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## Symbols Speak

Jerry Spinelli's novel *Stargirl* is filled with symbols that represent deeper ideas about individuality, change, and self-acceptance. Two of the most important symbols in the book are the desert and the sunflower. Each plays a special role in helping readers understand Stargirl's character and the lessons she brings to Mica High.

The desert, vast and open, represents Stargirl's free spirit. Unlike the structured

and predictable life at school, the desert is wild and ever-changing, just like her. It is the place where she feels most at home, where she dances in the moonlight and listens to the silence. The desert reflects Stargirl's ability to see beauty in things that others might overlook. Leo, who is torn between fitting in and being true to himself, visits the desert with her and begins to understand that being different isn't a bad thing—it's just another way to live.

The sunflower is another important symbol. Bright, cheerful, and always turning toward the sun, it reflects Stargirl's personality. She spreads kindness wherever she goes, just as a sunflower spreads seeds. She brings light to those around her, whether by playing her ukulele at lunch or leaving small gifts for strangers. Like a sunflower, she stands tall and true, even when others try to make her change.

As the novel progresses, these symbols help highlight the challenges of being unique in a world that values sameness. When Stargirl tries to fit in, it is as if she has left the desert behind and stopped being a sunflower. She becomes quieter, more like everyone else—but at a cost. The energy and warmth she once had begin to fade. Through these symbols, Spinelli shows that true happiness comes from embracing who you really are, not from trying to be like everyone else.

In the end, the desert and the sunflower remind us of the importance of staying true to ourselves, no matter what others think. Just as the desert remains vast and the sunflower continues to bloom toward the light, Stargirl's spirit shines, teaching Leo and the rest of Mica High a lesson they will never forget.