

## THE PIGMAN

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**OVERALL OBJECTIVE:** To provide teachers with instructional materials that will enhance their students' understanding of Paul Zindel's *The Pigman* through development of skills in the areas of vocabulary, literary analysis, writing, reading comprehension, and appreciation of the novel via a multi-level instructional approach.

### Specific Objectives of this Packet: To help students

1. build vocabularies based on the language used in the novel.
2. develop the reading comprehension skills of understanding cause-effect relationships, making inferences, drawing and evaluating conclusions, and reading critically.
3. develop the literary analysis skills of understanding characterization, determining theme, recognizing symbols, and identifying figurative language.
4. practice writing skills involved in describing a scene from a character's point of view.

### APPROACHES TO *THE PIGMAN*

Paul Zindel's *The Pigman* is a lively, easy-to-read novel that can both entertain students and help them to confront issues of maturity and personal relationships. Because of its brevity and its simplicity of style it is accessible to weaker readers, but its unusual narrative structure makes it useful as an example of the techniques possible in fiction. It can therefore serve both to improve the class's abilities in literary analysis, and to provide a stimulus for student writing.

Much of the book's attraction lies in Zindel's choice of speakers. John Conlan and Lorraine Jensen tell the Pigman's story in alternating chapters. This device holds the reader's attention through a variety of effects and allows the teacher to encourage diversity of writing styles in the students' own papers. But John and Lorraine are not merely the Pigman's mouthpieces. John's brash rebelliousness and wisecracking style conceal a genuinely caring temperament that is too often overwhelmed by his youthful egotism. Lorraine, on the other hand, attempts to master her world through the manipulation of only half-grasped psychoanalytic jargon. Both the class clown and the class intellectual will find familiar traits in these two characters, while the equal importance given to the male and the female point of view insures that one half the class will not reject the book as being only intended for the other half.

The teacher may discuss with the class those thoughts and actions of the two teenagers that may be typical of young people: their compulsion to have fun without considering the consequences of their action; their feeling of being harshly treated and misunderstood by the adult world; their doubts and fears about the future, particularly about death; and their groping, hesitant desire to find companionship and love. Students will find

their own feelings toward their parents mirrored in John and Lorraine's alternating efforts to reach out to and withdraw from adults, and the friendship that grows between the two adolescents can help make the point that relationships need not be dominated by sex or by sexual stereotyping.

*The Pigman* can be comforting to adolescents because it depicts young people who are neither paragons of virtue nor monsters of iniquity, but simply well-intentioned yet flawed human beings. Lorraine and John's slow, erratic movement toward maturity, with its setbacks and its moments of failure, is much more like the real experience of young people than are most stories of youthful heroism or of dramatic conversion from depravity to righteousness. Reading about such realistic characters can help students understand their own motivations and shortcomings, as well as provide entertainment and insight.

Finally, the moral questions raised by Lorraine and John's actions and their effect on Mr. Pignati can lead to vigorous classroom debate about values and personal responsibility. Students may be asked to discuss how much blame for Mr. Pignati's death should be assigned to each of the characters, or they may write or talk about Mr. Pignati's puzzle and their own views of who is most guilty. On all these topics, the class can be invited to draw on their own experiences as well as comment on the events in the book. *The Pigman* can therefore provide many opportunities for focused personal writing.

*The Pigman* invites comparison to many classics of fiction for or about adolescents, from *Catcher in the Rye* to the novels of M. E. Kerr and Judy Blume. Students will probably wish to read other books by Paul Zindel, many of which share similarities of theme and balance of male-female characterization with *The Pigman*. Besides units on adolescents in literature or on the first-person narrator, *The Pigman* can lead to further readings on family situations or on friendships between teenagers and older people. Lorraine and John's relationship with Mr. Pignati can be compared with the relationships in Theodore Taylor's *The Cay*, Maia Wojciechowska's *Don't Play Dead Before You Have To*, and Norma Mazer's *A Figure of Speech*. Able students who wish to further examine the topic of aging may be assigned Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori* or May Sarton's *As We Are Now*. The topic of parents and children may be further explored in Norma Klein's *Mom, the Wolfman, and Me*, or Kin Platt's Chloris novels. But even without such additional readings, *The Pigman* contains ample opportunities for discussion of vital personal issues, and for the study of literary technique as well.

### WHAT IS *THE PIGMAN* ABOUT?

John Conlan, a handsome and rebellious sophomore, is friends with Lorraine Jensen, a plain girl given to amateur psychoanalysis. Each has difficulties at home: John is in constant conflict with his

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**SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CHART**

**Key** Level 1 - Relatively easy exercises  
 Level 2 - Tasks for all students  
 Level 3 - More challenging exercises

SKILL AREA	ACTIVITY SHEET NUMBER	TIME OF USE	LEVEL	SKILL
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	6	During	2	Meaning from Context
	10	During	3	Implied Meanings
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READING COMPREHENSION	5	During	2	Recalling Details (Literal)
	7	During	1	Cause-Effect Relationships
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	20	After	3	Symbolism
22	After	2	Theme	
WRITTEN LANGUAGE	11	During	2	Character's Point of View

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