A Teacher's Guide to

THE TROUBLE IN ME

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jack Gantos has written books for readers of all ages, from picture books and middle-grade fiction to books for young adults and adults. His works include *Hole in My Life*, a memoir that won the Michael L. Printz and Robert F. Sibert honors; *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*, a National Book Award Finalist; *Joey Pigza Loses Control*, a Newbery Honor book; and *Dead End in Norvelt*, the 2012 Newbery Award Winner and the Scott O'Dell Award Winner for Best Historic Fiction. He lives in Boston, Massachusetts, and you can visit him at jackgantos.com.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Ages 12–6 | ISBN: 9780374379957
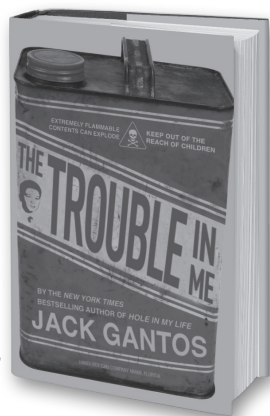
Based on true events, *The Trouble in Me* is a fiery, darkly humorous portrait of the author as a young teen—the perfect bridge between the Norvelt novels and his Printz Honor-winning YA autobiography, *Hole in My Life*.

Jack is basically a good kid, but circumstances allow him to make decisions that are not in his best interest. After attending five different schools in seven grades, Jack makes a commitment to read and write more and to excel in his new school. He hopes to make a new friend who will lead him down the road to popularity, but instead he meets Gary Pagoda, his next–door neighbor, who is the most dangerous kid around. Recently released from a juvenile detention facility, or "juvie," Gary is obsessed with fire and danger, and, determined to continue his life of crime, he plans to take Jack down with him. Through a series of fire-related "Olympic events," a confrontation with Gary's probation officer, and the theft of Jack's father's car, Jack could find himself being sent to juvie himself—or even worse!

As a follower, Jack is eager to leave his old self behind, and desperate for whatever crazy, hilarious, frightening thing might happen next. But he may not be as ready as he thinks he is when the trouble inside him comes blazing to life.

To attain specific Common Core grade-level standards for their classroom and students, teachers are encouraged to adapt the activities listed in this guide to their classes' needs. You know your kids best!

Pre-Reading Activity

Discuss the difference between a biography and an autobiography. Then ask students to write a one-page account of a personal experience and the impact it has had on their lives or the lessons they learned as a result. Students can share their writing in small groups.

CCSS: W.6.2, W.7.2, W.8.2, W.6.4, W.7.4, W.8.4, L.6.1, L.7.1, L.8.1, L.6.2, L.7.2, L.8.2

THEMATIC QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Family Relationships

- How does Jack's father's desire for "trophy-worthy" experiences affect each member of the family?
- On page 19, Jack says he rumbled under the depth of his mother's grief. Why is his mother so sad? How are Jack and his mother alike?
- What role does Jack's sister play in his life? Describe their relationship.
- Jack's father wants his family to work together as a unit so they will possess a collective strength. What evidence, if any, shows the family as a unit that expresses mutual respect and trust among its members?
- How would you describe the Pagoda family?

Fear

- What are Gary and Jack afraid of?
- How are Gary and Jack each motivated by fear?
- Gary's and Jack's siblings also operate in fear. What is each of them afraid of and how does their fear motivate their actions?
- Jack says on page 45 that if he didn't care about being in trouble, the consequences would have no power over him. How does this lack of fear land both Gary and Jack in a heap of it?
- On page 167, Gary says he is not a coward because he doesn't lie to himself. What evidence either proves or disproves Gary's statement?

Friendship

- On page 35-37, Jack describes the change he undergoes when he meets Gary. What is Jack looking for in his relationship with Gary? Why is Gary's friendship so important that Jack is willing to risk his life?
- Gary says Jack is his friend. If this is true, why does Gary physically and emotionally abuse Jack? What need does Jack meet in Gary's life?
- Which of Jack's sister's friendships help her deal with her situation in life?

Self-Image

- How does Jack's father affect Jack's self-image?
- How do Jack and his sister view themselves? How would the two of them describe each other?
- Jack and his sister are lost to themselves. Why do they only see themselves through the eyes of others?
- How would Gary describe his life and personality?
- Why is self-image so important? How does a person's self-image affect the decisions they make about their life?

Lying/Honesty

- Why are Jack and Gary such accomplished liars? How do their lies both help and hinder their plans?
- What lies does Jack's sister tell to protect her life and feelings?
- Why does Jack lie to his mother when she is always so fair to him?
- Jack says that when you deceive yourself, you believe you are telling the truth. What lies does Jack believe about himself?
- According to Gary's probation officer, Gary is a compulsive liar. How do Gary's and Jack's lies differ?

CCSS: L.6.1, L.7.1, L.8.1, L.6.2, L.7.2, L.8.2, L.6.3, L.7.3 L.8.3, RL.6.1, RL.7.1, RL.8.1, SL.6.1, SL.7.1, SL.8.1

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Vocabulary Enrichment

Ask students to look at the list of words below and to locate them in the book. Using a composition book or a binder, have students create a reading vocabulary dictionary with sections for each letter of the alphabet, adding the listed vocabulary words in the appropriate sections. First, ask students to write definitions of the words based on the context clues in the sentence. Then, ask students to confirm their definition by using classroom dictionaries and thesauruses. Finally, ask students to write an original sentence using the word. Students should continue to add to their reading vocabulary dictionary in their independent reading.

Feeble	Page 6	Repulsive	Page 39
Frolicked	Page 15	Catapult	Page 45
Perilous	Page 15	Perverse	Page 47
Stupor	Page 23	Impenetrable	Page 53
Contemptible	Page 39	Scrim	Page 202

CCSS: RL.6.4, RL.7.4, RL.8.4, L.6.4, L.7.4, L.8.4

Language Arts

Jack Gantos uses beautiful imagery to describe the events that occur in his story as well as the emotions the characters experience: for example, the description of Gary on page 28 and the description of the canal on pages 20 and 21. Ask students to find a passage that speaks to them and, using that passage as a mentor text, ask students to write about a personal experience involving similar emotions or a similar situation and to include the imagery that experience brings to their mind. Students can create an accompanying illustration and share their writing with the class.

As a class, brainstorm a variety of particularly effective descriptive passages and words from the novel. Then ask students to create a found poem using the ideas brainstormed or other effective examples of passages and words from the novel. Student poems should center on one of the characters, an event that occurred in the novel, or the student's reaction to one of the characters' lives. Have students read their poems to the class and post the poems in the classroom.

CCSS: W.6.3, W.7.3, W.8.3, W.6.4, W.7.4, W.8.4, L.6.1, L.7.1, L.8.1, L.6.2, L.7.2, L.8.2, L.6.3, L.7.3, L.8.3, L.6.5, L.7.5, L.8.5

Social Studies

Teens like Gary and Jack can be found in every school and in almost every neighborhood. Ask students to research the programs available in their state and community for teens who have been to juvenile detention centers or have been suspended from school. Include names, addresses, and contacts of programs; populations that are served by the organization; costs, if applicable; and other pertinent information. Then in small groups, ask students to compile the information into a brochure to be posted around the school and to be placed in the counselor's office.

Some people might consider Gary and Jack pyromaniacs because they love playing with fire. Ask students to look up the definition and, using evidence from the novel, justify whether or not the boys are, indeed, pyromaniacs. Then ask students to investigate pyromania and its impact on communities. Have students share their findings in small groups.
CCSS: W.6.2, W.7.2, W.8.2, W.6.4, W.7.4, W.8.4, L.6.1, L.7.1, L.8.1, L.6.2, L.7.2, L.8.2, L.6.3, L.7.3, L.8.3

Math

On page 121 and 122, Jack attempts to catapult himself over the house into the swimming pool, and Gary tells him to consider the geometry and timing. With a partner, ask students to investigate the necessary trajectory to accomplish what Jack did by blind luck. Then have each pair of students write an explanation of the math involved in accomplishing such a feat.
CCSS: W.6.2, W.7.2, W.8.2, W.6.4, W.7.4, W.8.4, L.6.1, L.7.1, L.8.1, L.6.2, L.7.2, L.8.2, L.6.3, L.7.3, L.8.3

Science

Gary and Jack are both obsessed with fire and use fire in their "Olympic events" (the story takes place in 1964, the year of the Tokyo Olympics). Ask students to read the section (pages 25-28) on the fire Jack starts in the grill for his father's birthday party. After reading the section, ask students to investigate the chemical reaction that occurs when lighter fluid, hot air, and fire come in contact. Ask students to create a flow chart and accompanying explanation of why the fire "whooshed" into Jack's face. Post the charts in the classroom.
CCSS: W.6.2, W.7.2, W.8.2, W.6.4, W.7.4, W.8.4, L.6.1, L.7.1, L.8.1, L.6.2, L.7.2, L.8.2, L.6.3, L.7.3, L.8.3

INTERNET RESOURCES

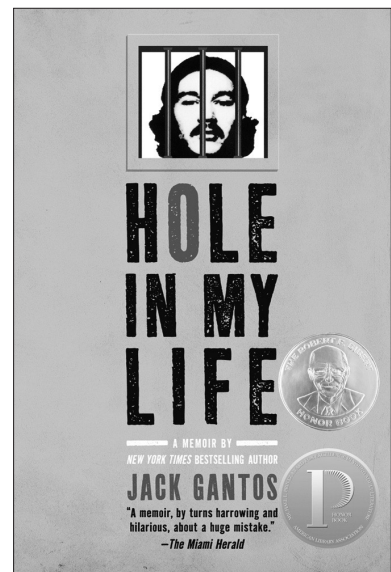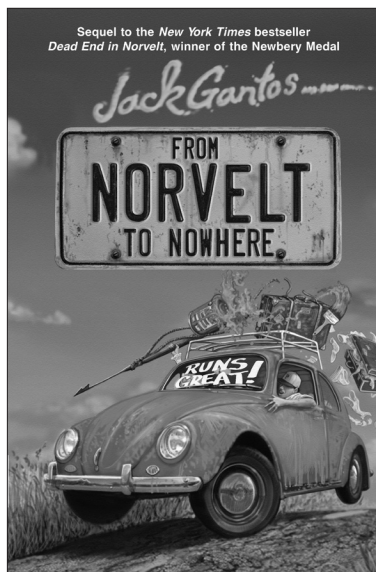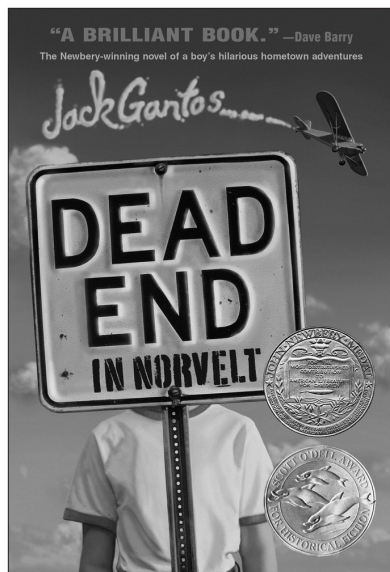For a complete listing of books by Jack Gantos and more, visit **jackgantos.com**

Jack Gantos on Facebook: Jack Gantos Fan Page (Official)

Counseling Children Who Play with Fire:
www.fireproofchildren.com/CounselingChildrenWhoPlayWithFire.htm

Compulsive Lying: **www.truthaboutdeception.com/lying-and...a.../compulsive-lying.html**

OTHER BOOKS BY JACK GANTOS

"A BRILLIANT BOOK." —Dave Barry
The Newbery-winning novel of a boy's hilarious hometown adventures

Jack Gantos

DEAD END IN NORVELT

Sequel to the *New York Times* bestseller
Dead End in Norvelt, winner of the Newbery Medal

Jack Gantos

FROM NORVELT TO NOWHERE

RUNS GREAT!

HOLE IN MY LIFE

A MEMOIR BY
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
JACK GANTOS

"A memoir, by turns harrowing and hilarious, about a huge mistake."
—*The Miami Herald*

For a detailed description of the common core standards used in this guide
please visit www.corestandards.org.

Common Core activities written by Susan Geye, Everman ISD Coordinator of Library Services