

Dead End in Norvelt



By
Jack Gantos

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

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About the Author: Nat Reed, a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years, served as a full-time instructor at Trent University's Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, please visit reednovelstudies.com.

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Suggestions and Expectations

Each chapter of the novel study focuses on two or three chapters of *Dead End in Norvelt* and is comprised of four distinct sections:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (page 7) as well as a **Checklist** (page 6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by all students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to:

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases... including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story... **and many others.**

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include: coming of age, learning from history, community and change, honesty, coping with loss.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *personification*
4. Identify *similes*
5. Identify *anagrams*
6. Listing compound words
7. Identifying parts of speech
8. Identify *syllables*

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Five W's and an H Chart
3. Create a synopsis
4. Identify the climax of the novel

Character Activities

1. Compare characters
2. Identify the protagonist
3. Relating personal experience

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Create a poem
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Write a description of personal feelings
6. Write a book review
7. Create a journal entry
8. Opinion writing

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a movie poster
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

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Synopsis

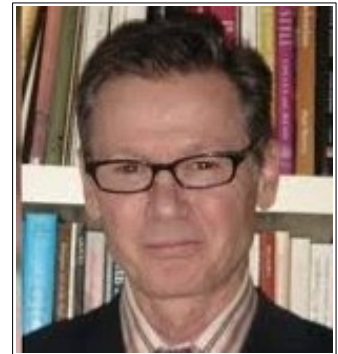
Dead End in Norvelt is the winner of the Newbery Medal for best contribution to children's literature and the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction!

Melding the entirely true and the wildly fictional, *Dead End in Norvelt* is a novel about an incredible two months for a kid named Jack Gantos, whose plans for vacation excitement are shot down when he is "grounded for life" by his feuding parents, and whose nose spews bad blood at every little shock he gets. But plenty of excitement (and shocks) are coming Jack's way once his mom loans him out to help a feisty old neighbor with a most unusual chore—typewriting obituaries filled with stories about the people who founded his utopian town. As one obituary leads to another, Jack is launched on a strange adventure involving molten wax, Eleanor Roosevelt, twisted promises, a homemade airplane, Girl Scout cookies, a man on a trike, a dancing plague, voices from the past, Hells Angels . . . and possibly murder. (Courtesy of the Publisher)

Author Biography

Jack Gantos

Jack Gantos is an American author best known for his humorous and deeply personal books for children and young adults. Born on July 2, 1951, in Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania, he grew up in several different towns, experiences that later inspired much of his writing. Gantos gained widespread recognition for creating the popular Joey Pigza series, which begins with *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*, a National Book Award finalist. His energetic storytelling style, often drawn from his own childhood challenges, resonates strongly with young readers.



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By Jack Gantos

Name: _____

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Chapters 1-2



Before you read this section:

It is important for an author to create an interesting **protagonist** (main character) for any work of fiction. *Dead End in Norvelt* features 12-year-old Jack Gantos, who is growing up in the small town of Norvelt, Pennsylvania during the summer of 1962. Think back on some of the most interesting main characters you have met in previous stories you've read. What do think makes for an intriguing character that really keeps your attention?



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

absconded	instinctively	exasperatedly	anemic
sinister	swain	delusional	enunciated

1. Get over here at once," Miss Volker shouted _____.
2. Little did anyone realize that the mayor _____ with the jewelry.
3. She was so pale that everyone thought she was _____.
4. He was such a nervous fellow that he flinched _____ at every loud noise.
5. My cousin referred to her new boyfriend as her _____.
6. Joanne made sure that she _____ each word very carefully.
7. "I think you must be _____ if you think I'll pay you," Mr. Seymour told her.
8. With an evil chuckle and a _____ sneer, he left the room and never looked back.

Questions



1. What is the **setting** of the story at the beginning of Chapter One?

2. Jack would like to receive payment in money for helping Miss Volker, or at least a slice of pie. What, however, does he receive as payment for his work that day?

--

3. Describe the event that occurred in Chapter One that could have ended very tragically.

4. Why did the doctor think that Jack might be in danger of becoming anemic?

5. Why did Jack think that the houses of Norvelt looked like the little green houses in a Monopoly game?

6. What was your impression of Mr. Spizz?

7. Describe the great experiment that Jack was going to embark on that day with Miss Volker.

8. Who was the town's esteemed founder? _____

9. How did Miss Volker come to take on the task of writing the town's obituaries?

Language Activities



A. Eleanor Roosevelt was a significant figure in American history, especially during the 1930s and 1940s. She was not only the wife of an American president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, but was very active in the affairs of the nation during a time in history when a person of her stature and commitment was sorely needed (The Great Depression and World War II). Using resources in your school library or on the Internet, research three interesting facts about this important person.



1	
2	
3	

B. A **simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. We find an example of a simile in this section: *My brown curls stood up on my head like a field planted with question marks.* What is being compared in this example?

Invent your own **similes** comparing the following item(s) with something from your own imagination:

a) an old army rifle

b) There are at least six additional examples of similes in this section. Find one of these and record it below.

C. Anagrams

An **anagram** is a word that is formed by changing the order of the letters of another word. For example, the letters in the word **WAS** can also form the word **SAW**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:



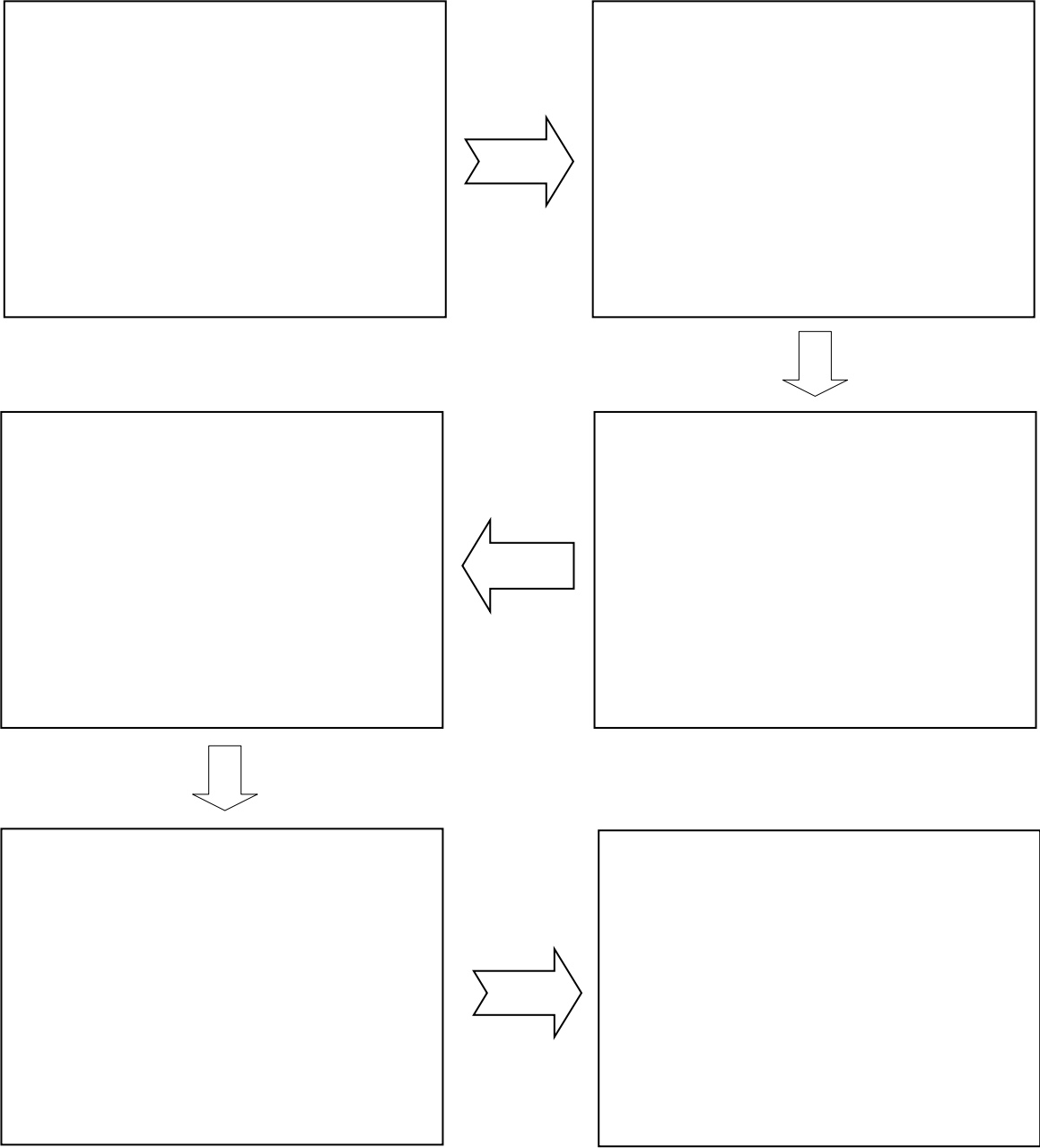
a) read the clue in the right-hand column.

b) Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters. All of the words in the left-hand column can be found in this section of *Dead End in Norvelt*.

Word	Anagram	Clue
sleep		Removes the outer covering.
drive		A swimmer is sometimes also a _____.
worth		Hurl.
start		Small cakes.
wrong		Become larger or greater.
steps		Nuisances.

D. Sequence Chart

Choose what you consider to be the six most important events in this section. In each of the six boxes below list the six events that you have chosen, describing what happened and telling why you consider this to be an essential part of the story.



Extension Activity



A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words



Use the three boxes to describe and illustrate the beginning, middle and end of this section.

Beginning Picture:	Beginning:
Middle Picture	Middle:
Concluding Picture:	Concluding: