

jerry spinelli

author study

Gearing Up!

About the books of Jerry Spinelli

Jerry's dedication to his craft and his unique storytelling skills make him a perfect candidate for a classroom author study. His stories bring to life characters that make his readers laugh, cry, and even learn something about themselves.

Get to know Jerry Spinelli and use his books to discuss the important themes of Identity, Friendship, Fear, Family, Community, and Self-Esteem.

About the Author

Growing up, Jerry Spinelli was really serious about baseball. He played for the Green Sox Little League team in his hometown of Norristown, Pennsylvania, and dreamed of one day playing for the major leagues, preferably as shortstop for the New York Yankees.

One night during high school, Spinelli watched the football team win an exciting game against one of the best teams in the country. While everyone else rode about town tooting horns in celebration, Spinelli went home and wrote "Goal to Go," a poem about the game's defining moment, a goal-line stand. His father submitted the poem to the *Norristown Times-Herald* and it was featured in the middle of the sports page a few days later. He then traded in his baseball bat for a pencil, because he knew that he wanted to become a writer.

After graduating from Gettysburg College with an English degree, Spinelli worked full time as a magazine editor. Every day on his lunch hour, he would close his office door and craft novels on yellow magazine copy paper. He wrote four adult novels in 12 years of lunchtime writing, but none of these were accepted for publication. When he submitted a fifth novel about a 13-year-old boy, adult publishers once again rejected his work, but children's publishers embraced it. Spinelli feels that he accidentally became an author of children's books.

Spinelli's hilarious books entertain both children and young adults. Readers see his life in his autobiography *Knots in My Yo-Yo String*, as well as in his fiction. *Crash* came out of his desire to include the beloved Penn Relays of his home state of Pennsylvania in a book, while *Maniac Magee* is set in a fictional town based on his own hometown.

When asked if he does research for his writing, Spinelli says: "The answer is yes and no. No, in the sense that I seldom plow through books at the library to gather material. Yes, in the sense that the first 15 years of my life turned out to be one big research project. I thought I was simply growing up in Norristown, Pennsylvania; looking back now I can see that I was also gathering material that would one day find its way into my books."

On inspiration, the author says: "Ideas come from ordinary, everyday life. And from imagination. And from feelings. And from memories. Memories of dust in my sneakers and humming whitewalls down a hill called Monkey."

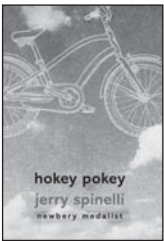
Spinelli lives with his wife and fellow writer, Eileen, in Pennsylvania. While they write in separate rooms of the house, the couple edits and celebrates one another's work. Their six children have given Jerry Spinelli a plethora of clever material for his writing.

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Book List

Work with your school librarian to have many of Jerry Spinelli's books on display in your classroom for the author study. Encourage students to read the books during quiet time and discuss them with one another. Which books and characters are their favorites?



Hokey Pokey

HC: 978-0-375-83198-0
GLB: 978-0-375-93198-7
EL: 978-0-307-97570-6
Also available in audio

Welcome to Hokey Pokey. A place and a time, when childhood is at its best: games to play, bikes to ride, experiences to be had. There are no adults in Hokey Pokey, just kids, and the laws governing Hokey Pokey are simple and finite. But when one of the biggest kids, Jack, has his beloved bike stolen—and by a girl, no less—his entire world, and the world of Hokey Pokey, turns to chaos. Without his bike, Jack feels like everything has started to go wrong. He feels different, not like himself, and he knows something is about to change. And even more troubling, he alone hears a faint train whistle. But that's impossible: every kid knows there no trains in Hokey Pokey, only tracks.

PRAISE FOR HOKEY POKEY:

★ "Sure to delight his many fans."
—*Booklist*, Starred



Milkweed

PB: 978-0-375-86147-5
EL: 978-0-375-89037-6
Also available in audio

Young Misha Pilsudski lives on the streets of Warsaw, Poland, and struggles with his identity. When he enters the Jewish ghetto and sees firsthand the evil acts of Hitler's Nazi soldiers, he realizes it's safest of all to be nobody. *Milkweed* opens in 1939 and tells the story of a homeless, nameless boy—a "nobody" until he takes up with other street kids and embraces the identity of a gypsy—Misha Pilsudski. Misha is fascinated by the Jackboots, and spends his days stealing food for himself and the orphans. When he meets Janina Milgrom, a Jewish girl, and follows her family to the Jewish ghetto, he loses his fascination with the Nazi soldiers. He slips in and out of the cracks of the walled ghetto, getting food for the Milgroms. For the first time in his life, he has a family until resettlement and deportation snatch them away. This good-hearted boy is once again a "nobody" and eventually makes his way to America, carrying only the memories of his adopted family with him.

PRAISE FOR MILKWEED:

★ "Spinelli's narrative is manic, fast, and scattered, authentically capturing the perspective of a young child."—*Booklist*, Starred



Stargirl

HC: 978-0-679-88637-2
PB: 978-0-375-82233-9
EL: 978-0-375-89002-4
Also available in audio

One glance and students know that the new girl at Mica High School is not your ordinary high school student. Stargirl Caraway is a free spirit. She has a pet rat named Cinnamon, plays the ukulele in the cafeteria, and refuses to wear the requisite jeans and t-shirts. Leo Borlock is both fascinated and horrified by Stargirl's disdain for fitting in. As he falls in love with her, he still longs for her to be more "normal." But maybe he should be careful about what he wishes.

PRAISE FOR STARGIRL:

★ "Newbery-winning Spinelli spins a magical and heartbreaking tale from the stuff of high school."
—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred

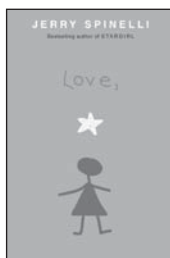
★ "Part fairy godmother, part outcast, part dream-come-true, the star of Spinelli's latest novel possesses many of the mythical qualities as the protagonist of his *Maniac Magee*."
—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred

"Sixteen-year-old Leo recounts Stargirl's sojourn at Mica High in an allegorical story that is engagingly written."—*Booklist*

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Book List (continued)



Love, Stargirl

HC: 978-0-375-81375-7
GLB: 978-0-375-91375-4
PB: 978-0-375-85644-0
EL: 978-0-375-89081-9
Also available in audio

Stargirl Caraway explores her new neighborhood with an eye for the unusual. She notices the agoraphobic neighbor, the seemingly homeless young boy, and others who do not fit in easily. Stargirl, never one with an inclination to conform, empathizes with the outcasts, making many of them her new friends. In the "longest letter ever" to her old boyfriend, Leo, Stargirl explores the magic in her new home and her decision to mark time in her own unique way.

PRAISE FOR LOVE, STARGIRL:

"Addressing loss, growing pains, and staying true to oneself, this stellar follow-up is both profound and funny."—*School Library Journal*



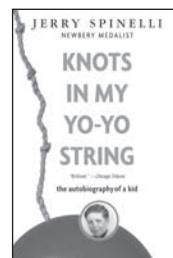
Crash

PB: 978-0-679-88550-4
EL: 978-0-307-55539-7

Newbery medalist Jerry Spinelli tackles the tale of cocky seventh-grade super-jock Crash Coogan, who got his nickname the day he used his first football helmet to knock his cousin Bridget flat on her backside. And he has been running over people ever since, especially Penn Webb, the dweeby, vegetarian Quaker kid who lives down the block. Through the eyes of Crash, readers get a rare glimpse into the life of a bully in this unforgettable story about stereotypes and the surprises life can bring.

PRAISE FOR CRASH:

★ "Readers will devour this humorous glimpse of what jocks are made of while learning that life does not require crashing helmet-headed through it."—*School Library Journal*, Starred



Knots in My Yo-Yo String

PB: 978-0-679-88791-1
EL: 978-0-307-48685-1

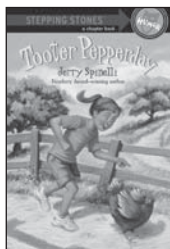
"A master of those embarrassing, gloppy, painful, and suddenly wonderful things that happen on the razor's edge between childhood and full-fledged adolescence" (*The Washington Post*), Newbery medalist Jerry Spinelli has penned his early autobiography with all the warmth, humor, and drama of his bestselling fiction.

PRAISE FOR KNOTS IN MY YO-YO STRING:

★ "As Spinelli effortlessly spins the story of an ordinary Pennsylvania boy, he also documents the evolution of an exceptional author."

—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred

"In this warm, deeply personal memoir of the kid he was, Spinelli takes us to Norristown, Pennsylvania, in the 1950s."—*Booklist*



Tooter Pepperday: A Tooter Tale

PB: 978-0-679-84702-1

Illustrated in black-and-white. Tooter was your average suburban kid, until her parents made her move to Aunt Sally's farm. It's not just that the pizzeria won't deliver—the vegetables on her plate were grown in a pile of compost, and everything smells like goat poop! But spunky Tooter has big plans for getting even—sabotage!

PRAISE FOR TOOTER PEPPERDAY:

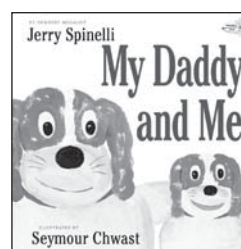
"The characters are well-developed—Tooter is at times reminiscent of Ramona—and the story is enjoyable."—*School Library Journal*



Blue Ribbon Blues

PB: 978-0-679-88753-9

Ever since her family moved to Aunt Sally's farm, Tooter's known that farm life is definitely not for her. So Tooter decides to show everyone what she's made of by winning the blue ribbon at the County Fair's goat show.



My Daddy and Me

PB: 978-0-553-11303-7

In a loving tribute to fathers and sons, Newbery Medalist Jerry Spinelli and *New Yorker* artist Seymour Chwast join talents to celebrate the very best moment of the day: when daddy comes home.



Alfred A. Knopf

STEPPING STONES



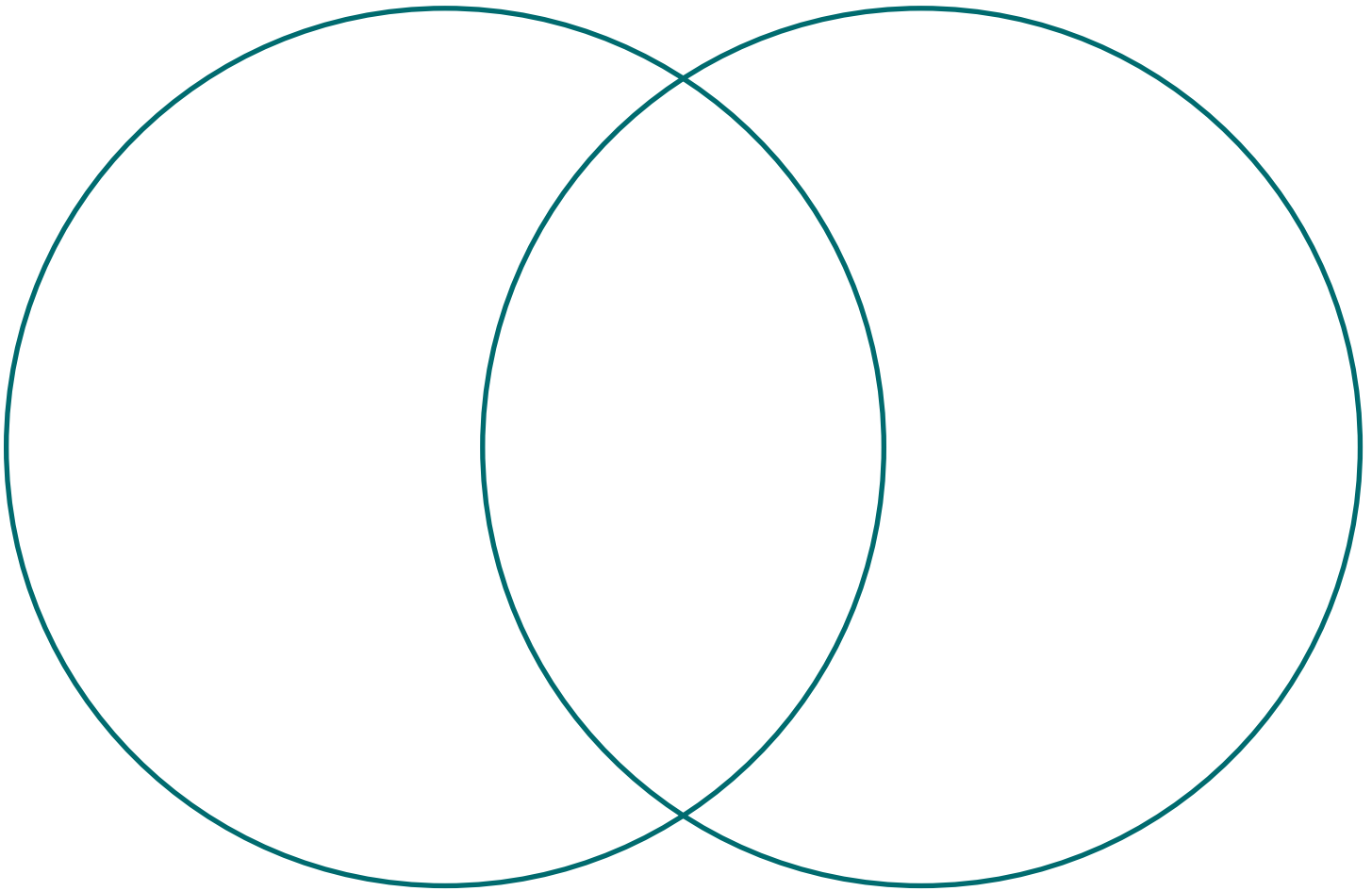
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Compare & Contrast

Read two books by Jerry Spinelli. Use the Venn diagram below to compare the books, including major characters, setting, conflict, and resolution.



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KWL Chart

Fill in the first two columns before your class begins the Jerry Spinelli Author Study. Fill in the third column at the conclusion of the author study.

What I KNOW about Jerry Spinelli	What I WANT TO KNOW about Jerry Spinelli	What I LEARNED about Jerry Spinelli

jerry spinelli

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Response Journal

Write your reaction to the Jerry Spinelli book you are reading in the space below. What feelings, thoughts, and questions come to your mind? Can you relate what you've read to something in your own life, in another book, or in another venue? What can you infer about the author from what you've read?

Book:

Chapter(s):

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