

Teacher Guide

Grades 7–8

Drums, Girls & Dangerous Pie

Jordan Sonnenblick

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DRUMS, GIRLS & DANGEROUS PIE

by
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Teacher Guide

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Table of Contents

Summary	3
About the Author.....	3
Characters	4
Background Information	4
Initiating Activities.....	6
Vocabulary Activities.....	7
Eight Sections	8
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities	
Post-reading Discussion Questions	21
Post-reading Extension Activities	23
Assessment.....	24
Scoring Rubric.....	31

Skills and Strategies

Critical Thinking

Identifying attributes,
compare/contrast, research,
evaluating decisions,
brainstorming

Comprehension

Analysis, main idea, predicting,
cause/effect, sequencing

Writing

Essay, script, journal, poetry,
novel chapter, review

Listening/Speaking

Interview, oral presentation,
listening, discussion, acting

Vocabulary

Definitions, synonyms/antonyms,
parts of speech, context clues,
glossary

Literary Elements

Foreshadowing, climax,
figurative language, theme,
characterization, setting,
point of view, genre, conflict,
audience

Across the Curriculum

Science—cancer/leukemia,
nutrition, stages of grief;
Music—jazz, drumming;
Math—tutoring/teaching;
Other—service projects,
community involvement

Dangerous Pie—Anxiety with Tic Tacs

Steven sits in his eighth-grade graduation ceremony remembering his school year. He recalls a journal entry in which he wrote about his annoying little brother, Jeffrey. He is proud to be playing the drum solo in the finale of the spring jazz concert. He remembers the morning of October 7 when his younger brother fell off of a stool and bled freely. At the end of that agonizing day, Steven found out that Jeffrey had leukemia.

Vocabulary	
tethered	
asphyxiated	
prose	
ambitious	
unrelenting	
fateful	
perch	
concoction	
interrogation	
demoted	
haze	
commentator	
concoction	
schemes	
leukemia	

Discussion Questions

- Where is the narrator as the novel begins? What clues does he give about the story's plot? *(The narrator is sitting in his gown at an eighth-grade graduation. He indicates that over the last school year, his entire life has changed. He explains by recalling a journal entry about his annoying younger brother.)*
- Describe Jeffrey as you learn about him from his older brother's point of view. *(Jeffrey is a cute five-year-old boy with blond hair. He embarrasses his older brother from whom he adores. He is also a bit mischievous, making many concoctions in the kitchen using his brother's prize drumsticks as stirring utensils. He is kindhearted, however. Steven is embarrassed when Jeffrey reveals too personal information to Steven's peers. The brothers have typical sibling rivalry.)*
About what things is Steven most concerned as he begins his narrative? *(He is a devoted drummer and cares passionately about his music. He is also concerned with girls, particularly Renee Albert, even though she has an older boyfriend. He is plagued by insecurities typical to most teenagers.)*

- What happens on the morning of October 7? What conflict or tension does this create? *(That morning, Steven is making Jeffrey breakfast. Jeffrey falls off of a kitchen stool and injures his nose. The family is alarmed when they realize how much Jeffrey's nose is bleeding. Mrs. Alper rushes him to the hospital while Mr. Alper takes Steven to school. Steven worries he may be in big trouble because he allowed Jeffrey to sit on the tall stool. His dad worries about how Jeffrey is faring since his father did not offer much reassurance on the ride to school. Mrs. Alper is clearly tense because of Jeffrey's bleeding.)*
- What tactics does Steven use to keep his mind off of Jeffrey? What other things work as a distraction? What good news does Steven receive from Mr. Watras? *(After trying to focus on other things, including difficult math problems and pretty girls, he is able to distance himself from the day's issues when he plays drums. He is pleased when Mr. Watras offers him a difficult drum solo to play in the spring concert.)*
- Compare and contrast Renee and Annette. *(Annette will marry. Renee is popular and pretty. She attracts attention, and Steven has a crush on her. She eagerly ends conversations with Steven to be with her other friends. While Renee does not seem truly interested in Steven, Annette seems very interested in him. Annette is more attentive to Steven, following through with conversations and asking questions to which she genuinely wants answers. She babysat Jeffrey and is compassionate about his hurt nose. She is not as popular or flashy as Renee. Steven says she is not good with boys but acknowledges that she is a good piano player. Both girls are in Steven's grade, and they offer him female attention.)*

7. After getting home, what does Steven expect? What does he learn instead? (*Steven expects to be blamed for Jeffrey's injuries. He is instead shocked by the news that Jeffrey has leukemia.*)
8. **Prediction:** How will Jeffrey's illness affect him and his family?

Supplementary Activities

1. **Figurative Language:** Begin a chart identifying the figurative language used in the novel. Continue adding to the chart as you read the novel. Examples: **Similes**—"blond ringlets like the ones on the angels" (p. 4); "braces that look like I tried to swallow a train wreck" (p. 4); "He started to scream like a banshee..." (pp. 26-27); "...Annette just popped up like some spastic hand puppet" (p. 28); "...the trumpet were blasting like a herd of elephants..." (p. 32); **Metaphors**—Steven Alper: King of the Internet (p. 4); discussion: an unending round of guilt-trip Ping-Pong (p. 16)
2. **Music:** Conduct research to determine what differentiates jazz from other music genres. Select two pieces of music, one that is jazz and one that is from a different genre. Write a short essay comparing and contrasting the two pieces of music.
3. **Music Research:** Dizzy Gillespie, and write a short essay explaining his contribution to jazz music.
4. **Health:** Conduct research on childhood leukemia. What is it? How is it treated? What are the statistics for overcoming the disease?

The Father at Sea—Jeffrey's Vacation

Steven recalls when Jeffrey was born and he took on the role of big brother protector. Steven stays home with his distant, silent father while his mother and brother go to Philadelphia to visit. Although Mrs. Alper checks in during the week with news confirming Jeffrey's leukemia, Steven does not receive word of these messages. He keeps the initial information he has about Jeffrey to himself, trying to convince himself that Jeffrey is really fine and the doctors have made a mistake. He deflects his fear and anger by being funny at school, practicing swimming, and venting in his journal.

Discussion Questions

1. What incident does Steven retell in his October 23 journal entry? How did Steven's talk with Grandpa affect him? (*Steven's grandpa told him that he would be special and important to Jeffrey because he was the big protector—not the father or the mother. It reminded Steven that he would have to help care for the baby because the baby would need protection. Steven believes he has taken on the protector role pretty well. He remembers the responsibility to care for his little brother from the moment he met him.*)
2. As the family commiserates about Jeffrey's condition, what is their first collective emotion? Why do you think they feel this way? (*The family recalls all the ways they could have treated Jeffrey better or paid closer attention to him as the leukemia symptoms began. They feel guilty for everything they did wrong or imperfectly, even though they know rationally that changing their actions could not have changed the outcome for Jeffrey. As a class, discuss the different stages of grief, including how they relate to a severe illness in a family.*)

Character Web

Directions: Complete the attribute web by filling in information specific to a character in the novel.

