

# *Focus* **ON READING**

## *The Pigman*

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This is a sample not intended for classroom use.



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# Introduction/Classroom Management

## WELCOME TO *FOCUS ON READING*

*Focus on Reading* literature study guides are designed to help all students comprehend and analyze their reading. Many teachers have grappled with the question of how to make quality literature accessible to all students. Students who are already avid readers of quality literature are motivated to read and are familiar with prereading and reading strategies. However, struggling readers frequently lack basic reading skills and are not equipped with the prior knowledge and reading strategies to thoroughly engage in the classroom literature experience.

*Focus on Reading* is designed to make teachers' and students' lives easier! How? By providing materials that allow all students to take part in reading quality literature. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains activities that focus on vocabulary and comprehension skills that students need to get the most from their reading. In addition, each section within the guide contains a before-reading **Focus Your Reading** page containing tools to ensure success: **Vocabulary Words to Know**, **Things to Know**, and **Questions to Think About**. These study aids will help students who may not have the prior knowledge they need to truly comprehend the reading.

## USING *FOCUS ON READING*

*Focus on Reading* is designed to make it easy for you to meet the individual needs of students who require additional reading skills support. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains teacher and student support materials, reproducible student activity sheets, an end-of-book test, and an answer key.

- **Focus on the Book**, a convenient reference page for the teacher, provides a brief overview of the entire book including a synopsis, information about the setting, author data, and historical background.
- **Focus Your Knowledge**, a reference page for students, is a whole-book, prereading activity designed to activate prior knowledge and immerse students in the topic.

The study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable sections to make it easy to plan classroom time. Five activities are devoted to each section of the novel.

## Before Reading

- **Focus Your Reading** consists of 3 prereading sections:

**Vocabulary Words to Know** lists and defines 10 vocabulary words students will encounter in their reading. Students will not have to interrupt their reading to look up, ask for, or spend a lot of time figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words. These words are later studied in-depth within the lesson.

**Things to Know** identifies terms or concepts that are integral to the reading but that may not be familiar to today's students. This section is intended to "level the playing field" for those students who may not have much prior knowledge about the time period, culture, or theme of the book. It also gets students involved with the book, increasing interest before they begin reading.

**Questions to Think About** helps students focus on the main ideas and important details they should be looking for as they read. This activity helps give students a *purpose* for reading. The goal of these guiding questions is to build knowledge, confidence, and comfort with the topics in the reading.

## During Reading

- **Build Your Vocabulary** presents the 10 unit focus words in the exact context of the book. Students are then asked to write their own definitions and sentences for the words.
- **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** offers 10 multiple-choice, literal comprehension questions for each section.

**Check Your Understanding: Short Answer** contains 10 short-answer questions based on the reading.

## After Reading

- **Deepen Your Understanding** is a writing activity that extends appreciation and analysis of the book. This activity focuses on critical-thinking skills and literary analysis.
- **End-of-Book Test** contains 20 multiple-choice items covering the book. These items ask questions that require students to synthesize the information in the book and make inferences in their answers.

## CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

*Focus on Reading* is very flexible. It can be used by the whole class, by small groups, or by individuals. Each study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable units of study.

This literature comprehension program is simple to use. Just photocopy the lessons and distribute them at the appropriate time as students read the novel.

You may want to reproduce and discuss the **Focus Your Knowledge** page before distributing the paperbacks. This page develops and activates prior knowledge to ensure that students have a grounding in the book before beginning reading. After reading this whole-book prereading page, students are ready to dive into the book.

The **Focus Your Reading** prereading activities are the keystone of this program. They prepare students for what they are going to read, providing focus for the complex task of reading. These pages should be distributed before students actually begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. There are no questions to be answered on these pages; these are for reference and support during reading. Students may choose to take notes on these pages as they read. This will also give students a study tool for review before the **End-of-Book Test**.

The **Focus Your Reading** pages also provide an excellent bridge to home. Parents, mentors, tutors, or

other involved adults can review vocabulary words with students, offer their own insights about the historical and cultural background outlined, and become familiar with the ideas students will be reading about. This can help families talk to students in a meaningful way about their reading, and it gives the adults something concrete to ask about to be sure that students are reading and understanding.

The **Build Your Vocabulary** and **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** and **Short Answer** activities should be distributed when students begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. These literature guide pages are intended to help students comprehend and retain what they read; they should be available for students to refer to at any time during the reading.

**Deepen Your Understanding** is an optional extension activity that goes beyond literal questions about the book, asking students for their own ideas and opinions—and the reasons behind them. These postreading activities generally focus on literary analysis.

As reflected in its title, the **End-of-Book Test** is a postreading comprehension test to be completed after the entire novel has been read.

For your convenience, a clear **Answer Key** simplifies the scoring process.

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## Focus on the Book

### Synopsis

John Conlan and Lorraine Jensen, sophomores at Franklin High School in Staten Island, New York, tell their tale as a “memorial epic” of their friendship with Mr. Angelo Pignati. The teenagers befriend the old man, who they affectionately refer to as the Pigman, through one of their prank telephone calls. Lonely and unhappy in their relationships with their parents, they embrace the Pigman’s kindness and generosity. One evening, as the three of them play with roller skates in the Pigman’s house, Mr. Pignati suffers a heart attack. While the Pigman is in the hospital, John and Lorraine throw a party at his house that gets out of hand. Mr. Pignati returns home to find his house a mess and his treasured glass pig collection destroyed. Although saddened, he forgives the two, but soon suffers a second and fatal heart attack. John and Lorraine are left to wonder about the role they played in the Pigman’s death.

### About the Author

Born in Staten Island, New York, in 1936, Paul Zindel lived a difficult childhood. His father abandoned the family while Paul was a young child, and his mother worked a variety of jobs to support the family, causing them to move every year or two. He didn’t read as a child, as there were no books in his home, and today he claims that he writes for the people who don’t like to read. He attended Wagner College, receiving a B.S. and an M.S. in chemistry, while also taking some creative writing classes. After college, he spent ten years as a high school chemistry teacher, writing in his spare time.

His play *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* was first produced in Houston in 1965, opened off-Broadway in 1970, and moved to Broadway in 1971, winning numerous awards including the Pulitzer Prize for drama for that year. *The Pigman*, his first novel, was published in 1968. It was extremely successful and earned acclaim as one of the Notable Children’s Books of 1940–1970 by the American Library Association and one of their Best of the Best Books for

Young Adults in 1975, as well as receiving the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award in 1969.

He has written numerous other books for teenagers and young adult readers, taking much of his material from his experiences as a high school teacher and from his own struggles growing up. His novels have been praised for their honest and sensitive treatment of contemporary teenage concerns, being called “cruelly truthful about the human condition” by the Horn Book.

### Historical Background

*The Pigman* was first published in the late 1960s, and it reflects its time, as well as universal themes of coming of age. In *The Pigman*, Lorraine lives with her single mother, who was legally separated from her father, who has since died. Although many types of families are common today, divorce, while not unusual, was not as widespread in the 1960s. Lorraine has had no contact with her father, and her mother continually badmouths him, even after his death. Although this is still sometimes the case, many divorces are more amicable today, and children often maintain relationships with both parents.

John, too, has a difficult home life. His parents are together, but they do not seem very happy. They have the outward signs of happiness—a nice home, two children, enough money for the wife to stay home—but these are all superficial. John spends his time trying to get a rise out of his parents and suffers stereotypical sibling rivalry with an older, irreproachable brother.

The roles of men and women during the period of *The Pigman* were more narrowly defined than they are today. Lorraine’s mother has to work as a single mother; she is a nurse by profession. John’s mother does not work, but spends all her energy cleaning the house and going to the beauty parlor. She defers to her husband in disciplining John. The father is clearly the head of the household. When John and Lorraine “play house” at Mr. Pignati’s while he is hospitalized, they follow similar patterns, with Lorraine cooking and John taking out the trash.

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## *Focus Your Knowledge*

- At the start of the book, Lorraine and John sign an oath to truthfully relate the facts about the experiences with Mr. Pignati. What is an oath? What does it mean to take an oath or to make an oath with someone?
- In their oath, Lorraine and John refer to their story as a memorial epic. What is an epic? What are the characteristics of an epic story? What other epics (books, movies, and so forth) are you familiar with? What characteristics do these epics have in common?
- Who do you talk with when you have a problem? What makes that person a good person to talk with?
- Should you always do everything an adult tells you to do? Is it ever all right not to listen to an adult's instructions?
- If someone is always getting in trouble, should you try to befriend that person to be a "good influence"?
- If you feel guilty about something you have done wrong, should you always admit the truth? Is it ever acceptable to lie or to keep the truth hidden?
- Should you always talk to your parents about things that are bothering you? Are there any topics or situations that you would not feel comfortable talking to your parents about?
- If your parents are unable to help you with issues that are bothering you, should you then try to talk to another adult? What other adults do you know who might be good to talk with?

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## Focus Your Reading

### Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

**avocation**—a hobby

**incandescent**—giving off light as a result of being heated

**commemorative**—something that honors a memory

**subliminally**—perceiving something unconsciously

**repress**—to hold back

**infantile**—lacking maturity; like an infant

**monstrosity**—a malformed plant or animal; a freak

**compulsive**—to act impulsively or irrationally

**mortified**—humiliated

**sanitarium**—an institution for the treatment of mental disorders

### Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

**Gestapo** refers to the police unit of Germany's Nazi army which was infamous for its terrorist methods. The Nazis, led by Adolf Hitler, ruled Germany during World War II.

**Thrombosis** is the formation of a blood clot in the body's heart cavity.

**Sigmund Freud** (1856–1939) was an Austrian-born physician and pioneer psychoanalyst.

**Homo sapiens** is the scientific name for human beings.

**Venus** is the Roman goddess of love and beauty.

**Jean Harlow** (1911–1937) was a glamorous, platinum-blond American movie star. She made a number of movies throughout the 1930s but died at the early age of 26.

“**Do you have Prince Albert in a can?**” refers to a prank. Prince Albert was a popular brand of pipe tobacco, packaged in a can. If the answer to the question is yes, the response is “Then let him out!”



## *Focus Your Reading*

### *Questions to Think About*

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The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. What do you learn about John's personality in these chapters?
2. What do you learn about Lorraine's personality in these chapters?
3. What do you think made the two of them become good friends?
4. How do John and Lorraine's home lives affect each of them?
5. Does John believe that he and Lorraine are responsible for Mr. Pignati's death?

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## Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “After my bomb **avocation**, I became the organizer of the supercolossal fruit roll.”  
avocation: \_\_\_\_\_
2. “We were supposed to study **incandescent** lamps . . .”  
incandescent: \_\_\_\_\_
3. “. . . but he spent the period telling us about **commemorative** stamps. He was so enthusiastic about the old days at the P.O.”  
commemorative: \_\_\_\_\_
4. “I should never have let John write the first chapter because he always has to twist things **subliminally**.”  
subliminally: \_\_\_\_\_
5. “It’s got to be written now before John and I mature and **repress** the whole thing.”  
repress: \_\_\_\_\_
6. “I almost had him convinced that smoking was an **infantile**, destructive activity when he pointed out a picture of Freud smoking a cigar on the book’s cover.”  
infantile: \_\_\_\_\_
7. “If I made a list of every comment she’s made about me, you’d think I was a **monstrosity**. I may not be Miss America, but I am not the abominable snowman either.”  
monstrosity: \_\_\_\_\_
8. “Although I didn’t know John and his family until two years ago when I moved into the neighborhood, from which I’ve been able to gather I think his father was a compulsive alcoholic.”  
compulsive: \_\_\_\_\_
9. “I was **mortified** picking it up because it fell between the seat and the window, and I was sure I’d look like an enormous cow bending over to get it.”  
mortified: \_\_\_\_\_
10. “The only part that impressed me out of the whole article was about the crazy lady in the **sanitarium** who hoarded food and sheets and towels and bathrobes—the one that used to wear all the bathrobes at one time.”  
sanitarium: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Check Your Understanding

### Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

- How many bombs did the Bathroom Bomber set off before deciding to stop?
  - two
  - twenty-three
  - thirty
- Who is the Cricket?
  - Lorraine's mother
  - Miss Reillen, the school librarian
  - Miss King, the English teacher
- What did Lorraine first notice about John?
  - his eyes
  - his hair
  - his smile
- How did John and Lorraine meet?
  - They sat next to each other in class at school.
  - Their friend Norton introduced them.
  - They sat next to each other and laughed to each other in school one morning.
- What would Lorraine like to be one day?
  - a writer
  - a psychologist
  - a gourmet chef
- What would John like to be one day?
  - a detective
  - a professional burglar
  - an actor
- What "game" do John and Lorraine play twice a week?
  - the supercolossal fruit roll
  - making prank phone calls
  - skipping school
- What nickname does John call his father?
  - Bore
  - Jerk
  - Lunatic
- What does Dennis say to keep the old woman on the phone for over two hours?
  - He is her long lost grandson.
  - He is with the sweepstakes prize patrol.
  - He is about to die from a skin disease.
- Who picks out the Pigman's phone number from the phone book?
  - Dennis
  - John
  - Lorraine

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## Check Your Understanding

### Short Answer

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Write a short answer for each question.

1. How did the narrator get the name the “Bathroom Bomber”?
2. Do you think John cared if he got caught as the Bathroom Bomber or not? Why?
3. Based on Chapter 1, what do you know about John’s personality?
4. How does Lorraine think John gets away with things?
5. What is the one big difference Lorraine believes exists between John and her?
6. Lorraine’s mother makes comments such as “You’re not a pretty girl” often. How do you think this affects Lorraine?
7. Why does Lorraine believe that John started drinking?
8. What was John’s reaction to Lorraine calling him a “lunatic” on the school bus?
9. John finds it ridiculous that his English teacher uses old slang and calls him a “card.” What do you think she means by the name?
10. Why don’t John and Lorraine play their twice-weekly game at John’s house?

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## *Deepen Your Understanding*

Paul Zindel chose to write this book from both John and Lorraine's points of view by alternating between the two narrators for each chapter. As a reader, what are some of the benefits of having the story told by two different characters? What are the possible disadvantages of having multiple narrators? What other formats might the author have used to tell this same story?

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