



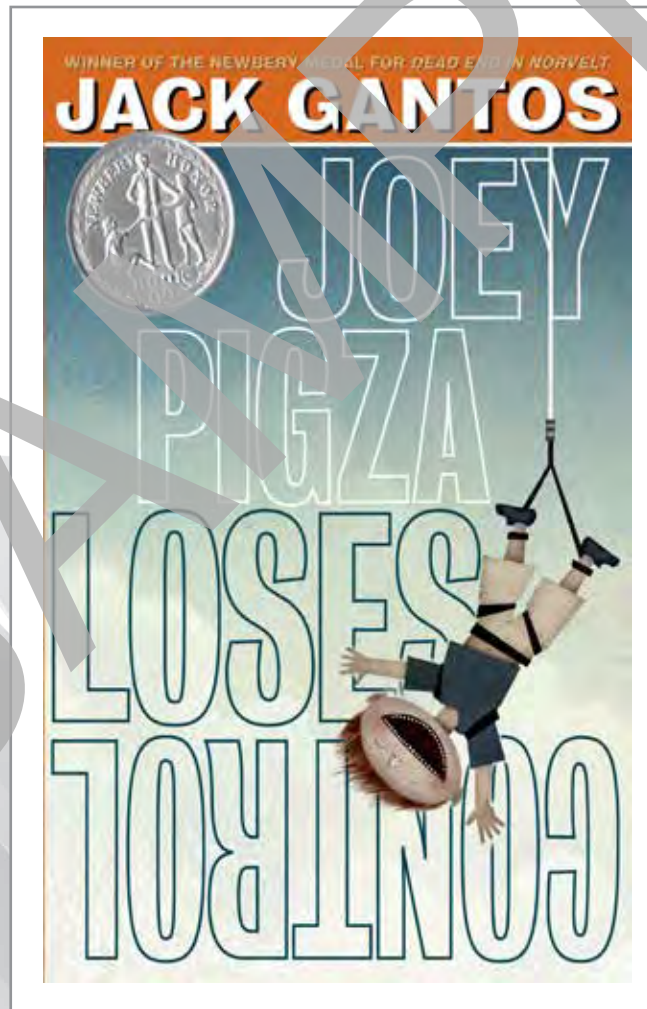
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Joey Pigza Loses Control

Jack Gantos



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Joey Pigza Loses Control

Jack Gantos

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Research, compare/contrast, creative thinking, behavior analysis, critical thinking

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing, similes and metaphors, Venn diagram, character growth

Writing

Letter writing, poetry, creative writing, epilogue, reporting, book proposal, script writing, critiquing, chapter titles

Listening/Speaking

Oral presentation, discussion, dramatizing

Vocabulary

Bingo, descriptive sentences, photos, vocabulary wheel, password game

Literary Elements

Figurative language, characterization, point of view, literary analysis, story mapping

Across the Curriculum

Psychology—pros/cons of medicating children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), alcoholism and its effects on families, enabling vs. tough love, emotional support, divorce; Art—illustration, collage, advertisements, cover design; Sports History—Cy Young Award, baseball greats

Genre: fiction

Setting: present day; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Point of View: first person, from Joey's point of view

Themes: addiction, friendship, responsibility, family relationships, acceptance, positive effects of ADHD medication

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. self, person vs. society

Tone: humorous, disturbing, heartening

Date of First Publication: 2000

Summary

After receiving a letter from Joey's dad requesting visitation rights with Joey, Joey's mom reluctantly lets Joey spend six weeks getting to know his dad. Dad claims to have quit drinking and found a job, but Mom still worries about leaving Joey in his care since Joey has only recently achieved stability in his life. While with Dad, Joey discovers that he is a talented pitcher and joins the baseball team Dad coaches. Dad soon returns to his irresponsible ways and flushes Joey's Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) medicine down the toilet, telling him it is a "crutch." The "old" Joey gradually returns, and Joey's ADHD causes him to behave unpredictably. Joey's lack of self control and desperate attempts to please his selfish father cause his downward spiral, and he lacks the mental clarity to realize he needs help. Dad's final blowup at the championship baseball game is all Joey can handle, and he runs away to call his mom for help. She rescues him from a local mall and brings Joey home, telling him she loves him and everything is going to be okay.

Characters

Joey: young boy with ADHD who has recently gained stability in his life with new medication and a new special education program at school; energetic, active, humorous, and conscientious

Mom: Joey's loving mother; hairdresser; supports and takes care of Joey

Dad: Joey's alcoholic father; irresponsible and selfish; coaches baseball as community service for an offense

Grandma: Joey's sickly grandmother; suffers from emphysema; selfish and bold; uses Joey's emergency money to buy cigarettes

Pablo: Joey's dog and constant companion; a Chihuahua mix

Leezy Fiddle: Dad's new girlfriend; sweet and caring; helps Joey find his mother

Chapters 1–3

After receiving a letter from Joey’s dad’s lawyer asking for visitation, Mom takes Joey for a six-week stay with his dad in Pittsburgh. Mom is nervous to leave Joey with his dad, who is a recovering alcoholic. She describes him as “wired,” like Joey. Joey has ADHD and has been moved to a special education school. He feels more in control of his life now that he is on a new ADHD medicine that comes in a patch he wears on his body.

On the way to Pittsburgh, Joey’s dog Pablo gets carsick, so Joey puts him in the car’s glove box and forgets about him until much later. Joey’s dad, Carter, takes Joey to Storybook Land Fun Park, the place where his “*whole life turned around*” (p. 22). Joey’s grandmother, who lives with Carter, comes along and plays miniature golf while the guys explore the park. Grandma has emphysema and uses an oxygen tank to help her breathe. Carter talks nonstop and does not seem interested in getting to know his son. At the park, Joey remembers that Pablo is in the glove box, and the family rushes back to Carter’s house to find Pablo sitting on the porch waiting for them.

Vocabulary

turnpike
visitation
notion
pursed
suede
amputated
plaster
hoisted
ignition
truce
tinsel
ringer
cowering
emphysema
pathetic
porridge

Discussion Questions

1. In the opening paragraph, Mom has “both hands clamped tightly around the wheel.” Joey is “snapping [his] seat belt on and off” (p. 3) and asking hundreds of questions about his dad. What does their behavior tell you about Mom and Joey? Why do you think they feel this way? *(They are both nervous about seeing Joey’s dad, Carter. Mom is probably worried about leaving Joey with him for six weeks. She may worry that Carter is not responsible enough to care for Joey or that he will be a bad influence on him. Joey needs a stable home life because of his ADHD, and his mother may worry that Carter’s instability will hinder Joey’s progress in controlling his behavior. Joey has heard stories about his father’s behavior and probably feels very insecure about being left with him, yet he also craves to know all about his father.)*
2. What can you tell about Joey’s mom from reading Chapter 1? *(She may not be the most responsible parent. She tells Joey that her license is “slightly expired” and that she does not have car insurance. Her driving is somewhat reckless, and she also allows Joey to put Pablo in the glove box, which most parents probably would not allow. It is obvious that she loves Joey, however.)*
3. Why do you think Mom received a letter from Carter’s lawyer? Why did the letter upset Mom? *(Carter has decided that he wants visitation rights with Joey. Mom is probably nervous about exposing Joey to his father’s behavior.)*
4. Why does Mom say she doesn’t really “want to feel anything about all this” (p. 8)? How does she seem to feel about it? *(She is probably trying not to think about the bad things that could happen while Joey is with his father. She is trying to convince herself that everything will be fine. She seems to feel very nervous and worried about leaving Joey with his dad.)*
5. How does Joey’s new medication affect him? *(The new medicine has a positive impact on his life. It has allowed him to settle down and control his thoughts and behavior. He now has a positive outlook about the future, because he knows he can make better decisions.)*

6. How could Joey's desire to be loved by his father be a bad thing? (*Joey claims to love his dad before he even knows him. His father sounds like he could be a very difficult person to love. Joey may try to do everything possible to please his father and earn his father's love, even if it's not in his best interest.*)
7. On pages 11–13 of the novel, what does the author's writing style imply about Joey's thoughts and behavior? (*The paragraphs and sentences are long. The reader can feel the fast-paced intensity of Joey's thoughts. The author's style reveals Joey's hyperactivity. His thoughts are unfocused and seem to race through his mind.*)
8. Why do you think Joey wore down a bald spot on his head? Why does his mom say he would "scrub those old-lady heads down to a nub" (p. 15) if he worked at the hair salon? (*His disorder caused him to pick and scratch at his head until his hair fell out. This is a tic brought on by the effects of ADHD, something he obviously feels embarrassed about. Joey's mother is making light of Joey's intense personality, which seems to be one of the ways in which she deals with Joey's hyperactive behavior.*)
9. On page 17 of the novel, what impressions do you get of Dad and Grandma? What is Dad doing, and why? (*Grandma may be nervous, as she is smoking on the porch. Dad is dressed in neatly pressed clothes, which may indicate that he wants to impress Joey or his mom. He wants to appear put-together. Dad is sweeping, which could be his way of releasing nervous energy, foreshadowing his desire for cleanliness and perfection, or could symbolize his attempt to clean up the mess he has made with Joey and his mom.*)
10. What does Joey mean when he says his dad is "wired"? How can he tell? How does this make Joey feel? (*His dad is hyperactive. He cannot stand still, and his body sounds "as if [it] was run by an electric motor" [p. 20]. This makes Joey nervous.*)
11. What can you tell about Grandma and her feelings about Joey's mom? (*She believes that Joey's mom lets Joey "run the show." Grandma seems to believe that she is a better influence on Joey than his mom.*)
12. How does Carter act at the park? What lesson did he learn there? How does Joey feel at the park? (*Carter does all the talking and does not stop to find out anything about Joey. Joey thinks, "I knew how Dad felt about everything. But Dad didn't know how I felt about anything" [p. 29]. Carter says his life turned around when he passed out and woke the next morning near the Humpty Dumpty at the park. He realized that he was "nothing more than a teary-eyed busted-up egg" [p. 26]. He decided he wanted to turn his life around, so he went to a clinic for help with his alcoholism. Joey is bored listening to his dad's stories and wants his dad to be interested in him. He is not having fun at the park, which is meant for children younger than him.*)
13. What does Dad mean when he tells Joey not to turn into a Humpty Dumpty? (*He means that Joey needs to stay in control and try not to fall apart. Worrying about Pablo will not change the situation.*)
14. **Prediction:** What kind of influence will Joey's father have on him?

Supplementary Activities

1. Behavior Analysis: Choose a day during the past week, and list the good and bad things about your behavior during that day. Then answer the following questions. Are there more good or bad behaviors? How can you change your bad behaviors to make them better? Do you get better results from your good or bad behaviors? Why?
2. Art: Draw an illustration of Joey and his dad at Storybook Land Fun Park to accompany Chapter 3.