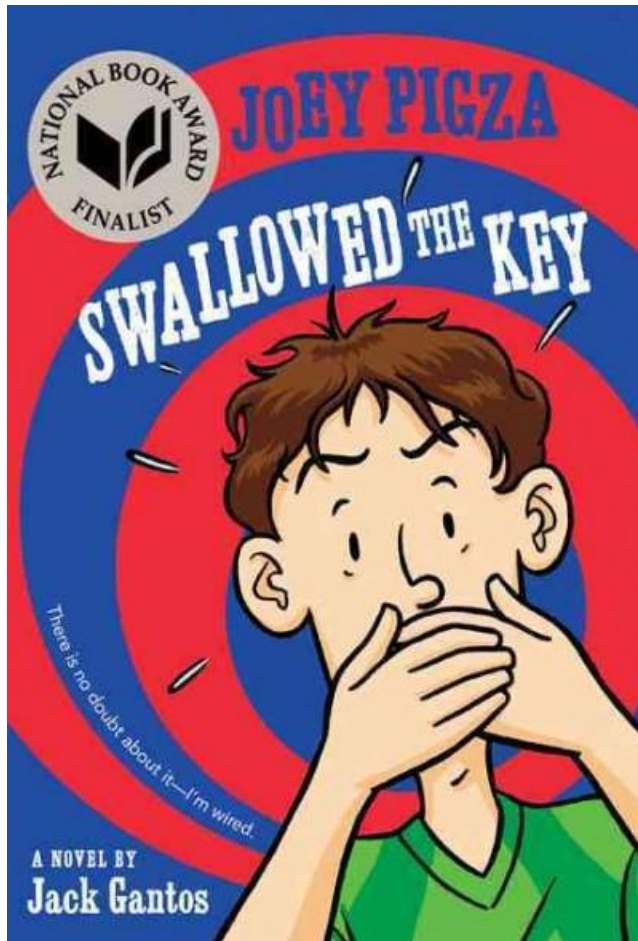


## About the book...



Living with his abusive grandmother for several years does not help Joey because she's just as wired as he is. Luckily Joey's mother returns and manages to get him on medication for his attention deficit disorder, but the medication usually wears off by noon and then Joey can't help but get in trouble. Sent to sharpen pencils, he sharpens his finger; he swallows his house key; he careens off desks or spins in his chair; and one day he cuts off the end of a classmate's nose. That's when he's sent to a special school where his medications are finally adjusted so that he can learn to control himself. Joey is a good kid who looks at his life with a tremendous sense of humor.

*-Books & Authors*

## About the Author...



Jack Gantos was born in Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania, and grew up in the nearby town of Norvelt. He remembers playing a lot of “pass the chalk” in Mrs. Neiderheizer’s class in first grade. He was in the Bluebird reading group, which he later found out was for the slow readers. To this day he’d rather be called a Bluebird than a slow reader. His favorite game at that time was playing his clothes were on fire and rolling down a hill to save himself.

When he was seven, his family moved to Barbados. He attended British schools, where there was much emphasis on reading and writing. Students were friendly but fiercely competitive, and the teachers made learning a lot of fun.

When the family moved to southern 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 (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.

He received his BFA and his MA both from Emerson College. While in college, he and an illustrator friend, Nicole Rubel, began working on picture books together. After a series of 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. He now devotes his time to writing books and educational speaking and lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

For more information, please visit the author's website at: <http://www.jackgantos.com/>.

### **Selected Writings**

- [\*Dead End in Norvelt\*](#), Farrar, Straus and Giroux (NY), 2011.
- *The Jack Henry Series:*
  - [\*Jack Adrift, Fourth Grade Without a Clue\*](#), Farrar, Straus and Giroux (NY), 1999.
  - [\*Jack on the Tracks: Four Seasons of Fifth Grade\*](#), Farrar, Straus and Giroux (NY), 1999.
  - [\*Heads or Tails: Stories From the Sixth Grade\*](#), Farrar, Straus and Giroux (NY), 1994.
  - [\*Jack's New Power: Stories From a Caribbean Year\*](#), Farrar, Straus and Giroux (NY), 1995.
  - [\*Jack's Black Book\*](#), Farrar, Straus and Giroux (NY), 1997.
- *The Joey Pigza Series:*
  - [\*Joey Pigza Loses Control\*](#), Farrar, Straus and Giroux (NY), 2000.
  - [\*What Would Joey Do\*](#), Farrar, Straus and Giroux (NY), 2002.
  - [\*I Am Not Joey Pigza\*](#), Farrar, Straus and Giroux (NY), 2007.

### **Awards**

- *Joey Pigza Loses Control* won a Newbery Honor Award in 2001; [\*Hole in My Life\*](#) won a Printz Honor Award in 2003; *Dead End in Norvelt* won both the Newbery Medal and the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction in 2012.

## Reviews

### VOYA

Joey Pigza is hyperactive and ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), and he knows it. Being wired is something that runs in his family; Joey's father skipped out when Joey was in kindergarten. His mother left shortly afterwards, abandoning Joey to the dubious care of a batty and abusive grandmother. For years Joey lived in chaos, until his mother came home sobered up and determined to take care of him. The trouble is that the meds Joey takes to control his condition work only half a day, and when they wear off he is quite literally off the wall, impossible in a classroom and a menace to himself and others. When Joey precipitates an accident that seriously injures a classmate, he is sent to a special education school where, as Joey observes, the kids arrive punished already with crippling handicaps. The school marks another turning point for Joey. A supportive caseworker helps Joey deal with and understand his disability, and he is put on a continuous release patch that evens out the delivery of his drugs. Joey returns to his old school feeling calmed down, hopeful, and even a little good about himself. Joey, his gutsy, struggling mother, and his long-suffering teachers come to life in this highly readable novel that is sometimes funny, sometimes heartrending, and both entertaining and engrossing. Be aware, though, that the plot and a lot of Joey's inner dialogues hang on the drugs that do or do not control his condition. Readers uncomfortable with the way that medicines are used to control children's behavior are going to have qualms about this story. There are plenty of Joeyes in schools today, and it is good to have one of their stories told with such skill and sympathy.

### *Booklist*

Joey Pigza, who lives with his hyperactive grandmother, understands that he's also "wired bad." Despite his best intentions, he can't concentrate and can't hold still. What's more, he can never resist an impulse: when his teacher assigns him to sharpening pencils to keep him from getting into mischief, he sharpens pencils, then chalk, then a Popsicle stick, and finally his own finger. He begins to settle down when his mother returns and gets him started on medication, but unfortunately, his morning pill wears off by noon every day. What makes this unusual is Gantos' sympathetic approach to all concerned. There are no bad guys among the adults, just well-meaning, occasionally exasperated grown-ups trying to help Joey get his behavior under control. Joey tells his own story, giving a vivid, keenly observed, detailed account of his actions and the reactions of others: "By lunchtime my meds had worn off again and I was spinning around in my chair like it was the Mad Hatter's Teacup ride at the church carnival." Gantos sometimes seems to be using Joey to inform readers, and occasionally makes Joey's comments seem too adult, but Joey is warm, lovable, and good-hearted, though maybe just a little too nice to be realistic. (He never even gets angry when he's deprived of the sugary treats he so craves.) Most teachers and students know at least one child with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and this book will surely help them become more understanding, even as they enjoy Gantos' fresh writing style and tart sense of humor. Gr. 4-7

### *Kirkus Reviews*

If Rotten Ralph were a boy instead of a cat, he might be Joey, the hyperactive hero of Gantos's new book, except that Joey is never bad on purpose. In the first-person narration, it quickly becomes clear that he can't help himself; he's so wound up that he not only practically bounces off walls, he literally swallows his house key (which he wears on a string around his neck and which he pulls back up, complete with souvenirs of the food he just ate). Gantos's straightforward view of what it's like to be Joey is so honest it hurts. Joey has been abandoned by his alcoholic father and, for a time, by his mother (who also drinks); his grandmother, just as hyperactive as he is, abuses Joey while he's in her care. One mishap after another leads Joey first from his regular classroom to special education classes and then to a special education school. With medication, counseling, and positive reinforcement, Joey calms down. Despite a lighthearted title and jacket painting, the story is simultaneously comic and horrific; Gantos takes readers right inside a human whirlwind where the ride is bumpy and often frightening, especially for Joey. But a river of compassion for the characters runs through the pages, not only for Joey but for his overextended mom and his usually patient, always worried (if only for their safety) teachers. Mature readers will find this harsh tale softened by unusual empathy and leavened by genuinely funny events.

### **Discussion Questions** (<https://multcolib.org/joey-pigza-swallowed-key>)

1. Do you know anyone who acts like Joey or do you ever feel like Joey? What is it like being around them? What does it feel like?
2. How do the teachers at school try to help Joey?
3. Is there something "wrong" with Joey? What is it?
4. Is Joey a "bad" kid? What would make people say that about him? What would you say to convince them otherwise?
5. How are Grandma and Joey alike?
6. Joey often gets in trouble at school, but in what ways does he help out?
7. Special guest Mrs. Cole comes to Joey's school to speak to the talented and gifted students about the phrase "character counts." What does that mean? How does it apply to Joey?
8. Who does Joey have to confide in?

9. How do you think Joey feels about his mom returning?
10. Why might Joey's Grandma have tricked him about his mom calling on the phone and walking by the house?
11. How is Joey able to manage his problem?
12. Do you have hope for Joey at the end?

## **Activities**

Research to learn more about ADD and ADHD.

Act out a scene or several scenes from the book.

## **Read-Alikes**

Karen Hesse, [\*Just Juice\*](#) (1998)

The middle child in a large, loving, but poor family, Juice, who is repeating the 3rd grade, frequently skips school rather than suffer the embarrassment of having her inability to read noticed. Pa has a reading problem that he won't admit, but which could contribute to his frequent bouts of unemployment. Juice's sisters and an understanding teacher try to help, but Juice is more interested in helping Pa set up a machine shop so he can pay off the overdue taxes so their home will not be sold. She's also worried about Ma, who is pregnant and suffering dizzy spells. A visit from a home health nurse provides some food for the children and medical care for pregnant Ma. By being home, Juice listens and learns about the treatment for Ma's gestational diabetes and is able to save her life and deliver her baby sister by using that knowledge and accurately reading the sugar monitor.

Cynthia Lord, [\*Rules\*](#) (2006)

Twelve-year-old Catherine has conflicting feelings about her younger brother, David, who is autistic. While she loves him, she is also embarrassed by his behavior and feels neglected by their parents. In an effort to keep life on an even keel, Catherine creates rules for him ("It's okay to hug Mom but not the clerk at the video store"). Each chapter title is also a rule, and lots more are interspersed throughout the book. When Catherine meets and befriends Jason, a nonverbal paraplegic who uses a book of pictures to communicate, she begins to understand that normal is difficult, and perhaps unnecessary, to define. Rules of behavior are less important than acceptance of others. Catherine is an endearing narrator who tells her story with both humor and heartbreak. Her love for her brother is as real as are her frustrations with him. Lord has candidly

captured the delicate dynamics in a family that revolves around a child's disability. Set in coastal Maine, this sensitive story is about being different, feeling different, and finding acceptance.

Kimberly Willis Holt, [\*My Louisiana Sky\*](#) (1998)

As young child, Tiger loved playing games with her mother who seemed to enjoy everything as much as her other friends did. Now that Tiger's older and a bright student, she realizes that her parents are "different." Folks in their hometown call them retarded while Tiger prefers "slow" and embarrassing. Granny, the stabilizing force in her family, dies unexpectedly and Tiger is left with difficult decisions. Should she move to Baton Rouge with her sophisticated Aunt Dorie Kay or should she stay with her parents, assuming more responsibility for their well-being?

Rodman Philbrick, [\*Freak the Mighty\*](#) (1993)

Maxwell Kane has always been an outcast. A slow learner and unusually large for his age, Maxwell is picked on by the other kids. He meets Kevin, a fellow outcast. Kevin has a disease which prevents him from growing over two feet tall. Together the two become Freak the Mighty, expand their imaginations, and discover the power of friendship.



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