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### The Same Stuff as Stars

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Paterson, Katherine. *The Same Stuff as Stars*. Clarion Books, 2002. ISBN 0618247440. \$15.00. 242 pp.

Reviewer: Tom Wright

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Contemporary Realistic Fiction;

Subject: Problem families; Worry in Children; Self-Reliance;

Katherine Paterson writes insightfully and compassionately about families and the modern plagues that beset them. She has the ability to describe abandonment in all its agonizing poignancy while offering the reader hope in the human spirit and the resiliency of youth.

Eleven-year-old Angel Morgan and seven-year-old Bernie are abandoned by their mother to the care of their frail and destitute grandmother. Angel's father is in prison, coming from a family pedigree of incarceration. Lest this sound too dismal an introduction, it is clear from the beginning that Angel and Bernie have spirit and hope. Angel must assume the mother's role, caring for both her younger brother and her aging grandmother. Great emotional energy is spent in an effort to create a stable façade to prevent the authorities from separating this family group. In these circumstances, a strange man who appears at night with a telescope introduces Angel to the stars. This begins a thread that continues throughout the story and is ultimately what gives Angel hope and strength. She is fascinated in the cosmos, and the immensity of space and man's place in it. As events seem to conspire against her, Angel thinks about Polaris, the North Star:

That was what she needed—a Polaris, a North Star, something steady so that she could always find her way. This story invites the reader to contemplate how many children find themselves in similar situations. It is a tragic state of affairs but Paterson weaves in a measure of human kindness that offers hope that there are "angels" among us that can intervene to care for those in need. Angel's fate is not clear but readers may trust that her spirit will break the cycle of despair. This is a moving piece of literature.