

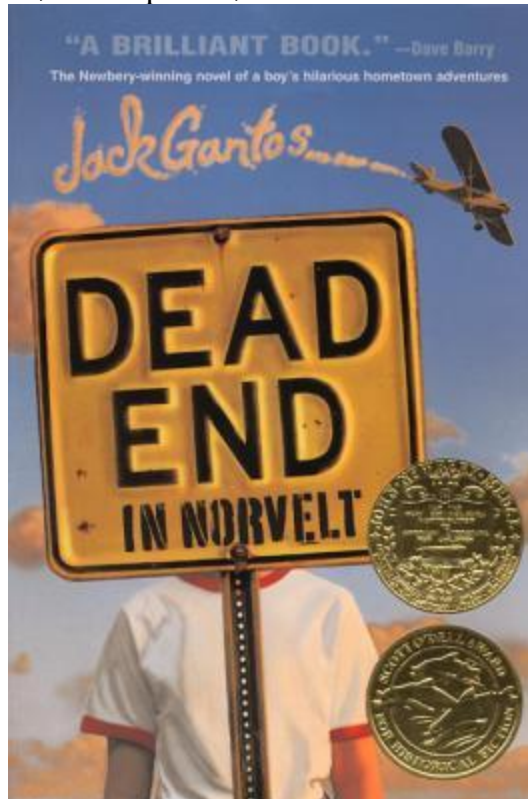
# Katherine Wanner

## Ideas and Resources for my Classroom

### CLASSROOM LITERATURE

## Dead End in Norvelt Classroom Activities

April 18, 2016 April 18, 2016 · katherinewanner



**Title:** Dead End in Norvelt

**Author:** Jack Gantos

**Copyright:** 2011

**Publisher:** Farrar Straus Giroux

**Readability Scores:**

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- Grade level Equivalent: 6.4  
Lexile<sup>®</sup> Measure: 920L  
DRA: 60  
Guided Reading: Y

### Summary:

Comical | Historic | Entertaining | Mysterious | Witty

In the historic town of Norvelt, Pennsylvania, twelve-year-old Jack Gantos spends the summer of 1962 grounded for various offenses until he is assigned to help an elderly neighbor with a most unusual chore involving the newly dead, molten wax, twisted promises, Girl Scout cookies, underage driving, lessons from history, typewriting, and countless bloody noses (Gantos, Jack).

### Delivery:

I would have my students use this novel in their literacy groups. They would pair off into groups of four and take turns reading the novel aloud to one another. They would complete projects based off of the book in their groups.

### Electronic Resources:

I have provided some technological resources that will help students to understand the historical premise of the novel. Understanding the time period will help students to comprehend the text.

[Click here \(https://youtu.be/oSMV5zxHaxc\)](https://youtu.be/oSMV5zxHaxc) for a short kid-friendly documentary-style YouTube video about Eleanor Roosevelt, the woman whom the town of Norvelt was named after. A lot of ideology referenced throughout the book centers around much of what Eleanor Roosevelt is famous for advocating for. This video may be used for an after-reading activity.

[Click here \(http://www.teachingbooks.net/book\\_reading.cgi?id=5653&a=1\)](http://www.teachingbooks.net/book_reading.cgi?id=5653&a=1) for access to an audio of Jack Gantos discussing his book. This audio may be used for a pre-reading activity in which students discuss fact versus fiction and get to know the author before delving into his book.

### Vocabulary Instruction:

Pre-reading vocabulary instruction is essential in helping students to comprehend this text as the novel takes place in a different era and there are many historical terms that are used frequently. Vocabulary words that I would make sure to pre-teach include:

- **Communist:** a person who believes that all property in a society should be publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to their abilities and needs.
- **Eleanor Roosevelt:** Wife of Theodore Roosevelt and therefore First Lady of the United States who was a strong advocate for human rights.
- **Obituary:** a notice of a death, especially in a newspaper, typically including a brief biography of the deceased person:
- **Paraffin:** a flammable, whitish, translucent, waxy solid used in candles, cosmetics, polishes, and sealing and waterproofing compounds.

- o Vietnam War: a war between communist North Vietnam and US-backed South Vietnam.
- o Anemic: a condition marked by a deficiency of red blood cells or of hemoglobin in the blood, resulting in pallor and weariness.
- o Cadaver: a dead human body.

### **Literal/Inferential Comprehension Strategies:**

**Pre-Reading:** Before reading the text it is important that students learn about the author, as this novel is nearly an autobiography. The author, Jack Gantos, has a personal website that could be viewed as a class. Then, students will listen to the audio that is provided above under technological resources. They will listen to him speak about the premise for writing the novel and listen to him read the excerpt he provides from his novel. Students may then discuss how writers use experiences from their everyday lives in their books and how “Dead End in Norvelt” is a mesh of fact and fiction. They could also use the audio to help them make predictions regarding what the text will be about.

**While Reading:** Students will be asked to answer both literal and inferential questions while reading the text, including:

### **Family Relationships**

- o Describe Jack’s family
- o Jack is punished by his mom for shooting his dad’s rifle and for mowing down her cornfield. Discuss how he is the victim in both incidents.
- o Jack’s parents try to convince him that they work as a team. Debate whether there is any teamwork in the Gantos family.
- o Cite evidence that Jack’s mom “wears the pants in the family.”
- o Which of Jack’s parents does he most respect?

### **Friendship**

- o Discuss Jack’s reputation among his peers.
- o Bunny Huffer is Jack’s best friend. Trace their relationship from the beginning of the novel to the end.
- o At first, Jack is simply Miss Volker’s scribe. At what point does he become her friend?
- o How does Bunny regard Jack’s relationship with Miss Volker?
- o Discuss the relationship between Mr. Spizz and Miss Volker.
- o Mr. Spizz enjoys pestering Jack. Debate whether he is jealous of Jack’s relationship with Miss Volker.

### **Community**

- o Norvelt is a New Deal community that was built to give “hardworking poor people a helping hand” (p. 54). Why does Jack’s dad call it a “Commie” town?
- o Discuss Miss Volker’s commitment to the town.
- o Debate whether Norvelt has lost its true sense of community.
- o What does Mrs. Gantos miss most about the “old” Norvelt? How is she trying to instill a sense of community in Jack?
- o Discuss how a town can change without changing its sense of community.

## Courage

- Jack tells his mother that his dad made him mow down the corn. Why does he feel that squealing on his dad was a cowardly thing to do?
- Anytime that Jack is anxious or fearful, his nose bleeds. How does it take courage to let Miss Volker operate on his nose?
- Explain how Bunny contributes to Jack's fears. How does she also help him gain courage?
- What is Jack's most courageous act in the novel?

## Lying/Honesty

- Explain what Mrs. Gantos means when she tells Jack, "Remember, a person first lies to himself before he lies to others" (pp. 207-8).
- Jack tells his parents that he didn't put the bullet in the rifle. Why does it take Mr. Gantos a while to admit that Jack is telling the truth?
- Who are the most honest and trustworthy characters in the novel?
- Discuss the most dishonest characters. How do they lie to themselves and to the entire community?

## Growing Up

- At different times in the novel, Bunny and Miss Volker tell Jack that he needs to be a man. How might their definition of a man differ?
- In what ways is Jack's father still a boy? Debate whether this interferes with Jack's journey toward manhood.
- At what point in the novel does Jack begin to understand his role as a man? Which character is most responsible for his coming of age?

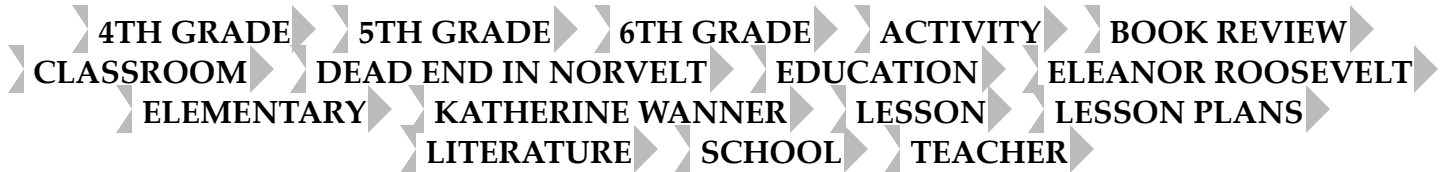
(Source) ([https://www.bookbrowse.com/reading\\_guides/detail/index.cfm/book\\_number/2629/dead-end-in-norvelt](https://www.bookbrowse.com/reading_guides/detail/index.cfm/book_number/2629/dead-end-in-norvelt)).

## After Reading:

- Have students watch the video provided above in technological resources which details important events throughout Eleanor Roosevelt's life. What were some of her ideologies?
- How did she implement them?
- Why was Norvelt named after Eleanor Roosevelt.
- What was the "New Deal"?
- What happens at the end of the story?
- What was your favorite part of the story? Why?
- Which character did you enjoy reading about the most? Why?
- Would you recommend this story? Why or why not?

**Writing Activity:**

*The text states, “Godmother Roosevelt made sure people had real houses—little New England-style houses—and they had bedrooms and a living room and a useful kitchen and a bathroom with a bathtub, and even a laundry room with a washing machine. The government called this luxury living. But Mrs. Roosevelt called it living with dignity.” What does Mrs. Roosevelt mean when she says that having these commodities means to “live with dignity”?*



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