



BOOK REVIEWS

Why we write book reviews?

- To share our opinion of books
- To recommend a book that we liked
- To encourage others to read

What do we include in the review?

- Author
- Title
- Date published
- Don't give away any of the main events
- Give your own opinion
- NO SPOILERS !!

Structure

- **Introduction:** introduce the title of the book and the author
- **Description:** describe the novel in some detail but don't give away the ending. Comment on things such as characters, plot development, setting etc.
- **Evaluation:** tell the reader what you thought of the novel. Your opinion is important, it is what the reader really wants to know. Explain why you liked or disliked it. Think of your audience, who are you writing for? Highlights / weak bits?
- **Recommendation:** Unputdownable? End with a recommendation in favour of the play if you liked it. If you didn't, advise your readers not waste their time and money.

Structure - Introduction

- Give the title of the novel
- Give the name of the author
- Give the name of the publisher and the date (inside the front cover)
- What genre is the book? (science fiction, romance, horror, comedy etc.)
- Give an overview of the novel in 2 sentences

Structure - Description

- Outline the plot
- Write a short summary of the plot
- **Do not give away the ending, any spoilers or main events!**
- Give the name of the main characters and describe what they are like
 - What kind of person are they? Describe their personality using adjectives.
 - Are the characters likeable or unlikeable?
- Describe the setting of the novel. Where and when is it set?
- Describe the themes of the novel. Describe the underlying message of the novel.

Structure - Evaluation

- Describe your favourite moments from the novel and explain why they are your favourite
- Describe your least favourite moments from the novel and explain why they are your least favourite
- Explain whether you liked the novel or not overall
- Give your final opinion of the novel

Structure - Recommendation

- Would you recommend the novel to someone?
- Who would you recommend it to?
- Who is it suitable for?
- Give it a rating (e.g 4/5 stars)

REVIEW

Stargirl, by Jerry Spinelli

An American novel set in an Arizona high school in the recent past, this story appeals on many levels and should interest Junior Cert students of all abilities. The Stargirl of the title is a most unusual girl, who when she joins Mica high school sparks off, extreme reactions among her fellow students.

With her eccentric name and wardrobe, her bizarre practice of serenading complete strangers on their birthdays, the pet rat who lives in her schoolbag and many more quirky little habits, Stargirl excites speculation from her first day. Is she an alien? Have the school authorities planted her? Whatever the truth, she can't be ignored.

Stargirl's story is narrated by Leo, an older boy at school, who against his better judgement gets involved in the controversy that inevitably follows wherever she goes.

This novel may appeal mainly to girls, although the male narrator makes it accessible to boys also. It can be read as a bittersweet love story, but it's also quite provocative on issues such as conformity versus individuality, bullying and friendship. The language of the book is very lyrical, making it an excellent springboard for personal writing assignments. I would recommend it for 13 to 15 year olds.

'TESS', Summer 2003

Your bit!

- This information can only be written if you have read the book.
 - Some of it is fact but **your opinion is very important** too.
1. The story / plot
 2. The characters
 3. Highlights
 4. Any weak bits?
 5. Unputdownable?
 6. Score

The story / plot

- This is **WHAT** happens. To help you think about the main events, first draw a time line with the beginning scene of the book at the top of a piece of paper and the final scene at the bottom.
- E.g. Write "Harry starts at Hogwarts" at the top and "Harry _____" at the bottom.
- You can also write a sentence about **WHERE** and **WHEN** the story takes place. E.g. At Hogwarts school of wizardry in the present day.
- **DON'T SPOIL THE ENDING**

What happened in the story?

What was the story about?

What length of time did it cover? (this is the amount of time that passes during the course of the story, not how long it took you to read it)

Was what happened unusual? Ordinary?

What was the opening of the story like? Exciting? Slow? Dramatic? Dull?

How did the events of the story follow on from each other?

What was the climax of the story?

The characters

Or WHO is in the book. To help you describe the characters, first jot down these details:

- Name of character
 - Role
 - Adjective to describe them
- For example:
- Harry Potter
 - Schoolboy wizard
 - Brave

Who were the main characters?

What were they like?

Were they described in much detail?

Which did you find most interesting? Most sympathetic? (if you find a character sympathetic, you like them as you can understand their feelings. Perhaps you have had a similar experience to them)

What kind of relationships and / or conflicts were there?

Did these characters change throughout the story?

Highlights

- This is where you describe your favourite part of the book.
- Was there a particular piece of action, description or characters' speech you really enjoyed?
- Feelings and attitudes described in depth?
- Was it a good story? Why?

Any weak bits?

- Were there any chapters where you found yourself wishing for some action to liven up the plot?
- Any unrealistic characters?
- Any descriptions or chapters that you felt were weak?
- Were there any moments or characters that might have been improved? If so, what changes would you make?

Unputdownable?

- Did you grab the book whenever you had a spare moment?
- Did you read it rather than playing computer games or watching TV?
- Or did you read the first chapter before letting it gather dust on your bookshelf?
- Did you feel during and after reading it?
- How would you compare it to other books you read?
- Would you recommend this book to others?

The Setting

- ▶ Compare the setting of the book to the world that you know. Is it set in the past, future or another world etc.
- ▶ Can you picture the book's setting when you close your eyes? Try to pass on to your reader a sense of setting.

The Characters

- ▶ Does the writer make you believe in them as real people?
- ▶ Do you like or dislike the characters?
- ▶ Write about the characters using examples of what they have said and done to give a sense of their personalities.

The Plot

- ▶ Give your reader a taste of the plot but don't give the surprises away.
- ▶ Summarise the plot in a way that will answer some questions about the book, but leave other questions in the reader's mind.

Overall Thoughts

- ▶ Give your opinion on what type of person would enjoy reading the book.
- ▶ Give the book a mark out of five and explain why you awarded this mark.
- ▶ Give your thoughts and explain any changes to the book you would make.