



Motown Record Corporation

# Wonderful Stevie Wonder

by Ann Bishop

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- 1 His name is no accident. It was given to him because it sounded like a good name for a star. And it's no idle boast, either. He *is* a wonder.
- 2 He was born blind, to a poor black family in Saginaw, Michigan, on May 13, 1950. He spent his childhood in Detroit as Stevland Morris. He became "Little Stevie Wonder" at the age of twelve, and at that age he wrote and recorded his first smash hit, "Fingertips." He grew up, discarded the "Little," and became Stevie Wonder—not only a superstar, but a musician who has been called "the most admired of his generation." His records have sold millions of copies and he has received awards almost too numerous to count.
- 3 If you stopped with just those facts, it might sound as if his fame had come easy. He was handicapped, sure; but he'd "made it" by the age of twelve, so the handicap didn't really handicap him. Poor and black—well, that too might have been a problem, but obviously it wasn't, because it didn't stop him either. Stevie had the twin blessings of talent and luck, and that's all it took to give him his fast, glittering ride to the top.
- 4 But that view of Stevie Wonder omits everything about him that is really important. Certainly he had talent, but talent contains only a possibility, only the raw material, only something that has to be worked and trained and developed into achievement.

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- 5 Certainly he had luck. His first and biggest piece of luck was his family. They made it possible for him to have a childhood as free and normal as any blind child could have. They made it possible for him to find a world in which he could be whole—his music.
- 6 His second piece of luck was an early introduction to the recording company where his professional career began. That introduction came, however, because Stevie had worked hard to merit it.
- 7 As for the handicap that hasn't handicapped him: it hasn't because Stevie wouldn't let it. To someone who has been blind from birth, as Stevie has been, the world is different from the world of the sighted—different even from the world of those who become blind after having had vision.
- 8 There are many things the blind can never experience, things that must be seen to seem real: the sky, the moon, the horizon, mountains in the distance, a bird in flight—and light. For those who are totally blind, there is no light.
- 9 It's more difficult for blind children to learn to talk than it is for children with sight. Children learn to speak not only by hearing sounds, but by seeing how the lips and tongue move when the sounds are made. If a child with sight drops a pencil or a penny, it's easy to find, but a blind child must grope and then often can't find whatever was dropped. And it's more difficult for a blind child to learn to eat with a knife and fork. In fact, just about all the ordinary things people have to do are more difficult for the blind. But the worst thing for many blind people is that they frequently must ask for help. And it's not pleasant to always have to rely on others.
- 10 Those are some—just some—of the ways life is hard for blind people. The cowardly thing to do would be to give up, and lead a life of self-pity and dependence.
- 11 But that was not Stevie's way. His mother taught him that blindness could be a blessing in disguise—a chance to develop other gifts in a special way—and he believed her. He developed his sense of touch, his sense of hearing, and his memory. He began very early to listen to music, and it became the most important thing in his life. He learned to play the piano, the harmonica, and the drums, and he began to sing. He developed his very real musical gift as fully as he could. And because he had done so, when a stroke of luck—the interest of another musician, Ronnie White—brought him to the attention of a recording company that could give him the chance of a career, he was able to perform so well that in a very short time he became a star.
- 12 Even then he didn't stop learning and developing. During his teens, he wrote and sang slick popular music. He made a lot of money which Motown, the company for which he recorded, put in a trust fund for him. When he was twenty-one, he gained control of the trust. He had more than a million dollars in the bank. It would have been easy and safe to go on in the same way—stay with the same company, write and record the same kind of music—but Stevie wanted to do more. He wanted to write music in a new and more serious way. He wanted to write about the things that were important to him: racial equality, religion, deep human love. So he did. He used part of his money to set up his own studio, with all the instruments that fascinated him and the equipment he needed to create and record his new kind of music.
- 13 He had high expectations of what he could do. His new music could have been a failure. But it wasn't—instead, it brought him a wider, more enthusiastic audience than he had ever had. He came to be considered not merely a popular star, but a creative musician of the first rank.
- 14 The most important thing about Stevie Wonder is that he *knows what's important*. His music speaks to all of us, and so do his words. He once said, "The only people who are really blind are those whose eyes are obscured by hatred and bigotry. They can't see the light of love and justice."

## How Well Did You Read?

Write *T* if the statement is true according to the story. Write *F* if the statement is false.

- 1 Stevie Wonder was given his name because it sounded like the name of a star.
- 2 Review paragraph 2. The main purpose of that paragraph is to describe Stevie's feelings about his career.
- 3 Stevie achieved success in part because he had talent and luck.
- 4 Review paragraph 8. The main purpose of that paragraph is to help the reader understand what it is like to be blind.
- 5 Review paragraph 9. The main purpose of that paragraph is to describe the difficulties of the blind.
- 6 Because he was born blind, Stevie became entirely dependent on other people.
- 7 Because he was born blind, Stevie developed his other senses and gifts.
- 8 Stevie's later music was more serious than his earlier songs.
- 9 Review paragraph 14. The main purpose of that paragraph is to tell how Stevie's music has changed over the years.

## Learn about Words

### Vocabulary

**A** You can often tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. Then find the word that fits the given meaning. Write the word.

- 1 gave up; got rid of (2)
- 2 group of people born at about the same time (2)
- 3 clearly; apparently (3)
- 4 leaves out (4)
- 5 deserve (6)
- 6 place where the land appears to meet the sky (8)
- 7 reliance on others (10)
- 8 hopes (13)

**B** A word may have more than one meaning.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. See how the word in **heavy type** below is used in the paragraph. Decide whether it has meaning **a**, **b**, or **c**. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

**9 records** (2)

- a** disks used with a phonograph
- b** official written accounts
- c** best marks yet attained

**10 attention** (11)

- a** position assumed by a soldier upon command
- b** notice; interest and concern
- c** act of courtesy

## Word Study

- C Steve answered **angrily**.  
Pearl left **early**.  
We will meet **here**.

The words in **heavy type** are adverbs. Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. Adverbs often tell how, when, or where something is done. In the examples above *angrily* tells *how* Steve answered, *early* tells *when* Pearl left, and *here* tells *where* we will meet. In each sentence below there is an adverb in **heavy type**. Decide whether the adverb tells you how, when, or where something is done. Write *How*, *When*, or *Where*.

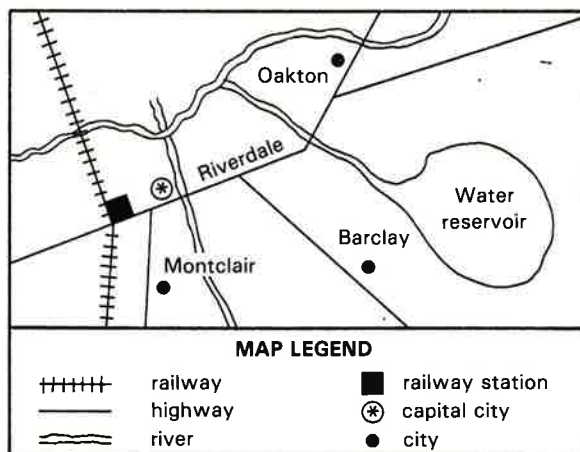
- 11 Nita left **angrily**.
- 12 She walked **rapidly**.
- 13 I came to the party **late**.
- 14 **Soon** I'll be rich.
- 15 We visit them **yearly**.
- 16 Samuel ran **away**.
- 17 I smiled at her **happily**.
- 18 I'm going **there**.

- D Kittens eat **very** often.  
Kittens are **rather** tiny.

The words *very* and *rather* are often followed by an adjective or an adverb. For that reason, *very* and *rather* are sometimes called adjective-adverb markers. Some other common adjective-adverb markers are *somewhat*, *really*, *quite*, *more*, *most*, and *too*. For each sentence below, write the adjective-adverb marker and the adjective or adverb that follows it.

- 19 My father was rather anxious yesterday.
- 20 Lorna is more capable than Don.
- 21 My sister walked very slowly.
- 22 I'm somewhat concerned about you.
- 23 I'm really sorry I offended you.
- 24 Donna's work is quite pleasing.
- 25 Don't walk too far.
- 26 Ruth most earnestly urged me to stay.

- E There are several symbols on this map. Notice the dots. The map *legend* (below the map) tells you that that symbol shows where a city is located. Use the legend to find out what the other symbols mean. Then decide whether the statements below are true or false. Write *T* for true or *F* for false.



- 27 Riverdale is the capital city.
- 28 The closest city to the reservoir is Barclay.
- 29 The highway crosses the river in four places.
- 30 The closest city to the railway station is Riverdale.
- 31 The railway crosses the river in three places.
- 32 There are five cities shown on the map.
- 33 The closest city to Riverdale is Montclair.