



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key

Jack Gantos



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key

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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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

novelunits.com

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Identifying attributes, research, brainstorming, creative thinking, critical thinking, compare/contrast

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—cultures; Geography; Science—research; Math—word problems; Art—illustrations, comics, collages; Health—diet

Literary Elements

Simile, metaphor, allusions, story mapping, plot development, character analysis

Writing

Diary, personal, freewriting, creative, persuasive, poetry, reports, essays

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, storytelling, oral reports, interviewing, drama

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing, foreshadowing, cause/effect, inference, context clues

Vocabulary

Word maps, charades, synonyms, antonyms, defining, parts of speech

Summary

Joey Pigza is a well-meaning fourth grader whose impulsive behavior gets him into lots of trouble. Joey, who claims that “wired” behavior runs in the family, narrates the story. Although Joey’s antics can be humorous, it is clear that gaining control is tantamount to Joey’s success in school. The medication Joey takes for his hyper behavior isn’t working and his self-esteem plummets. After mishaps like swallowing his house key and stealing and eating an entire pie while on a class trip, things go really wrong. Joey accidentally hurts another student and is sent to the county’s special education center. At this special school, Joey is told his home life is part of his problem (his mother left him with his grandmother and has just recently reentered Joey’s life) as well as the poor choices Joey makes. Joey receives help from a team of medical professionals and a caseworker nicknamed Special Ed. With attention and support, as well as an effective new medication, Joey is on his way to realizing the potential he has always possessed.

Characters

Joey Pigza: Fourth-grade narrator of the story who takes medication for an attention disorder

Fran Pigza: Joey’s mother who has recently returned to raise Joey on her own; she appears to use alcohol as a means of coping with life

Carter Pigza: Joey’s absent father who suffers from an attention disorder

Grandma: Joey’s paternal grandmother who, like her son and grandson, exhibits wired behavior; she raises Joey in his mother’s absence

Ed Vanness: Nicknamed “Special Ed”; Joey’s caseworker at the Lancaster County Special Education Center

Mrs. Maxy: Joey’s fourth-grade teacher

Mrs. Howard: Joey’s special-education teacher

Maria Dombrowski: Classmate who is accidentally injured by Joey

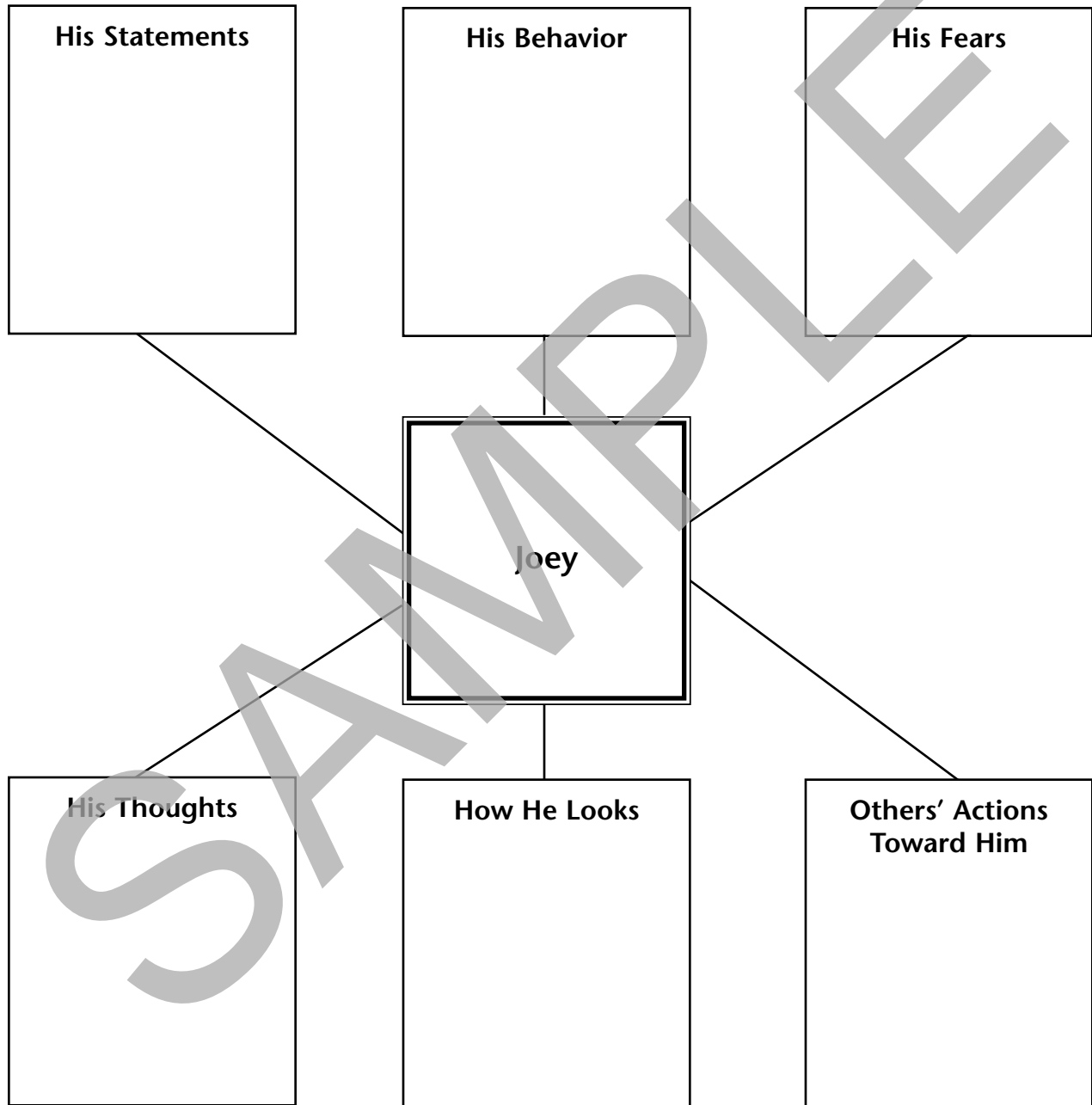
Mrs. Jarzab: Joey’s principal

About the Author

The works of Jack Gantos include novels for adults, young adults, and middle grade readers as well as over twenty books for primary readers. Gantos claims to have been writing about hyperactivity his entire career, citing the misadventures of his characters Rotten Ralph, Jack Henry, Frankie Pagoda, and Joey Pigza. About kids who are “wired” like Joey, Gantos says, “These are good, smart kids who, like

Attribute Boxes

Directions: Record evidence about Joey's character within the boxes.



Chapter 1 “Off the Wall”

Vocabulary

drills (3)	blurt (3)	hesitate (4)	holler (4)
whirling (4)	yanked (5)	clamped (5)	behavior (6)

Discussion Questions

1. Look at the chapter title. What does the expression “off the wall” mean? *(Answers will vary; a good definition in the context of this chapter would be “uncontrolled behavior.”)*
2. What does Joey mean when he says he is “wired”? Give examples of his “wired” behavior. *(The word “wired” describes Joey’s impulsive behavior. His bouncing a Superball off of the lockers and ceiling and spinning through the hallway like a top are examples of this behavior.)*
3. What kind of “meds” do you think Joey takes? Why does he take them? *(Answers will vary; it appears Joey takes medication to control his behavior.)*
4. Does Joey answer questions appropriately when called upon in class? Why or why not? *(Answers will vary.)*
5. Why does Joey respond to each of Mrs. Maxy’s questions by saying, “Can I get back to you on that”? *(Answers will vary; it appears that Joey responds in an impulsive manner and that this is a phrase he repeats often.)*
6. How does Mrs. Maxy respond to Joey’s disruptive behavior? *(She sends him to stand in the hallway.)*
7. What does Joey do while standing in the hallway? *(He bounces his Superball off of the lockers and ceiling and uses his belt and shoelaces to spin himself like the Tasmanian Devil.)*
8. Is Joey able to settle himself down? Why or why not? *(Joey does not settle down; Answers will vary.)*
9. What behavior goals do you think the principal discusses with Joey? *(Answers will vary.)*
10. What task does the principal assign Joey while he is in her office? Why do you think she gives him this particularly duty? *(Joey sorts the crayons by color; Answers will vary, but perhaps he is given this task to keep him busy so he cannot get into further trouble.)*
11. Who is narrating this story? How can you tell? *(Joey Pigza is telling the story; The reader knows this because Mrs. Maxy identifies Joey as the first-person narrator when she addresses him by name.)*
12. **Prediction:** What do you think causes Joey to act out in class? *(Answers will vary.)*

Supplementary Activities

1. Research: Have students research common behavioral disorders and/or learning disabilities in children their age or Joey’s age. Ask them to include the following information when they

present their findings to the class: What can cause behavioral or learning disabilities? What are common symptoms? What are the effects of such conditions? What treatments are available in your school or community?

2. Discussion: Ask a student volunteer to read aloud the passage where Joey bounces around the hallway. Have students discuss how his behavior is and is not amusing. Then have students consider and discuss how acting as Joey does in this section would reflect on them positively and negatively at school or at home.
3. Critical Thinking: Ask students to answer the following prompt in a personal journal entry: How would you feel about taking medication every day, as Joey does? Inform students that they do not need to share their responses with classmates or the teacher.
4. Literary Analysis: Instruct students to start a simile and metaphor list or graph as they continue reading the novel.

Chapter 2 “Family Tree”

Vocabulary

recognize (8)	crumble (8)	pigpen (8)	responsible (8)
high-voltage (9)	pyramids (10)	scalded (11)	vibrate (11)
hobbies (11)	mesmerized (12)	fuse (13)	apologizing (14)
hyperactive (14)	stuntman (15)	dispenser (16)	

Discussion Questions

1. Where is Joey’s father? Where has his mother been? (*Joey’s father currently lives in Pittsburgh. Joey’s mother followed his father around in an attempt to get him “turned around.”*)
2. Who has been raising Joey? (*his grandmother*)
3. Look at the way Joey describes his mother’s return. Are his word choices interesting or unusual? Why? What does this say about his feelings toward her? (*Examples of Joey’s descriptions: “mom finally...remembered about me”; “...a stranger”; “said the lady who was my mom”; “I didn’t recognize the lady”; “I wasn’t sure she was my mom”; “I didn’t like her at all”; Answers will vary, but Joey appears ambivalent toward his mother.*)
4. What other family members does Joey claim are wired? (*He says both his father and grandmother are wired.*)
5. What does Joey mean when he compares his family tree to a set of high-voltage wires? Why might this be important? (*Joey uses an analogy that extends the “wired” behavior that runs in his family; it suggests that his behavior might be genetic.*)
6. How does Joey feel about his father? (*Joey is curious about him and would like to see for himself what he is like.*)