

# Joey Pigza Loses Control

by Jack Gantos

Since he started taking “good meds,” Joey has gotten control of his hyperactivity, but when he goes to meet his father, he discovers a bigger version of himself, just as “wired,” yet more dangerous because his dad believes he can lick any problem by toughing it out “like a man,” and insists Joey do the same.

## THEMES

family, divorce, love, problem-solving, responsibility, forgiveness

Young Listener Unabridged Audio

## I. PRE-TEACHING

### A. Have the class define and discuss these terms:

license, expired, sprouting, Chihuahua, whimpered, trumpet, splintered, maniac, carousel, berserk, infected, jewelry, electrified, scrambled, ignition, medicine, hyper, duffel, miniature, oxygen, balcony, cleats, pedicure, nostrils, slithering, dominoes, reared, dashboard, debut, bazooka, vibrating, sponsor, generic, mischievous, determination, jig, periscope, cinnamon, bootstraps, mannequin, tenors, sopranos, enunciate, chimpanzee, blaring, convenience, swooped, desperate, cluster, fiasco

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

1. Do you know anyone who is hyperactive or has Attention Deficit Disorder? What is it like to be around this person?
2. When you have problems, how do you solve them? Do you try to tough it out? Do you seek help? Why is it sometimes difficult to ask for help?

## II. PRESENTATION

### A. Understanding the Story:

1. Begin with Chapters 1-5: What is Joey worried about on the way to see his dad? What is the first thing he notices about his dad? What is his grandma like? What plans does his dad have for him? Why does Dad go to Storybook Land? How does Grandma get around? What does Dad say when he finds Joey throwing his Clemente ball against the wall? Why had Dad been arrested? Why does Dad call Joey “Caveman”?
2. Advance to Chapters 6-10: What secrets must Joey keep from his mother? What part of baseball does Joey like best? Why does he hate to bat? How does Dad change when he begins to drink again? What does Dad do with Joey’s patches? How does this make Joey feel? What plans does Dad have for him? What makes Joey think he’s not out of control? Why doesn’t Joey tell his mom what’s happening? How does he avoid answering her questions?

3. Complete the story with Chapters 11-14: What does Joey like about bungy jumping? When does he begin to realize that the “old Joey” is back? In what ways does he manipulate his father? What had Grandma done to Dad to calm him down when he was little? Where does Dad take him that night? How does Joey feel riding the bumper cars? What happens when Joey tries to steal his father’s car? What happens at the baseball game? How does Leezy help him connect with his mother? Why do Joey and his mom have to go back? What is the last thing Joey sees as they drive away?

### B. For Discussion:

1. Discuss how cars function as symbols in the story, from the trip to see Joey’s father, to Dad letting him drive, to Joey wrecking the car, to riding the bumper cars. How do these symbolize the tension between Joey and his parents and within himself?
2. Why does Dad relate to the fairy tale characters at Storybook Land? Why does he feel they helped him turn his life around? Did they? Why or why not?
3. Trace the ways Joey becomes more and more hyperactive. At what point is he aware it’s happening? When did you first realize it?
4. What does Joey learn when he pretends to be a mannequin? What does he decide about being a perfect kid? How does this relate to the way he feels about himself?
5. What makes Joey a good pitcher? In what ways does Dad’s coaching fail him? How might a different kind of father encouraged his talent?

## 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 write about their relationship with their parents, especially if their parents are separated or divorced.

2. Have students write an exciting sports scene. Encourage them to use active verbs.
3. Have students write about secrets they have had to keep. What's difficult about keeping a secret?
4. Have students read the fairy tales and nursery rhymes depicted in Storybook Land and talk about deeper meanings an older child or an adult might find in them.
5. Have students write down all the good things they would like to have happen to them. Why is it good to think about good things instead of about bad things that might happen?

### B. Art and Music:

1. Have students select background music that is appropriate to some of the scenes. Joey is especially fond of Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass, so their music would fit many of the scenes.
2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. They could show Joey with Pablo, include a baseball with a signature that might be Roberto Clemente's, the characters in Storybook Land, a bungy cord, and a shopping cart Grandma might use.
3. Have students illustrate a fairy tale or nursery rhyme and share with a child

### C. Social Studies:

1. Joey's mom is driving carefully because her license has expired and she doesn't have insurance. Have students learn why drivers' licenses are important and what could happen if someone were stopped by the police without a driver's license. Why is it important to have insurance?
2. Have students learn more about Roberto Clemente. What makes his athletic accomplishments special?
3. Have students learn more about ADHD. How many children are affected by it in the United States? How many adults? How is it diagnosed and treated?
4. Create a timeline of Joey's life. What are some things that have happened to him that contribute to his problems or determine the way he deals with them?

### D. Science and Math:

1. Have students find out what happens to people who smoke, such as how Grandma has to live on oxygen.

How can we prevent young people from taking up the habit?

2. Have students find out about hyperactivity. What causes it? How is it treated? Why are there so many cases? Do adults suffer from it too? What medicine is in Joey's patch? How does it help him?
3. Have students learn about Chihuahuas. How were they bred? What characteristics do they have? Why are they so small? Ask students if they think they'd like to have one as a pet. Why or why not?
4. Joey's dog, Pablo, gets car sick. Have students find out what causes motion sickness. What can be done to prevent it?
5. Dad tells Joey that he was given anti-malaria pills in Panama. Have students find out more about malaria. What causes it? What are the symptoms? Why is it prevalent in warm climates?

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