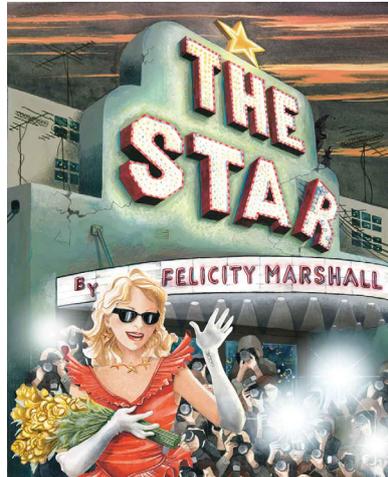


Teacher's Notes

The Star by Felicity Marshall



Introduction

The Star is a picture book aimed at children from mid primary to teens. The topic of the story is fame – its allure, its emptiness and its short life. In our celebrity soaked culture, fame has come to be something for young people to aspire to – a career choice, an end destination.

The main character, Marion, a wooden doll, depicts a modern day archetype in a rags-to-riches story with a difference – from nonentity to star, and back again. She is based on many a young star gracing the pages of tabloid newspapers and magazines, whose fame is short-lived. She is not based on anyone in particular but Marilyn Monroe, Brigitte Bardot, Britney Spears, Princess Diana, Greta Garbo, Lady Gaga and countless other lesser-known bright young starlets whose star has shone and then faded away, have contributed to the creation of Marion.

The public is subjected to a continual barrage of media hype about the lives of ‘stars’. No detail of their private lives is off limits. They are referred to in magazine banners by their first name only – assuming our familiarity with them and their deeds that have earned them this fame. Unless you are an almost constant commercial TV watcher, or listener to rock ‘n’ roll radio stations, you may have no idea who these people are. They endorse all kinds of products from coffee to travel goods to sunglasses and so on. Their body weight and their love lives are under perpetual scrutiny by an avaricious and fickle public.

The invention of the telephoto lens in the 1970s and the subsequent emergence of the paparazzi (freelance photographers who make a living obtaining intimate celebrity photographs by whatever means they can, including stalking and stake-outs) go hand in hand with the rise and demise of the careers of young stars.

The man in the hat is invisible throughout, but his control over Marion is apparent and somewhat sinister. With his ‘invisible strings’ he manipulates her rise to fame and her subsequent downfall like an expert puppeteer.

Her two loyal friends, Harley, an acrobatic harlequin, and Polka the dog, stick by Marion through her dizzying rise to stardom. And they are there to help her when she falls back to earth, demonstrating that true friendship, loyalty and love are the cornerstones to happiness. The fickle nature of fame can be a seductive force that promises happiness, however briefly, but will brutally move on to the next bright star.

Marion has her own perfume, like many a ‘celebrity fragrance’, ranging from David Beckham, Beyoncé, and Jennifer Lopez to a proposed perfume made from the DNA of Michael Jackson’s hair.

Polka the dog places enormous value on people’s smell, and there are references to this throughout the story. Marion’s real smell that Polka mentions is a canine metaphor for Marion’s real self – her soul. Her designer fragrance ‘ME’ is her marketed signature fragrance – giving the public a way to legitimately have a piece of her. And of course a dog does not understand nor place any value on fame.

In hindsight I realise that my three main characters, Marion, Harley and Polka reflect my own two children and their devoted dog, when they were growing up.

QUESTIONS

1. The Title

- ✚ What are different meanings for the word star?
- ✚ Why do we refer to some famous people as *stars*?
- ✚ Who do you immediately think of when you read the title?

2. The Cover

- ✚ What clues does the cover give about the story inside?
- ✚ Look at the cover and think of three questions about what you see.
- ✚ Why is one of the letters in STAR falling over?

3. The Characters

Make a list of all of the characters in the story. Put a quote from the book beside their name. For example:

Marion – ‘She secretly longed for adventure’

3. The Story

Comprehension Questions

- ✚ How was Marion different to her two friends?
- ✚ Why did Marion want to be a star?
- ✚ Why did Harley and Polka hesitate before following Little Bird?
- ✚ What did the man say about Harley and Polka when he first met Marion?
- ✚ What role did Little Bird play in Marion becoming famous?
- ✚ Who taught Marion how to dance?
- ✚ What three things does Marion change to become a star?
- ✚ What happens immediately after Marion becomes a star?
- ✚ What happens to Harley and Polka when Marion becomes a star?
- ✚ What does Polka say about her?
- ✚ Why is the man's smile missing one day?
- ✚ Why does Marion look for Harley and Polka?
- ✚ What do they say when she asks for their help?
- ✚ What happens to China Cutie?
- ✚ What happens the day after Marion ends up on the scrap heap?
- ✚ How does the story end?

Ideas Questions for discussion

Fame

- ✚ Why do people want to be famous?
- ✚ Does fame always bring happiness? Why or Why not?
- ✚ How does fame change Marion?
- ✚ How does fame change people in general? Why?
- ✚ Is fame more important than friendship?

Writing Task: Would you like to be famous? Why or why not?

Friendship

- ✚ Define Friendship
- ✚ Is Marion a good friend? Are Harley and Polka good friends? What is the difference?
- ✚ What kind of friend is the Man?
- ✚ Is the story about fame or friendship?

Writing Task: Why do we need friends?

Celebrity Culture

- ✚ What is 'Celebrity Culture'?
- ✚ Are all celebrities as disposable as Marion?
- ✚ Can you think of some celebrities who have had a similar experience as stars?
Why did they fall?
- ✚ What does our interest in celebrities say about us?
- ✚ Are all celebrities as fragile as China Cutie?

Writing Task: Which celebrities are you interested in? Why? Can you imagine a point when you will lose interest in them?

4. The Illustrations

The detailed illustrations ranging from fine pencil work to full colour paintings in watercolour and gouache, give the reader a rich visual experience, and the amount of colour used in each illustration can be read as an emotional barometer of sorts, ranging from happiness, then caution in the beginning, to complete despair and humiliation when Marion reaches her use-by date.

- ✚ Research Felicity Marshall, the author and illustrator of *The Star*.
- ✚ What other books has she illustrated?
- ✚ What materials has she used to create these illustrations?
- ✚ Do the illustrations help make the story come alive?
- ✚ Look at Polka's dots. When do they change? Why?
- ✚ List some of the different things attached to Harley and Polka's hats and Harley's shoes.
- ✚ Some of the illustrations are more colourful than others. Why?
- ✚ Have you ever listened to the sound of the sea by holding a shell to your ear as Marion, Harley and Polka did just before Little Bird sang in Marion's ear?
- ✚ Harley and Polka have ruffled collars and masks like old-fashioned harlequin dolls. These ruffles are repeated in Marion's new dress that Harley sews for her. What does this represent?

- ✚ Have you noticed televisions, radios and newspapers throughout the book? What is the media's role in making someone famous?
- ✚ In one of the illustrations there is an empty pizza carton in the foreground – The Big Cheese Pizza Co. What does the term 'Big Cheese' mean?
- ✚ In another illustration there is an envelope addressed to Marion Etoile. Etoile is a French word. What does it mean?
- ✚ Have you discovered a star in every illustration?

Activities

1. Think of someone who is just starting to become famous. Keep a scrapbook of photos and articles about them. Observe the changes in their appearance, lifestyle, relationships.
2. Research one of the following in small groups and present your findings to the class:
 - Harley is a Harlequin. What is a Harlequin and why do you think the writer employed one in her story?
 - The Hollywood Star System: A brief history.
 - The Faust legend. What is the connection with The Star?
3. A Debate: In teams of three, debate the following proposition:
 'Celebrities are necessary. They represent our hopes and dreams'
4. Creative Writing: Write your own rags-to-riches story using the following steps:
 - Create and introduce a character.
 - Your character becomes famous – you decide why.
 - Your character is famous but fame has its ups and downs.
 - Fame changes your character – you decide how.
 - Your character either comes to terms with fame or abandons it. It is your decision.
5. The Media: Collect examples of celebrity news from a range of sources including magazines, newspapers, the internet, television, and radio. For each example, answer the following questions:
 - What kind of language is used to describe the person? What aspect of the person does the article focus on?
 - What images are used and why?
6. Write a review of The Star. Put all of the reviews on a board where everyone can read them.
7. The scrap heap where Marion is thrown is filled with all kinds of items. Look at the picture carefully and list some of things you see. Some people believe

that the disposable nature of celebrities is similar to our consumer culture.
What do you think?

Information is available on Felicity's website www.felicitymarshall.com The Style File website www.thestylefile.com or the website for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators www.scbwi.org
The publisher's website is at www.fordstreetpublishing.com