

JACK GANTOS

JOEY PIGZA

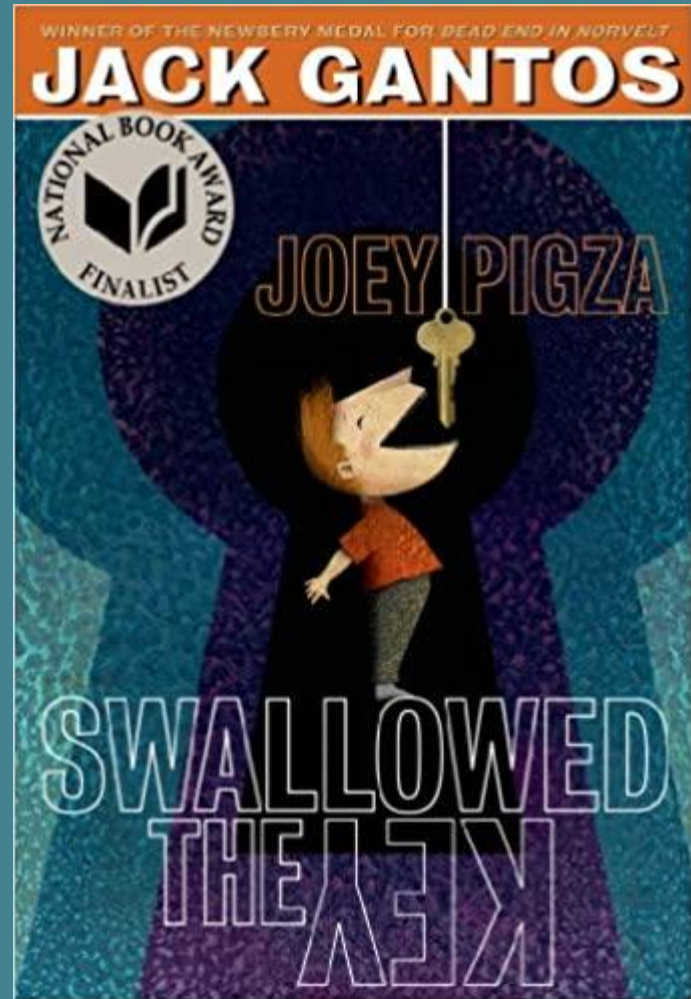
SWALLOWED THE KEY

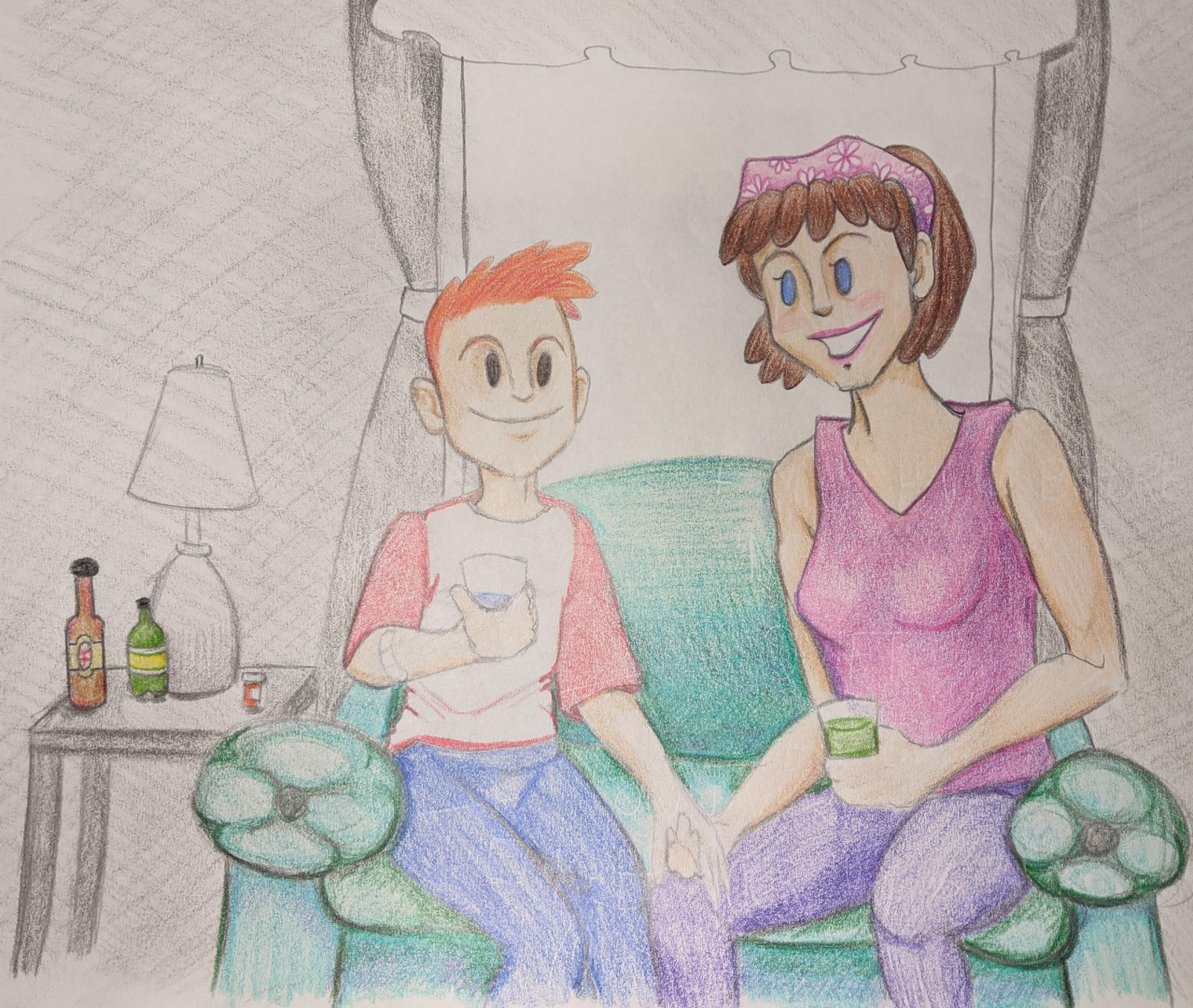
Narrative Art Response

SUMMARY:

Joey Pigza's got heart, he's got a mom who loves him, and he's got "dud meds," which is what he calls the Ritalin pills that are supposed to even out his wild mood swings. Sometimes Joey makes bad choices. He learns the hard way that he shouldn't stick his finger in the pencil sharpener, or swallow his house key, or run with scissors. Joey ends up bouncing around a lot - and eventually he bounces himself all the way down, into the district special-ed program, which could be the end of the line. As Joey knows, if he keeps making bad choices, he could just fall between the cracks for good. But he is determined not to let that happen.

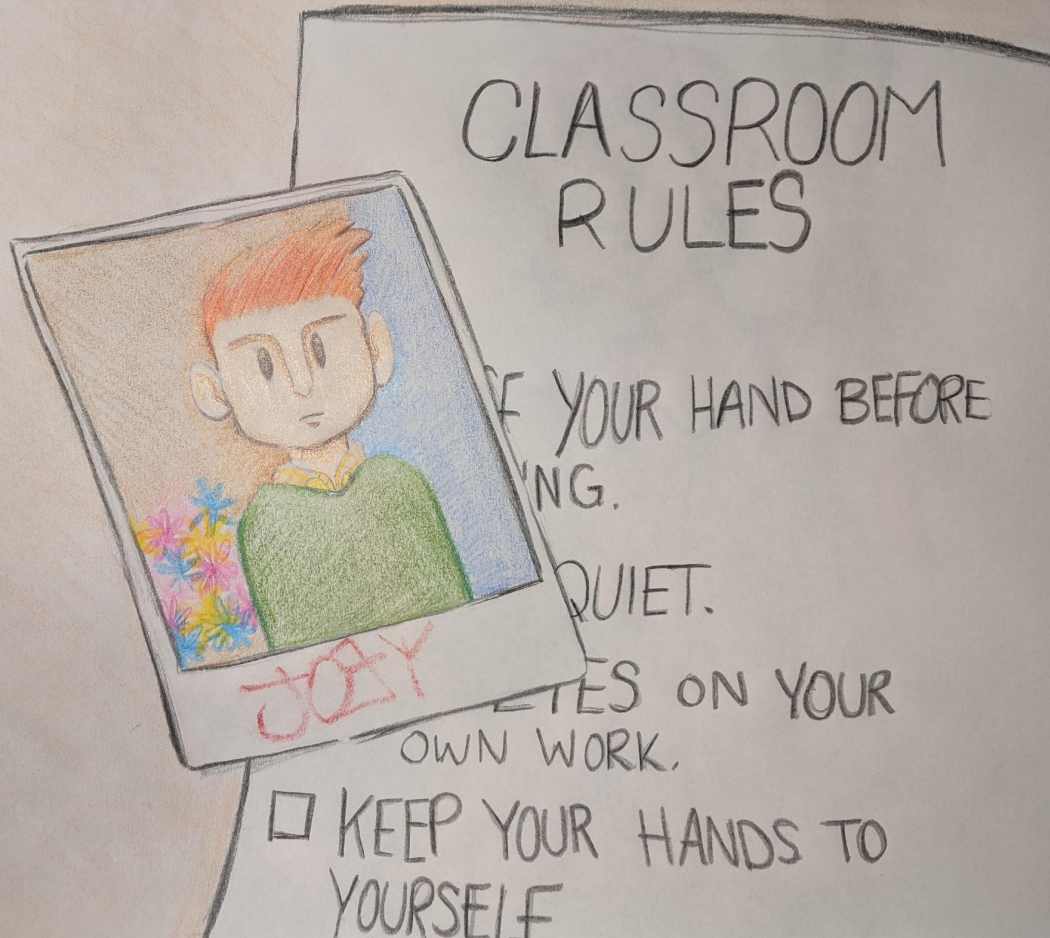
"They say I'm wired bad, or wired sad, but there's no doubt about it -- I'm wired."





“Don’t worry so much. Now let’s get you some medicine.” She put a pill in my one hand and a glass of water in the other, but before I could take the pill she said, “Just hold on a minute more.” She got the bottle of Amaretto and mixed it with some Mountain Dew and then said, “See, Mommy has her own meds. It comes in a bottle.” Then we clinked glasses and I took my pill. I was so happy to take it. I could feel it going down my throat like a little white round superhero pill on its way to beat up all the bad stuff in me. Everyone said it would help. (28)

See page 49 for Joey questioning his mom if she drunk a lot when she was pregnant. See page 53 where Joey thinks making a drink will make his mom happy and proud of him. See page 105 for another drinking scene. While this one seems innocent, later in the book you can see the stress of the mother in thinking others feel she’s not a good mom.



“Keep your mind on your work,” she said, tapping the rules sheet on my desk. “Now sit up and listen. “Okay,” I said, and quickly sat on my hands. As soon as she left I pulled an old photograph of me out of my jeans and set it on my desk. It was a picture of me standing very still with my hands by my side and my eyes looking directly at the camera. I looked like a little statue. It’s a wonder a bird didn’t land on my head for a rest. “See,” Mom said, when she gave the photograph to me. “This is proof that you can be still. So whenever you feel out of control, look at this picture and it will remind you to calm down.” (32)

See page 90 to reference Joey seeing himself in school bus mirrors and how he wishes he could always see around himself and through time.



There were a few kids from upstairs, but the room was mostly filled with the hurt kids, the slow kids, the kids who steered their wheelchairs with their chins, the spastic kids who walked and taked funny and wre brought to school in their own special bus or in special cars from home. I always wondered where they went once they arrived. Now I knew. [...] I looked away, far away to a shiny corner of the room because even my grandma taught me that it wasn't polite to stare at crippled kids. Then I looked back and a few of them were looking at me, which was okay because I was normal. (36-37)

See page 50-52 for descriptions of some of the special ed kids Joey sees. 91-98 Joey rides a special bus to the Special Education school and describes the special needs students.



See page 60 where Joey cannot have a pumpkin to carve like the other kids on the field trip Page 58 shows where all the students are able to try a pie, but Joey isn't allowed and can only have a cinnamon apple. On page 47 during a birthday party in the special ed classroom Joey is the only one to not get a cupcake.

Then I licked the plate like a dog, and by the time I finished my mind was a mess and my legs were pumping. I was ready to run a circle around the entire world. I had a funny sound in my head, kind of a hissing like when the TV station goes off the air at night and there is nothing but static, but really loud static and no words at all and getting louder like tires speeding down a wet road and coming right at me. My eyes felt so swollen with the flood of energy inside my throbbing head that I could only see the tops of my cheeks and a smudge where my nose fit on and a bigger blur beyond that. I took a deep breath and the air gushed into my lungs and lifted me up and suddenly I was running and crashing through the stalk of the cornfield. I had my arms stuck out like the wings of a plane, and the long curved leaves sliced me up but I didn't feel the stinging. I didn't feel my feet hit the ground. I didn't feel the jolt when I tripped forward and slammed into the cornstalk and clods of dirt with my chest and bounced right up and kept going. (62-63)



I was racing back to the bumper stickers with scissors in my hand when it happened. I tropped over the stupid ear of the rabbit slipper and I sort of dove through the air with the open scissors wretched all the way out in front of me like some evil Big Bird's beak when Maria Dombrowski walked sideways across my path like a safety patrol guard and said, "Slow down." But I didn't and my hand collided with the side of her face and I went tumbling down the aisle. I thought I was the one who was screaming because it was so loud I figured it had to be coming out of my mouth. But it wasn't me. I jumped up and didn't know what had happened at first., when, Oh my God, you should have seen the blood. It was like a pipe had burst. Blood just poured onto the floor from the cut end of her nose and she stood there shaking with her eyes wide open like she stuck her finger in the electric socket. I bent over and picked up the top of her nose, which now looked like the tiny end piece of a sliced banana. Then I stood up and pressed it back in place but the blood sprayed out in a circle like a shower nozzle. Oh, it was awful. (73-74)

See page 39 for the intro of the bunny slippers, and page 41 to see Joey wore the slippers home. On page 70 Joey explains he's wearing the slipper on one foot because of his barnyard accident.

Referring to Key Topics

Inclusion: While Joey Pigza was never said to have an IEP or 501 Accommodations, his teachers acknowledge that he is different and receives medication for his ADHD. Joey spends most of his time in the general classroom. It is not until he gets more *out of control* that he's sent for part of the day to the self-contained special education room to get reacquainted with the rules and behavior expectations.

Diversity: When Joey Pigza is referred to join the Special Education room he describes students as having a wide diversity of disabilities (p. 36-37, 50-52, 91-97). This is also the case for when he is sent to the Special Education Center for six weeks for hurting another student (p. 80, 110). *The book does not reflect on race, gender, or sexual orientation as differentiation.

Community: The best scene of community I could think of is in the special education room and in the Special Education Center. There, all students have built a valuable community of friendship and trust, whereas it could be argued that Joey is kept out of the *community* in his own general classroom, and as he is bullied getting off the schoolbus in his own neighborhood.

Disability: Joey Pigza has attention-deficit disorder. The only hard evidence of this is found on the back of the book in a review. There is a lot of circumstantial evidence throughout the book that would back-up this claim. There are several instances referring to his meds or medicine, approximately 17 instances, in fact. In addition to referring to meds, Joey's condition is indicated by his feelings and by him not being treated fairly by his teachers (not giving him sugar or sharp objects that other students get).

Self Determination: In chapter 7, "Gifted & Talented," right before *the bunny slipper incident* Joey snuck out to an assembly for the gifted students. It was at this event that Joey listened to an inspirational speaker telling everyone that they can change the world and it's their duty to help others.

I'd never be a part of the gifted and talented kids. That much was true. But I was one of the special people. My mom said I was special, the nurse said I was special, and I was also in special ed. So I really listened to everything she had to say, and I liked what I heard, that because we were the special kids we had to make sure we put our energy and talent to work for the benefit of the whole world. [...] She went on and on about how it was up to the special gifted and talented kids to lead the way for others and that if we pledge to be a positive force in the world then the world will be a better place for everyone. [...] What she said was true. Already I was thinking about something I could do during the day that would make the world a better place because of me. Joey Pigza (p. 68-70).