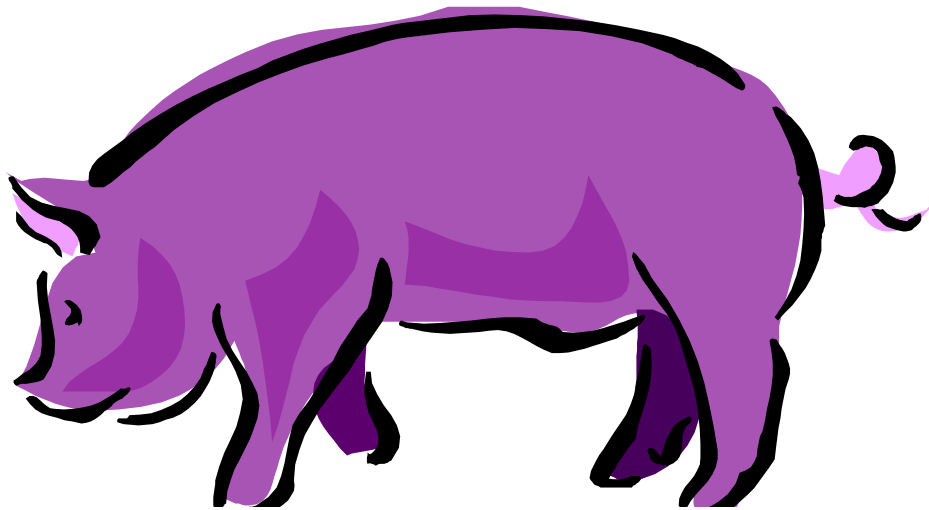


# THE PIGMAN



Paul Zindel

## Chapter one

There is talk of how Lorraine plays jokes on supply teachers at school. We learn that the librarian's nickname is 'the cricket' because 'her nylon stockings rub together when she walks so they make a scraaaaaaatchy sound.' (p.11).

### **Points worth noting**

This chapter is narrated by John, and is written in a conversational style.

John's observation 'Cricket is down at the other end of the library showing some four – eyed dimwit how to use the encyclopaedias,' hints at his arrogant, superior attitude that will dominate the novel.

## Chapter two

Lorraine tells us how she has tried to convince John not to smoke. So far, her efforts have proved unsuccessful because 'nothing seems to have any impact on John.' (p.13).

Lorraine believes that, despite appearances, John is compassionate, but hides his feelings, pretending instead not to care. John's complex personality is revealed when Lorraine tells us 'John has compassion deep inside of him, which is the real reason we got involved with the Pigman.' At the same time though, there is the acknowledgement that 'at first John thought of it all simply as a way for getting money for beer and cigarettes.' One cannot help feeling that whilst John is portrayed as manipulative character, he is to be pitied when we learn that 'any real hostility he has is directed against himself.' (p.14). Paul Zindel links John's problems to his home – life and in part excuses his behaviour, this therefore makes it difficult for the reader to form a fixed opinion of John; our feelings towards him are ambivalent.

Lorraine tells us how she first met John when she was sitting next to him on a bus. At first, he irritated Lorraine, but eventually he made her laugh too.

### **Work – descriptive writing**

In chapter two, Lorraine describes John in an honest way. Whilst she is his friend and sees that he has many attractive qualities, Lorraine knows only too well that John has traits that are far from attractive too.

Describe a friend that you have. What attracts you to that particular person? What annoys you about your friend? How do you cope with it?

## Chapter three

In the opening paragraph, John tells us how attractive he is. On first reading, one would perhaps mistakenly laugh at John's apparent sarcasm, if it were not for the fact that Lorraine has already told us that he is indeed very handsome. John's narcissistic spiel leaves us with little doubt that he really is an arrogant, self – important teenager.

John has little respect for authority, he simply does as he chooses. When his father enquires 'Do you realise I've been trying to get your mother for half an hour and the line's been busy?' John replies 'Those things happen, I was talking to a friend.' (p.21). Although John's insolence angers his father, he is powerless to stop him taking advantage. Whilst John's action of pouring 'airplane glue in the keyhole of the lock,' is childish in the extreme, it is John's way of gaining control over his father and avoiding the situation where he is barred from using the phone.

John's remark that Norton and Dennis are 'two amoebae' and that Dennis's mother 'is so retarded that she doesn't know what's coming off anyway' confirms that John believes that he is intellectually superior not only to his peers, but also to their parents.

## Chapter four

Lorraine's view of Dennis and Norton at the beginning of the chapter is somewhat tempered, she refers to them as 'really disturbed boys,' and calls Norton a 'social outcast.' That the two descriptions of the boys are written one after another, does I think, invite us to compare both Lorraine's and John's reflections, and comment upon the different ways in which they express their thoughts.

Although it is Lorraine who first makes contact with Mr. Pignati, it is John who is in the background telling Lorraine what to say. Unable to stand by and listen to Lorraine make the arrangements, John demands that he wants to speak to Mr Pignati and takes the receiver from Lorraine.

### **Work – script John and Mr Pignati's telephone conversation**

So far, we have decided that John is arrogant, insolent, conceited, overly confident and believes that he superior to others. The author conveys this through what John says, his actions, and what Lorraine says about him.

Imagine that when John takes the phone from Lorraine, he does speak to Mr. Pignati. Write out the phone conversation that follows. Remember that it should be in keeping with what we already know about John. He is persuasive, enjoys fooling others, and is greedy for money to buy beer and cigarettes.

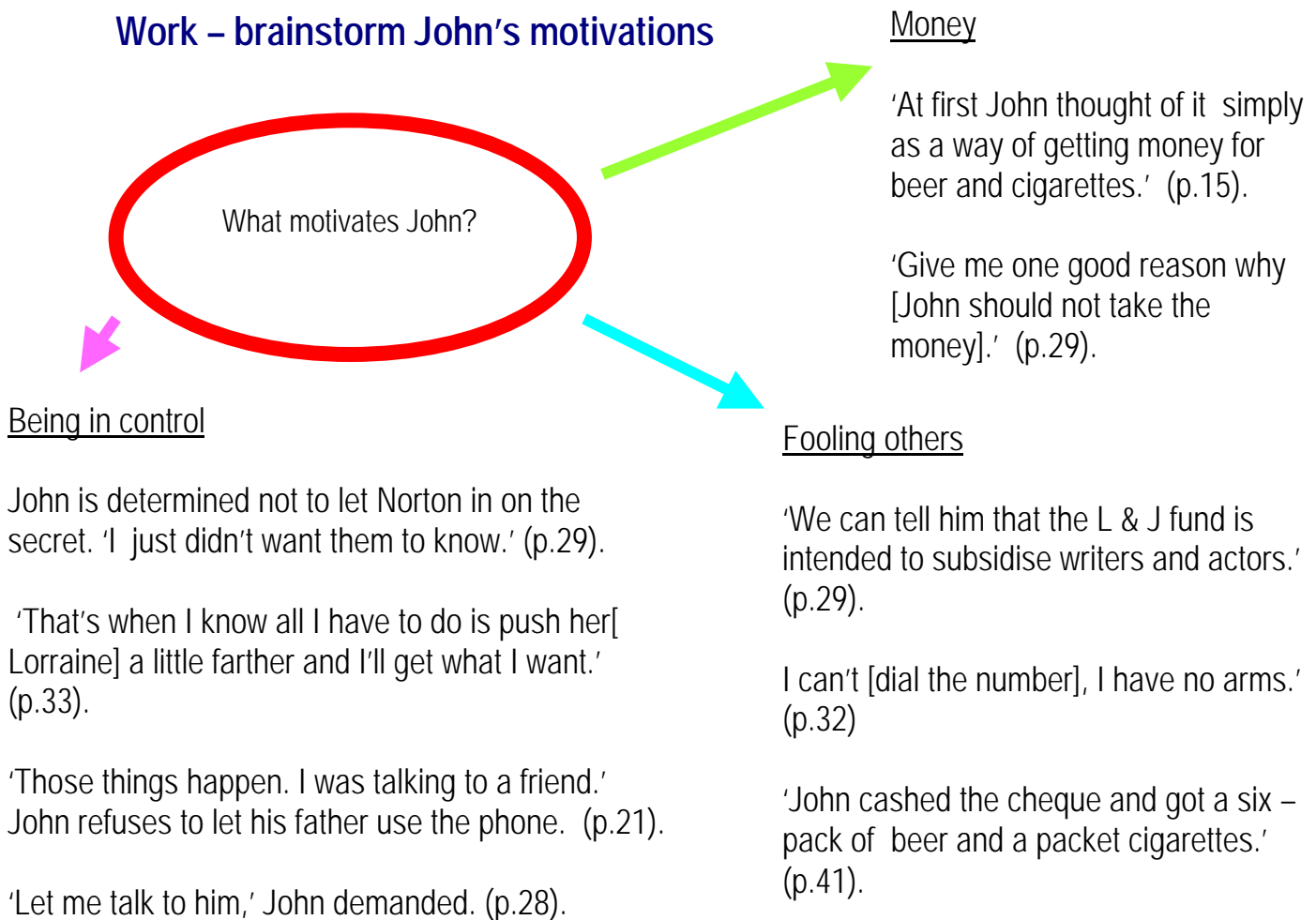
## Chapter five

Lorraine refuses to go to Mr. Pignati's house 'because it is wrong to take money from an old man.' (p.29). John persists, arguing that they should tell Mr. Pignati that he is supporting a charity for aspiring actors and writers. John openly admits though that he 'did need a dollar and a quarter for a six pack.' (p.30). Not content with fooling Mr. Pignati, John tells the operator that he cannot dial the phone number that he wants because he 'has no arms.' John's seemingly altruistic desire to do 'his duty to visit the lonely,' is exposed for what it really is; a cunning plan to earn him money for beer.

John is shrewd enough to realise that 'all I have to do is push her [Lorraine] a little farther, and I'll get what I want.' Monitoring the situation at each stage, John concludes 'then I knew I had her just where I wanted her.' Despite Lorraine's protestation that it is mean to take money from an old man, and her hesitation when she sees Mr. Pignati's house because he might be poor, she is persuaded against her better judgement and ends up going to the house with John.

Exercising his power over Mr. Pignati, John forces him to hand over the money so that they can leave as quickly as possible. John's cold uncaring nature is revealed when Mr. Pignati suggests 'We should all go to the zoo tomorrow.' Ignoring the comment, John reminds Mr. Pignati of their reason for the visit. With 'an air of impatience,' John tells him 'Miss Trueman and I have many other stops to make today.'

### Work – brainstorm John's motivations



## Chapter six

John uses the money from Mr. Pignati to buy beer and cigarettes. (p.41). John and Lorraine accompany Mr. Pignati to the zoo, where they meet Bobo, the gorilla that is Mr. Pignati's 'best friend.' It becomes clear that Mr. Pignati is a lonely, if slightly disturbed, man.

### **Work – writing to explain or describe**

Paul Zindel, through Lorraine's eyes, describes vividly a trip to the zoo. Write an account in which you describe a particularly memorable day out. Try to make your account as interesting and as entertaining as possible.

## Chapter seven

Lorraine and John visit Mr. Pignati's house. He shows them around and invites them to look around the house. Lorraine discovers a photograph, and asks who it is. Both Lorraine and John know that 'something [is] wrong,' with the version of events that Mr. Pignati has given about his wife, but they are not quite sure what it is that is wrong.

Whilst John is looking through Mr. Pignati's drawers, he discovers the burial certificate for Conchetta Pignati, the wife that is supposedly on holiday in California.

### **Work – critical thinking, hypothesizing and speculating**

Discuss the significance of the burial certificate. If Conchetta is dead, as now seems the case, why has Mr. Pignati lied to Lorraine and John? What, if anything, is he hiding?

## Chapter eight

Lorraine and John are slightly uneasy because they know that Mr. Pignati has lied to them, and they don't know the circumstances surrounding the death of his wife.

Mr. Pignati takes them to Beekham's department store, where he insists on spending lots of money on John and Lorraine. He buys three pairs of roller skates, and they skate home together.

### **Points worth noting**

Mr. Pignati is keen to make friends with John and Lorraine and treats them well, but at the same time one understands that he *needs* them too. He is vulnerable, in many ways more vulnerable than John and Lorraine. It is through his friendship with John and Lorraine that he can revisit his childhood years.

## Work – writing to inform, explain, describe

John describes to Lorraine how he has found the funeral bill. Lorraine is shocked, believing that all along she has had a feeling that something was amiss. Why do you think that Lorraine forgets about this discovery so quickly?

Write a detailed account of a time when you have been taken by surprise. Pay careful attention to the vocabulary that you use.

## Chapter nine

Norton quizzes John as to why he goes Mr. Pignati's house. John refers again to Norton's limited mental capacity, deciding that he is 'so low on the scale of evolution he belongs back in the age of the Cro – Magnon man.' (p.78) John thinks back to Norton's childhood, in which 'he played with dolls,' and seems to link Norton's limited intelligence with the fact that he played with dolls as a child. Perhaps the most important thing to come out of this, is that John admits that he is 'just as screwed up as he is.' (p.82).

John attempts to understand the way he is, and why he has the problems that he does. He blames his father for encouraging him to drink at a young age. Implicit in this criticism of his parents though, is perhaps a criticism of John himself; of his inability to have the strength of character as a young adult to tackle the problem himself. This chapter reveals the growing divide between John and his parents.

## Work

John's observation about Norton playing with dolls, is closely linked to socially acceptable roles for males and females.

A stereotype is a commonly held belief, often with little or no truth in it. For example it is not true that boys who play with dolls are gay. Stereotypes can be used to define identity; they can include as well as exclude.

Discuss male and female roles and stereotypes. How have both men's and women's roles have changed over the past thirty years? Think about:

- Working women – women in high of responsibility;
- Education;
- Maternity and paternity leave;
- House husbands;
- Single parent families;

and any other changes that the group believes are relevant.

## Chapter ten

Lorraine's mother begins to question her as to where she has been. Lorraine tells her mother that she has been to a Latin dance club, and missed the last bus home. John and Lorraine have been to visit Mr. Pignati, and that is why she is late home.

John and Lorraine admit to Mr. Pignati that they aren't charity workers, and the plan was all a game.

Mr. Pignati begins to cry as he remembers his wife, he tells them his secret, that his wife Conchetta is dead. To cheer up Mr. Pignati, John suggests that they play a game, but Mr. Pignati's choice is a bizarre game in which there is talk of a murdered wife.

During a game of chase, Mr. Pignati collapses with a suspected heart attack, and falls down the stairs to the bottom.

### **Work – creating suspense**

In this chapter suspense is built up in various ways. We know that Lorraine is telling lies to her mother, Mr. Pignati reveals that his wife is dead, but doesn't say how she died and Mr. Pignati initiates a strange game.

Look at how Paul Zindel makes the story interesting and creates suspense.

### **Comprehension questions**

1. What lie does Lorraine tell her mother? (p.84).
2. Why is her mother paranoid? (p.84).
3. How does the author build up suspense as Lorraine enters Mr. Pignati's house? Pick out appropriate words and phrases. (p.86 – 87).
4. How does Mr. Pignati react when John tells him the truth?
5. We know that Mr. Pignati is sad about something else. Why isn't it revealed here? (p.88).
6. Why do you think that the author doesn't give us any more information other than 'she's [Conchetta's] dead?' (p.90).
7. What is the purpose of the strange game?

## Chapter eleven

Realising that Mr. Pignati has had a heart attack, John and Lorraine call the police and an ambulance. John is arrogant, commenting on the attitude of the 'snotty cop.' Again John's thoughts reveal his belief that he is superior to other people, 'I mean those particular cops were so dumb it was pathetic. I felt like I was talking to two grown up Dennises who had arrested mental growth.' (p.97)

John's remark that Lorraine looked like 'a Mongolian peasant hawking flowers in a flea – market' as she carried the flowers for Mr. Pignati to the hospital is far from complimentary, and will form part of a collection of comments made by John that are derogatory to women.

John asserts his authority over Lorraine when he insists that they will take Mr. Pignati's house keys, despite Lorraine already having declined the offer. He tells us "Maybe we will, I said, taking the keys right out of her hand [...]. I flashed Lorraine a dirty look and she never finished her sentence.' (p.100).

After dressing up in Mr. Pignati's and Conchetta's clothes, John and Lorraine enjoy a candle lit dinner that she has prepared. John announces that he is 'a handsome European businessman and that you [Lorraine] are in love with me!' (p.104). It is he who, despite Lorraine's protestations, kisses her. Admittedly, in the first instance, this could be taken as a teenage experiment between two close friends, but when Lorraine tells him forcefully 'John, stop it now. I'm not kidding.' (p104), John does not stop, it simply encourages him and Lorraine is powerless to stop him.

## Chapter twelve

John telephones the hospital to check that Mr. Pignati is fine, but in an echo of an earlier incident, John persuades the operator to connect him to the hospital free of charge because he tells the operator that 'I just lost my dime trying to get to St. Ambrose hospital. I got some saloon by mistake.' (p.107). The aspect that concerns me most is the ease with which John is able to invent lies on the spur of the moment.

Lorraine has made the evening meal, but John refuses to help. He is awkward, demanding that Lorraine 'shut up and do the dishes.' (p109). Unable to recognize that life is much easier if people work as a team and co – operate, John refuses to remove the garbage because 'you're the one who makes it.' (p109). Not wanting to appear as if he is doing Lorraine a favour, John decides that he will take the garbage out, not to help Lorraine, simply because 'The Pigman's coming home tomorrow, and this hovel better look good.' (p.110).

### **Work – analyse John's character**

In chapters eleven and twelve, we learn a considerable amount about the way in which John behaves and his relationship with other characters.

Look back over the following incidents;

- p.97 When the police question John
- p.99 John's description of Lorraine carrying the flowers
- p.100 John's decision to take the keys
- p.102 John's reply to Lorraine 'None of your business.'
- p. 104 The point where Lorraine tells John 'Stop it, I'm not kidding.'
- p.107 John's lie to the operator
- p.109 John's refusal to remove the rubbish
- p.110 John's decision to take the rubbish out
- p.112 John's decision to invite friends around to have a party

Comment on how the author portrays John. Pay attention to his personal characteristics and his relationship with other people. Use quotes to support your answer.



## Chapter thirteen

John invites Dennis to the party, telling him to steal a bottle of whisky from his father. Earlier, Lorraine talked of John's hatred of both Dennis and Norton. (p.23).

John refers to Lorraine as 'she' six times as he describes her preparing the food for the party. His lack of respect for women in general is evident through the relationship that he has not only with his mother, but with teenage girls. Melissa Dumas is envisaged as having 'a lovely voice, but her memory is like that of a titmouse with curvature of the brain.' (p.116).

Lorraine's reasonable request that the music is turned down, so that it won't interfere with the nuns, is met with John's put down, 'Oh shut up.' He describes his anger and remarks how he was 'furious about her telling me I made most of the garbage.' Although John does treat Lorraine shabbily, he comments favourably on her appearance. 'Lorraine looked beautiful again,' he thinks to himself. Perhaps the silent thoughts that John has, do show that he has a more caring side to his personality, but the problem is that these comments often remain unsaid, they are locked in John's private thoughts.

John's blatant disregard for other people's belongings is evident in his assessment of the damage to the house after the party. 'There wasn't that much damage being done,' he tells us. It consists of 'somebody drop[ping] a drink down the stairs, and a cigarette [which] burned a small hole in the throw rug.' A lamp has also been smashed.

The way in which John lies to Norton when he turns up uninvited, indicates that he is an essentially weak character, one who is prepared to lie rather than to stand up for what he believes. Rather than sending Norton away, John is over friendly, telling him that 'I've tried to get in touch with you all night.' (p.118) He invites him to join the party.

John is angry that Norton smashes one of Mr. Pignati's pigs. Understandably, he is upset and annoyed, but John's response to punch Norton in the face is extreme enough. Further to that, there is no sense of regret, rather he says 'when I saw the blood pouring out of Norton's nose, I was so happy I began to laugh. (p.121)

### **Work – writing to analyse, review and comment**

- Consider John's attitude towards women. Comment on how he treats Lorraine, and his comments about Melissa and Helen.
- Describe the relationship between John, Dennis and Norton. (p.113). Look back at pages 20, 22 and 29. What is John's motivation for inviting Dennis to the party?

## Chapter fourteen

Lorraine is concerned about Mr. Pignati, he is upset that his house has been damaged, and his beloved wife's dress has been ripped. Lorraine feels that John has let her down, he is in part responsible for the trouble, yet he is so drunk that he is unconscious.

Lorraine is in trouble for lying to her mother, but it is not this that makes her cry, but the guilt that she feels for being partly responsible for the events at Mr. Pignati's house.

She goes to bed thinking 'of the condition of Mr. Pignati's house.' Loyalty and friendship built on trust are what Lorraine values, and she feels that she has broken those bonds of friendship with Mr. Pignati. She is concerned that he will interpret the events as Lorraine and John deliberately choosing to leave him in this way. Lorraine's regret and remorse do not make better what has happened, but at least the acknowledgement that she is in some way to blame and her realisation that it was a game that went wrong, go part way to moderate our feelings of anger towards her.

John's response to the situation provides us with a sharp contrast. His first words are far from expressing any concern for Mr. Pignati. Instead, he chooses to concentrate on his own problems. 'My father says I have to go to a psychiatrist,' he announces. He appears to be unaffected by the previous night's events and calmly moulds the slush into an ice ball whilst complaining 'My mother started her high – frequency cackling, but it was Bore who got on my nerves.' John does enquire about Mr. Pignati, but even at this late stage, his sentiments are insincere, Lorraine detects the 'artificial enthusiasm' in his voice. (p.130).

Mr. Pignati collapses and dies during a trip to the zoo.

### **Work – writing a newspaper report**

- Imagine that you are a journalist. Write a report on the death of Mr. Pignati. Your article should be printed on an inside page of the newspaper.
- Re – write the article in seventy words for a 'news in brief' section of the newspaper.

*Discuss how to set out a newspaper report – the features that should be included, witness statements, style, tone, language used and anything else that is relevant.*

**Discussion point** - Why do you think that Mr. Pignati liked to visit Bobo so much?

## Chapter fifteen

Lorraine is shocked when she realises that Mr. Pignati is dead. Reacting in the expected way, she 'burst into tears and ran out.' (p.135). John on the other hand, is rather cold in his response. 'You better get out of here,' he tells Lorraine. In a cynical attempt to justify his comment, John tells us that if Lorraine's mother had realised that she was involved with Mr. Pignati, 'her mother would've shipped her off to a Tibetan convent for ninety – six years.'

Arguably, John is a caring person, and it is revealed in his response to Mr. Pignati's death. John's questioning 'Why did you [Mr. Pignati] have to die?' and the placing of the handkerchief over Mr. Pignati's mouth is a poignant moment in which John sheds the cold exterior that he has presented to the reader for most of the novel. 'I did care,' John tells us. He admits that 'Up until then had never been particularly disturbed about seeing a corpse,' but things appear to be different now. Perhaps this lonely old man whom John was so keen to deceive has taught him more than he ever imagined. If the deception of Mr. Pignati and his subsequent death have taught John to feel compassion, then at least some good has come out of the story.

Whilst John is clearly the architect of his own disaster, at various points in the novel, it emerges that he is in part, a product of his damaged home life. It is a damning indictment on society that John feels 'Maybe I would rather be dead than turn into the kind of grown up people I knew.' (p.138). John is finally able to see that 'We [Lorraine and John] had trespassed [...] and we were being punished for it.' John and Lorraine have matured during the course of the novel, and have come to realise that 'When he [Mr. Pignati] died, something in us had died as well.' Taking full responsibility for the chain of events, it is the first time that we hear John admit that 'no one else was to blame.' (p.140).

### **Work – is John to blame?**

For most of the novel, John is portrayed as a self – centred hedonist. Arguably he appears to mature towards the end of the novel. Consider the extent to which John is responsible for the events that unfold, and whether or not he accepts responsibility for his part in the destruction of Mr. Pignati.