representative takes Susan (Stargirl) and Leo to the oratorical contest while Susan's parents drive in their own car. In the backseat of Mr. McShane's car Susan tells Leo that Dori is mad at her for changing—for betraying herself. Together they joke about how others will react if Stargirl wins the contest. Stargirl convinces Mr. McShane to stop along the road and she gets out of the car. She stands before an audience of cacti and practices her speech.

There are two rounds in the contest. Susan had prepared a wonderful speech entitled, "I Might Have Heard a Moa." However, in the semi-final round, the speech surprises Leo, as it is not the speech she has practiced.

In the final round she delivers an altogether different speech (with the same Title however), and more like a casual talk on someone's front porch. At the very end Susan's voice drifts off, becomes very soft, almost inaudible. Then Susan takes her seat on the stage, puts her hands in her lap and asks, "Can you hear it?" The audience responds with wild applause.

Chapters 27 - 28 Analysis

In these two chapters we see Susan clearly becoming Stargirl again. Her behavior is becoming spontaneous again. She also shows her reverence for the earth in two ways: First when she practices her speech in the desert to the cacti. Second when she calls her speech "I Might Have Heard a Moa." The Moa is a large extinct, flightless bird, resembling the emu. She is asking the audience to listen to the past, respect it, but she is also saying that if we try hard enough we can hear things that have been lost.



Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

Stargirl wins the speech contest as she had said she would. That evening Leo and Stargirl are allowed to join the adults in the nightclub where they celebrate, drinking ginger ale and dancing. Stargirl's picture appears in the newspaper the next day, and there is even a report about the contest on the television news. People in the hotel congratulate her when they see her. When they return to Mica High however, only Dori and two teachers are there to congratulate her. Dori is holding a sign that says, "Way to Go Susan. We're Proud of You."

Chapter 29 Analysis

We can see what a good friend Dori is to Stargirl. Although she is still somewhat angry with Stargirl for trying to be someone she is not, Dori knows that a good friend cheers on a friend no matter what. The fact that she calls Stargirl, Susan, tells her she will respect her friend's choices and decisions even if she does not like them.



Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

Stargirl does not seem surprised over the small gathering in the school parking lot. She seems content to celebrate with those who have shown up to congratulate her. Leo is surprised when Mr. Caraway gives him Stargirl's silver plate (trophy).

The following Monday, the old Stargirl is back in full force. She has her Ukulele and Cinnamon in tow. When she gives smiley face cookies to everyone in the lunchroom Hillari takes her cookie and uses her shoe to smash it to bits. All the while Dori stands and applauds the return of Stargirl.

On their walk home from school that day, Stargirl and Leo discuss the upcoming Ocotillo Ball and it is clear that Stargirl expects Leo to ask her and Leo is hesitant about doing so.

The next day Leo sees a sign up sheet on Roadrunner announcing a musical group called the Ukee Dooks and he notices names like Minnie Mouse and Darth Vader are written there. Even Kevin remarks that, "She's turning goofy again..." Still, the girls go ahead with their singing group, while the students continue to make fun of them. Embarrassed by the situation Leo finds a way to sneak out of school so he could avoid Stargirl

Chapter 30 Analysis

Again we see the strength of character in Stargirl, but also in Dori. Dori is downplayed in this novel but she seems to emerge as the only person who has not given into the peer pressure. Even Stargirl has changed (perhaps to teach us a lesson), but Dori has always been true to herself and to her friend. This is more than we can say about Leo. It becomes too painful for him. His character is not strong enough to stand up to the embarrassment, or the peer pressure.



Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Summary

Leo doesn't go to the Ocotillo Ball with Stargirl. He rides his bike to the tennis courts of the Mica Country Club to watch from a distance. He notices the desert is changing. The desert flowers, so abundant earlier in the year, are fading now. Stargirl did go to the Ball. She arrived in a bicycle side care with Dori peddling the bicycle. Her dress is remarkable and her hair is incredible, done up in ringlets. She also wears a necklace that identifies her as a member of the Loyal Order of the Stone Bone. She is described as "Beautiful, Unusual, Interesting, Different, and Regal." A very ordinary student asks her to dance. After this many of the students became antsy. Then the band played the bunny hop and within seconds, Stargirl was leading a caravan of dancers who were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

Hillari Kimball and Leo Parr tried to regain the spotlight from Stargirl but it didn't work. At the end of the evening Hillari walked up to Stargirl, slapped her, and told her that she ruins everything. Stargirl left as graciously as she had arrived; it was the last time anyone ever saw her.

Chapter 31 Analysis

It is interesting that away from the pressure of Mica High the students can appreciate Stargirl. She is still exotic, and bizarre in her behavior, but perhaps that is why the "ordinary" Raymond Studemacher asks her to dance. Perhaps he sees in Stargirl someone who is as different from the others as he is; someone brave enough to step forward and be herself. But, clearly there is no changing the likes of Hillari Kimball. Her anger, jealousy, and need to control do not give in to even a momentary change in peer pressure. In effect, she remains in high school while we can see the others moving beyond the cliques and ideas so firmly entrenched there.



Chapters 32 - 33

Chapters 32 - 33 Summary

It is Valentine's Day fifteen years later. Leo returns to Mica and visits Archie. They sit, talking about how nothing has changed and yet, everything has changed. Leo asks Archie if Stargirl was real. "Yes," he tells Leo, "She was real." He says that Stargirl was just more primitive than the rest of us.

On a return visit Archie shows Leo Stargirl's office in Archie's tool shed, where she mapped out her plans; where she made Birthday cards and other gifts. He shows Leo a photo album of "The Early Life of Peter Sinkowitz." He discovers that Stargirl had folder on all of them, Kevin, Dori, Danny Pike, even Hillari and Wayne.

Leo continues to visit Archie whenever he returns home, even after college. On his final visit Archie asks Leo to drive him out to the desert. They stop on the side of the road and walk a short distance to an outcropping of rocks. Archie uses an axe to dig a hole in one of the rocks. He places Barney in the hole and says, "This is home." Then he takes a scrap of paper from his pocket and puts it in the hole before he seals the rock back up. The rock looks undisturbed. When Leo asks Barney what was written on the paper, Archie says, "A word."

Chapters 32 - 33 Analysis

Leo is an adult at the end of this book and yet much of what Stargirl was is still a mystery to him. He finds when he visits Archie that he still has things to discover about her. He also discovers it wasn't magic or any strange powers that created Stargirl; She worked at what she did. Archie hints that she was closer to what might be the "natural order of things." She was more "primitive." Perhaps, he wanted us to think about whether or not all of our progress, our attempts at being something other than just other animals on the earth (in the grand span of time) helping each other cope and survive is only futile.

When Archie goes into the desert to bury Barney he is putting himself there too. He knows that he too will be returned to the earth, that his bones will become part of the rock and earth. Archie seems comforted by this, not fearful or angry. He has known his place all along, as does Stargirl. We never discover what the word word was on the slip of paper. We can only guess.



Conclusion

Conclusion Summary

The book ends with Leo reflecting on his latest class reunion. Oddly enough they talk about the night Stargirl led the bunny hop. They try to recreate the magic of that night, but can't. We also learn there is a club at Mica High called "The Sunflowers," and members of the club pledge to do one nice thing a day. We also get an update on the lives of several of the students. We also see Peter Sinkowitz putting his water skis on the roof of a yellow Volkswagen Beetle. Leo says he feels guilty when he buys a card at Hallmark. He also says that he reads the newspaper looking for the little articles on acts of kindness. He finds many such articles. He continues to think about Stargirl, and one day, just before his birthday, he receives a gift-wrapped package with a porcupine necktie in it.

Conclusion Analysis

There are many things we can learn from the Conclusion. It is only now that the students of Mica High appreciate Stargirl.. She gave them pure enjoyment of course, but she also left her desire to spread kindness and good will to others. As so often happens, we don't realize what someone is giving us until they are long gone and we are older. Leo has learned from Stargirl, and he mourns the fact he has lost her -until the day he finds the gift on his porch. He then knows she is still out there watching and doing good deeds.



Characters

Leo Borlock

Leo Borlock is first presented as an average 11th grader at Mica High. We are given hints that he is an average or above average looking young man. When we see him through Stargirl's eyes, he is described as cute. Leo dreams of being a sports announcer someday and seems comfortable in his own skin, but he seems a little more sensitive to his feelings and the feelings of others than most of the other characters in the novel. He also seems intuitive, sensing things will happen. Throughout the course of the novel we see him give in to the feelings of the students around him, in that he too is somewhat embarrassed by Stargirl. This is a disappointing development because from the beginning we think he is morally stronger than that. He does suffer some anxiety and true sadness over his inability to stand up to the other conforming students of Mica High, but in the end it is too late for the potential relationship he might have with Stargirl. Later, as an adult, he consults Archie about Stargirl, and we see the lesson Leo has learned from her about conformity, good deeds, and being true to oneself.

Leo functions in the novel as the storyteller, but he also is the character who presents decisions and dilemma's that anyone at his age might face in a similar situation. We learn he is smart enough to ask for help and advice from Archie and he gives that advice consideration. He also recognizes there is something good in Stargirl. He is curious about her. He even learns how to notice the beauty around him by sitting quietly in the dessert with her. In other words, we sense he is open to change, that he can see beyond the immediate environment and this period in his life. He seems to want more. He seems to be on the brink of maturity, but not quite ready for the responsibility of maturity, although well aware that with time and maturity he will be making other choices. We ache for Leo. We can see his potential. Isn't his potential for individual thinking and good behavior in all of us?

Stargirl

When Stargirl appears at Mica High she is in the 10th grade. To say that she is eccentric in dress and behavior is an understatement. Sometimes she dresses in costumes. Later, we discover that her mother works as a seamstress making costumes. Her "ordinary" apparel is a long dress, which is described as a "Pioneer" dress. She is first described as rather average-looking with long sandy-brown hair and freckles across her nose. Her distinguishing characteristic is her very large eyes. Stargirl carries a pet rat in a bag that is decorated with a large Sunflower. She also carries her Ukulele around, plays it and sings to people for their birthday. Through the author/narrator we begin to see a girl who is untouched by the pressure to conform. She seems more in tune with nature than people, and more able to feel the joy and sorrow of others with an unmatched intensity. This is clear when she cheers at football and basketball games, attends wakes, and shares the beauty she sees in her environment with Leo.



Stargirl doesn't understand why others don't relish life to the same extent she does. She doesn't buy into their gossip or ill will. She seems pure in intent and is a sincere non-conformist. She is a friend to anyone who wishes to be her friend. Stargirl does things unselfishly and doesn't want to gain anything in return. We see that she approaches problems and challenges with a sense of humor. Clearly, she is very intelligent as well. It is rather surprising when we discover she lives in a normal/average house with normal/average parents. Stargirl seems to be the opposite of Hillari Kimble. Few of us have know a true

Stargirl. If we did, we probably steered clear. She gives us the sense that there are many people around us who have something to offer, but we fail to take the time to get to know them, because they are so very different from what is average or expected.

When Stargirl tries to change for Leo it is a disaster and the change doesn't last long. She is a shooting star in the lives of the students at Mica High. She is there, shines brightly, and then is gone. We see the culmination of what Stargirl is when she gives her final speech at Phoenix West High School. In that speech, Stargirl talks about the distant past, to the distant future, from the ordinary, to the most extraordinary. She talks about designer labels and enchanted places. She ends the speech with the image of a solitary mockingbird singing in the desert. It is clear she is like that solitary mockingbird.

Kevin Quinlan

Kevin is Leo's best friend and his partner with Hot Seat (the cable interview program produced and directed by the two boys). Kevin's dream is to be a sleazy talk show host. He is bright, a good student and although he is not in the most popular crowd he isn't on the sidelines either. He doesn't hide his feelings and tells Leo what he is thinking and feeling, even if it may not be what Leo wants to hear. Kevin seems to get a lot of pleasure out of school and his friendships. He also has a natural curiosity about things. He has an analytical mind and is always thinking, putting one and one together so to speak. He also has a sense of humor about things, and this sense of humor is highlighted through his interactions with Stargirl and others. Kevin is very much like Leo in terms of how others see him and what his status is at Mica High. He differs from Leo in that he doesn't seem to have the angst Leo has, but he doesn't have the sensitivity either. He is smart and curious for the sake of the task at hand; he doesn't seem to really want to know what lies beneath the surface in terms of feelings and motives. He just figures things out on the surface. He does function as a good friend to Leo because he is concerned about the decisions Leo is making. Kevin isn't as judgmental as many of the others at Mica are, but he doesn't stick his neck out socially either. He has a niche and functions well within that niche (as Leo's friend, as partner of Hot Seat), but he doesn't create conflict or resolve it either. His function in the story seems to be to question things and to move the plot along. He plays by the rules (as indicated when the jury questioning Stargirl get out of hand.)



A.H. (Archibald Hapwood) Brubaker or Archie

Archie is a sixty-five-year-old widowed, retired university professor who lives near the high school. He is described as an average-looking senior citizen with gray hair. As a paleontologist his hobby is collecting and studying bones. Student often come to his house for informal lessons, and he calls the gathering of students the "Loyal Order of The Stone Bone."

Archie has a special affection for one particular giant raggedy Saguaro Cactus on his property. He calls the Cactus, "Senor Saguaro," and gives the Saguaro some important status. He appreciates and respects the old Cactus. Archie is wise and gives advice without giving it directly. While the students visit him to talk about bones and such, they often share their problems and concerns with him. His advice is always without value judgements.

Archie named some of his specimens. Barney, a 60-million-year-old rodent skull, was a favorite. Barney represented life stripped down to bone. The character of Archie helps the reader look below the surface of things (an intended pun here). He has a deep appreciation for nature, both the natural progression of things in nature and in the human condition. He also seems to understand human psychology. Archibald helps us look beyond the immediate problems in the story and toward an acceptance of all things. He accepts and likes all of the young adults in the story, but seems to have a special affection and appreciation of Stargirl. He likes the idea that she cannot be described. He tells us in many ways that we have to wait and see, that life experience helps us to understand others and ourselves. He also makes us feel we cannot be separated from our natural surroundings, and that there is beauty in some of the things we might find ugly like the old Saguaro. We hear a mature adult voice through the character of Archie.

Hillari Kimble

The narrator describes her by saying, "Her face, and hair, and figure were right enough." She is the yammering, smirking, and bouncing-off-in-a-huff-type girl. We learn early on that Hillari Kimble is famous for her complaining. We also are told she is famous for a hoax, specifically the time she pretended to want to join the cheerleading squad, made the squad, then said she wasn't really interested in being on the squad. In other words Hillari always seems to want to make a point. She wants to prove she can have what she wants, but won't take just anything. She sees herself as better than others. Her boyfriend is the best looking boy (Wayne Parr) in school. And, we sense this is the only reason he is her boyfriend. He is a trophy boyfriend, someone she can show off. Hillari's temperament seems dangerous from the onset of the story. She is the girl we would want to have as a friend unless we could avoid her altogether. We sense, and learn later, that she doesn't just get angry. She gets even. We have all known a Hillari Kimble in our lives. She is the person who seems to magnify the wedge between



kindness and acceptance and un-acceptance and elitism. She likes to know what is happening and demands to be in control. When she isn't, look out!

Wayne Parr

Wayne Parr is Hillari's trophy boyfriend. He is the most gorgeous boy in school. He is popular even though no one seems to know why, except for the fact that he is gorgeous. He does nothing. He is not in sports. He does not earn A's. He holds no office in school. He is not particularly concerned or involved in anything. Still, he is popular. When interviewed by Hot Seat he says his goal in life is to be in Gentleman's Quarterly Magazine. He is a symbol for someone who is admired for the wrong reason— his looks. He truly does very little else to earn admiration. He has won popularity without really winning it. He is like a paint-by-numbers picture, not original; everything is on the surface and in perfect order, square jaw, perfect teeth and hair. And, of course, he is Hillari's boyfriend. Again, we have all known someone like Wayne Parr. Incidentally, the word Parr is a play on the word Par used in golf for the normal number of shots required for getting the ball to a particular hole on the golf course. It also means the face value of a share on the stock market. The word Parr literally translated means a young salmon or trout up to two-years-old. You take your pick with regard to the author's intent.

Dori Dilson

Dori is a brown-haired ninth grader, and Stargirl's loyal friend. She sits with Stargirl at lunch and seems to enjoy Stargirl for who she is. Dori is known for the large looseleaf notebook filled with poems she carries around with her at all times. Even when the others turn on Stargirl, Dori is there. The only time we see her upset with Stargirl is when Stargirl tries to change for Leo's sake. Dori thinks Stargirl has betrayed herself by changing for Leo's sake. Still, she gets over her anger, and stands by Stargirl cheering for her when she wins the speech contest. She even joins Stargirl in a duet in the school courtyard. Dori seems to represent the kind of friend we would like to have, the kind of friend we would like to be. She seems untouched by what others think. Like Stargirl, she has many good qualities. She just doesn't shine as brightly. She represents someone truly comfortable in her own skin, not likely to give in to peer pressure. While she is considered a minor character here, we could argue that she is the true heroine, someone we should have been looking more closely at all along.

Mr. McShane

Faculty representative to the state speech contest. He drives Stargirl (Susan) along with her guest, Leo, to the state contest in Phoenix.



Little Peter Sinkowitz

Stargirl's neighbor. Stargirl is doing a photo journal of Peter so that he will have a record of the ordinary things that happened in his life while he was growing up.

Cinnamon

Cinnamon is the rat who travels everywhere with Stargirl in the canvas bag. The bag has a picture of a Sunflower on it. Cinnamon functions as a symbol for the things we label as ugly or distasteful. Stargirl cherishes Cinnamon. Leo learns from Cinnamon. Cinnamon is fragile and vulnerable in the environment of both people and predators; still Stargirl sees his worth in and apart from herself.



Objects/Places

Senor Saguaro

Senor Saguaro is the giant tattered cactus that grows in Archie's backyard. He has become a towering and silent sage of sorts. He is a living thing, not really an object. He seems to represent the beauty we can find in things that have been a part of the earth for a long time. When the characters talk to him, they are, in fact, speaking to their own deep knowledge, their own intuition about life and the passing of time, the beauty hidden in all of us.

Barney

Barney is a 60-million-year-old Paleocene rodent skull. He is Archie's favorite specimen. Archie refers to Barney in several of his discussions with Leo. When Leo questions if Stargirl is real, Archie tell him she is as real as Barney. He is saying here that even if the form and substance of each (Barney and Stargirl) are unclear and different, they represent something important and worthy of a close look. At one point Archie calls Stargirl "Rara avis," or rare bird, confirming that she is a rare specimen as well.

Plywood Roadrunner

This is the school bulletin board.

Hot Seat

This is the school talk show that was organized and run by Leo and Kevin

Enchanted Place

A place in the desert where Stargirl takes Leo to help him get in touch with nature and with her.

The tool shed

This is Stargirl's office, a place where she makes greeting cards and plans her good deeds.



Sunflower bag

A tote bag with a big sunflower on it. It is also the vehicle used to carry Cinnamon back and forth to school

Wagon

Stargirl has a wagon under her bed in which she keeps pebbles. She puts a pebble in when she is happy, and she takes one out when she is sad.

Loyal Order of The Stone Bone

This is a club that Archie conducts at his home. The students study bones and discuss things with Archie.

The Ukee Dooks

A singing group that Stargirl and Dori form

Themes

Conformity/Individuality

The most obvious theme is the careful look at conformity and how it limits us, making us latch onto false values and means of evaluating others. We need only look to the personality (or lack thereof) of Wayne Parr. Wayne is gorgeous, but not much more of anything else. He is testimony to the fact that we tend to look at the outside and compare the exterior of people in order to evaluate. More often than not that comparison has to do with some norm, as well as the ability to spend money and adorn oneself with the latest fashion and accessories.

Throughout the novel the author suggests (through the character of Stargirl) that life might be more fun if we could let go of group notions about what is normal, and beautiful and judge for ourselves. The author also is suggesting that we might be of more value to each other if we could look beyond the surface considerations.

Stargirl is not just unusual within the walls of Mica High. Her unusual willingness to share her feelings allows her to value others joys and struggles and to give freely through random acts of kindness. Clearly, this book gives us a look at the pitfalls of both conformity and popularity, encouraging us to examine how we treat others, and how to be true to ourselves.

In the character of Archie we see an adult who is not what we expect. It is interesting that some of the students accept his differences, his eccentricities. It is almost as if individuality is more acceptable in those who are older. Also, Archie continues to ask the students to look at things that to most would seem ugly or peculiar. He has great love and respect for things in nature, such as Barney and Senor Seguario, things which would not get a second look by most. The fact that many of these things come from below the ground, before our time, or, are anchored to the ground is no coincidence. The character that seems to be overlooked by most everyone is Dori. Dori is the true individual who has somehow blended into the high school culture, but we can look to her for her strength of character and her loyalty to, not just who she is, but the value she sees in Stargirl.

Peer Pressure

We learn a lesson about conformity and peer pressure when Leo Borlock, who we begin to think is not a part of the popularity game, gives into the pressure to value that which is "normal," or beautiful, based on a norm. He can admire Stargirl, but when he is linked to her behavior, when there is no doubt about his affiliation, he is embarrassed and wants to back off. He can't take the heat. He is not as loyal as he might be if peer pressure were not a factor for him. We expect more from Leo, much like we really expect more from ourselves. He lets us down as we so often let ourselves down when



push comes to shove. Sometimes, once we gain importance and power, we feel the need to affiliate ourselves with others who have power and importance in a sub-culture like high school. Hillari does this. In fact all of her power comes from her feeling of self-importance and her affiliation to the gorgeous Wayne Parr.

The novel gives us a look at what we destroy when we shun things unlike ourselves. It also shows that some will accept those who are different if they are some use to us. Once the cheerleading captain recognizes that Stargirl has something to offer them, they accept her. They think, at first, that Stargirl is cheering the football team because she has team spirit. They later learn she just cheers anything that is fun, or good, or worth cheering. But, alas, she proves to be too different, even once she wears the cheerleading uniform, so her popularity/acceptance doesn't last long.

We also learn there is something in Stargirl that no one, not even Leo, can change. Even when she tries to convince him that she is "normal," her ability to laugh at herself, and to see the irony in what others do, remains intact. We get the feeling when she changed at Leo's urging she was doing it more to show him what she would be like if she were to give into peer pressure. By the end of the novel we realize that what survives longer than our high school popularity, is what we give to others. Stargirl is remembered for the joy she gives her class, for her good deeds, even through these things were not appreciated until she was long gone. This is what Leo remembers too. He doesn't talk about the kiss, his love for her, or how she embarrassed him. He sees that she has left good things behind. He has learned from her because she was different.

Beauty

There are surely more subtle themes here too. Archie, who serves as a kind of philosopher for the other characters, shows us the beauty in the things we tend to think of as strange. His fascination with the rodent skull asks us to look carefully, beneath the surface. Just as the desert surprises us with beauty if we look beyond the surface, if we look closely we will find beauty in all things different from what we have come to expect.

Archie even gives the old Saguaro a certain majesty and respect, and the students come to think of the Saguaro in the same way. He hopes his students learn to look beyond the tatters as well. Wayne Parr is considered good looking by the student body, and yet we can't quite figure out how he actually contributes too much of anything. He might as well be a statue, yet the school population continues to adore him. Stargirl also functions as the person who shows Leo the beauty in the desert/in nature. He did have some sense of that beauty, but that sense was limited. He wasn't looking as carefully at the things around him until Stargirl began to point them out. This began in the desert in the "enchanted place," and soon she was showing Leo how beautiful the ordinary things, like the color of someone's front door could be. She found beauty in a child playing in front of his house. She found beauty everywhere and in everyone.



Near the end of the novel we discover that Stargirl has kept folder on everyone, including those who caused her a measure of grief. Cinnamon is the epitome of something that most of us might find repulsive. She shows Leo how beautiful and sensitive this creature (a plain brown rat) actually is. She begs Leo to look closely: "Doesn't he have the cutest ears?" Then she asks him to make contact with this creature who we would normally avoid: "Tickle him behind his ears. He loves that." Stargirl is not only aware of the beauty in Cinnamon, but she needs to get close to that beauty and bids others to do so as well.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in first person narrative and Leo Borlock is the narrator. He is telling the story in present tense. The novel is rich with dialogue as well. We learn about other characters through what they say and do, but mostly through Leo's eyes. Two characters seem to take on unusual roles as far as use of language goes. We get a philosophical point of view from Stargirl, as she speaks in riddles much of the time. She encourages others to look more carefully. She makes fun of things that others seem to accept. She is always asking questions of the others that make the reader think as well. She is more playful with language as well. An example of this is when she says the Pledge of Allegiance to "United Turtles of America and to the fruit bats of Borneo, one planet in the Milky Way ..." When she does this she questions the conventional way we use language to divide ourselves, rather than unite us; to limit ourselves, rather than to connect us to the larger world in time and space.

Archie uses Spanish at various times in the novel. When he speaks to Senor Saguario he does so in Spanish, and in so doing he is suggesting that the language we use was not the first language here. He is reminding us that like the land, this other language was here first.

Archie also uses scientific terms to explain things. He uses words like fossil, extinct, paleontology, and creodont. Through Archie the students learn a language of those who are aware of the past.

Archie also speaks as a philosopher. He doesn't answer directly, but instead he asks the students who visit him questions or he speaks in riddles. When Kevin asks him if Stargirl is real he says, "Every name is real... that's the nature of names."

Archie also speaks with his actions. When he tries to explain how real Stargirl is he picks up the tiny, wedge-like skull of Barney, a 60-million-year-old rodent and holds it up telling the boys that Stargirl is as real as Barney is.

Setting

Mica Arizona is a small community in the foothills of the Miracopas (Mountain Range). Much of what happens in the story takes place in a high school setting, particularly in the lunchroom, hallways, and out on the football field or on the basketball court. Occasionally, the author takes us out into the strange and magnificent desert landscape. Both flora and fauna are described in the book. There is Porcupine Yucca, Beaver Tail, Prickly Pear, Barrel Cacti and more. Those not familiar with a desert landscape would expect the soil to be more sandy than pebbly. And the bits of mica (a silicate material found in minute shiny scales) imbedded in the soil are also surprising.



We also learn that there are ponds beneath the ground in the desert and that frogs lie dormant until the rains come.

While we are given many descriptions of homes or community buildings the reader is given a sense that they are the type of homes, albeit stucco, that you might find in any small town.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in relatively straightforward narrative with rich, clear description, in chronological order, rich with dialogue. The narrator stops now and then to pause and play with language in a rich, poetic way. An example of poetic language occurs in Chapter 3, p.12 when Leo is thinking about Stargirl: "And each night in bed I thought of her as the moon came through my window...In that moonlit hour, I acquired a sense of the otherness of things."

We also see his "poetic reflection" in chapter 9 as he reflects on his feelings through his observation of life in the desert landscape: "In the Sonoran Desert there are ponds. You could be standing in the middle of one and not know it...they lie dormant and waiting, these mud frogs, for without water, their lives are incomplete..." Then again, later in the same chapter, he compares the students at Mica High to these frogs: "We were awash in tiny attentions. Small gestures, words, empathies thought to be extinct came to life." These carefully crafted passages are not a burden on the story, but instead provide a sense of comfort no matter where the reader's empathy lies.

The dialogue is rich and realistic. We see the author's ability in many scenes. The dialogue is especially playful when Stargirl and Leo converse. We also learn about Stargirl as she responds to the questions Leo asks. Many of her answers are riddled with meaning as in chapter 17 when they are in the desert. They are talking about time and Leo asks Stargirl "Do you have time?" Her response is, "Nobody has time... time cannot be owned... time is free to everyone!"

Structure

There is a normal structure beginning with suspense and rising action. The element of suspense begins as soon as we are introduced to Stargirl and continues as we wait for Stargirl to do the unusual things she does. Like the student body at Mica High we do not know what she will do next. But we just know things will go wrong for her. She is such a surprise and so different that we know this will not fly in a high school setting for long. We are aware of the rules, and the key players from the moment we meet Hillari . We know this based on our own awareness of how exceptional people are treated in almost every subculture and even in the larger culture. There are various conflicts both big and small and most revolve around Stargirl or Leo. The most obvious occurs when Stargirl sings happy birthday to Hillari (when asked not to sing on her birthday), when Stargirl cheers for the other team on the playing field, when she is put on Hot Seat, and when



she declares her love for Leo on the school bulletin board. All of these events lead to her decline in popularity, and even Leo tries to distance himself from her.

The lulls in activity like the visits to Archie's house, or the walks in the desert serve as time for the reader to stop to figure things out, to question, to examine, as do Archie and Stargirl. The falling action or denouement occurs from the point at which Stargirl wins the speech contest in Phoenix. While she is never held in high esteem again, not even after this win, she seems to have resolved her desire to try to be someone she is not. The others learn to accept her somewhat for what she is, but then she moves away from Mica. This is where this reader thinks the book should have ended. You decide. It seems like the falling action goes on and on at the end of the book as Leo returns to Mica as a young adult, and later again. We are even given a look at the main characters well into their adulthood even after the events in the novel have been resolved.

We are left with a mystery that should have been solved, should have been part of the resolution. It might have been nice if the author had given us more of a hint with regard to the note Archie put into the hole with Barney.



Quotes

"In that moonlit hours, I acquired a sense of the otherness of things. I liked the feeling the moonlight gave me, as if it wasn't the opposite of day, but its underside, its private side, when the fabulous purred on my snow-white sheet like some dark cat come in from the desert." Chapter 2, p. 12

"She was illusive. She was today. She was tomorrow. She was the faintest scent of a cactus flower, the flitting shadow of an elf owl. We did not know what to make of her. In our minds we tried to pin her to a corkboard like a butterfly, but the pin merely went through and away she flew." Chapter 3, p.15

"Did Parr create us, or was he simply a reflection of us? I didn't know. I knew only that if you peeled off one by one all the layers of the student body, you would have found at the core not the spirit of the school, but Wayne Parr." Chapter 4, p.20

"Senor Saguaro was a cactus, a thirty-foot-tall giant that towered over the tool shed in the backyard. It had two arms high on the trunk. One stuck straight out; the other made a right turn upward, as if waving 'adios!' The waving arm was green from the elbow up; all else was brown, dead. Much of the thick, leathery skin along the trunk had come loose and crumpled in a heap about the massive foot; Senor Saguaro had lost his pants. Only his ribs, thumb-thick vertical timbers, held him up. Elf owls nested in his chest." Chapter 7, p30-1

"...There was no direction to my liberation. I had no urge to color my hair or trash my sneakers. So I just enjoyed the feeling and watched the once amorphous student body separate itself into hundred of individuals. The pronoun "we" itself seemed to crack and drift apart in pieces." Chapter 9, p.41

"I pledge allegiance to United Turtles of America and to the fruit bats of Borneo, one planet in the Milky Way, incredible, with justice and black bean burritos for all." Chapter 10, p.44

"I was a yellow balloon, smiling and lazy, floating above the classrooms. I felt a faint tug on my string. Far below, Kevin was calling, 'You're in love, dude!' I merely smiled and rolled over and drifted dreamily out a window." Chapter 17, p. 85

"Unlike Stargirl, I was aware of the constant anger of our schoolmates, seething like snakes under a porch. In fact, I was not only aware of it, but at times I also understood their point of view. There were even moments when something small and huddled within me agreed with it." Chapter 23, p. 127-8

"I couldn't take my eyes off her. She cradled her books in her arms. The sunflower canvas bag was gone. The rat was gone. The ukulele was gone. She turned around slowly for my open-mouthed dumbstruck inspection...She looked magnificently,



wonderfully, gloriously ordinary. She looked just like a hundred other girls at Mica High."
Chapter 26, p.139

"Star people are rare. You'll be lucky to meet another...We are star stuff, yes?" He (Archie) held up the skull of Barney, the Paleocene rodent. "Barney too, hum?..And I think every once in a while someone comes along who is a little more primitive than the rest of us, a little closer to our beginnings, a little more in touch with the stuff we're made of." Chapter 32, p. 177



Topics for Discussion

What do you think might happen if someone like Stargirl came to your school? And, thinking about the characters in the novel where would you stand in relationship to Stargirl? Would you make fun of her, join her and make her your friend, ignore her?

What do you think was in the note that Archie put into the hole with Barney?

Discuss the ideas and values that Archie and Stargirl share?

What are the character flaws of the main characters in the novel? Leo is clearly not without flaws, and Stargirl is not without flaws. Discuss their flaws.

Who is the most admirable person in the novel? Would you, could you be like that person?

What was the significance of Senor Saguaro, of Barney, of Cinnamon? What do they have in common?

Discuss what surprised you about the setting in this novel. Discuss some of the things in the setting around you that often go unnoticed.