

*A truly killer comedy filled with history and mystery!
The hilarious sequel to the Newbery Medal-winning novel
DEAD END IN NORVELT.*

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

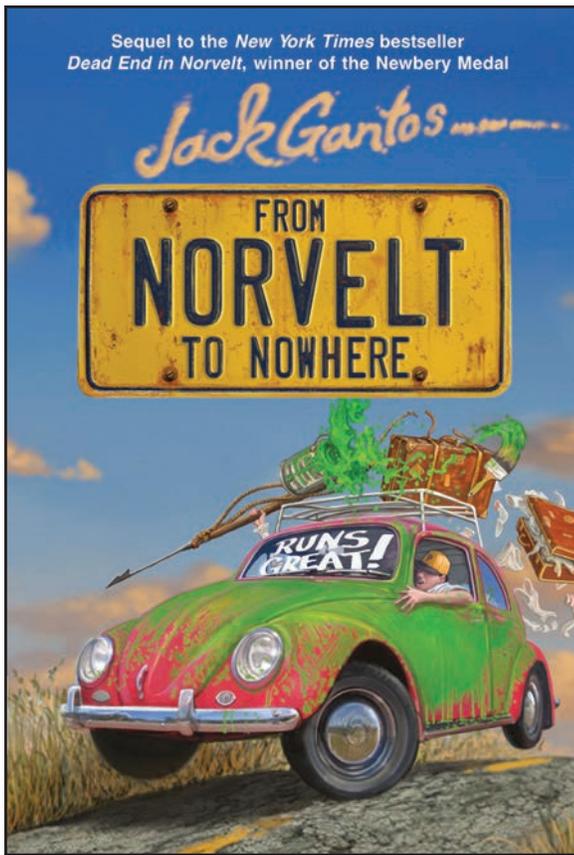


FOR
USE WITH
COMMON CORE
STATE
STANDARDS

By Jack Gantos



Farrar Straus Giroux
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ABOUT THE BOOK

Set in 1962 at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, this new adventure about the fictionalized young Jack Gantos returns to the author's western Pennsylvania hometown, a few months after the close of the first book. Twelve-year-old Jack is busy with the dirty job of digging a fallout shelter in his backyard. He is also once again entangled with a local murder mystery. On Halloween night, poor Mrs. Custard, an old lady who has just moved back to Norvelt, dies after eating a poisoned Girl Scout cookie, just as Jack is trick-or-treating on her doorstep. Jack and Miss Volker—his elderly friend, mentor, and neighbor—are convinced that Mr. Spizz, the lead suspect in the seven old-lady murders from the previous summer, is the old crook behind the new crime. When Jack sees a light on in Spizz's former office, he is convinced that the alleged murderer is back in town. Then the Grim Reaper strikes again, as news arrives that Eleanor Roosevelt has died. Grief-stricken Miss Volker needs Jack to accompany her on a train trip to Hyde Park to pay her respects to the town's founder. This mission takes an abrupt turn and Jack finds himself on a wild ride as he and Miss Volker travel south in pursuit of the "truth" regarding the murders in Norvelt. There are notes written in code, a gun in Miss Volker's purse, and a host of suspicious characters following them. Jack isn't quite sure whom to trust, but he is in for one big surprise when they reach Miami.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Have students consider the cover art and the title of the novel and write a brief essay that makes a prediction about Jack's next adventure. Who are the main players? Give students time to read aloud and discuss their essays.

Correlates to Common Core ELA Standards:

Writing: Text Types & Purposes W.5.1, 5.3, 6.1, 6.3

Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL.5.1, 6.1

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS:

Questions for Group Discussion

TEAMWORK

- Why does Jack feel that he and Miss Volker are a mismatched pair?
- Explain what Jack means when he references *Moby-Dick* and says, “She [Miss Volker] was my captain and I was her Ishmael.” (p. 52)
- Discuss what Jack means when he says of Miss Volker, “I made her feel smart and she made me feel clueless.” (p. 78)
- Miss Volker says to Jack, “We *made* history together. Never forget that!” (p. 276) What does this mean? What will Jack most remember about the history they made?
- Discuss what Jack will miss about Miss Volker.

GROWING UP

- Jack’s mother discovers his Classic Illustrated Comics and orders him to donate them to the tag sale. Why does Jack’s mother think the comics are “immature”? How is it natural for a boy Jack’s age to possess both mature and immature reading material?
- Jack gives the reader a long list of taboo items in his bedroom. What secret items doesn’t he mention that might be included on this list?
- Explain why Jack feels more mature when he dresses in the new clothes that his dad sent.
- Why does Jack call falling into the septic tank a “fairy-tale baptism” that transforms him into a man?
- Miss Volker brings out the boy and the man in Jack. Discuss the times when Jack behaves like a boy. At what point in the novel does he become a man?
- What differences might Jack’s mother see in him when they are reunited in Florida?

GOOD VS. EVIL

- Jack is fascinated by the comic-book version of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Why does the story make him feel that there is a little of both Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in himself?
- Discuss Jack’s good side. How is his evil side revealed?
- As Jack thinks about Dr. Jekyll, why does he question whether he knows the truth about himself?
- Discuss Miss Volker’s Jekyll and Hyde moments.
- What is the difference between a split personality and being two-faced? Why does Miss Volker say that she is two-faced?
- Why does Miss Volker say that good and evil can’t live together?

FEAR

- Discuss the relationship between fear and cowardliness.
- Jack’s dad thinks that Jack’s imagination contributes to his fears. How does Miss Volker confuse his imagination and cause fears?
- What are Jack’s most fearful moments?
- Jack’s mom warns, “Don’t jump to conclusions. Think it all through and you won’t fall to pieces.” (p. 145) How does this advice help Jack deal with his fears?
- At the beginning of the novel Jack feels that he is a coward. How does the journey with Miss Volker teach him courage?

GUILT

- What is the relationship between guilt and shame?
- Discuss why Jack feels guilty about Mrs. Custard’s death.
- Debate whether Jack can leave shame behind when he moves to Florida.
- Miss. Volker feels guilty that she hasn’t lived up to Eleanor Roosevelt’s example. How does she display no guilt as the story progresses?

MAKING CHOICES

- Explain what Jack’s mother means when she says, “Bad choices lead to bad consequences.” (p. 28)
- Discuss the bad choices that Jack makes while on his journey with Miss Volker. What are the consequences?
- In the book what does Jack learn about questionable choices made by several heroes from history, including President Lincoln and Eleanor Roosevelt?
- Which other characters make bad choices?

Correlates to Common Core ELA Standards:

Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL.5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3

Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL.5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

VOCABULARY

Have students jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them taking clues from the text. Then have them use a dictionary to check the definition. How well did they do? Such words may include: *feral* (p. 10), *contritely* (p. 20), *ferocious* (p. 21), *enunciated* (p. 39), *callous* (p. 40), *vigilante* (p. 57), *narcissist* (p. 83), *perverse* (p. 83), *dormant* (p. 85), *precipice* (p. 104), *garish* (p. 108), *proboscis* (p. 126), *labyrinth* (p. 127), *carnage* (p. 166), *orate* (p. 170), *avarice* (p. 186), *fickle* (p. 201), *contempt* (p. 208), and *amniotically* (p. 248).

Correlates to Common Core ELA Standards:

Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L.5.4, 6.4

LANGUAGE ARTS

Jack Gantos uses literary metaphors throughout the novel. Identify a metaphor that best describes Miss Volker’s quest for the Norvelt killer and use a metaphor of your own to describe the relationship between Jack and Miss Volker. Look at the many metaphors and adjectives used to describe Mr. Huffer throughout the story; how do these anticipate his unmasking as the Norvelt killer?

Correlates to Common Core ELA Standards:

Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L 5.5, 6.5

The journey to Hyde Park is Jack’s first train ride outside the state. In olden days, when people traveled by train, family and friends would often write “train letters” to travelers to convey their love and best wishes. These letters were slipped in the traveler’s suitcase to be discovered and read on the journey. Write a train letter that Jack’s mother and Bunny might write to Jack. Allow time in class to share.

Correlates to Common Core ELA Standards:

Writing: Text Types & Purposes W.5.2, 5.3, 6.2, 6.3

Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W.5.4

In the two Norvelt novels, Jack has had plenty of experience helping Miss Volker write obituaries for the *Norvelt News*. The capture of Mr. Huffer is like a death because it ends the mystery of who murdered the old ladies in Norvelt. Write a humorous obituary that Jack might write for Mr. Huffer on the day he is shipped back to Norvelt in his special steel casket. Take into consideration Mrs. Huffer's involvement in the scheme. Encourage peer editing for clarity, spelling, and grammar.

Correlates to Common Core ELA Standards:

Writing: Text Types & Purposes W.5.3, 6.3

Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W.5.4, 5.6, 6.4, 6.6

Writing: Research to Build & Present Knowledge W.5.7, 6.7

Language: Conventions of Standard English L 5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2

SOCIAL STUDIES

Use books in the library or sites on the Internet to find out about the Cuban Missile Crisis. The following website provides a brief overview: <http://library.thinkquest.org/11046/days>. Divide the class into three groups and ask each group to produce a taped segment about the Cuban Missile Crisis for a television news program such as *Face the Nation*, *Sixty Minutes*, or *20/20*. Prepare a bibliography of informational sources used to prepare for the show.

Correlates to Common Core ELA Standards:

Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL 5.4, 5.5, 6.4, 6.5

Writing: Research to Build & Present Knowledge W.5.7, 5.9, 6.7, 6.9

History/Social Studies: Integration of Knowledge & Ideas: RH 6-8.7, 6-8.8

Jack's school requires students to do community service after the school is shut down in the wake of the propane-tank explosion. Ask students to plan a service project in their neighborhood. Perhaps it's walking dogs, babysitting, cleaning up litter, planting gardens, planning and holding a yard sale, etc. Prior to the start of the chosen community service project, brainstorm with the class to come up with the information that must be included in a follow-up "Community Service Report." Once the service project has been completed, have the students write the report and publish it on the class/school website.

Correlates to Common Core ELA Standards:

Writing: Text Types & Purposes W 5.3, 6.3

Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W.5.4, 5.6, 6.4, 6.6

ART/SOCIAL STUDIES

Jack's mother asks Miss Volker to tutor Jack while traveling on their adventure. Take into consideration all that Jack sees and learns on his journey from Hyde Park, New York, to Miami, Florida. Subjects could include anything from the mythical discovery of the Fountain of Youth and the founding of the utopian community of Rugby, Tennessee, to Adolf Hitler's involvement in the development of the Volkswagon and Eleanor Roosevelt's involvement with singer Marian Anderson. Have students make illustrated trading cards that represent Jack's newly acquired knowledge. For example, a card for the Lincoln Memorial should include a picture of the memorial on the front and the facts that Jack learns on the back. Students should then research and find two additional facts that aren't mentioned in the novel. Then have students trade their cards.

Correlates to Common Core ELA Standards:

Writing: Research to Build & Present Knowledge W.5.7, 5.8, 6.7, 6.8;

History/Social Studies: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RH.6-8.7

DRAMA

Put Mr. Huffer on trial. Stage and tape the courtroom drama. Appoint a defense attorney, a prosecutor, a judge, a jury, obvious witnesses, and a surprise witness. Include visuals necessary for a conviction.

Correlates to Common Core ELA Standards:

Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL.5.3, 6.3

Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6

INTERNET RESOURCES

<http://www.nps.gov/hofr/index.htm>

The official website of Springwood, the home of Franklin D. Roosevelt in Hyde Park, New York, offers information about the Roosevelts.

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Cuban-Missile-Crisis.aspx>

The official website of the John F. Kennedy Library provides information on the Cuban Missile Crisis.

http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_vault/2013/05/20/eleanor_roosevelt_the_first_lady_s_license_to_carry_a_pistol.html

Article on Mrs. Roosevelt's decision to acquire a permit to carry a pistol on her travels.

<http://www.historicrugby.org/>

Information about Miss Volker's hometown of Rugby, Tennessee, founded by the British author Thomas Hughes.

<http://www.norvelt.org/Norvelt/Home.html>

Includes information about the history of Norvelt, Pennsylvania.

[http://www.tkinter.smig.net/ClassicsIllustrated/.](http://www.tkinter.smig.net/ClassicsIllustrated/)

A selection of cover images of these classic comic books.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Anne Lower



Jack Gantos has written books for people of all ages, from picture books and middle-grade fiction to novels for young adults and adults. His works include the 2012 Newbery Medal winner *Dead End in Norvelt*; *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; and *Joey Pigza Loses Control*, a Newbery Honor Book.

Jack was born in Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania, and grew up in nearby Norvelt. When he was seven, his family moved to Barbados. He attended British schools, where there was much emphasis on reading and writing, and teachers made learning a lot of fun. When the family moved to south Florida, he found his new classmates uninterested in their studies, and his teachers spent most of their time disciplining students. Jack retreated to an abandoned bookmobile (with three flat tires and empty of books) parked out behind the sandy ball field and read for most of the day. The seeds for Jack's writing career were planted in sixth grade, when he read his sister's diary and decided he could write better than she could. He begged his mother for a diary and began to collect anecdotes he overheard at school, mostly from standing outside the teachers' lounge and listening to their lunchtime conversations. Later, he incorporated many of these anecdotes into stories.

While in college, he and an illustrator friend, Nicole Rubel, began working on picture books. After a series of well-deserved rejections, they published their first book, *Rotten Ralph*, in 1976. It was a success and the beginning of Jack's career as a professional writer. Jack continued writing children's books and began teaching courses in children's book writing and children's literature. He developed the master's degree program in children's book writing at Emerson College and the Vermont College M.F.A. program for children's book writers. He now devotes his time to writing books and educational speaking. He lives with his family in Boston, Massachusetts.

For more information about the author, visit jackgantos.com.

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