



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **There's a Girl in My Hammerlock**

Jerry Spinelli

**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# There's a Girl in My Hammerlock

Jerry Spinelli

## 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

Brainstorming, synthesis,  
research, visualization,  
categorization

### Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,  
cause-and-effect, contrast/  
comparison, inference

### Writing

Narrative, descriptive, letter-  
writing

### Vocabulary

Antonyms/synonyms,  
classifying

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, role play,  
interviewing, sounds

### Literary Elements

Characterization, story  
elements, similes, fore-  
shadowing, style

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## Summary of *There's a Girl in My Hammerlock*

Eighth-grader Maisie Potter finds herself going out for wrestling when she doesn't make the cheerleading squad and she notes that Eric DeLong has also gone out for the wrestling team. As Maisie is propelled along the wrestling adventure, she discovers that her community and school are not quite ready for boys and girls wrestling on the same teams. She meets Coach Cappelli who is a traditional coach, concerned for her and uncertain about how girls on the wrestling team will work out; but he becomes supportive and insists that she be treated as a wrestler and a Raven, not as a girl. Once the tale is played out, Maisie decides that she has grown in self-esteem and to respect herself.

### About the Author

Jerry Spinelli was born in 1941 in Norristown, Pennsylvania. He earned his A.B. from Gettysburg College and his M.A. from Johns Hopkins University. His career as a writer and editor was with Chilton Company (magazine publisher) from 1966-89. His books for young adults include *Space Station Seventh Grade*, *Who Put That Hair in My Toothbrush?*, *Night of the Whale*, *Jason and Marceline*, *Dump Days*, *Maniac Magee* (Novel Unit and Student Packet available), *The Bathwater Gang*, *There's a Girl in My Hammerlock*, and *Fourth Grade Rats*. He won the Newbery Award for *Maniac Magee*. He is married to Eileen Mesi (a writer) and they have seven children. Spinelli builds on his personal experiences and those of his children in his writing. In his Newbery acceptance speech he said he got his ideas from schoolchildren: "You're the funny ones. You're the fascinating ones. You're the elusive and inspiring and promising and heroic and maddening ones."

### Introductory Activities

1. Complete the anticipation guide on page 5 of this guide to react to statements on themes encountered in the book.
2. Make some predictions about the book. Choose one of the following ways to prepare for predicting:
  - a) Look at the cover, end sheets, and teasers on the back cover. What details have you noticed and what then do you predict? You can first just record details and then expand to predicting.
  - b) Read three pages from the book, one at the start, one from the middle, and one in the last third of the book. What do you suppose will be the story herein?
  - c) Talk to a classmate or librarian who has read other books by Jerry Spinelli. What do you expect of a Spinelli book?
  - d) The main character in the book is an eighth grade female who won the award as the best female athlete in seventh grade. What do you expect of such a character?
3. Put together some questions which you expect to be answered from the story. Trade your list of questions with a classmate; you will each answer each other's questions.

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4. Watch a wrestling match on television and a middle school match. How are the two the same and different? Fill in a K-W-L chart to record what you know of the sport. Then pose questions you expect to be answered in reading the book. The L column can be finished after reading the book to remember what you've learned of wrestling.

<b>K</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>L</b>
What I Know	What I Would Like to Learn	What I Learned

5. Imagine that you've decided to pursue a unique sport or activity in which your gender usually does not participate. Free write your feelings about the situation and what you expect from the experience.
6. These objects figure prominently in this book: a snowplow, a pet rat, and wrestling mats. What do you suppose may happen in the story?

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## Chapter Nine — Pages 45-52

### Vocabulary

gruesome 45

pounced 48

glutton 49

grapples 49

### Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Maisie is having a hard time of it with wrestling. Make a list of the reasons for her to continue and the reasons to drop out.

To Continue	To Drop Out
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• stubbornness</li><li>• challenge</li><li>• to fulfill what she said to parents</li><li>• Eric Delong</li><li>• Coach Cappelli</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• notes on the door</li><li>• missing basketball, potential to win</li><li>• attitudes of classmates</li><li>• pain of exercises</li><li>• Coach Cappelli</li><li>• her brother John</li></ul>

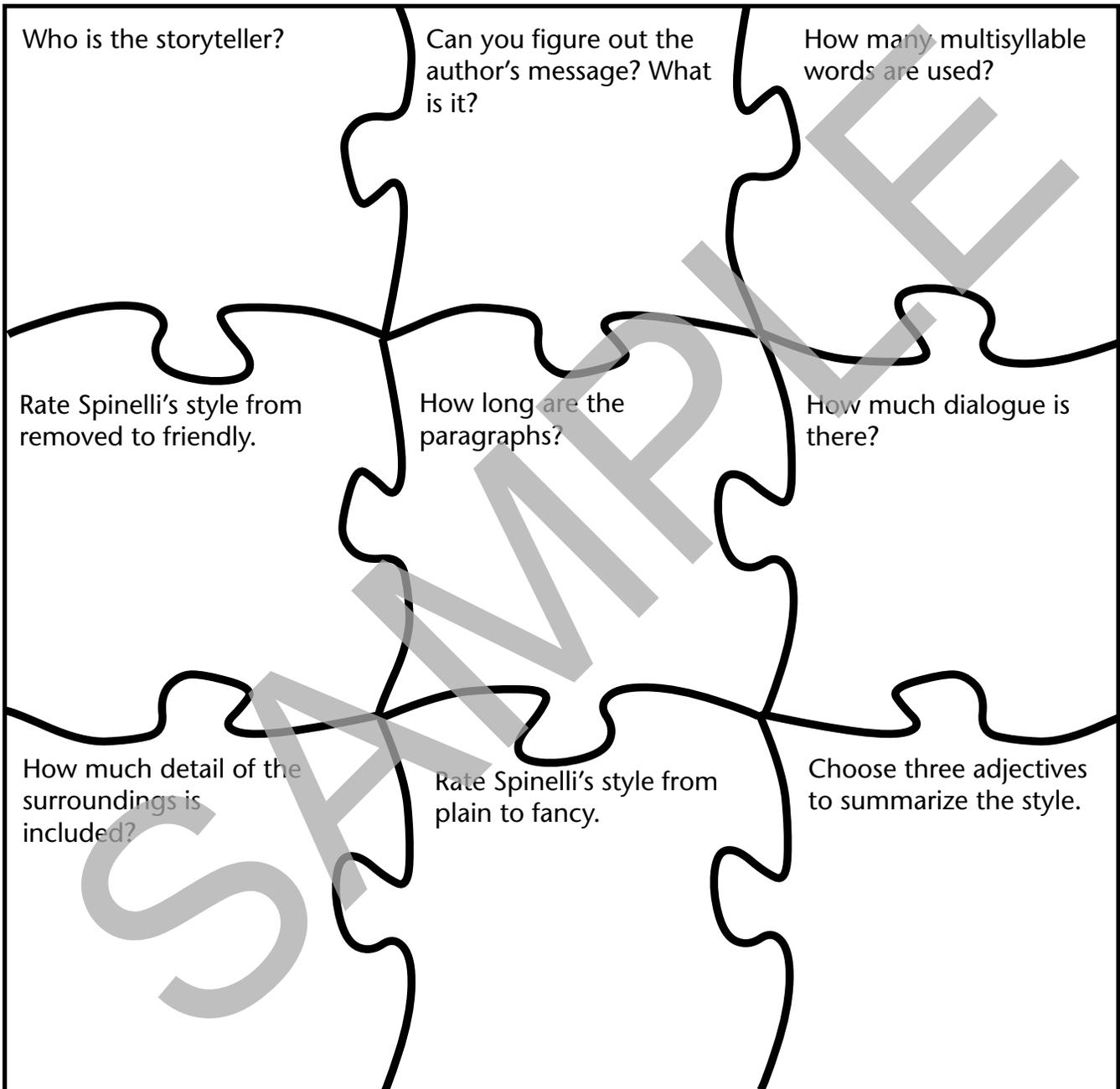
2. How do you suppose Maisie feels in this chapter? The author tells us what is happening but not always how Maisie feels emotionally. *(Answers will vary just as Maisie probably has some conflicting feelings.)*
3. Why do Maisie and George get sent to Coach Cappelli's office? *(Page 47, They find his comments about "stance or dance" funny and act silly as they end up circling like a pair of chimps.)*
4. How does Cappelli interpret Maisie and George? *(Page 49, He is very irritated about their humorous stance. He accuses Maisie of taking this whole wrestling team thing as a joke or prank or bet. He rails on about her being a "glutton for attention" and how he'd like to have her off his wrestling team if he thought he could get away with it.)*
5. Who is Tall Tina and why does she talk to Maisie? *(Tall Tina is six feet tall and the starting center on the girls' basketball team. She wishes Maisie were out for basketball because she is a good player and Tina and Maisie would play well together.)*

### Supplementary Activities

1. Use some similes to explain the difference in heights and stature between Maisie and Tina.
2. Use a story map to review the progress of the story thus far. Feel free to redesign the story map to your own specifications. Explain the changes to your teacher.

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## Style Puzzle



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8. What is this business about Bernadette talking to Maisie? (*Maisie is able to consider the pet rat and realizes that a toy snake would not be a welcome companion in the room.*)

### Supplementary Activities

1. Search out the similes the author uses to describe Maisie after the nutcracker. (like a victim from *Friday the 13th*, like somebody had planted a golf ball inside her upper lip, like a fish) Explain the similes and then choose alternate comparisons which you might also use. Try describing something or someone you know with similes.
2. Was the pet rat a good idea for Maisie? Why or why not? Explain in a short paragraph including reasons for your answer.
3. Have you ever told your concerns to a pet, even though the animal didn't talk back to you? How did it make you feel? What was special about the conversation? Create a dialogue between you and your real or imagined pet.
4. Take a look at smelling salts and maybe even smell some. What other first aid is usually available in school situations? Ask the school nurse or principal for the information.

## Chapter Twenty-One — Pages 118-123

### Vocabulary

collapsed 119

contortion 119

### Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Why does Maisie want, for the first time in her life, vacation to end fast? (*Practices during vacation run from nine to noon, definitely longer than the usual after school practices.*)
2. How does P.K. manage to earn some extra money? (*She charges her friends to see Maisie's golf ball lip and to touch it.*)
3. Who is Tank? (*P.K.'s new friend whose father calls him Tank in preference to his real name of Rodney, so he will grow up to be tough.*)
4. What is the new diversion for P.K. and Tank during Christmas vacation? (*They are intrigued with wrestling and are waiting for Maisie every day after practice with some new wrestling game or contest.*)
5. How does it work out to Maisie's pleasure when she takes P.K. and Tank to practice? (*The two are well received by the other wrestlers and there are several pickup "matches." The special bonus is when they encounter Eric DeLong after practice and get a bit of attention for themselves and for Maisie when they take on Eric as their newest target.*)
6. What do you predict the present Coach Cappelli has in mind for Maisie in the new year?