



Columbia Junior High School

Questions & Discussion Packet

Jerry Spinelli's novel – ***Stargirl***

Stargirl Questions

Chapter #1

Explain the unusual text feature that is used at the beginning of this novel. Why do you suppose the author included it in this story?

Chapter #1 is untitled. What do you think would be an appropriate title for this first chapter? Why? Explain your answer.

Based on the limited information about Stargirl in chapter #1, what assumption could you make about her? Provide one detail from the selection to support your assumption.

Chapter #2

According to the selection, what is Hillary Kimble's explanation for Stargirl's appearance in school?

The narrator, Leo, says at the end of the chapter...

It was during one of these nightmoon times that it came to me that Hillari Kimble was wrong. Stargirl *was* real.

What do you think Leo means by this?

According to the passage, who is Leo's best friend at Mica High?

According to the passage, what strange things does Stargirl do to invite attention from the other students?

Chapter #3

Kevin and Leo produce a television show at Mica High called the HOT SEAT. Give me the name of a program on television today that most closely resembles this show. Explain why they are similar.

What do you think the (author Jerry Spinelli or/and main character Leo) is implying when he says....(p.15)

**She laughs when there was no joke. She danced when there was no music.
She had no friends, yet she was the friendliest person in school.
In her answers in class, she often spoke of sea horses and stars, but she did not know what a football was.
She said there was no television in her house.
She was elusive. She was today. She was tomorrow.
She was the faintest scent of a cactus flower, the fluttering 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.**

What is the purpose of the text feature (* * *) at the top of page 16?

Two of the themes in this novel are conformity and individuality. Keeping that in mind, what is the significance of the following passage?

Then one day after school I followed her. I kept at a safe distance. Since she was known not to take the bus, I expected the walk to be short. It wasn't. We trekked all over Mica, past hundreds of grassless stone-and-cactus front yards, through the Tudorized shopping center, skirting the electronics business park around which the city had been invented a mere fifteen years before." (p. 16)

Chapter #4

What is symbolic about Wayne Parr's name?

Read both passages below. Explain how Mark Twain would react to Leo's observation about Wayne Parr.

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. (p. 19)

"Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's time to pause and reflect."

Mark Twain

Chapter #5

According to this passage, name 2 things that get Stargirl noticed by the students at Mica High.

Based on the information in the selection, what conclusions can be drawn about Stargirl?

What sentence/phrase states the most important idea in this chapter?

- a. "She gave us something to talk about. She was entertaining."
- b. "By then most of us decided that we liked having her around."
- c. "We found ourselves looking forward to coming to school, to see what bizarre antic she's be up to."
- d. "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."

Why did you make this choice?

Chapter #7 - This is our first introduction to Archie. Archie plays the role of the wise old sage or YODA figure which means that everything he says is seems to be both wise and confusing at the same time.

What does Archie mean when he says on page 32?

“On the contrary, she is one of us. Most decidedly. She is us more than we are us. She is, I think, who we really are. Or were.”

Kevin asks Archie on page 33, **“So it’s not just an act?”** Archie responds by saying **“An act? No. If anybody is acting, it’s us. She’s as real... as Barney”** (skull of a 60-million-year-old Paleocene rodent). What point is Archie attempting to make with this comment?

Kevin later asks Archie if Stargirl’s name is **“real.”** Archie says,

“The name?” Every name is real. That’s the nature of names. When she first showed up, she called herself Pocket Mouse. Then Mudpie. The – what? – Hullygully, I believe. Now....”

Explain how Archie’s explanation is very similar to something else that we have read in this class.

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

Chapter #8

According to the selection, what are the reasons for Stargirl's new popularity?

At this point in the novel, one question begs to be asked. Is Stargirl *trying* to be popular or does it come because of her innocence or natural naiveté? Provide evidence from her experiences and/or novel.

Chapter #9

How is the description of the desert frogs at the beginning of the chapter a metaphor for what is happening at MICA High School?

What does Leo mean when he says, **“It was a rebellion she led, a rebellion *for* rather than against. For ourselves. For the dormant frogs we had been for so long.”**?

Kevin calls MICA High's new impulse of individuality **“a miracle.”** Archie responds by saying, **“Best hope it's not – the trouble with miracles are, they don't last long.”** What do you suppose Archie is inferring with his comment?

Chapter #10

According to this section, what three events show that people are starting to mistrust Stargirl? With each event, explain why Stargirl's actions violated one of those "unwritten rules" of society.

1.

2.

3.

Chapter #11

As Stargirl's popularity suffers as a result of her cheerleading for the other team, Leo observes that,

"Of all the unusual features about Stargirl, this struck me as the most remarkable. Bad things did not stick to her. Correction: *her* bad things did not stick to her. Our bad things stuck very much to her. If we were hurt, if we were unhappy or otherwise victimized by life, she seemed to know about it, and to care, as soon as we did. But bad things falling on her – unkind words, nasty stares, foot blisters – she seemed unaware of. I never saw her look in the mirror, never heard her complain. All of her feelings, all of her attentions flowed outward. She had no ego."

Why do the other students feel so strongly about Stargirl's cheering for the other team? How could Leo's observation above help explain it?

Which metaphor below best describes Stargirl: Explain your answer.

Stargirl is the mirror in which MICA High School gazes into daily.

or

Stargirl is the lantern which guides MICA High School on its journey of self discovery.

Chapter #12

According to the selection, what was the stated purpose of the *Hot Seat*?

Chapter #13

What was ironic (appearance is different than reality) about this Hot Seat episode?

In the beginning, Hillari Kimble seems to be the only person who openly dislikes Stargirl. But then others begin to feel the same way as Hillari. Do you think that groups of people need a leader, like Hillari Kimble, to turn opinions against another person?

While Stargirl is a guest on "Hot Seat," Kevin asks her why she changed her name. Do you accept her reason why she did this? How is "Stargirl" an ideal name for her? Think about the possibility of changing your name several times. Do you think your name is an integral part of who you are, or can you imagine yourself with another one?

Chapter #14

“In life, the best way to play your cards is to lay them face up on the table.”

Do you think Stargirl follows this “life” advice? Provide an example from chapter #14 to support your view on this.

Chapter #15

What qualities about a person make them attractive? Why do you think Stargirl is attracted to Leo?

Chapter #16

Kevin overhears a group of girls talk about Stargirl getting kicked off the cheerleading squad. Here is the conversation:

“When?”
“Today. After school. Just now!”
“I don’t believe it!”
“I don’t believe it took so long.”
“Kicked off? Are they allowed?”
“Sure. Why not? It’s not *her* school.”
“I would’ve kicked her off long ago. It was treason.”
“Good riddance.”

What is inferred in the statement “It’s not *her* school”?

What’s treason? Is what Stargirl did at the basketball game treasonous? Explain.

Why do you think Leo is attracted to Stargirl?

Chapter #17

The following is a “definition” of Zen:

Zen is a walk through the garden....an effortless practice of being here now. It is one of the most ancient practices to attaining enlightenment and reaching a higher level of consciousness. It is the most simple and effortless path to total liberation, that involves no-effort, no-thought, and literally no-mind.

Do you think Stargirl is attempting to attain Zen when she takes Leo to her enchanted place in the desert? Provide one example from this section to support your point of view.

Chapter #18

Any one of the words could be used to describe how Leo is feeling in chapter #18.

Alone

Paranoid

Avoided

Provide one detail from the selection to support your choice.

Chapter #19

When Leo tells Archie how he and Stargirl are being shunned, Archie responds by saying, “**Poor dolphin. Caught in a tuna net.**” Explain this metaphor.

Chapter #20

Remember this from 8th Grade? Henry David Thoreau??? Dead Poet's Society?? The Dead Poet's Society members would read this in the old Indian cave before their meetings??

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God.....

From Henry David Thoreau's "*Where I Lived, and What I Lived For*"

In chapter #19 (bottom p. 102 & p. 103), Archie tells Leo...

"It's in the morning, for most of us. It's the time, those few seconds when we're coming out of sleep but we're not really awake yet. For those few seconds we're something more primitive than what we are about to become. We have just slept the sleep of our most distant ancestors, and something of them and their world still clings to us. For those few moments we are unformed, but creatures more in tune with a tree than a keyboard. We are untitled, unnamed, natural, suspended between was and will be, the tadpole before the frog, the worm before the butterfly. We are, for a few brief moments, anything and everything we could be. An then..."

Explain how these ideas/passages are connected. They are both inferring or hinting at the same thing. What is it?

Archie takes Leo out back to talk to Senior Saguaro. Senior Saguaro "asks" Leo only one question; "**Whose affection do you value more, hers or the others?**" What is the answer to this question? Why?

Chapter #20

Back to this Zen thing....There was a surfer/bank robber movie that came out in the early 1990's called *Point Break*.....starring Keanu Reeves, Patrick Swayze, and Anthony Kiedis who is the lead singer of the band *Red Hot Chili Peppers*). The name of the lead bank robber in the movie (played by Patrick Swayze) is "Bodhi" which is short for "bodhisattva". In Zen Buddhism a "bodhisattva" is a person who has attained Enlightenment, but who postpones Nirvana (paradise) in order to help others to attain Enlightenment. If you watch the movie and you can overlook the bad acting of Keanu Reeves, you will see in some sort of weird surfer movie southern California gratuitous violence Hollywood sort-of-way how he tries to do this. Is Stargirl Leo's bodhisattva? Explain and provide evidence.

Chapter #21

According to the section, what are three sources which inspire Stargirl's random acts of kindness?

Chapter #22

Leo goes over to Stargirl's house for dinner. After dinner, Stargirl explains how she is making a biography of the life of Peter Sinkowitz, her little next door neighbor. Here is the passage:

(p. 123).....I just keep an eye out for him, and a couple of times a week I jot down what I saw him doing that day. I'll do it for a few more years, then I'll give it to his parents to give to him when he's older and ready to appreciate it." A puzzled look came over her face. She poked me with her elbow. "What?"

"Huh?" I said

"You're staring at me really funny. What is it?"

I blurted, "Are you running for saint?"

I regretted the words as soon as they left my lips. She just looked at me, hurt in her eyes.

Why was Leo's comment "Are you running for saint?" hurtful to Stargirl? Why would that question be hurtful to you?

Chapter #23

Do you, as a reader, like Stargirl? If you were a student at MICA High, would you reach out to her like Dori Dilson, or reject her like Hillari Kimble? Do you think the students at Mica High are ultimately too harsh on Stargirl?

Chapter #24

“The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about.”

Would Leo agree with the quote above? Explain and provide evidence from the chapter to support your position.

Chapter #25

Who does Leo blame for Stargirl’s shunning? Why?

Which of the following quotes most closely resembles the point Leo is attempting to get across to Stargirl in Chapter #25? Explain your answer.

“One of the greatest diseases is to be nobody to anybody.”

**“Society knows perfectly well how to kill a man
and has methods more subtle than death”**

“Society is always trying in some way to grind us down to a single flat surface.”

Chapter #26

Stargirl changes into "Susan," Leo says

"she looked magnificently, wonderfully, gloriously ordinary. She looked just like a hundred other girls at Mica High--I had never been so happy and proud in my whole life."

How did you feel when you read this part of the novel?

Why do you think people continued to shun her?

Chapter #27

According to the section, why is Dori Dilson, who has been Stargirl's one enduring friend, angry at Stargirl?

Chapter #28

Ok, now it's time to dig deep and test your long term memory. Think back to 8th Grade when we watched the movie Dead Poet's Society. Remember the scene where the shy kid Todd Anderson is suppose to recite his original poem in class, but he ditches the assignment because he's not confident that it's "correct" or "right." Mr. Keating (Robin Williams), his teacher, doesn't let him off the hook and instead asks him to demonstrate a "Barbaric Yawp". The term, we quickly find out, comes from a line in Walt Whitman's poem "Song of Myself" which says, "I sound my barbaric YAWP over the roofs of the world." The whole line actually says,

**I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric YAWP over the roofs of the world.**

How is Stargirl's speech at the oratorical contest in Phoenix also an example of a barbaric YAWP. Explain and provide evidence to support your answer.

Chapter #29

Why is Stargirl popular and supported in Phoenix after she wins the competition, but shunned and unaccepted back in Mica?

Chapter #30

Why does Stargirl change back to her original self?

Stargirl's attempt at normalcy doesn't work very well. Do you think it is easy to reinvent yourself?

Leo is watching Stargirl and Dori Dilson sing and dance in the courtyard one day. He even acknowledges that they have “been practicing” and were “really good.” He observed

Students walked past, most of them not even glancing her way. I saw Wayne Parr and Hilliari Kimble go past, Hilliari laughing out loud. And Kevin. And the basketball guys. I realized now that the shunning would never end. And I knew what I should do. I should go out there and stand in front of them and applaud. I should show Stargirl and the world that I wasn't like the rest of them, that I appreciated her, that I should celebrate her and her insistence on being herself. But I stayed inside. I waited until the last students had left the courtyard, and Stargirl and Dori were performing for no one. To my surprise they went on and on. It was too painful to watch. I left school by another door. (p. 166)

Which word below best describes Kevin in this passage? Please explain your answer.

Coward

Fearful

Understanding

Chapter #31

By whom was Stargirl described as “Beautiful....Unusual.....Interesting....Different.....Regal” as she enters the Ocotillo Ball? What is significant about that?

The Ocotillo Ball at the end of the novel represents a turning point. Do you think Stargirl made a deliberate attempt to say good-bye at the ball? What do you make of the students' behavior at the ball, and what does this tell you about the student body of Mica High as a whole?

Chapter #32

Archie says about Stargirl, "Star people are rare. You'll be lucky to meet another." Do you think Leo was grown-up enough for his relationship with Stargirl? How about the students of Mica High? Will Leo ever figure Stargirl out?

Chapter #33

What is the irony at the end of *Stargirl*? Is Stargirl popular after all? What happens to the "popular" kids in the story--do they stay popular?

MORE THAN STARS

On her trip to Phoenix before the oratorical contest, Stargirl repeated something she had heard from Archie about Mockingbirds. Here is what she had said,

...He said he believes mockingbirds may do more than imitate other birds. I mean, other living birds. He thinks they may also imitate the sounds of birds that are no longer around. He thinks the sounds of extinct birds are passed down the years from mockingbird to mockingbird.

...He says when a mockingbird sings, for all we know it's pitching fossils into the air. He says who knows what songs of ancient creatures we may be hearing out there.

At the time, this passage was a little confusing. But after we have finished reading the novel, how does this passage help explain the last chapter in this book?

Brainiac Questions

What is unusual about the spelling of Hilliari Kimble's name? What point do you think Jerry Spinelli is attempting to make with this spelling?

How does this novel show the conflict between the individual and society?

There is some evidence in this novel that the author Jerry Spinelli created Stargirl is a Christ figure. Find some evidence from the novel to support that claim.