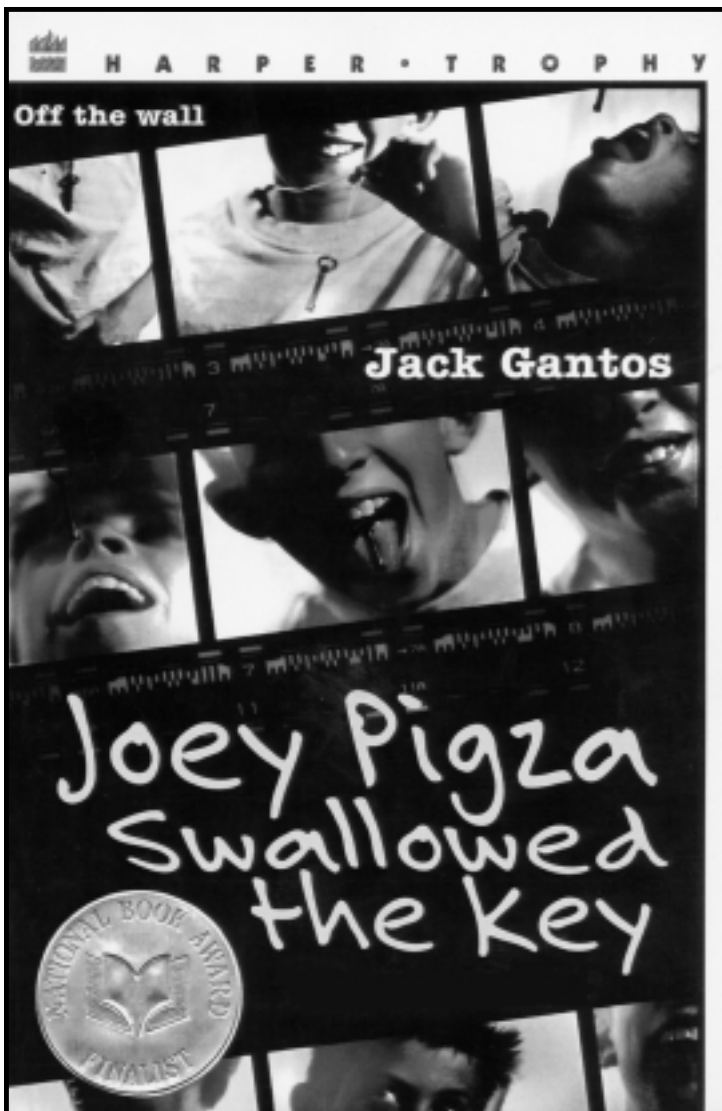


*A Discussion Guide for Parents and Teachers*

# JOEY PIGZA SWALLOWED THE KEY

BY JACK GANTOS



## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

*Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* is an irresistible, funny, and moving first-person fictional account of a great kid suffering from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The information and discussion topics presented in this guide are intended to spark discussion about the book and about ADHD. Teachers and parents who know children with ADHD are encouraged to use this book and guide to help raise awareness and understanding about this disorder and how to cope with it, both in and out of the classroom.

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Joey Pigza can't sit still. He can't pay attention, he can't follow the rules, and he can't help it—especially when his meds aren't working. Joey knows that he's really a good kid, even though he has ADHD. But his behavior is getting increasingly dangerous, and his loving mother and most patient teachers can no longer cope with him. When things accidentally go too far, Joey is shipped off to a special education center. There, he

finally begins to get the help he needs to curb his boundless energy. Written from Joey's point of view, this award-winning novel gives readers a glimpse into Joey's mind—and shows us what the life of a child with this disorder is like. It is a heartbreaking tale of one boy's struggle to behave and do the right thing when his body won't listen.

*Plus: Information on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder*

## QUESTIONS TO TALK ABOUT

- Consider Joey's family situation. What might have happened to Joey if he had continued to live with his grandmother?
- Joey's mother admits that she used to have a drinking problem but says that she cleaned herself up so she could take care of her son. Do you think she handles things well with Joey? What things does Joey's mother do that you think really help him?
- How does the way this book is written help you understand what Joey is going through? Why would it have been different if the book had been written in the third person?
- Think about the different people in Joey's life: Joey, his mother, his grandmother, Mrs. Maxy, and Mr. Ed. How does each person deal with Joey's condition, and how do their actions affect Joey's behavior? How do their actions affect the outcome of the story?
- Joey knows better than to swallow the key, but he does it anyway. Why? How does he feel about it?
- When Joey is sent to the special education center, neither he nor his mother nor his teachers consider it a punishment. Why not?
- Discuss various ways in which the special education center is good for Joey.
- What happens when Joey tries to go apologize to Maria? Discuss the viewpoints of both Maria's father and of Joey. Do you think Maria's father handles the situation well? What about Joey?
- What do you think about the ending of the book?

## QUOTATIONS TO TALK ABOUT

- "And it wasn't that the important stuff Mrs. Maxy had to say went in one ear and out the other. It was that it didn't go in at all but just bounced off." (p. 19)
- "Joey, if you slip any more, school just might let you slip away like water down a drain and the class will continue on as if you never existed." (p. 29)
- "I kicked away at the chair legs until my heels were so sore they were bruised and it hurt to kick. Then suddenly it just seemed all the energy drained out of me and the yellow walls were so bright I closed my eyes and fell asleep." (p. 39)
- "She was crying but I didn't know if it was because she drank too much or if it was just the everyday sadness of her life with me." (p. 50)
- "... given Joey's record, he was bound to end up at the center anyway, so maybe this is a blessing in disguise. What happens now is all up to him." (p. 80)
- "I could dive out the bus door and run away and bounce off the walls all the way to Pittsburgh like my dad, or I could pull myself together like my mom and go to special ed and get help. It was as if my life was trapped between two words: run or stay." (p. 94)
- "I was finally going down the right path to being better. That getting better was really happening to me. That it was my turn for everyone to help, and there was no turning back to my old self unless I messed up. And I didn't want to mess up." (pp. 142–143)
- "And as Special Ed said, 'You gotta face the hand you're dealt and deal with it, and make your problems be the smallest part of who you are.' And he's right." (pp. 147–148)
- "You know, Joey, the medication has helped settle you down, but you have been a good kid all along. You are naturally good. I hope you know that about yourself. You have a good heart." (p. 153)

## A Conversation with Jack Gantos



**Q:** What made you want to write this book?

**A:** *I knew a lot of ADHD kids when I was growing up, although at that time they were just considered very active kids. Also, as an author I visit a lot of schools, and I meet many kids with ADD and ADHD. The book started when I was speaking to a classroom. There was a young boy sitting at his desk directly across from me, who was shouting out all the answers to my questions. He was very bright. I was impressed with the gymnastic ability in his feet. He seemed to have many ways to hook his feet in portions of his desk and just sort of swing around—he couldn't keep still. After a certain time he went from having a great time at the presentation to having something go wrong. I could see it in his face. He became scared of something. Finally he looked over at the teacher in a moment of desperation and blurted out, "Teacher! I forgot to take my meds!" The teacher just pointed to the classroom door and the child shot directly out of his seat and out the door. I could hear him slapping the lockers all the way down the hallway to the nurse's office.*

*That night, I was in my hotel room making notes, as I always do at the end of the day. I started writing about that child, and I realized at that moment that he really was a character I needed to know more about. My heart had really been taken down the hall by that character, and I had to go get it.*

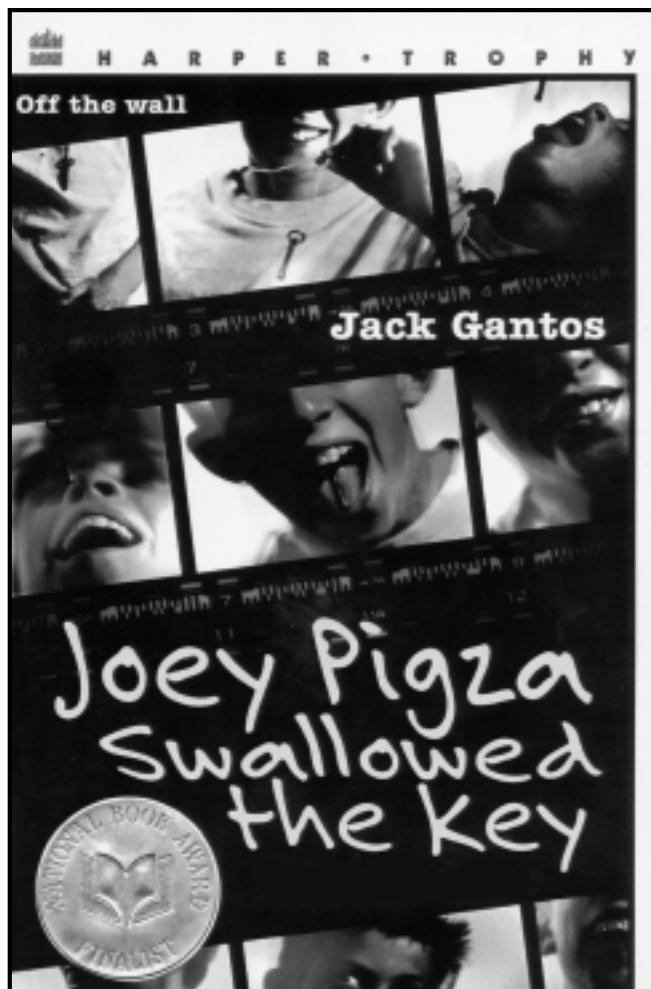
**Q:** Do you have any advice for teachers and parents who have children with ADHD?

**A:** *It takes a lot of patience. I think it's very important to separate the disorder from the kid so that you, the teachers, the parents, and the kids know that some of the behavior is disorder-driven. These kids can be really great and they can really choose to do the right thing, but they need an awful lot of special attention and consistency.*

**Q:** How did you research this book?

**A:** *The research came in three ways. First, I called up a lot of schools and teachers and special ed teachers that I had gotten to know through all my school visits, and spoke to them. I spoke to the school nurses about medication. I also did a lot of research over the Internet, including at some chat lines for people with ADHD kids. There's a lot of ADHD support over the Internet. And of course, the old-fashioned way: I read some books. Not only about the disease itself but also books for parents and teachers about how to handle children with ADHD.*

*About as quickly as I learned all that stuff, I forgot a large percentage of it. The book isn't just information. The book is driven by the character, but I did research because I wanted to make sure that I wasn't writing a fairy tale. I knew there would be kids with ADHD who would read this book, and I wanted it to be a hopeful book. I wanted them to see part of themselves in Joey and be able to say, "If he can do it, if he can get help, if he can get the right medication, if he can get a grip on himself—then maybe I can too."*



# JOEY PIGZA SWALLOWED THE KEY

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FOR MORE INFO ON ADHD, PLEASE  
VISIT THESE WEBSITES:

■ [www.chadd.org/](http://www.chadd.org/)

C.H.A.D.D., which stands for Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, is the national nonprofit organization for people with ADHD. Their comprehensive website is a great starting point for people who need information on and support for ADHD.

■ [www.zinezone.com/zines/goodlife/mind/attention/](http://www.zinezone.com/zines/goodlife/mind/attention/)

Zinezone.com gathers articles from the web and arranges them by subject matter. They've got a great selection of information on ADHD, including links to other sites and frequently asked questions.

■ [www.mediconsult.com/mc/mcsite.nsf/conditionnav/homepage](http://www.mediconsult.com/mc/mcsite.nsf/conditionnav/homepage)

Mediconsult has a section of "condition centers" to provide information on various medical conditions. They have a comprehensive ADHD section, which even includes a selection of educational materials.

■ [www.newideas.net/adhd101.htm](http://www.newideas.net/adhd101.htm)

This thorough site boasts "over 80 pages of useful information for parents, teachers, or health professionals."

■ [www.oneaddplace.com/addhome.htm](http://www.oneaddplace.com/addhome.htm)

One A.D.D. Place aims to consolidate resources and information on ADHD in one spot—check it out!

■ [www3.sympatico.ca/frankk/](http://www3.sympatico.ca/frankk/)

This is a detailed Q&A site focusing on ADHD.

## TIPS FOR DEALING WITH A CHILD WITH ADHD

According to experts, ADHD affects approximately 5% of the children in the United States. According to C.H.A.D.D. (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), the best approach to ADHD children is believed to be a combination of “medical, educational, behavioral, and psychological interventions.” While the best approach for dealing with a child with ADHD depends on the child and the discretion of the parent, teacher, and doctor, the following are some general suggestions for helping ADHD children in the classroom and at home. These tips were gathered from reputable ADHD websites and organizations. More information on these organizations can be found on the back of this flap.

- In the classroom, try to place the child’s desk close to the teacher and out of the way of stimulating distractions.
- At home, try to find extracurricular activities that the child will enjoy and excel in to help build self-esteem.
- Parents should set aside a special time of day to sit and catch up with their child.
- Make sure you express your expectations and instructions clearly and explicitly. ADHD children find it easier to stay on task when they know exactly what’s expected of them, without any ambiguity.
- Establish routines that the child can depend on. Children with ADHD especially need and respond to structure in their daily lives.
- Children with ADHD frequently face social difficulties. Teachers and parents should do what they can to help the child make friends.
- Give lots of encouraging feedback. Praise is one of the most rewarding and encouraging incentives for an ADHD child.