

THE GLENCOE LITERATURE LIBRARY

Study Guide

for

The Pigman

by Paul Zindel



New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet Paul Zindel



. . . *The Pigman* probably is successful now because it triggers discussions with kids about problems that are very important to them. I think that's just the way that books work and what's behind all authors writing books, whether they know it or not.

—Paul Zindel, *A Message from the Author*

Paul Zindel, the author of *The Pigman*, had a difficult childhood. He grew up without his father, he had a stormy relationship with his mother, and he had very little self-esteem.

Zindel was born in 1936 on Staten Island, New York. He was raised by his mother after his father abandoned the family when Zindel was only two years old. In search of work, his mother moved the family fifteen times during his childhood and adolescence. For this reason, he didn't form many close relationships with other children. Instead, he withdrew inward, observing the world around him from a distance. "All of my novels begin with real, specific moments from my own life," he says. In fact, everywhere in his work, readers can find reflections of Zindel's childhood and adolescence. In his autobiography, *The Pigman and Me*, Zindel writes:

Eight hundred and fifty-three horrifying things had happened to me by the time I was a teenager. . . . If you haven't croaked before finishing [The Pigman], then you'd understand how I survived being a teenager.

Zindel Becomes a Writer After Zindel was graduated from Wagner College, Staten Island, he taught high school chemistry for ten years. He quit his job as a teacher to begin writing. His first play, *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds*, is about a student from a troubled home who prepares an experiment about marigolds for her school's science fair. The play won a Pulitzer Prize as well as the New York Drama Desk Critic's Circle Award. Encouraged by an editor who had seen the play, Zindel wrote the novel *The Pigman*, a book that became a favorite of generations of teenaged readers and their teachers.

Zindel Breaks New Ground Most reviewers of young adult literature credit *The Pigman*, along with several other novels published during the 1960s, with establishing a new category of literature, the young adult (YA) novel. Since the novel was first published, in 1968, Zindel has written twelve other young adult books, as well as plays, a children's book, a series of books for middle school readers, and screenplays.

Zindel's ability to write about adolescents with honesty and humor has won him a wide audience and made him one of today's most well-known and respected writers of books for young people. *New York Newsday* recently wrote that Zindel is "the rare specimen of a grown-up who seems to have total recall of that emotional roller coaster ride."

Zindel is married and has two children. He says that he likes storytelling. "We all have an active thing that we do that gives us self-esteem, that makes us proud," he says. "It is necessary. I have to write stories because that's the way the wiring went in." Today, Zindel lives in Manhattan, where he continues to write.

Introducing the Novel

“This is a shocker of a book, written in a contemporary idiom. It is a haunting story. The book is startling and truthful and vivid.”

—*Young Readers’ Review*

A MODERN CLASSIC

In 1968, the year that *The Pigman* was published, few novels addressed the pressures that teenagers face in the language that teenagers themselves use. *The Pigman* does just that. A major reason for the book’s success is that it reveals teenagers’ thoughts, feelings, and longings accurately and honestly. The novel opened the door for other realistic fiction for young adults. Although *The Pigman* is more than thirty years old, it continues to speak to the needs and interest of teenagers.

The main characters in *The Pigman* are high school sophomores John Conlan and Lorraine Jensen. John wants to be accepted as the individual he is and has dreams of becoming an actor.

Lorraine has few friends, loves to read about psychology, and wants to be a writer. The lives of these two characters change dramatically when a middle-aged widower, Angelo (“The Pigman”) Pignati reaches out to them and becomes their friend. The lessons that they learn through their experiences with Mr. Pignati change the way they see themselves and the world around them.

THE TIME AND PLACE

The story takes place in Staten Island, New York, in the late 1960s. During this period, public protests against racial discrimination and the war in Vietnam helped create a climate of rebelliousness against authority. Some teenagers openly rebelled by engaging in bad habits such as smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, and using profanity. Teenagers held marches and sit-ins against the draft, demanded that their schools give them a voice in what they studied, and struggled to gain greater political power.

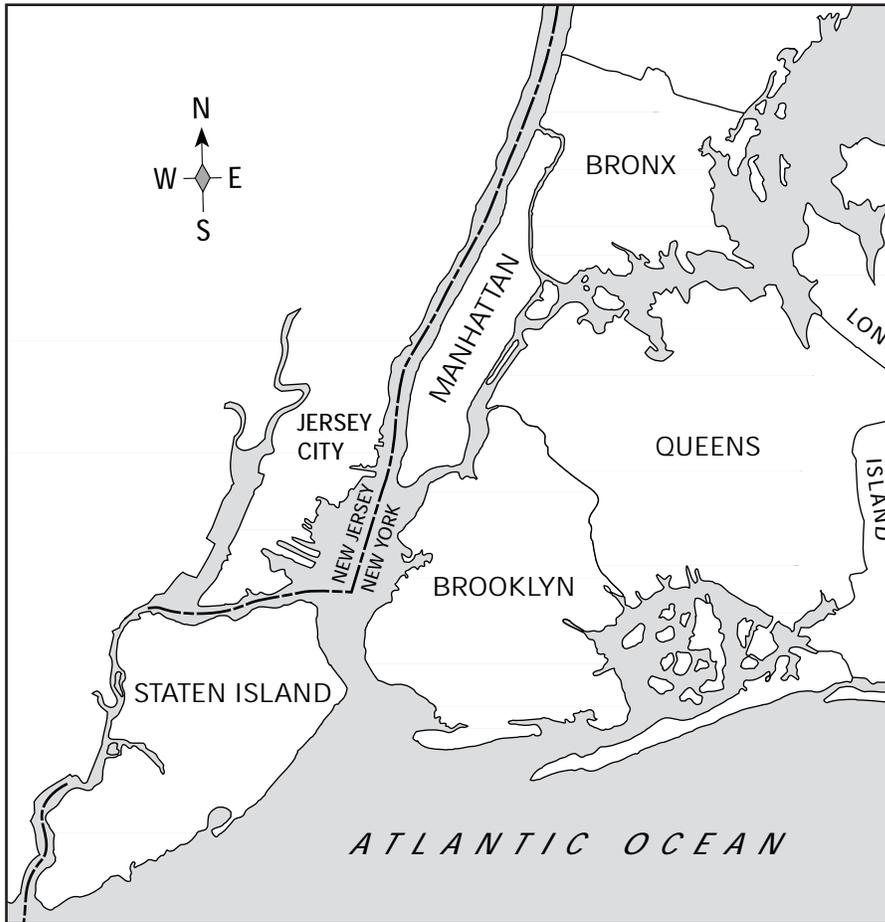
Did You Know?

Staten Island, the setting of *The Pigman*, is the smallest of five boroughs that make up New York City, the largest city in the United States. A borough is a political division unique to New York City. The other four boroughs, in order of size from largest to smallest, are Brooklyn (which until the 1890s was a separate city), Queens, Manhattan, and the Bronx. In total,

these boroughs make up a city of over 7 million people.

When most Americans speak of New York City, they generally mean Manhattan, the home of Wall Street, the nation’s financial capital, and Broadway, the nation’s chief theater district. Staten Island residents are able to reach Manhattan by ferry.

NEW YORK CITY'S FIVE BOROUGHS



CRITIC'S CORNER

"[John and Lorraine's] 'epic' makes a very funny book on one level because Mr. Zindel catches the bright, hyperbolic sheen of teen-age language accurately and with humor."

—John Weston, *New York Times*

"[The Pigman] is a somber and chastening story that gets better and better as it goes on."

—David Rees, *The Marble in the Water*

"Few books that have been written for young people are as . . . truthful about the human condition."

—Diane Farrell, *Horn Book Magazine*

Before You Read

The Pigman Chapters 1–5

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Who is your best friend? Why is this person's friendship important to you?

Journal

In your journal, describe your friend and explain why you value his or her friendship.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how and why two teenagers become best friends.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Some novels begin with a prologue, or short introduction. *The Pigman*, for example, begins with a prologue titled "The Oath." The purpose of a prologue is to give background information about the story that follows. As you read "The Oath," notice that it tells you what kind of story *The Pigman* will be and when, where, and how it will be told.

Who Is Talking?

The Pigman has two first-person narrators, John and Lorraine. They are the main characters in the novel as well as the "voices" that tell the story. John and Lorraine take turns explaining what happened, so that readers see events from John's point of view in one chapter and Lorraine's point of view in the next. Pay special attention to the comments that John and Lorraine make about each other. Like real-life best friends, they often have insights into each other's personality.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

avocation [av ə kā' shən] *n.* hobby (p. 1)

compassion [kəm pash' ən] *n.* sympathy for other people; pity (p. 5)

distort [di stôrt'] *v.* to twist the truth; to give a false impression (p. 5)

mortified [môr' ti fīd] *adj.* extremely embarrassed or ashamed (p. 7)

patron [pā' trən] *n.* person who provides financial support to artists or writers (p. 16)

philanthropy [fi lan' thrə pē] *n.* act of charity intended to help a person or a group of people (p. 12)

prevarications [pri var' i kā shənz] *n.* lies (p. 14)

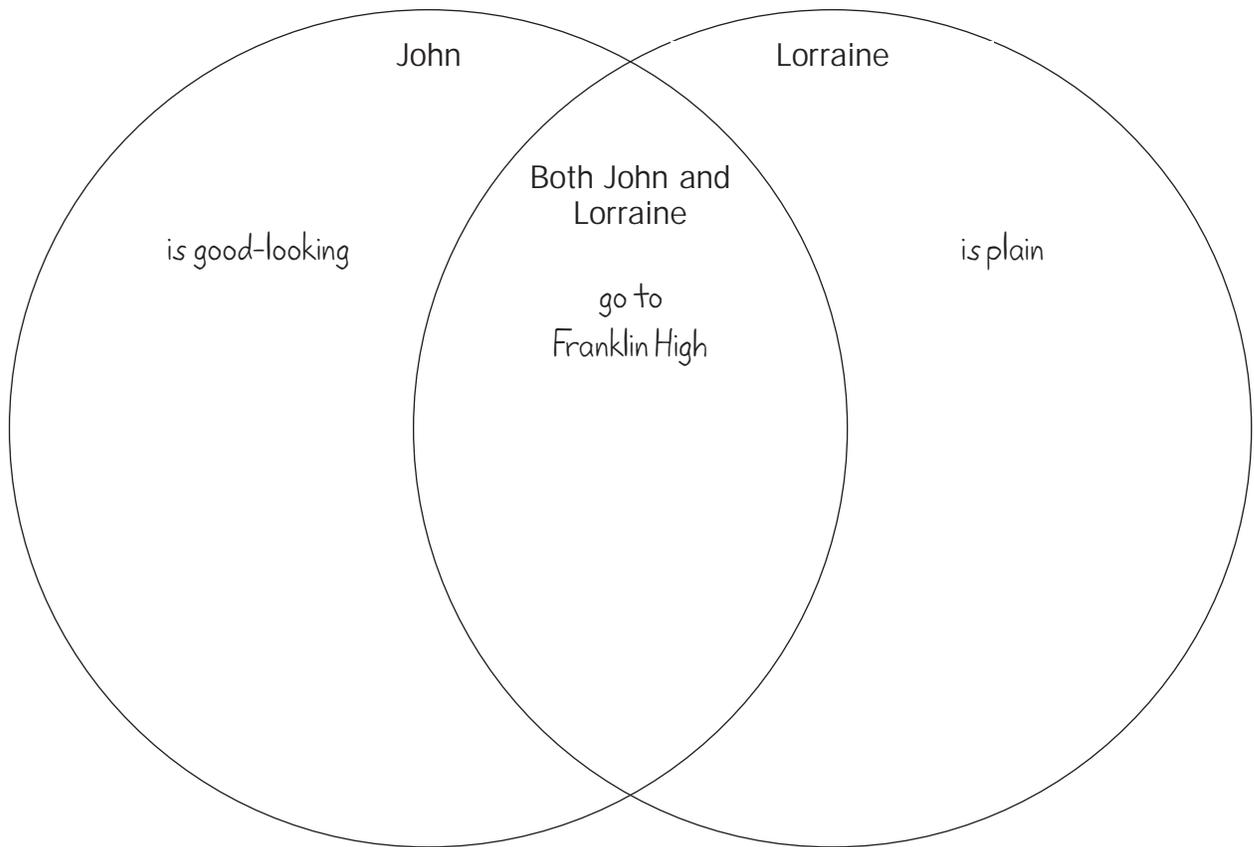
subliminally [sub lim' ə nəl lē] *adj.* unconsciously (p. 4)

subsidize [sub' si dīz'] *v.* to provide financial aid (p. 16)

Active Reading

The Pigman Chapters 1–5

Friends are usually alike in some ways and different in others. For example, friends may be the same age and go to the same school, yet have very different opinions and personalities. So it is with John and Lorraine. As you read the first five chapters of *The Pigman*, fill in the Venn diagram below with the ways in which John and Lorraine are similar and different. Use the sample answers as models.



Responding

The Pigman Chapters 1–5

Personal Response

What are your impressions of John? of Lorraine?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How does John feel about school? How did he act on his feelings when he was a freshman? How does he act on them now? What does this change in his behavior tell you about him?

2. What does Mrs. Jensen think of Lorraine? Does Lorraine share her opinion? Explain.

3. Describe the telephone prank that John and Lorraine play on Mr. Pignati. How does John feel during the prank? How does Lorraine? What do their feelings suggest about each of them?

4. Why does Mr. Conlan install a lock on the family telephone? How does John respond? What do their actions suggest about their relationship?

5. How does Mr. Pignati treat John and Lorraine during their first visit? Why does he treat them this way?

Responding

The Pigman Chapters 1–5

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. Do you think that Mr. Pignati is a believable character? Why or why not?

7. How might John answer the **Focus Activity** question on page 16? How might Lorraine? Are their ideas about friendship similar to yours? Why or why not?

Literature and Writing

Analyzing a Relationship

In a paragraph or two, analyze John's relationship with his parents. What does Lorraine think is the cause of the problems between them? Do you think Lorraine is right? What other factors might be involved? What might the family do to get along better?

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In chapter 4, Lorraine says that Norton is a social outcast. With a group of classmates, discuss what she means. Together, decide which other characters in the novel might be called outcasts and why. Share your group's conclusions with other groups in your class.

Performing

With a small group of classmates, choose a scene from *The Pigman* that could be performed as a play. Appropriate scenes include John and Lorraine's conversation on the bus, Lorraine's phone call to Mr. Pignati, and John and Lorraine's first visit with Mr. Pignati. Discuss how the characters should sound and act in the scene. Choose roles and rehearse the scene. Then perform the scene for your class.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Pigman Chapters 6–8

FOCUS ACTIVITY

How do you express your individuality? Do you wear unusual clothes? Style your hair a certain way? Listen to certain kinds of music?

Quickwrite

Jot down a few of the ways that you express who you are.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how John and Lorraine express their individuality.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

In the mid-1960s, British rock musician John Lennon started a fad when he began wearing eyeglasses that looked like those that Benjamin Franklin had worn. Soon, teenagers everywhere were sporting “Ben Franklin glasses”—small, square eyeglasses with thin wire frames. Franklin not only wore glasses, he also experimented with different types of lenses. Among his many inventions are bifocals—eyeglasses that contain corrective lenses for both far-sightedness and near-sightedness.

Two Kinds of Conflict

Every story contains some kind of conflict, or struggle. Because novels are longer than short stories, they often contain several conflicts. Conflicts can be external or internal. An external conflict is a struggle between characters who have different needs, goals, or personalities. An internal conflict is a psychological struggle arising from a personal problem or a difficult decision. As you read the next three chapters of *The Pigman*, look for both kinds of conflicts.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

antagonistic [an tag' ə nis' tik] *adj.* hostile; given to arguing or fighting (p. 29)

anxiety [ang zī' i tē] *n.* fearful concern or nervousness (p. 29)

eerie [ē' r' ē] *adj.* strange and frightening (p. 34)

ingrate [in' grāt] *n.* ungrateful person (p. 37)

nocturnal [nok tû' r' nal] *adj.* of the night; active at night (p. 30)

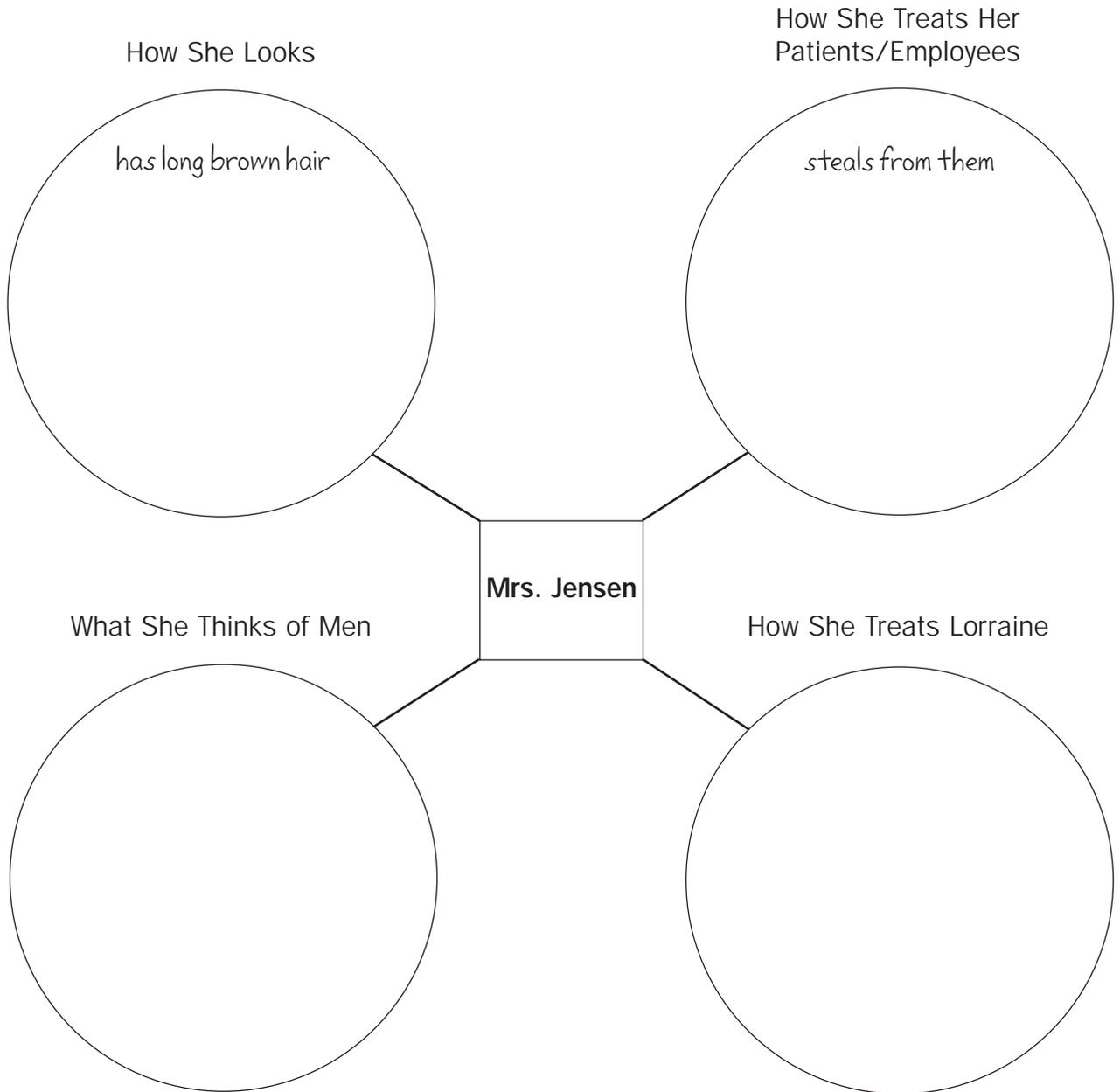
omens [ō mən' z] *n.* clues as to what will happen in the future (p. 29)

ritual [rich' ō ə l] *n.* customary series of acts (p. 35)

Active Reading

The Pigman Chapters 6–8

In chapters 6 and 8, Lorraine shares many details about her mother. As you read these chapters, take notes about Mrs. Jensen in the blank circles on the character map below. Use the sample answers as models.



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Responding

The Pigman Chapters 6–8

Personal Response

How did you react to John's news about Mrs. Pignati? Why?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why does Lorraine dislike the Baron Park Zoo? In what ways is her life similar to that of the zoo animals?

2. Briefly describe the three omens that Lorraine refers to in chapter 6. What do the omens have in common?

3. What is so unusual about Mr. Pignati's best friend? What does Mr. Pignati's choice of friend suggest about his life?

4. What does Mr. Conlan want John to do for a living? How does John feel about the career choice? Why?

5. What lie does Mr. Pignati tell about his wife? In your opinion, why does he lie? Support your opinion with evidence from the novel.

Responding

The Pigman Chapters 6–8

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

6. How does Mr. Pignati react when the salesclerk thinks that Lorraine is his daughter? What does the reaction tell you about Mr. Pignati's feelings for Lorraine?

Evaluate and Connect

7. Book reviewers have praised the realism of the dialogues in *The Pigman*. Do you agree with the reviewers? Do the dialogues, or conversations, seem real to you? Why or why not?

8. Review your response to the **Focus Activity** on page 20. What are the some of the ways that John expresses his individuality? If John were a student today, what forms of self-expression might he use?

Literature and Writing

Analyzing a Friendship

In a paragraph or two, analyze why John and Lorraine become friends with Mr. Pignati. What do you think Mr. Pignati adds to their lives?

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

With a group of classmates, list the conflicts, or struggles, that the major characters in *The Pigman* experience. Label each conflict “internal” or “external.” Then predict how each conflict might turn out. Share your lists and predictions with other groups in your class.

Science Connection

Use the snake quiz in chapter 6 as a model to write a quiz of your own. Research “fun facts” about one of the animals that Lorraine and John visit at the zoo. You might look in an encyclopedia about animals or search the Internet for appropriate sites. Write a short list of true-false questions based on the information that you find. Then quiz your classmates.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Pigman Chapters 9–11

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Recall a time when you apologized to a friend. How did you feel before the apology? How did you feel afterward?

Journal

In your journal, briefly describe why you felt that you owed your friend an apology and how the apology made you feel.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out why John and Lorraine apologize to Mr. Pignati.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

People in the United States usually think of insects as disgusting pests. In some countries, however, people think of insects as delicious snacks. Actually, over a lifetime each of us unknowingly eats as much as a pound of insect parts, because insects often infest the granaries where flour is milled. Rather than harming us, insect parts add much-needed protein to our diets. Insect parts can appear in breads as little dark specks, but more often they are invisible to the eye.

Suspense and Foreshadowing

One of the ways that authors keep readers interested in stories is to create a sense of suspense. Suspense is a feeling of curiosity, uncertainty, or dread about what will happen next. Foreshadowing—hints or clues about what will happen—increases the level of suspense. As you read *The Pigman*, look for clues that hint at what might happen, and think about the suspense that these clues help build.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

assassin [ə sas' in] *n.* murderer; killer (p. 61)

berserk [bər sŭrk'] *adj.* crazy; insane (p. 51)

interrogating [in tər' ə gāt' ing] *n.* questioning (p. 56)

mull [mə] *v.* to think about; to ponder (p. 56)

mundane [mun dān'] *adj.* ordinary; commonplace (p. 63)

predicament [pri dik' ə mənt] *n.* difficult situation or problem (p. 61)

putrid [pyŭō' trid] *adj.* rotten (p. 52)

Active Reading

The Pigman Chapters 9–11

In chapters 9 through 11, you will learn a little more about several of the characters. Like real people, their experiences affect their behavior, attitudes, and feelings. As you read, fill in the cause-effect chart below to better understand what causes the characters to act, think, and feel as they do.

Cause

Effect

When Norton was a child, other children made fun of him because . . .
he liked to play with dolls

As a result of this experience, Norton now . . .
is a tough guy

When John was ten years old, his father gave him . . .

As a result of this experience, John now . . .

When Mrs. Jensen was expecting Lorraine, Mr. Jensen . . .

As a result of this experience, Mrs. Jensen now . . .

Mr. Pignati's wife has . . .

As a result of this experience, Mr. Pignati now . . .

Responding

The Pigman Chapters 9–11

Personal Response

Do you think that John and Lorraine are falling in love? Explain.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why is Norton so curious about Mr. Pignati? How does John react to Norton's questions? Why?

2. How does Mrs. Conlan feel about John's drinking and smoking? Do you think John is right to blame his parents for his bad habits? Is John at all to blame? Explain.

3. What do John and Lorraine confess to Mr. Pignati? What does he confess to them? What does their willingness to confess to each other suggest about their relationship?

4. What happens to Mr. Pignati while he is roller-skating? How does Lorraine react to the incident? How does John react? Are their reactions what you expected? Explain.

5. When and why do John and Lorraine pretend to be Mr. Pignati's children? Do you think that they would actually like to be his children? Why or why not?

Responding

The Pigman Chapters 9–11

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. In your opinion, what do the news clippings, pictures, and handwritten notes add to the novel? Would you miss them if they were not there? Explain.

7. Why do John and Lorraine apologize to Mr. Pignati? How do you think the apology makes them feel? Are there similarities between John and Lorraine's situation and the one you described in the **Focus Activity** on page 24? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Making Predictions

What do you think will happen to John and Lorraine? to Mr. Pignati? In a paragraph or two, predict how the novel will end. Be sure to base your predictions on clues in the novel.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

"A house is not a home" is an old saying. With a group of classmates, define the difference between *house* and *home*. Then discuss the places that John, Lorraine, and Mr. Pignati live. Which would you call houses? Which would you call homes? Why? Share your group's conclusions with other groups in your class.

Health Connection

John and Lorraine mistakenly call Mr. Conlan's illness "sclerosis of the liver." The actual name of the disease is "cirrhosis," and it is one of many serious health problems caused by alcohol abuse. Use the Internet or library resources to find out how drinking alcoholic beverages can harm a person's health. Then create an informational poster or booklet about the dangers of alcohol abuse.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Pigman Chapters 12–15

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What do you think the future holds for you? What do you most want out of life?

Questionnaire

Explore your beliefs by rating the importance of each of the following goals.

Very Important	Somewhat Important	Unimportant	
			1. Making a lot of money.
			2. Finding love.
			3. Holding a high-level job.
			4. Having close friends.
			5. Being a good parent.

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover what John thinks the future holds.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Experts on aging sometimes advise lonely elderly people to get pets. Pets provide companionship, make the elderly feel needed, and add meaning to their elderly owners' lives. Dog owners who walk their pets get an additional benefit: exercise.

Climax and Resolution

In a novel or short story, the climax is the moment when the central conflict comes to a head. The resolution is the point at which the central conflict is settled, or resolved. As in real life, resolutions are not always happy or complete. Everyone does not necessarily live happily ever after, and all conflicts may not be completely resolved. As you read the final chapters of *The Pigman*, look for the climax and think about the resolution.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

hors d'oeuvres [ôr dûrvz'] *n.* foods served as appetizers (p. 75)

hovel [huv'əl] *n.* small, often dirty house; shack (p. 73)

incongruous [in kông'grôo'əs] *adj.* dissimilar; not belonging together (p. 81)

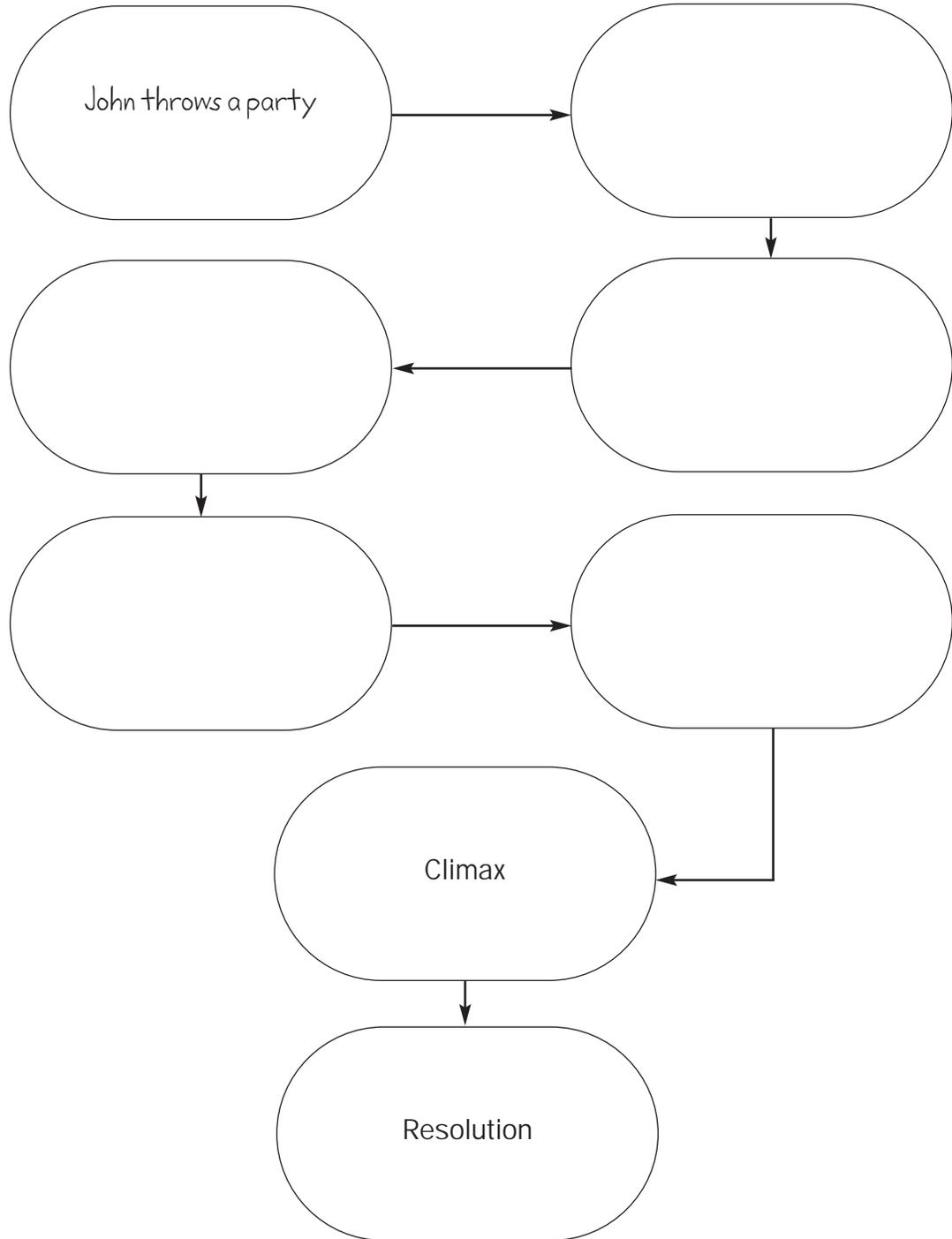
infantile [in'fan tīl] *adj.* childish (p. 72)

proficiency [prə fish'ən sē'] *n.* skill (p. 86)

Active Reading

The Pigman Chapters 12-15

As you read chapters 12 through 15, use the ovals below to take notes about the events that lead up to the climax. Then sum up the climax and the resolution. You may add ovals if you wish.



Responding

The Pigman Chapters 12–15

Personal Response

What did you think of the conclusion of *The Pigman*? Why?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. In chapter 12, John starts to care about how his hair and clothes look. Whom does he want to impress? Why?

2. When Lorraine recalls her candlelight dinner with John, she says, “it was as if I was being told about . . . something beautiful waiting just for me.” What do you think that “something beautiful” is?

3. Briefly describe Lorraine’s nightmare about Mr. Pignati’s “pig room.” What incident does the dream foreshadow?

4. Why is John so upset when Norton breaks Mr. Pignati’s porcelain pigs? What do the pigs represent, or symbolize, to Mr. Pignati?

5. Why are John and Lorraine arrested? How do their parents react?

Responding

The Pigman Chapters 12–15

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. Why does John think about his father when Mr. Pignati dies?

7. How might John answer the questionnaire in the **Focus Activity** on page 28? How might Lorraine? Explain.

Literature and Writing

A Letter to Mr. Pignati

Imagine that you are either John or Lorraine. Then write a letter of apology to Mr. Pignati in which you explain why you are sorry and how much he meant to you. Be sure to use specific details from the novel to write your letter.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Lorraine blames John for what happens to Mr. Pignati. John seems to blame Mr. Pignati himself. Who, if anyone, is to blame? With a group of classmates, carefully review chapters 14 through 15. Try to come to an agreement of opinion. Then share your opinion with others groups in your class.

Learning for Life

Imagine that you have the opportunity to interview Paul Zindel, the author of *The Pigman*. With a partner, write a list of questions that you would like to ask him about the characters and his reasons for writing the book.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Paul Zindel

Journey to Meet the Pigman

Before You Read

Focus Question

Who has had the greatest influence on you? Why?

Background

Like many novelists, Paul Zindel sometimes bases his fictional characters on real-life people who have had an influence on him. In "Journey to Meet the Pigman," Zindel describes the people on whom he based the major characters in *The Pigman*.

Responding to the Reading

1. How did Paul Zindel manage to live rent-free in a castle? Why does he think that the castle was a good place for a storyteller to live?

2. Whom did Zindel meet while he was living in the castle? What fictional characters did these people help inspire?

3. What made Zindel recall his mother's former roommate, Connie? Why did the recollection give him chills?

4. Who was Nonno Frankie? In your opinion, what was Nonno Frankie's greatest contribution to Zindel's life?

5. **Making Connections** Compare and contrast Nonno Frankie with Mr. Pignati. In what ways are they alike? Different?

Personal Writing

In a few paragraphs, describe the person who has had the greatest influence on you. Make your description vivid by using specific details and quoting a few of the person's favorite sayings.

Walter Dean
Myers

The Treasure of Lemon Brown

Before You Read

Focus Question

What is your most treasured possession? Why do you value it?

Background

Walter Dean Myers began writing stories and poems when he was only ten years old. Today, some fifty years later, he is an award-winning author of fiction for young adults. “The Treasure of Lemon Brown” is one of his most popular short stories.

Responding to the Reading

1. How does Greg feel at the beginning of the story? Why?

2. Why won't Greg believe that Lemon Brown has treasure? What kind of treasure comes to Greg's mind?

3. What is Lemon Brown's treasure? Why does Lemon Brown place so much value on these items?

4. In what important ways do Greg and Lemon Brown help each other?

5. **Making Connections** In what ways is Mr. Pignati's friendship with John and Lorraine similar to Lemon Brown's friendship with Greg?

Learning for Life

Interview a parent or other older family member to find out what family possessions he or she treasures and why. Together, create a list of items that you might place in a “memory box” for future family members to enjoy.

Naomi Shihab
Nye

The Rider

Before You Read

Focus Question

What do you do when you feel lonely?

Background

Naomi Shihab Nye is an award-winning poet who often bases her poems on her experiences. She has said that she values poetry because it “makes us slow down and listen carefully to the few things we have really heard, deep inside.”

Responding to the Reading

1. What does the boy in the poem do to escape loneliness? What does the speaker in the poem do?

2. In what lines of the poem is loneliness personified, or given human traits? What does the personification add to the poem?

3. To what is the escape from loneliness compared? In your opinion, is the comparison effective? Why or why not?

4. **Making Connections** In *The Pigman*, how do John, Lorraine, and Mr. Pignati cope with their loneliness? In your opinion, are their ways of coping better or worse than those described in the poem? Explain.

Art Connection

Create a poetry poster for “The Rider.” Copy the poem on a large piece of paper or posterboard, and make an illustration to accompany the poem. You might draw a picture or create a collage of magazine clippings. Bring your poster to class and share it with your classmates.

Barbara
Kantrowitz,
Pat Wingert,
Anne
Underwood

How Well Do You Know Your Kid?

Before You Read

Focus Question

What problems do today's teenagers face?

Background

"How Well Do You Know Your Kid?" first appeared in the May 10, 1999, issue of *Newsweek*. The popular newsmagazine contains articles on current events, trends, and issues.

Responding to the Reading

1. According to the article, what is the most troubling issue that teenagers face? What are some of the causes of the problem?

2. In your opinion, is it a contradiction for teenagers to say that they want privacy yet crave their parents' attention at the same time? Explain.

3. Do you think that cliques and other peer groups fill a useful role in a teenager's life? Why or why not?

4. According to the article, why do parents find it so difficult to get along with their teenagers? What does the article advise parents to do? What do you think teenagers might do to improve their relationship with their parents?

5. **Making Connections** In your opinion, which character or characters in *The Pigman* would most benefit from reading "How Well Do You Know Your Kid?" Why?

Learning for Life

With a small group of students, take an informal survey of teenagers at your school. Ask at least ten other students in your grade or class what issue most troubles teenagers today. Jot down the students' responses. Then tabulate the responses and report your findings to your class.

X. J. Kennedy

What We Might Be, What We Are

Before You Read

Focus Question

What qualities do you look for in a friend?

Background

X. J. Kennedy is as well known for his textbooks as he is for his poetry. The prize-winning poet taught college-level English classes for many years, and he has written a number of books about writing and literature. In his books and poems, Kennedy often uses humor to get his points across.

Responding to the Reading

1. Which lines of the poem describe what the two people might be? what they are?

2. List the comparisons that are made in lines 1–7. What do the comparisons have in common? What do they suggest about the speaker’s relationship with the “you” in the poem?

3. In lines 13–15, to what does the speaker compare himself? To what does he compare the person to whom he is talking? What does the comparison suggest about the future of their relationship?

4. How do you think the speaker in the poem might answer the **Focus Question**? Why do you say so?

5. **Making Connections** Which characters overcome the greatest differences to make friends in *The Pigman*? Explain your answer.

Geography Connection

The poem refers to a Balinese goat. Use a globe or an atlas to locate the island of Bali. Then calculate the distance between Bali and New Jersey. How does this knowledge add to your understanding of the poem?