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Introduction

A good book can touch our lives like a good friend. Within its pages are words and characters that can inspire us to achieve our highest ideals. We can turn to it for companionship, recreation, comfort, and guidance. It can also give us a cherished story to hold in our hearts forever.

In Literature Units, great care has been taken to select books that are sure to become good friends!

Teachers who use this unit will find the following features to supplement their own valuable ideas.

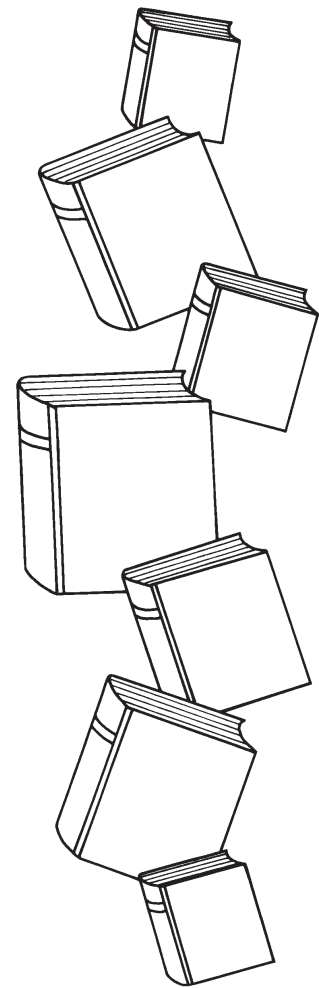
- Sample Lesson Plans
- Pre-reading Activities
- A Biographical Sketch and Picture of the Author
- A Book Summary
- Vocabulary Lists and Suggested Vocabulary Activities
- Chapters grouped for study, with each section including:
 - quizzes
 - hands-on projects
 - cooperative learning activities
 - cross-curricular connections
 - extensions into the reader's own life
- Post-reading Activities
- Book Report Ideas
- Research Activities
- Culminating Activities
- Three Different Options for Unit Tests
- A Bibliography of Related Reading
- Answer Key

We are confident that this unit will be a valuable addition to your planning, and we hope that as you use our ideas, your students will increase the circle of “friends” they have in books!

Standards

*A Guide for Using **Loser in the Classroom*** meets one or more of the following language arts standards, which are used with permission from McREL. (Copyright 2007, McREL, Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. Telephone: 303-337-0990. Website: www.mcrel.org)

- Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process.
- Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts.
- Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
- Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.
- Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions.
- Gathers and uses information for research purposes.
- Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.



Before the Book

Before you begin reading *Loser* with your students, complete some pre-reading activities to stimulate interest and enhance comprehension. Here are some activities that might work well for your class.

1. Predict what the story might be about just by hearing the title. (You might tell the students that the story shows a character in his first six years of school.)
2. Predict what the story might be about just by looking at the cover illustration.
3. Discuss other books by Jerry Spinelli that students may have heard about or read.
4. Answer the following questions.
 - Are you interested in
 - * stories about children your own age?
 - * stories with modern settings?
 - * stories that show what situations a child lives through as he grows up?
 - * stories that have both funny and sad occurrences?
 - * stories that show a unique perspective on life?
 - How might a child deal with the teasing of other children?
 - If you had to choose: Is it better to have many close friends or the support of your parents?
 - How can a young person remain unique and special when the rest of his world is telling him to be the same as everyone else?
5. Work in groups to create a factual or fictional story about a child who is being pressured by his or her classmates to act a certain way.
6. Research unique or special people who took a different path than most people and became successful.

Different?

Donald Zinkoff has found it difficult to make friends. People view him as different. Although he is loved at home, and his parents think he is just fine, at school he is an outsider. Even the teachers have trouble accepting Donald.

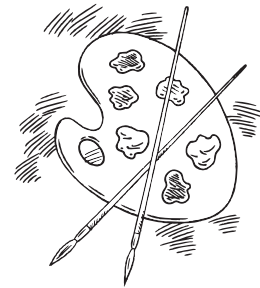
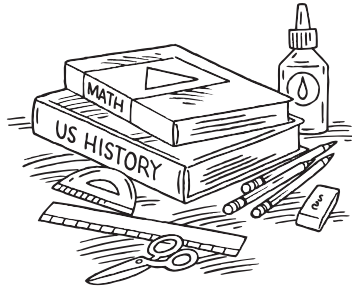
It is important to each of us to be accepted. We are concerned that others, especially those people our own age, see as “one of the group.” In order to be accepted we must sometimes act in a way that is really not the way we feel or believe. When we consider it seriously, we know that it is the differences that make the world a more interesting place. Do we want a world where everyone acts the same? Do we want to live in a world where everyone looks the same? Differences enrich our lives.

In groups of three or four, list some of the differences you can find among those in your group. After you have completed your list, discuss how these differences make you and your classmates more interesting.

Here are some categories to help get the group started.

Physical Characteristics

- skin color
- eye color
- hair length and color
- height



Talents

Favorite school subjects

Family Size (numbers of brothers and sisters)

Birth Order

Favorite Possessions

Parents' Jobs

Hobbies

Fears

Favorite Foods

Sports Played



Have your group come up with four or five other categories and then list your differences for each one.

Relays

Donald Zinkoff practiced hard to be good at the Field Day relays. Relays are fun. Try some of the ones listed below. Perhaps your class will enjoy them so much that you want to plan your own Field Day.

- **Balloon Pop:** Provide each team with balloons—you'll need one per team member plus a couple of more, just in case. Inflate the balloons, so each is about the same size. Set up a chair for each team at a destination point. As the relay begins, the first member of the team carries a balloon to the chair, puts the balloon on the chair, and then sits on the balloon until it pops. When the balloon pops, the student runs back to his or her team and tags the next person in line. The relay continues until the last student in each team has made it back to the line. The first team to finish wins.
- **Suitcase Madness:** Provide each team with a suitcase of old clothes, containing a pair of oversized pants, an oversized shirt, and large shoes. (If you really want hysterical students, include colorful boxer shorts and an outrageous hat.) When the relay begins, the first member of each team runs to the destination spot with suitcase in hand, opens the suitcase, and puts on each of the clothing items over his or her own clothing. When that student is fully dressed, he or she undresses, packs up the suitcase, and runs back to the team. He or she then hands off the suitcase to the next student and the relay continues... The relay ends when the last student returns to the team with the packed-up suitcase. The team that finishes fastest wins. (You might have each pose while dressed while a photo is taken.)
- **Orange You Having Fun??** Teams stand in a line with the first member of the team holding an orange (or other similar-sized fruit.) The objective is to pass the orange down the line to the last team member without using their hands. This is done by gripping the orange under your chin (remember, no hands!), then turning around to face the next person and for them to take the orange from you by gripping it under their chin. This process is repeated down the line to the last person. Either stop the relay at this point or have the last person run to the front and start again. The race stops when the first person ends up at the front again. If you drop the orange while passing it, you must start over with the first person!
- **Don't Egg Us On!** Each player has to run balancing an egg (raw or hard boiled) on a spoon. (Or, if you prefer, use marbles.) If the object falls off the spoon, players have to stop, pick it up and replace it before running on again to a destination point and back to the next in line.
- **Mummy!!** You'll need plenty of economy toilet-paper rolls. One team member is nominated to stand perfectly still. Other team members then have to wrap him or her up so they look like an Egyptian mummy. Points awarded for first to finish and points to best-dressed mummy.

Try this variation and have teams of 6. Each member wraps one body part: arm (2), leg (2), head—there should be only one of those!

Connections

At the end of Chapter 27, Donald starts to hallucinate because of the cold and his exhaustion. He starts thinking and talking about his past. For each of the following, connect to the moment in the novel when he first heard each of them.

"piece of cake"

"TINTINNABULATION"

"Go Donald!"

"AND THE Z SHALL BE FIRST"

"yellow button"

"Get off my team"

"One thousand congratulations"

"Jabip"

"Good morning young citizens"

"Heaven help (me)"