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Loser

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UNIT OVERVIEW

Loser

OVERVIEW

This novel study provides teachers with a highly structured format for teaching language arts, as students develop a love for reading longer materials, like novels. Various areas such as reading comprehension, vocabulary development, decision-making, spelling and writing are all entwined in this integrated approach, eliminating the need for teaching these skills separately. Activities are divided into three main sections:

1) Chapter Questions

For each chapter students answer a thorough set of questions requiring answers in complete sentences. Reading comprehension is a key as students must read and understand the entire novel in order to answer the questions. (One major strength of the novel study approach is that students must understand the novel or they will be unable to do the required assignments.) The *Discussion Questions* allow the teacher to bring students into a conversation about key events in the novel.

2. Vocabulary and Language

Each chapter also includes activities dealing with such things as word meanings, use of the dictionary and thesaurus, spelling, syllables, antonyms/synonyms/homonyms and compound words.

3. Writing and Creativity

In this section, students apply what they have learned about language in order to express themselves more effectively. Creative writing is a focus of this segment, allowing teachers more opportunity to incorporate their own ideas into developing creative writing skills.

STORY SUMMARY

Loser

Jerry Spinelli's novel, *LOSER*, chronicles the childhood of Donald Zinkoff. Zinkoff is one of the most unusual, endearing characters ever to grace the pages of a novel for Young Readers. No matter what the game, Zinkoff never wins. He trips over his own feet; constantly raises his hand without ever knowing the correct answer; falls down laughing at the mention of any unusual word. The other kids have their own word to describe Zinkoff, but he is too busy to hear it.

The novel traces Zinkoffs' journey from first to sixth grade. It details his important friendships; marks his relationships with different teachers, and describes how he copes with various *shortcomings* that everyone but he and his parents deem terribly important.

"*Loser*" is an excellent novel, which sensitively deals with the human spirit and the importance of failure. It is especially recommended for students struggling with acceptance among their peers, or who bear up under various negative influences.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jerry Spinelli



Jerry Spinelli was born in Norristown, Pennsylvania. He attended Gettysburg College and John Hopkins University. In 1991 he won the Newbery Award for his novel, *Maniac McGee* and in 1998 *Wringer* was named a Newbery Honour Book. He and his wife, Eileen have six children and several grandchildren. Eileen Spinelli is Jerry's favourite author.

Jerry Spinelli's novels reflect the power of childhood memories and powerfully affect his work: "Isn't it a magical, wonderful thing that our childhoods are not irretrievably lost to us, like the juice squeezed forever from an orange, and that without moving so much as an eyelash we can call back Buddy Braithwaite's bare, rat-proof feet, or Ginny Sukoloski's dungaree nipping duck, or Joey Lapella's green teeth?"

His other books include:

- The Bathwater Gang*
- Crash*
- Fourth Grade Rats*
- Maniac McGee*
- Space Station Seventh Grade*
- Wringer*
- The Library Card*
- Who Put the Hair in My Toothbrush?*

CHAPTER 1- 4

Questions

1. What do we learn of Zinkoff in the first chapter?

2. Describe how Zinkoff reacts to his new freedom in Chapter 2.

3. What does the author mean by the term "sidewalk pups" at the beginning of Chapter 3?

4. In Chapter 3 the author lists a number of contests that the sidewalk pups engage in. Can you think of two more contests that might have appealed to them?

5. Zinkoff hasn't yet noticed that he never wins any of the contests. What does this tell you about his personality?

CHAPTERS 8 - 9
Writing and Creativity

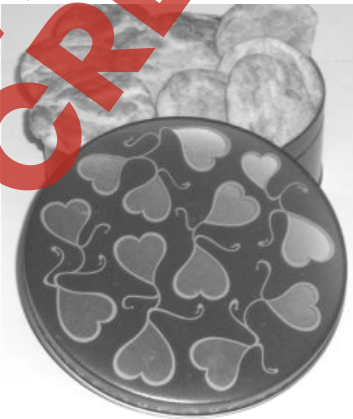
Word Match

Match the words on the left with the correct meaning on the right:

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1. Misinformed | a. Manners |
| 2. Acquires | b. Exactness |
| 3. Intends | c. Unselected |
| 4. Intrepid | d. Means |
| 5. Etiquette | e. Mised |
| 6. Random | f. Hasty |
| 7. Haphazard | g. States |
| 8. Precision | h. Chance |
| 9. Proclaims | i. Brave |
| 10. Slapdash | j. Gets |

Snickers-doodle

Zinkoff's favourite cookie is the snickers-doodle. Research a recipe of your favourite cookie. Include the recipe and give your cookie an unusual, personalized name.



CHAPTER 10 - 11
Vocabulary and Language

Synonyms are words with similar meanings. Use the context of the sentences below to help you choose the best synonym for the underlined word in each sentence. If you cannot determine the meaning from the context, consult a dictionary.

- Mrs. Biswell found Zinkoff's behaviour to be insulting and disrespectful.
a) silly b) rude c) humorous d) noisy
- Zinkoff's handwriting was atrocious.
a) stylish b) neat c) old-fashioned d) dreadful
- The teacher grew tired of the boy's antics in the cafeteria.
a) pranks b) speeches c) charades d) stale lunches
- Donald expects to drive a respectable distance.
a) short b) far c) good d) bumpy
- Mr. Zinkoff is determined to make the day live up to his son's expectations.
a) goals b) anticipations c) hobbies d) riddles

Compound Words

A compound word is composed of two or more words united together. For example, hair + cut = haircut

In the following activity, one word from Column A must be joined to a word in Column B.

| Column A | Column B | Compound Word |
|----------|----------|---------------|
| play | ball | 1. _____ |
| mail | time | 2. _____ |
| every | ground | 3. _____ |
| him | room | 4. _____ |
| child | one | 5. _____ |
| base | way | 6. _____ |
| green | self | 7. _____ |
| door | box | 8. _____ |
| class | board | 9. _____ |
| lunch | hood | 10. _____ |

- As Zinkoff grows up some things about him change and some things stay the same. Complete the following chart from the information in Chapter 17.

| Things about Zinkoff that change | Things about Zinkoff that stay the same. |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. _____ | 1. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 3. _____ |

Questions for Discussion

- What do you think of the other kids calling Zinkoff a "loser"?
- Do you know any students personally who have cruel nicknames like this?
- Why do you think "The Waiting Man" fascinates Zinkoff so much?
- Why do you think Zinkoff enjoys riding his bike so much?
- What does the term "unconditional love" mean? Is this a valuable thing for a parent to have?



CHAPTER 5 - 7
Vocabulary and Language

Using words from Chapters 5 - 7, complete the following crossword puzzle.



| Across | Down |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. To push forcefully. | 1. Touch lightly. |
| 5. Donald _____. | 2. To be in charge of (as in films). |
| 7. Fruit of the oak tree. | 3. Prohibit or veto. |
| 10. Is a symbol of. | 4. Clear handwriting. |
| 12. A form of practice. | 6. Captivate with awe. |
| 13. An exciting undertaking. | 8. Remold (as in a tire). |
| 14. Donald was in _____ one. | 9. Time without end. |
| 16. Short for <i>Play Time</i> . | 11. A team. |
| 17. Miss _____. | 14. Stated. |
| 21. To be aware of. | 15. Something a horse will do. |
| 23. Donald tripped and _____. | 16. Not even one mistake. |
| 24. Without delay or hesitation. | 18. Goofy. |
| 25. Donald was never _____. | 19. Chooses |
| | 20. Above the neck is one's _____. |
| | 22. You eat with a knife, spoon and _____. |

CHAPTER 8 - 9

Vocabulary and Language

Word Search Puzzle

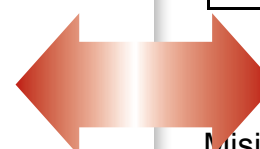
Find the 16 words from the Word Box in the Word Search Puzzle. The words are in a straight line, but can be forwards, backwards, or even diagonally.

| | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|
| acquires | snicker doodles | serious | pacifier |
| misinformed | announces | etiquette | quilted |
| mailman | absolutely | intends | impressed |
| Zinkoff | miraculously | random | haphazard |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Z | X | V | B | Z | S | E | R | I | U | Q | C | A | B | I |
| M | D | M | A | I | L | M | A | N | C | V | T | M | H | M |
| I | F | H | U | N | R | A | N | D | O | M | I | Z | H | P |
| R | G | A | Y | K | R | A | F | G | H | S | S | A | B | R |
| A | H | P | T | O | T | F | N | E | I | G | D | Q | V | E |
| C | J | H | R | F | Y | G | G | N | S | F | N | W | R | S |
| U | K | A | E | F | U | H | F | E | O | K | E | R | S | |
| L | S | Z | W | S | I | O | E | R | T | U | T | R | T | E |
| O | U | A | Q | D | R | E | R | T | Y | C | N | T | U | D |
| U | O | R | A | M | D | F | G | H | J | V | I | C | I | O |
| S | I | D | E | T | L | I | U | Q | N | B | C | Y | E | P |
| L | R | D | S | R | E | I | F | I | C | A | P | U | I | S |
| Y | E | A | B | S | O | L | U | T | E | L | Y | C | V | B |
| A | S | E | L | D | O | O | D | R | E | K | C | I | N | S |
| E | T | I | Q | U | E | T | T | E | Z | X | C | V | B | N |

ers 8 - 9 Vocabulary and Language

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Z | S | E | R | I | U | Q | C | A | | I | |
| M | | M | A | I | L | M | A | N | | | | M | | M | |
| I | | H | | N | R | A | N | D | O | M | I | | | P | |
| R | | A | | K | | A | | | | S | S | | | R | |
| A | | P | | O | | | N | | I | | D | | | E | |
| C | | H | | F | | | | N | | | N | | | S | |
| U | | A | | F | | | F | | O | | E | | | S | |
| L | S | Z | | | | | O | | | | U | T | | E | |
| O | U | A | | | | R | | | | | N | | | D | |
| U | O | R | | | | M | | | | | | I | C | | |
| S | I | D | E | T | L | I | U | Q | | | | | | E | |
| L | R | D | | | R | E | I | F | I | C | A | P | | S | |
| Y | E | A | B | S | O | L | U | T | E | L | Y | | | | |
| | | S | E | L | D | O | O | D | R | E | K | C | I | N | S |
| E | T | I | Q | U | E | T | T | E | | | | | | | |



ANSWER KEY

- | | |
|-------------|---------------|
| Misinformed | a. Misled |
| Acquires | b. Gets |
| Intends | c. Means |
| Intrepid | d. Brave |
| Etiquette | e. Manners |
| Random | f. Unselected |
| Haphazard | g. Chance |
| Precision | h. Exactness |
| Proclaims | i. States |
| Slapdash | j. Hasty |

ers 10 - 11 Questions

off asks the teacher how many days of school are left.
 off cannot control his laughter and is always laughing at inappropriate times.
 Biswell does not seem to like children. *Answers will vary.*
Answers will vary. Perhaps to keep his spirits up.
 off throws up on the eraser and ruins it.
 father took him on his mail route on Sunday when there was no official mail delivery.
 professional. No peeking in mail slots. Be friendly.