

Loser
by
Jerry Spinelli

Book Information

Jerry Spinelli, Loser
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Book Level: 4.3
Interest Level: MG

Even though his classmates from first grade on have considered him strange and a loser, Donald Zinkoff's optimism and exuberance and the support of his loving family do not allow him to feel that way about himself.

Award: Judy Lopez Memorial Award...Children's Literature; Parent's Guide Book Award/Honor Book; Publishers Weekly Best Book

Topics: Character Traits, Self-Acceptance; Community Life, School; People, Family; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Read Now Power Up Recommended Lists, Know Yourself; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 4-6; Recommended Reading, Children's Literature Choice; Recommended Reading, Junior Library Guild Selection

Main Characters

Andrew Orwell a boy Zinkoff's age and a neighbor in second grade

Bonce a boy who attends Monroe Middle School

Cherise Orwell Andrew's mother

Claudia a little girl who lives on Willow Street

Donald Zinkoff a boy with great enthusiasm for life, who is seen by some as a loser

Gary Hobin a popular, athletic classmate of Zinkoff's

Hector Binns a classmate Zinkoff chooses to be his best friend

Miss Meeks Zinkoff's first-grade teacher

Mr. Yalowitz Zinkoff's fourth-grade teacher

Mr. Zinkoff Zinkoff's father, a mailman

Mrs. Biswell Zinkoff's second-grade teacher

Mrs. Shankfelder Zinkoff's fifth-grade teacher

Mrs. Zinkoff Zinkoff's mother

Oh Mailman Lady an elderly woman who lives on Willow Street, part of Mr. Zinkoff's mail route

Polly Zinkoff Zinkoff's younger sister

Waiting Man a man on Mr. Zinkoff's mail route who spends his days at the window waiting for his brother, a soldier missing-in-action in Vietnam, to return

Vocabulary

apparently according to evidence; according to what seems to be; according to how things look; in a way that seems to be true; seemingly; clearly; plainly; obviously

atrocious extremely or enormously wicked; terrible; horrible; shockingly brutal or cruel; dreadful; awful; horrifying or frightful; exceptionally bad or ugly

chat a light, friendly talk; a light conversation; a gab

congratulate to express praise or good wishes

dimly vaguely; faintly; not clearly; in an indistinct or obscure manner; with imperfect sight

familiar well-known; easily recognized; common; ordinary; not strange; comfortable; friendly

incredible unbelievable; seeming too good to be true; amazing; wonderful or remarkable; hard to believe

merely nothing more than; only; just; simply

silently without making any noise or sound; without speaking or saying anything; not out loud

surely without a doubt; certainly

Synopsis

Donald Zinkoff loves school. He is thrilled when his teacher, Miss Meeks, calls the students "young citizens" and informs them they have 2,160 days to spend in school. To Zinkoff, every day of school offers the excitement of the first day, and he likes to arrive early. Although he comes to be known as sloppy, clumsy, and annoying to classmates and some teachers, he remains enthusiastic about school and life. On a treasured Take Your Kid to

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Loser

by

Jerry Spinelli

Work Day with his dad, Zinkoff gets to deliver mail of his own creation to the residents of Willow Street and meets Waiting Man and Oh Mailman Lady.

It is in fourth grade when students begin to look at Zinkoff differently. While his teacher, Mr. Yalowitz, encourages and supports Zinkoff, by the end of the year, especially after his performance on Field Day, he comes to be known as a loser. However, a ride in his father's old car, Clunker Six, convinces him that his father will never give up on him.

In fifth grade, despite his classmates' opinions, Zinkoff is busy enjoying growing up. At the end of the year, Gary Hobin tells Zinkoff to find a different team when they once again end up on the same team for Field Day. When Zinkoff cannot find another team to take him, he instead spends Field Day wandering the town and finally sharing sandwiches and his life story with Oh Mailman Lady.

At middle school, Zinkoff seems to vanish. Although he remains the star of his own life, to most of the student body he is nobody. On a snowy day in the middle of a snowball fight, he wanders away to help find Claudia, a missing little girl. He wanders through snow and sleet for hours until he collapses and is finally found by a snowplow operator. This event intrigues another boy, Bonce, who finally chooses Zinkoff, who won't go away, for his football team.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Literary Analysis

Why do you think the author, Jerry Spinelli, would write a story about an awkward boy who is considered a loser?

He shows readers that people are more than they might at first appear and more than the opinion some others might have of them. He wants to encourage readers to look beyond appearances.

Constructing Meaning

Despite being tagged a loser by his classmates, Zinkoff does not seem to accept this label for himself. Why do you think Zinkoff does not allow the opinions of his classmates to define him?

Zinkoff has many interests and enjoys many things, especially riding his bike. He also has the support of some good teachers and his parents, who celebrate him with "one thousand congratulations" and unconditional love.

Teachable Skills

Understanding the Author's Craft

Differentiating Fact and Opinion

Understanding Characterization

Making Predictions