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The Pigman

by

Paul Zindel

1968



MonkeyNotes by Diane Clapsaddle

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The novel, *The Pigman*, is set in New York City in the specific neighborhood and school, specifically.....

CHARACTER LIST

MAJOR CHARACTERS

John Conlan - He is a sophomore in a New York City high school. He is terribly dissatisfied with his life and misbehaves in interesting ways to try to give meaning to his own existence. He appears to have great potential and wants to be an actor. Like most teens, he will eventually discover that he, and he alone, makes his life whatever it will become.

Lorraine Jensen - Extremely under-confident, she is John's alter-ego. She lives with a mother who only knows how to criticize, so her relationship with John and Mr. Pignati becomes very important to.....

Angelo Pignati - The old man who comes to be affectionately referred to as the Pigman, he is living alone and unloved when John and Lorraine make his acquaintance through a silly

Lorraine's mother - Completely angry with what life has dealt her, Lorraine's mother finds no.....

John's parents - His mother becomes obsessed with her house, its furnishings, its cleanliness as.....

Norton Kelly - Dubbed a real "berserker" by John, Norton has truly bad traits. He's willing to.....

Dennis Robin - The boy who hangs out with Norton, Dennis is perhaps mildly retarded or at.....

John and Lorraine's Friends - All of the people whom John and Lorraine know in their high.....

CONFLICT

Protagonist - The protagonist of a story is the main character who traditionally undergoes some sort of change. He or she must usually overcome some opposing force. John and Lorraine are the protagonists. They write and speak through alternating chapters telling the story of their encounter with the Pigman and.....

Antagonist - The antagonist of a story is the force that provides an obstacle for the protagonist. The antagonist does not always have to be a single character or even a character at all. There seems to be no antagonist in this story but the inner demons John and Lorraine must.....

Climax - The climax of a plot is the major turning point that allows the protagonist to resolve the conflict. The climax of this story occurs when Mr. Pignati arrives home to find that John and Lorraine have had a

Outcome - Mr. Pignati dies of a broken heart even though the official cause of death will be a heart attack. He has been betrayed by John and Lorraine and even though at the time of his death, they are trying to.....

SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

This novel relates the story of two young New York City teenagers who feel unwanted and unloved at home and are on a path of self-destruction, when they meet by chance an old man named Angelo Pignati. They find his name in the phone book in a random game of telephone pranks and with all the wrong intentions, go to his house and become his friends. They meet there nearly everyday after school as well as taking trips to the zoo with Mr. Pignati to feed his friend, the baboon named Bobo.

In the process of this relationship, John and Lorraine learn some valuable truths about friendship and betrayal that can never be forgiven. They make the decision to have a destructive party in his.....

THEMES

Growing Up - The theme of growing up is the most prevalent theme. Both John and Lorraine are products of dysfunctional families and, like all of us, find it easy to point to their parents as the source.....

Fate or Destiny - The theme of fate or destiny is a relatively dominant idea in this novel. The question the author, Paul Zindel, seems to be posing is: How much of life is coincidental, forcing each of us to deal with it as it unfolds and how much of our lives can be blamed upon our active or passive involvement.....

The Generation Gap - The theme of the generation gap is a more subtle undercurrent as the story unfolds and then is boldly declared in the end. John and Lorraine enter the world of the elderly and Mr. Pignati enters a world he already lived in his youth when they befriend each other. John is angry in the.....

MOOD

This story is filled with mood swings just like adolescents whose bodies and minds are constantly changing. We very much like John and Lorraine at times and.....

AUTHOR INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Paul Zindel was born on Staten Island, New York, on May 15, 1936. He spent his high school years moving around the city and enrolling in four different schools, so he had a great background upon which he could base this novel. He graduated from Wagner College, also on Staten Island and earned a master's degree in science. He was a high school chemistry teacher for ten years before his writing career took off. A class in playwriting eventually led to a television presentation of one of his plays, *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* and then, that led to a contract to write books for teenagers. *The Pigman* was published in.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

Prologue

Summary

The Prologue consists of an Oath signed by Lorraine Jenson and John Conlan declaring that on the 15th day of April of their sophomore year at Franklin High School, they have decided to record the facts about Mr. Angelo Pignati. They insert a commentary about Miss Reillen, the school librarian who is watching them closely as they type this journal. Of course, she probably "thinks we're using her typewriter to copy a book report for our retarded English teacher." They finish by swearing to tell only the truth and invoke the name of God to make their declaration even stronger.

Notes

This prologue is integral to understanding the characters even before the reader is officially introduced to them. We begin to see glimmers of the seriousness of this story and how important they think it is to write it down. So Mr. Pignati must have made a distinctly serious impact on their lives. Also, we get a sense of their dissatisfaction with school and their teachers as they finish their sophomore year in high school. They must be about fifteen or sixteen years old - old enough to understand that something has happened in their lives to change them profoundly. It is important to note as well as we read this book in 2005 that it was published in 1968, a very different time than we're used to, i.e., these two teens are using a typewriter instead of a computer.

CHAPTER 1

Summary

The narrator of chapter 1 is John, who will alternate chapters with Lorraine. He declares immediately his dislike

for school, but indicates that if not for this dislike, he and Lorraine would never have met Angelo Pignati, nicknamed the Pigman. John shows us his extreme dislike for school by detailing his behavior there. He had been dubbed the Bathroom Bomber because he set off bombs in the men's room. The time between his lighting the fuse and the explosion was about eight minutes, so John could hear it anywhere he was in the building, which brought him great satisfaction. It also meant that any boy who had sneaked off to have a cigarette in the bathroom would be the one who was blamed by the "gestapo" (one of John's colorful names for authority figures). He also was the organizer for the "super colossal fruit roll" every Wednesday in which the students would gather up apples from the lunchroom and roll them at the same time towards any teacher's desk. He declares that now that he is a sophomore, he has given up all "that kid stuff" and only writes on desks as his criminal enterprise.

John's final declaration until he actually begins the story involves his habit of cursing. He promises Lorraine that he won't actually use curse words, but will instead type "@#\$\$%" for mild curses and "3@#\$\$%" for more serious ones. He ends his first narrative by explaining that Miss Reillen is called the Cricket, because she's fat and wears skirts that are too tight. So when she walks, her nylon stockings make a scraaaaaatchy sound!

Notes

This is our first introduction to John and he is quite a character! He shows us his "James Dean rebel without a cause" attitude and reveals that he is close to being a real delinquent. He hasn't yet taken the more serious steps of real crime, but he has no interest in school, doesn't play sports, and generally hates everything, especially teachers and authority figures. We get a sense that he has the potential for choosing a life that wouldn't make him exactly a model citizen. It is important to note, however, that he has voluntarily chosen to give up cursing, at Lorraine's request, which shows he may have a side of his character that understands how to share and show respect.

CHAPTER 2

Summary

Lorraine speaks in this chapter and observes that John has the tendency to "twist things subliminally." She just wants to write down all the strange events they experienced in the last few months. She continues commentary on John's character by noting that he gets away with most of the unacceptable behavior he exhibits, because he is so handsome. She describes him physically – six feet tall, brown hair and blue eyes – but also observes that "he drinks and smokes more than any boy I ever heard of. . . he drinks and smokes to assert his independence." She tries all the time to force him to quit, but she has been unsuccessful. She further observes that.....

OVERALL ANALYSES CHARACTER ANALYSIS

John Conlan - At six foot tall and very handsome, extremely intelligent, but under-confident, John is lost in a world where he feels entirely out of place. He misbehaves at school and develops questionable friendships. His parents don't understand him and his desire to be an actor, but through his friendship.....

Lorraine Jensen - She is a teenager who is deeply involved in adolescent anxiety and fears. She has little self-esteem because of her mother's constant criticism and her own anxieties. She makes friends with John, because he overlooks what she considers her faults and is willing to go along with much of.....

Mr. Pignati - Looking like Santa Claus, telling silly jokes, and playing silly games, this old man, who dies at the end, represents what life can become for many of us. He was happy as long as his wife was.....

Lorraine's Mother - This woman can not break the walls of bitterness down. She was evidently at one time very happy with Lorraine's father, but for reasons beyond just sleeping with another woman, he left

John's Parents - John's mother lives in complete denial. She hates the discord built up in their house because John is different and his father fights with him about his difference. She prefers to concentrate on the..... beautiful if cold home she has built and like the baboon's cage, she is trapped in it. John's father is very simply

Norton Kelly and Dennis Kobin - These two young men symbolize those young people who are doomed to failure. Their very natures indicate they will live lives that are antitheses to those

John and Lorraine's Friends - These young people are all misfits and "losers" and are part of the story as a reflection of where John and Lorraine believe they belong for most of the novel. They all have.....

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The story is told in flashback with two narrators alternating the telling of the tale. It begins with a mini-prologue in which John Conlan and Lorraine Jensen relate the story of an old man named Mr. Pignati whose friendship changes their lives and helps them mature. They meet him during a telephone prank and.....

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

Growing Up - The theme of growing up fulfills the idea of the bildungsroman. John and Lorraine learn some very painful lessons as they grow over a period of several months in their tenth grade year. They.....

Fate or Destiny - The theme of fate or destiny impacts the reader because there are so many instances of "woulda, coulda, and shoulda" in the novel. Lorraine calls these moments omens, because when

The Generation Gap - The generation gap is not a significant theme until the end when John and eventually Lorraine realize that they and Mr. Pignati had blurred the line between youth and adulthood and

RISING ACTION

The rising action begins after John and Lorraine explain that they are recording the events which took.....

FALLING ACTION

The falling action involves the chapters which follow Mr. Pignati's return from the hospital. John and Lorraine seek out his.....

POINT OF VIEW

The entire point of view is from the perspectives of John and Lorraine who alternate chapters as they tell their tale. Because they are only fifteen or sixteen years old, we see the world from the.....

OTHER ELEMENTS

Foreshadowing

There are several other literary devices that pop up at various times in the story. The most prevalent one is **foreshadowing** which frequently presents clues of something that will happen later in the novel. Some examples of foreshadowing include:

- 1.) The mini-prologue prepares us for a serious event which will take place in the lives of John and Lorraine.
- 2.) Lorraine's still eyes as described by John foreshadows how important the Pigman's life and death were to them.
- 3.) John's description of Norton and Dennis as amoebas prepares us for how Norton will have an impact leading to the Pigman's death.....

Use of Irony

Another element that is important to note is **irony** – when something happens, or is seen, or is heard that we may know, but the characters do not, or that appears opposite of what is expected. Some examples of irony include:

- 1.) Lorraine is insistent that John not curse in the record they are writing of their time with Mr. Pignati. This is ironic, because cursing is the least of the bad decisions they both make throughout the novel.
- 2.) It is ironic that Lorraine, who was so afraid to be laughed at or criticized, would become friends with.....

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS - QUOTES

The following quotations are important at various points in the story: (Harper Trophy, An Imprint of Publishers, New York, 1968/2005)

- 1) **“But I gave up all that kid stuff now that I’m a sophomore. The only thing I do now that is faintly criminal is write on desks.”** (p. 3)

This is said by John early in the narrative. It shows his slightly off-center sense of humor, but it also explains some of the petty types of rebellion he expressed.

- 2) **“In fact, the thing Lorraine and I liked best about the Pigman was that he didn’t go around saying we were cards or jazzy or cool or hip. He said we were delightful . . .”** (p. 16)

In this quote, John expresses why he likes the Pigman: the old man doesn’t patronize him like other adults. he just genuinely likes him.....

SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS / IMAGERY / SYMBOLS

The White Pig figurine - This pig symbolizes the love between Mr. Pignati and Conchetta. It was the first pig figurine he gave her.

The Three Monkeys - They symbolize John, Lorraine, and the Pigman who, like the little monkeys, cling to each other for comfort and to sooth their fears.....

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

Title: *The Pigman*

Author: Paul Zindel

Date Published: 1968

Meaning of the Title: Refers to the nickname John and Lorraine, two New York teenagers, give the old man named Mr. Pignati, whom they befriend and who teaches them much about life before he dies.

Setting: New York City circa 1968

Protagonists: John Conlan and Lorraine Jensen.....

STUDY QUESTIONS / MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

- 1.) John and Lorraine are writing this story, because
 - a.) they want to memorialize Mr. Pignati
 - b.) they feel guilty
 - c.) both a. and b.
- 2.) John and Lorraine meet Mr. Pignati by
 - a.) going to his home to sell cookies
 - b.) talking to him at the zoo

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playing a telephone prank on him.....

ANSWER KEY

1.) c 2.) c

ESSAY TOPICS / BOOK REPORT IDEAS

1. Analyze the relationship John and Lorraine develop with Mr. Pignati by considering the following: how they were good for each other, how they were bad for each other, and how they were trespassers in each others' lives.
2. Discuss John's character. What makes him tick? What does he learn from his time with Mr. Pignati?.....

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