



OMNIBUS BOOKS

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Teachers' Notes

Star

Catherine Bateson

Teachers' notes written by Madeline Holmes

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Introduction

Star is a touching story of how a young girl navigates her way through life when her world is turned on its head. It's just been Star and her mum ever since her dad died and that's how Star likes it. But when her mum's friend Charlie moves in, her life is rearranged and she's no longer in the middle. Star doesn't want a new dad and she certainly isn't keen on some annoying new siblings moving in on her space but she doesn't get a say. Trying to work out where she fits in isn't easy but it may just be that her new life is a perfect fit.

About the Author

Award-winning Australian author Catherine Bateson credits a childhood spent in a secondhand book store with sparking her career as a poet and author of fiction. A published poet, Bateson made the transition to fiction with *A Dangerous Girl* and its sequel, *The Year It All Happened*, verse novels that reflect the concern and speech of modern Australian teens, while *Rain May and Captain Daniel* (Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year, Younger Readers, 2003; Queensland Premier's Book of the Year, Younger Readers, 2003; Patricia Wrightson Award, Shortlisted 2003, New South Wales Premier's Award, 2003) finds an inner-city mother and daughter adapting to platypus, fruit bats, and other quirks of life in rural Australia. Catherine's other books for younger readers include *Millie and the Night Heron* (Children's Book Council of Australia Honour Book, Younger Readers, 2005), *Magenta Mcphee* and *The Wish Pony*. In addition to writing novels and poetry, Bateson has worked as a creative writing teacher for over a decade. In her spare time she hosts writing workshops for students and appears at poetry and writing festivals.

Reading the Text

Part One

Class discussion: first impressions

After you have read the first chapter, have a discussion about your first impressions and thoughts on *Star*. First chapters are important. You quickly learn whether or not you like the style of writing and if you like the characters involved. You also learn what the story will be about or you at least have some idea about where the story might end up. The first chapter is the beginning of the story but it is not necessarily the beginning for the characters. Events that we don't know about yet have already occurred by the time we meet them.

Here are some topics you can use to prompt discussion:

- 1) Think about characterisation. What do we learn about the characters immediately? Think about how the characters interact with one another and look closely at the dialogue. As a class, create a character chart with the characters you have been introduced to and list what you know about each one.
- 2) Point of view is the position from which the story is told. When we start a book, we soon learn whose eyes we are experiencing the story through. *Star* is told in first-person narrative. This means that the story is told directly to the reader as if someone is speaking to you. What do you think of this style of storytelling? Do you read many books like this? Can you think of other ways the story might be written? Do you like Star's voice? What kind of narrator is Star?
- 3) What do you think Charlie means by 'child of privilege'. How would you define privilege? Do you think Star is privileged? What kind of person is Charlie?

Research task: planning the future

Like Star, consider where you would like to be in ten years. Think of your future self like a character in a book and use your imagination to create your world ten years from now. If you think you'll be travelling, research where you might be. If you think you'll be starting university, research what type of course you might be doing. You might have moved interstate or overseas. You might have moved out of home. Go to the library and read the blurbs of at least ten books. What do they have in common? How are characters' stories described? What sorts of words are used? Create your own blurb for what your future self will be doing ten years from now. You can post your 'blurb' on your blog.

Literary component: response blog

- 1) Start a response blog to record your impressions of the novel. This will be useful when you come to the extension activities. Continue the class characterisation chart as you gather more information. You could include chapter summaries and map the journey of the characters. What do you think are the important themes of the novel? Write about what you like and what you don't like and try to justify your responses. Start a word bank of unfamiliar words you come across.
- 2) You have ten minutes to write your own opening paragraph to a story in first-person narrative. Once you've done this, post it to your blog for your classmates to read and comment on. Look at your classmates' openings and speculate about what each story might be about.

Part Two

Class discussion: narrative themes

- 1) This is a story of change. Have a discussion about the new developments in Star's life. How is she coping with all the disruptions? Star says that life isn't fair. Do you think Star is being fair to the people around her? Are they being fair to her? In your own words, define fair and unfair to the person next to you.

- 2) The opposite of change is stability. Which do you prefer? What are the advantages and disadvantages for each? Would a story where everything remains the same be engaging?
- 3) Star's mum tells her that things will get back to normal soon and in response Star questions exactly what normal is. What does normal mean to you? Can one person's normal be different to another person's idea of normal? What do you think is normal for Star?

Research component: creating a business plan

Star decides that if she can breed catfish she can make enough money to buy a horse. Imagine that like Star you wish to save up for something special. Think about how you could make money and come up with a business proposal which you would present to your parents. You need to think of a scheme that will be commercially viable. In your proposal, you need to outline your plan – how you will run your business, what you need and how you would go about implementing the plan, etc. You must also argue why it will be successful – who will want your services/product and why? You can research your potential target market as well as other products or services that are similar to yours to support your proposal.

Literacy component: haiku

- 1) Star describes haiku as a form of Japanese poetry. It consists of 17 syllables and is three lines long. Typically, each poem mentions a season but, like Star says, you can hint at the season by word association. Star's teacher Ms Bishop says a haiku is normally an observation, particularly of the natural world. In the book the characters describe it as a snapshot, which is a short moment in time. You might think of it as one photograph in an album. Go through the novel and look at Star's haiku poems to get a feel for how they work. Consider which ones you like best and why. Once you understand how they go together, you can write your own. Keep a haiku diary for a week and at the end, post your poems to your blog.
- 2) Continue to update your blog with your impressions of the novel. Respond to Star's falling out with Hayley and comment on what friendship means to you.

Part Three

Class discussion: narrative themes

- 1) What do you think of the family's decision to move to the country? How would you interpret Charlie's idea of sustainable living? Why is sustainable living appealing? What does the country offer that the city doesn't?
- 2) Moving can be a big deal. Star is moving to a new town, a new house and a new school. Being new can be a challenging experience. How does Star adapt to these challenges? Has anyone experienced similar situations to Star's?

Research task: arguing your case

You've been invited to participate in a debate to resolve the issue of where the best place to live is. The debate topic is 'city living is preferable to country living'. In teams of three, you will be asked to argue for or against this assertion. It is important to research your topic so you have information to support your argument. For information on how to construct and conduct your debate, visit this useful debate and persuasive writing guide for students:

http://www.kyrene.org/schools/brisas/sunda/debate/sunda_debate_unit.pdf

Literary component: creative writing

- 1) 'The morning was so full of good omens – cream cheese, grated carrot and sultanas on my sandwiches, a clean uniform and my favourite socks and double art.' Star, p. 39.

An omen is something that happens that indicates how the future will play out. We can have good omens, like Star's in the book, or bad omens. A good omen can be something like a clear blue sky and a bad omen can be grey clouds and rain, depending on how a person might interpret the weather. Come up with a list of your own good and bad omens. Be creative. Think about your perfect start to the day and the very worst start to the day you could have.

- 2) Star and her mum talk about implementing 'house rules' to ensure things run more smoothly. Think about your own living arrangements and create a set of house rules to suit you. Then apply house rules to your school or even the world. Be creative in your response.

After Reading the Text

Class discussion: final impressions

Throughout the book, all the main characters undergo some form of change in their lives. What do students think of this theme? Is it a hopeful story? Which character did you best connect with and why? Did you feel sympathy for every character? Was there a character you disliked or felt was unsympathetic? Do you understand every character's motivations? Discuss how each character evolved over the course of the story. Is there a moral to the story?

Literacy component: creative response.

Write a short story and explore how your protagonist copes with unexpected change. Draw on the situations and character experiences in *Star* for inspiration. You might like to base it on an experience of yours that had a significant impact on your life.

Extension Activities

- 1) Write a review of *Star*. A good review is entertaining to read. It should be as interesting as the book you are writing about. You're summarising the book for a potential reader. Avoid saying whether something is good or bad and instead look at what you think works and what you think didn't work. Once you've compiled your review, you might like to go one step further and, in groups of three or four, have a book review session like you see on TV. As well as talking about *Star* you might like to introduce books you've read in the same genre or by the same author as a comparison. You could even film these sessions and have someone pretend to be the author appearing on the show.

- 2) Charlie tells Star that he's always on the outside (p. 175). What do you think this says about Charlie's character? Are Charlie and Star alike in any way? What does Charlie's character offer Star's character? How does he make her think about the world? Write a blog post about Charlie's purpose in the novel and what you think of him as a character.
- 3) Choose an important relationship in the book and select the most significant episodes in the relationship. What do you learn about the characters, and the development of the characters and the relationship? Write a short piece discussing how the relationship has changed over the course of the book and all the factors that are involved.
- 4) Star likes to read old books, preferring stories that don't always explain everything and that use words she may not have heard before. Do you have a favourite book that isn't modern? If so, how is it noticeably different from contemporary stories? Do you agree with Star's assessment? Write a comparison piece of modern and older stories to post on your blog.
- 5) Select a scene or section from the novel and present it as a storyboard or as a graphic novel with words and pictures.
- 6) Find out about the author. You could look online by tracking down articles and critiques from magazines or newspapers. How important do you think it is to know about the author's background in relation to the novel?
- 7) Prepare a monologue as one of the characters from the novel. Try to reveal your chosen character's personality and thoughts and feelings about particular events and people in the story.
- 8) Choose a scene from the novel and write a script to act out as a group or in pairs. The scene might be presented as a live performance in class or as a film.