

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Starplace

by
Vicki Grove

Book Information

Vicki Grove, The Starplace
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Thirteen-year-old Frannie learns hard lessons about prejudice and segregation when she becomes friends with a young black girl who moves into her small Oklahoma town in 1961.

Award: SLJ Best Book; State Award

Topics: Community Life, Prejudice; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; People, African American; Recommended Reading, Children's Literature Choice

Main Characters

Celeste Chisholm a black teenage girl who reveals to Frannie an ugly truth about the history of Quiver, Oklahoma

Frannie Driscoll a white teenage girl who meets Celeste and learns about true friendship

Harley Driscoll Frannie's little brother who adores Celeste

Kelly Frannie's "cowgirl" friend

Margot Frannie's friend who tries to be French

Max, Theodore, and Jason the three boys who are part of Frannie's group of friends

Miss Cantwell the eighth-grade chorus teacher who creates the Ladies of Harmony

Mitch Driscoll Frannie's little brother who is apprehensive around Celeste

Mr. Chisholm Celeste's father, who is conducting research in Quiver to learn more about the death of his grandfather

Mr. Jolson Frannie's mother's employer who reveals his prejudices in the story

Nancy the "mother hen" of Frannie's group

Tricia Harmon and Carla Foster two snobby classmates of Frannie and Celeste

Vocabulary

alto a low female singing voice

integration the act of making whole by bringing all parts together; to unite

manacles a device used to confine the hands

segregation a policy of social separation of races practiced in the past by many communities

soprano a high female singing voice

Synopsis

Frannie Driscoll is getting ready to start the eighth grade in Quiver, Oklahoma. She and her friends, Kelly, Margot, and Nancy, are planning a Hawaiian Luau at Frannie's house for the first weekend of the new school year. The girls bicker over the details, and Frannie is concerned she will have to take the blame if the party is a failure. Before they can start buying the decorations, the girls have to consult Frannie's mother at the real estate office where she works. Outside the office, they notice a shiny black car. Frannie goes over to the car and peeks through the tinted window. She sees a girl staring back at her. Embarrassed about snooping, Frannie pretends to kill a "dragonbee" on the window and ducks into her mother's office.

The night before school starts, Frannie watches the same black car park across the street from her house. Mr. Chisholm and his daughter, Celeste, who are newcomers to Quiver, get out and mysteriously examine the field. The next morning, Frannie asks her father about the zinc mines. She is curious about the miners who were killed years ago and wonders if the field is possibly cursed.

When arriving at school, Frannie and the rest of her classmates are somewhat shocked to see Celeste Chisholm there because she is black. In their community, the black students attend another school. Frannie and her friends discuss racial issues and whether or not they should invite Celeste to their party. The friends have mixed feelings.

The next day, Miss Cantwell, the chorus teacher

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asks each member of the chorus to sing for placement. Most of the students appear nervous, but Celeste sings with ease. Everyone is awed by her beautiful voice. In the restroom after class, several girls make rude comments about Celeste, knowing she is in one of the stalls. Frannie overhears their comments, but does nothing. Afterwards, she is embarrassed at her lack of courage and runs over to invite Celeste to the luau. Celeste remarks that Frannie was the girl who looked in her car window, which embarrasses Frannie further.

At the end of the week, the luau does not turn out to be the social event that the girls had hoped it would be. Frannie, annoyed and humiliated, runs to the abandoned playground in the nearby field. At the only remaining fixture, the rocket slide, Frannie finds Celeste, who claims she is there to practice her singing. The two girls pledge friendship with each other, and Frannie brings Celeste back to her house where only a few people are left. Frannie's friends make Celeste feel very comfortable and accepted.

Several weeks into the school year, Frannie and Celeste are chosen to become members of the double trio, Ladies of Harmony. Their group performs all over the area and is even invited to sing at the country club. In October, Celeste shows Frannie her attic, and within it the old meeting place of the Ku Klux Klan. Frannie is so horrified that Mr. Chisholm has to drive her home. Soon after, when the Ladies of Harmony perform at the country club, Miss Cantwell announces the group has been invited to a regional showchoir competition in Tulsa. The school cannot afford the entry fee and the dresses that are required, so several of the girls' parents and other business people offer to pay for them.

One day, Celeste, Kelly, and Frannie go horseback riding and come across an old mining cave. During their exploration, they find some manacles, and Frannie closes one of the locks around her wrist. Kelly goes for help, and Celeste locks herself in a manacle to show her devotion to their friendship. Before help arrives, Celeste tells Frannie the story of

her great-grandfather and the Ku Klux Klan. She explains that he probably died in that cave. After the girls are rescued, Mr. Chisholm invites Fannie's and Kelly's families to his home to view the old Klan meeting place. The parents are horrified, as they were unaware that such horrible events took place in their town.

As the school year progresses, Miss Cantwell says that Carla, one of the initially selected singers, has recovered from her throat trouble and wishes to rejoin the group. Frannie assumes she will be cut since she was originally an alternate but, after the girls audition once more, Miss Cantwell cuts Celeste instead, claiming she does not blend well. Frannie is furious, but Celeste is not surprised. That evening Celeste tells Frannie she is moving back to St. Louis because she will have more musical opportunities there, her father's research is done, and they miss Celeste's mother. Though Frannie is devastated, the girls continue their friendship over the years. As the book ends, Frannie is writing an article about Celeste's musical performance in *Aida*.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

When Frannie looks into the car and sees Celeste, she pretends to see a "dragonbee" on the window. Why do you think Frannie is so embarrassed?

Frannie is probably embarrassed to be caught in the act of spying. In addition, Frannie is probably nervous because Celeste is African American, and Frannie had little contact with non-whites in the past.

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Literary Analysis

This story centers on the racial tensions of a small town in Oklahoma. Do you think race relations have changed since the story's time period? Why or why not?

Some students may feel that little has changed. Because of the media and the internet, many of the existing hate groups have new ways to express their opinions in a public forum. Yet, some students may feel that things have changed for the better. Affirmative Action and the civil rights movements have enabled minorities to receive opportunities for higher education or fair employment that would have been less likely in the past.

Inferential Comprehension

Frannie Driscoll is a teenage girl who is concerned with what others think about her. Based on your knowledge of her character, why do you think she befriends Celeste knowing that many of her classmates will not approve?

Frannie, though intent on fitting in, is very conscious of other people's feelings. In addition, Frannie is raised in a household that rejects prejudice. Frannie knows what it is like to feel left out, and she does not like seeing others feel bad. She admits she fails sometimes, but ultimately Frannie does what she knows is right.

Constructing Meaning

While Frannie and Celeste are in the cave, Celeste tells Frannie about her great-grandfather. How does Celeste's story make you feel?

Celeste's story about her great-grandfather is probably very upsetting to most readers. Her vivid descriptions of the atrocity may leave readers feeling as if it happened to someone in their own families. Celeste's account helps the reader to better understand what it is like to be discriminated against and hated because of skin color.

mentions Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Frannie. Frannie, having never heard of Dr. King, assumes he is Celeste's family doctor. When she begins to take interest in the world around her, Frannie discovers who Dr. King is. Have your students research various aspects about Dr. King's life. Then have each student deliver a short oral report on his or her assigned aspect.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors This book gives a brief view of the controversial Ku Klux Klan. Discuss the history of this group. Then have your students write a one-page response on why hate groups exist and what kind of damage they cause.

Recognizing Feelings Many students know what it is like to feel shunned. In this story, Celeste is shunned and called names. Eventually, Frannie and Celeste become friends, but not everyone accepts Celeste. Ask your students to consider what it would be like to be Celeste. Ask them to consider the time period and setting of the story. Then, have the students write a short response about how they would feel if they were Celeste.

Responding to Literature For much of the novel, Frannie is disinterested in the news of the world. She becomes tired of hearing about the Berlin Wall. Eventually, Frannie takes interest and begins to watch the news as she makes meaningful connections to her own world. Ask your students to watch the news for one week. Then, have each student create a short presentation which explains a specific news topic and how it relates to the student's own life.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Celeste