

What Would Joey Do?

by Jack Gantos

His “weirdness” under control, Joey Pigza turns into “Mr. Helpful,” but everyone seems to need more help than he can give, from his mom and dad having crazy fights, to his homeschooling partner Olivia, who earns the title “Mistress of All Evil,” to Grandma, the one who best understands Joey, saying she’s ready to die.

THEMES

family, friendship, love, responsibility, courage, grief, religious belief

Young Listener Unabridged Audio

I. PRE-TEACHING

A. Have the class define and discuss these terms:

glaring, oxygen, hoisted, genie, bayonet, vibrated, phlegmy, launched, gluttons, criminally, exhaustion, antibiotics, harassing, Braille, plaque, cursive, deprivation, syndrome, testy, flinched, cubicle, asphalt, condiment, smarmy, aluminum, sic, persecution, disguise, ban, abduction, gleefully, dreaded, veered, rabid, droned, posse, ghoul, radar, antenna, lured, unrelenting, tripod, shards, chaos, threshold, smithereens, massacre, sacrificial, mannequins, karma

B. Before beginning the story, discuss the following questions with the class:

1. Do you enjoy spending time with your family? Do you have grandparents? What do you like about them?
2. How do you feel when someone you care about fights? Do you wish you could make things better for them?
3. Have you read or listened to either of the first two books about Joey Pigza? What did you like about them?

II. PRESENTATION

A. Understanding the Story:

1. Begin with chapters 1 - 3: What happens when Dad goes by the house on his motorcycle? What does Grandma predict will happen to Booth? Why does Joey hang the muffler in his room? What does Mom like about Booth? What does Joey like about the yard gnomes? Why does Joey hate homeschooling at Mrs. Lapps’? What does Olivia say is wrong with being homeschooled? What does Joey feel Olivia and Grandma have in common?
2. Advance to chapters 4 - 6: Why does Joey like the grocery store? What happens to Pablo? Why is the policeman looking for Joey? How does Joey know where to look for Pablo? Why does he now understand how his mother feels about his father? Why has his father taken all the dogs? What does Joey decide to do about Olivia? What happens when they try to return the last dog? What does Joey agree to do for Olivia? Why does Olivia’s mother feel guilty about Olivia’s blind-

ness? What advice does Grandma give Joey about taking Olivia to *Godspell*?

3. Complete the story with chapters 7 - 9: How does Joey feel on Thanksgiving morning? What happens to spoil the day? What happens to Grandma that night? What does Joey do to honor her? What does she say in the note she leaves him? How does Joey’s family’s blowup change Olivia’s life? What do his parents fight about at the funeral parlor? What does Joey decide to do about his promise to Olivia? How does it turn out? As he heads for school, Joey wonders what he would have been like if he hadn’t had his nutty family. What does he decide?

B. For Discussion:

1. When his dad runs away from the hospital, Joey thinks about the expression, “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” What does this mean? Is it true in Joey’s case? Why or why not?
2. Why does Joey relate to the yard gnomes? In what way do they serve as symbols in the story?
3. Why does Joey put labels on everything?
4. Joey asks his grandmother if she thinks he’s “weird because he’s wired or wired because he’s weird.” What would you say?
5. Olivia tells Joey, “Anyone who is not allowed to make mistakes has to live a secret life.” What secret life does Olivia have to live? What about Joey? Why is it better to allow people to make mistakes?
6. Why does Dad compare himself with Humpty-Dumpty? Why is he unable to put himself together again?
7. What do you think will happen to Joey now? What career do you think he might choose? Why?

III. EXTENDING THE LESSON

Give students the opportunity to work with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:

A. Language Arts:

1. Have students listen to the verbs used, such as when Joey’s father is riding the motorcycle—*buzzing, roared, blasted, throttled, snarled*. They might notice the long

vivid sentences and how quickly they need to be read to capture the wild ride.

2. Have students listen to the similes Joey uses, such as describing his father as looking like “a giant black bat,” the policeman’s walkie-talkie “that squawked like an angry parrot trapped in a box,” or Grandma’s skin so gray she looks “like frozen smoke.” What do similes add to a description?
3. Have students write a short play about the secret life of a yard gnome.
4. Have students practice being blind for a day. They could wear blindfolds and team up with another student to help them, then write about how it felt.
5. Have students write about losing a pet. If they haven’t had this experience, have them read “Lost Pet” signs or ads in the newspaper and write about how they’d feel if their pet was lost.

B. Art and Music:

1. Have students select background music that is appropriate to some of the scenes. They might find music from *Godspell* or the Beatles’ *The Yellow Submarine*, or music by Stravinsky, such as *Rite of Spring*, for Dad’s motorcycle ride.
2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. They could show Dad on his motorcycle, Mom with her broom, Thanksgiving dinner thrown on the porch, Grandma behind her shower curtain, Mrs. Lapp and Olivia, the cemetery and the yard gnomes, and Joey caught in the middle.
3. Have students watch the movie, *The Miracle Worker* about Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller and compare it with the way Olivia’s mother treats her. How could Olivia’s mother improve her behavior towards Olivia?
4. Have students draw a cartoon of Joey taking all the Chihuahuas home.

C. Social Studies:

1. Have students learn more about homeschooling.
2. Have students learn about Louis Braille and his development of the Braille System. They might learn to read Braille or use the Braille alphabet to write their names.
3. Grandma believes that disasters come in sevens. Have students student learn about superstitions and

beliefs about numbers. Why are 3 and 7 so important in numerology?

4. Have students learn about fundamentalist religious beliefs. What do the Amish believe? Why won’t Mrs. Lapp have newspapers in the house? What other beliefs can students learn about?
5. Have students learn what a restraining order is and why they are issued.

D. Science and Math

1. Joey knows how fuses work and immediately gets the lights back on. Have students learn how a fuse box works.
2. Have students learn about the health hazards of smoking and design a campaign to keep young people from taking up the habit.
3. Grandma always buys lottery tickets even though she knows the odds of winning are not good. Have students find out about lotteries and calculate the odds.
4. Have students emulate Joey and learn the names of the insects, flowers, or trees they see on a walk.
5. Have students learn why the police and other law enforcement agencies fingerprint people
6. Grandma says they ought to name a hurricane after Joey. Have students find out how hurricanes are named. Would they like to have one named after them? Why or why not?

USING AUDIOBOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM

When it comes to teaching today’s students, sometimes books are just not enough. In an increasingly technological and information-savvy world, the ability to read will be critical to every child’s success. The value of audiobooks as a learning tool in the education of children is widely recognized by experts. Audiobooks bring written text to life, adding an interactive quality that can ignite a child’s imagination. They encourage reading by broadening vocabularies, stretching attention spans, and fostering critical-thinking skills. Listening to audiobooks in the classroom can effectively enrich the reading experience and aid your students in understanding and appreciating literature, history, theatre arts, and more!

Theme Related Reading and Listening:

Listening Library offers additional titles that explore similar themes and content areas. Use the information below to purchase book and tape kits from our extensive list of award-winning and popular titles to enhance the learning experience for students in every classroom or library.

Other titles by Jack Gantos:

- *Joey Pigza Loses Control*
- *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*

Other titles students may enjoy:

- *All Alone in the Universe* by Lynne Rae Perkins
- *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo
- *The Graduation of Jake Moon* by Fred Savage
- *Hope Was Here* by Joan Bauer
- *Joey Pigza Loses Control* by Jack Gantos
- *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* by Jack Gantos
- *Things Not Seen* by Andrew Clements
- *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town* by Kimberly Willis Holt

For a FREE school and library catalog of Listening Library’s unabridged productions:

- Call TOLL FREE 1-800-733-3000
- FAX us at 1-800-940-7046
- email us at BOTCS@randomhouse.com
- visit our website at www.school.booksontape.com
- or write:

Books on Tape
1745 Broadway
New York, NY 10019

© 2007 Listening Library