

Dead Wednesday



By

Jerry Spinelli

A Novel Study
by Nat and Joel Reed

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About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. *Dead Wednesday* is comprised of the following activities:

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 keep 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 personal growth, issues of self-esteem, dealing with loss / grief, friendship, empathy, acceptance of others.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *personification*.
7. Identify *anagrams*
8. Listing compound words
9. Identifying parts of speech
10. Identify/create *similes*
11. Identification of root words

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Identify *cliffhangers*
5. Identify the climax of the novel.
6. Complete a Story Pyramid

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Identify the protagonist
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Compare characters

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Create a poem
6. Write about personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete an Observation Chart
9. Complete a KWS Chart

Art Activities

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

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Synopsis

On Dead Wednesday, every eighth grader in Amber Springs is assigned the name and identity of a teenager who died a preventable death in the past year. The kids don black shirts and for the whole day everyone in town pretends they're invisible—as if they weren't even there. The adults think it will make them contemplate their mortality. The kids know it's a free pass to get away with anything.

Worm Tarnauer feels invisible every day. He's perfectly happy being the unnoticed sidekick of his friend Eddie. So he's not expecting Dead Wednesday to feel that different. But he didn't count on being assigned Becca Finch (17, car crash). And he certainly didn't count on Becca showing up to boss him around! Letting this girl into his head is about to change everything.

This is the story of the unexpected, heartbreaking, hilarious, truly epic day when Worm Tarnauer discovers his own life. (Courtesy of the Publisher)

Author Biography

Jerry Spinelli

Born in 1941 in Norristown, Pennsylvania, Jerry Spinelli discovered his calling in 1957 when his high school football team won a big game. The town celebrated, his fellow students raced through the streets, but Jerry sneaked back home and marked the occasion in his own way. He wrote a poem. Later the town newspaper published it. "And," he reports, "I've been a writer ever since."

Married to Eileen Spinelli, who is also a writer, Jerry was for many years an editor for the Chilton Company. Now a full-time writer, he lives in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania.

Jerry Spinelli's immensely popular books include *Space Station Seventh Grade*, *Jason and Marceline*, *Who Put That Hair in My Toothbrush?* and *Maniac Magee*, which has won more than fifteen state children's book awards in addition to the Newbery Medal. [The Publisher]



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Student Checklist

Student Name _____

Assignment	Grade/Level	Comments

Dead Wednesday



By Peter Brown

Name: _____

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6:57 a.m. – (Including) 8:01 a.m.



Before you read the chapters:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. The main character of *Dead Wednesday* is Worm Tarnauer an eighth grader dying for the vast Siberia of schoolless time known as summer vacation. Think back on some of your favorite characters from past novels you have read or movies you’ve seen. Who would you say is your *most favorite* character ever? What made you select this character?



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

hassle	epitaph	receding	boondocks
scrum	merged	exposure	intention

1. *He walked the world unseen.* That would be Worm's perfect _____.
2. By now his old nickname and more recent tag have publicly _____: *Worm. Shy.*
3. Worm knows this, but has no _____ of getting into a debate about it.
4. A skeleton walks the full length of the bus for maximum _____.
5. He can tell by her _____ voice that she's heading down the hallway.
6. Getting out of bed for school is such a _____.
7. People try to lure him from the sidelines to join the _____.
8. Worm did not enjoy living so far out in the _____.

Questions



1. Describe the **setting** of the story at the beginning of Chapter One.

2. What is he looking forward to that will occur at 12:30 in Veterans Park?

3. What was your impression of Worm's dad? What helped you form this impression?

4. Answer True or False:

- a) Worm loved being the center of attention. True or False
- b) Worm considered himself to be a watcher-thinker. True or False
- c) Worm's mom wanted him home right after school to help his dad. True or False
- d) Amber Springs Avenue was the town's boundary line. True or False

5. What do you think motivates the other students to give David Ott such a hard time? Would you consider this a form of bullying? Why or why not?

6. Why does Worm like to hang out with Eddie? What do you think this reveals about Worm's personality/character?

Language Activities



A. 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 the first section of *Dead Wednesday*.

Word	Anagram	Clue
plays		Thrust or spread.
enters		Begrudge.
sprint		Impressions made by one's fingertips.
hater		The world.
hates		Go quickly.
dreads		More morose.
tables		Home for a horse.

Now find two additional words from this first section which have interesting anagrams to see if you can stump a classmate.

Word	Anagram	Clue

B. Next to each pair of words indicate whether each is an example of a Synonym (S), Antonym (A), or Homophone (H).

1	spectator - participant		6	fascinates - bores	
2	stairs - stares		7	gloomy - shadowy	
3	sprint - race		8	maturity - newness	
4	screams - whispers		9	bus - buss	
5	delete - insert		10	habit - practice	

C. A Quatrain Poem Celebrates Living in the Boondocks.

The **quatrain** is a popular form of rhymed verse. It is a poem of four lines, is usually light and can be humorous. The following quatrain is the first four lines of the famous poem, *The Boonies*, written by the renowned poet, Atrocious Halitosis.

*I live so far from anywhere,
I can't ever find my ways.
It takes a month to get to town,
So here at home I stays.*



Various rhyming schemes make up a quatrain poem. As you can see, the above four lines have a rhyming scheme of **A - B - C - B**. Other rhyming schemes include: ABAB, AAAA, AABA, ABBA, ABBB, and AAAB.

Your task is to write your own quatrain poem. You may choose a rhyming scheme that fits with your own personal creation. The theme should have something to do with the themes established in this first section of our novel.

The Quatrain Poem

Now create your own Quatrain Poem. Your poem must follow the format of a quatrain poem described above (and must rhyme).

Title: _____

Bonus Question.

In the above poem why do you think the poet used the word **ways** and **stays** instead of **way** and **stay**?

D. Cliffhanger

7:26 a.m. contains an important literary device called a **cliffhanger**. A cliffhanger usually occurs at the end of a chapter when the author leaves the reader in suspense. How is this true of **7:26 a.m.**? Why do you think the author ended the chapter this way?



E. A **simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. An example from this novel is: *Time drips like a slowly leaking faucet.*

What is being compared in this example?

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Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your own imagination:

a) a bumpy bus ride to school

b) an old shed

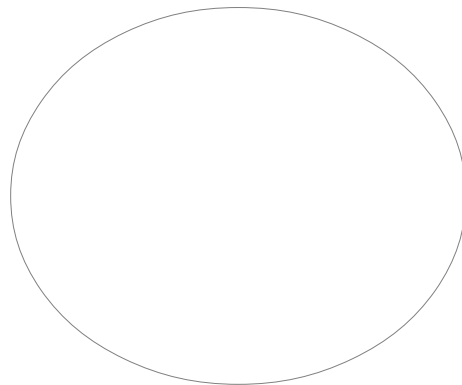
c) your choice

F. 5 Ws and an H.

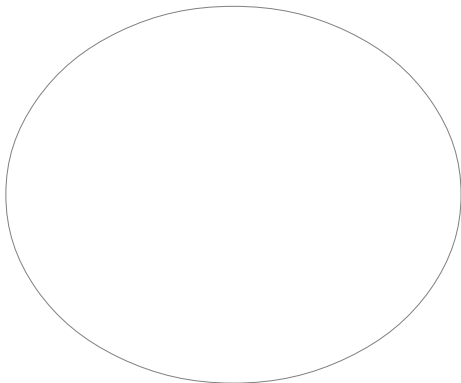
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



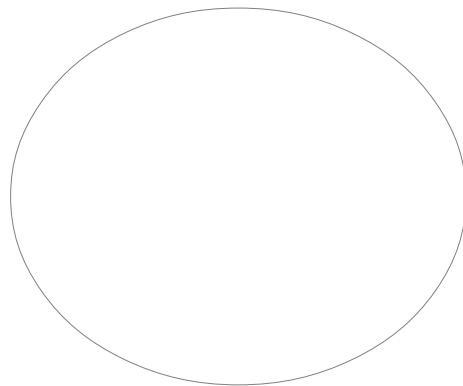
WHO?



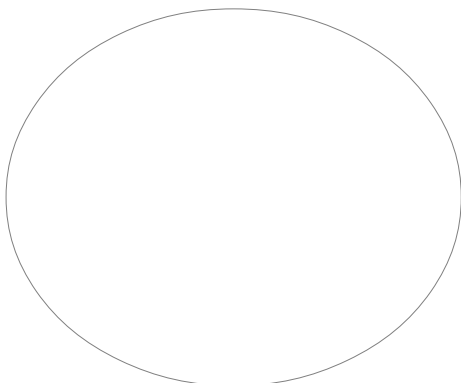
WHAT?



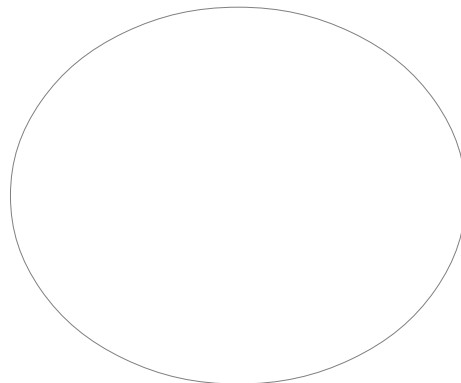
WHEN?



WHERE?



WHY?



HOW?

Extension Activity



Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A storyboard can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel. Complete the storyboard below illustrating the events described in this section of our novel. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.

1	2
3	4
5	6