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Wringer by Jerry Spinelli

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CREATE A STORYBOARD 



Wringer is a Newbery Honor winning book written in 1997 by the beloved and prolific middle-grade author, Jerry Spinelli. It is a popular novel to use in middle school or with upper elementary students. It is the unique story of a young boy named Palmer LaRue who has been dreading the day he turns 10. In his town, 10-year-olds get the job of "wringer" at the town's annual family festival, Pigeon Day, where 5,000 pigeons are released from crates and shot down in a competition for a sharpshooter award. Spinelli models the festival after a real Labor Day shoot that was held in Hegins, Pennsylvania every year from 1933 through 1998. "Wringers" run around the field and wring the necks of pigeons to ensure they're dead and "put them out of their misery" - a concept Palmer finds very confusing. The story follows Palmer's journey from a life driven by fear and the longing to be accepted to one where he gains the confidence to stand up for what he believes. Storyboard That's teaching materials and *Wringer* activities combine to be a helpful novel study guide that is sure to be a hit with students of all ages!

STUDENT ACTIVITIES FOR WRINGER

Characters



Physical / Personality Traits
How does this character interact with others in the book?
What challenges does this character face?

VIEW ACTIVITY



VIEW ACTIVITY



VIEW ACTIVITY

Plot Summary



VIEW ACTIVITY



VIEW ACTIVITY



VIEW ACTIVITY

VIEW ACTIVITY

Essential Questions for *Wringer* by Jerry Spinelli

1. How does one's values and beliefs influence their choices? Is it difficult to stay true to one's values and beliefs? Why or why not?
2. Should some traditions be broken?
3. Why is it difficult to break with tradition?
4. How do one's friends influence one's choices?
5. Who are some of the main characters and what challenges do they face?
6. What are some of the symbols and motifs present in the novel? How does the symbolism help you better understand the characters and their motivations?
7. What are some of the themes present in the novel?
8. What messages, lessons, or morals does the author try to impart to the reader?

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Wringer by Jerry Spinelli Book Summary

Beware! This summary of the book, *Wringer* by Jerry Spinelli below does contain spoilers! This synopsis is meant to be a helpful recap for students after they have read the book. Or, a useful refresher for teachers to help them decide if they would like to use this powerful story in the classroom.

The book, *Wringer*, begins in a small town of Waymer, Pennsylvania is steeped in traditions, some of which make little sense to young Palmer LaRue. At the beginning of the story, we meet Palmer as he turns 9-years-old. He is thrilled that the neighborhood gang is finally willing to initiate him, something that involves giving him trash for presents and a new nickname: "Snots". Having a birthday in Waymer also means that you get "the treatment" from an older boy named Farquar, which involves him giving you punches in the arm for every year old you are, extra punches for crying. Palmer takes all of these rites of passage in stride because he longs to be a part of the gang so badly. It is led by a boy named "Beans" (real name Arthur) and includes "Mutto" (Billy) and "Henry" (George). Beans has a mean streak and enjoys bullying others, especially Palmer's neighbor and former friend, Dorothy Gruzik. Palmer succumbs to their [peer pressure](#) and goes along with all of the gang's cruel antics.

The malice-driven Beans is especially excited about turning 10 and becoming a "wringer", something that Palmer has been dreading his whole life, ever since he saw his first Family Fest Day at 4-years-old. Family Fest is a decades old tradition where the town gathers for food, fun, and festivities that include a Pigeon Shoot. They capture 5,000 pigeons in crates and release them a few at a time to be shot down by marksmen. The winner of the competition earns the coveted Sharpshooter Award. Palmer's own father won the Sharpshooter Award in 1989 and it sits proudly on their mantel. Palmer learns that "wringers" have the special job of wringing the necks of fallen pigeons in order to make sure they are dead and "put them out of their misery". Young Palmer grapples with the attitudes and customs that he is presented with. He doesn't understand the glee that the

gang feels at one day becoming wringers. He finds the idea abhorrent. However, he keeps all of his fears and feelings buried deep inside of him.

One day, a big problem arises when a pigeon lands on Palmer's windowsill. The feisty bird enters Palmer's room and makes himself quite at home. He roosts in Palmer's closet, eats the snacks Palmer provides, and even nips at his ears. Palmer names his secret pet Nipper. Palmer knows that in his town, having a pigeon for a pet is a bad idea. He steals books from the library to learn all about pigeons but doesn't dare tell anyone about Nipper. In his research, Palmer learns that pigeons are fascinating and beautiful creatures. Nipper becomes a beloved pet and friend and Palmer is fiercely protective of him. Palmer knows that Nipper would be in great danger if the gang, especially Beans, ever found out about him. The only person Palmer can confide in about Nipper is Dorothy Gruzik.

Palmer has followed along with the gang's bullying of Dorothy. However, he knows that she is the only one who would understand about his love for Nipper and his conflicted feelings about the Pigeon Day festival. Palmer apologizes to Dorothy for his treatment of her and confesses that he has a secret pet pigeon. Dorothy is a true friend and accepts and supports Palmer. She is also an advocate of non-violence and against the Pigeon Shoot. She encourages Palmer to stand up for what he believes in. She says if he doesn't want to be a wringer, "then don't". It's something that Palmer finds easier said than done. However, Palmer does things to protect Nipper that he would never have dreamed of doing before. He lies to the gang to avoid hanging out with them. Palmer even pretends to spit on the floor in class so that his teacher will make him stay after school for a week rather than face the gang.

However, Nipper can't stay a secret forever. The gang figures out that Palmer has a pet pigeon and Palmer is desperately afraid that Beans will come and kill it. Dorothy is leaving for a family vacation at the seaside and Palmer asks her to take Nipper and set him free at the beach. Palmer is devastated to lose his beloved pet but feels he must do it to protect him. The dreaded Pigeon Day arrives and Palmer asks Dorothy where she released Nipper. When she says she did it by the train tracks, Palmer is appalled! That is the exact place people capture and crate pigeons for the shoot! Palmer has to decide whether to keep quiet and protect himself or defy tradition and save Nipper!

Palmer rushes to the shooting range and searches the crates for Nipper. He finally sees the bird being released and shot out of the sky in the air! Nipper falls onto the field. Palmer races to save his friend to the shock of the crowd. He scoops Nipper up in his arms and carries him through the field to safety, disregarding the danger. The crowd looks on in awe, some intrigued. Palmer has finally overcome his fears and in doing so saved Nipper's life. Nipper had a hurt wing but he survived. As Palmer walked off the field with Nipper cradled in his arms, another child reached out to pet the wounded bird and asked his father if he could have one. The story ends with the article in the Waymer newspaper about Pigeon Day saying that it was a successful event which raised \$34,000 for the public park. It also mentions that there was an unexpected episode where one lucky pigeon was rescued by a "reckless lad".

The Real Story Behind *Wringer*

The story of *Wringer* may sound far fetched to some students. However, it is based off of a real festival that took place in Hegins, Pennsylvania every Labor Day weekend beginning in 1933. About 200 marksmen would take turns shooting thousands of pigeons that would be released from traps in the town's central park. Young boys would also participate as "trapper boys" who would help to release the birds from their traps and also gather up the dead birds. The "trapper boys" would also kill any wounded birds as the story explains by "wringing" their necks or stomping on them. In the 1980s, animal welfare groups began protesting the annual event and it eventually came to an end in 1998. However, pigeon shoots are still occur in some parts of Pennsylvania. Students can learn more about Pennsylvania Pigeon shoots [here](#). This informative resource can spark meaningful classroom discussions about whether they believe pigeon shoots and other forms of animal cruelty should be outlawed.

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Wringer by Jerry Spinelli Customizable Lesson Plans and Activities

The *Wringer* activities above are designed as a complete unit for teachers to easily copy and customize to meet the needs of their students. The focus of this novel study is to help students gain an intimate understanding of the story and improve their comprehension skills. These free resources help students to be able to identify

the major plot points that make up the narrative arc of the story as well as analyze the story for theme and much more! They are perfect to use during a classroom session or even as homework assignments because teachers can see students storyboards updating in real time as they work! Read on to learn more about the activities above. Remember when you find a classroom activity that you think your students will enjoy, all you have to do is click "copy". It will be immediately brought into your teacher dashboard to assign to your students that very day!

***Wringer* Characters Analysis**

Have students track the *Wringer* by Jerry Spinelli main characters' and supporting characters' development and growth throughout the story using a character map. An engaging way to hold reader's accountable is to have them add to their character map every time they are introduced to a new character in the story.

Visual Vocabulary Storyboard

It is critical to expand a student's vocabulary and grammar in order to expand student knowledge. Throughout reading, students may come upon many unfamiliar words. Students can storyboard their understanding of these words which will lead to better retention! Students can include the term, its definition and either a sentence that they create or one that is taken from the text along with an illustration that depicts its meaning.

Themes, Symbols, and Motifs

This *Wringer* lesson plan allows students to delve into high level literary elements in a way that helps students

of all learning styles be successful. Themes, symbols, and motifs are valuable aspects of any literary work, and they add richness to stories. Students can visually demonstrate their understanding of these concepts by storyboarding! Students can explore themes such as peer pressure, bullying, friendship, family and coming-of-age.

Plot Diagram

Students can create a Plot Diagram of the events in the story. Not only is this a great way to teach the parts of the plot, but it reinforces major events and helps students develop greater understanding of literary structures as they track the actions, thoughts, and interactions of the main and supporting characters.

Movie Poster

Students can create dazzling movie posters for the novel to demonstrate their understanding of the most important aspects such as setting, characters, and the overarching themes of the story.

Favorite Quote or Scene

Teachers can give students a list of *Wringer* by Jerry Spinelli quotes or can have students write down quotes as they read. Students can make a text to self connection by identifying their favorite quote or scene from the novel and creating a storyboard that illustrates the scene and includes the important dialogue or text along with a description of why it resonates with them!

About the Author

Jerry Spinelli is the beloved American author of over 40 books for children and young adults. In addition to *Wringer* (1997), some of his many award-winning novels are: [*Maniac Magee*](#) (1990), *Stargirl* (2000), *Loser* (2002) and [*Milkweed*](#) (2003).

Jerry Spinelli was born in Norristown Pennsylvania February 1, 1941 and has said that as a child he wanted to grow up to be a cowboy or a baseball player. However, in high school he wrote a poem that was published in his local newspaper and after that he was hooked on writing! His novels

Spinelli went to Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania majoring in English and working for the school's magazine. His first job was as an editor for a magazine and in his free time he tried his hand at writing novels.. However, none of Spinelli's novels for adults were published and it wasn't until he began writing from the point of view as a child that he got his big break in 1982 with *Space Station Seventh Grade*. He has since won the prestigious John Newbery Medal in 1998 and 1991 along with many other awards for his numerous works. *Maniac Magee* and *Stargirl* were even made into movies!

In addition to being an author, Spinelli is the father of 6 children and 16 grandchildren! He lives in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania with his wife, Eileen Spinelli who is also a children's book author.

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Discussion Questions to Use in Pairs or Groups

Can be used for a *Wringer* by Jerry Spinelli Quiz!

These class discussion questions are designed for upper elementary or middle school students. They may be used during reading, or upon completion of the novel. These questions can be printed as a word document and students can answer them offline individually in a reader's notebook. Even better, students could *storyboard* their answers to the questions which will engage all of their critical thinking skills! After answering, students can use their storyboard to help support a class discussion on the various topics. It is always impressive to hear the different opinions that students have, even though they are reading the same novel!

1. From the beginning of the book, Palmer appears to be different from his peers and those around him. What do you think makes Palmer different?
2. How does Palmer change over the course of the story?
3. What might the pigeons represent in the book?
4. Why does Palmer dread his 10th birthday?
5. Why does Palmer feel as though he has no choice but to be a Wringer?
6. Why is Farquar's birthday "Treatment" something the boys seek out?

7. Is there a tradition or rite of passage in your life that you experienced? Did you enjoy it or dread it? Why?
8. Why do you think Palmer refuses Dorothy's suggestion that she tell the world that Palmer does not want to become a Wringer?
9. Why do you think Palmer is more sensitive than the other children in the gang?
10. Why does Palmer go along with the gang when they bully his former friend Dorothy?
11. Why do you think the gang enjoys bullying Dorothy?
12. Why does Dorothy not retaliate against the gang?
13. If you were in Dorothy's situation what would you do?
14. What does Palmer learn and how does he change after he "adopts" Nipper?
15. The Pigeon Shoot festival that is the inspiration for this book ended in 1998. Do you think this festival should be held? Why or why not?

Ideas for Post-Reading Activities

Storyboard That is an excellent tool for students to create fun and engaging projects as a culminating activity after finishing a novel. In addition to our premade activities, here are some ideas that teachers

can customize and assign to students to spark creativity in individual students, pairs, or small groups for a final project. Several of these ideas include Storyboard That templates that can be printed out or copied into your teacher dashboard and assigned digitally. All final projects can be printed out, presented as a slide show, or, for an extra challenge, as an animated GIF!

1. For Groups: Choose a scene from the story and write a short play to reenact to the class. Use the traditional storyboard layout to plan out your scenes. You can add text to your storyboards, or simply use the cells to visualize each scene of your play.
2. Using the timeline layout, retell the story in chronological order. Our timeline layout gives you the options to include year, month, day, and even hour! You may also choose to omit these altogether.
3. Choose a setting from the story and create a map of the setting using the small poster or worksheet layout. Use free form or other text boxes to include a key or label the different parts of the map.
4. Using one of Storyboard That's [board game templates](#), create a game based on the book for your classmates to play!
5. For Groups: Divide the chapters of the book amongst your group members. Each member of the group creates a storyboard for their assigned chapter. This can be done as a collaborative project, or separately for longer novels.

6. Using the worksheet layout and Storyboard That's worksheet assets, create a test or a quiz for other students in the class. You can create all kinds of questions such as multiple choice, short answer, and even matching! When you are done, be sure to make an answer key.
7. Using one of Storyboard That's [biography poster templates](#), create a poster about the character of your choice. Be sure to include important biographical features such as: place and date of birth, family life, accomplishments, etc.
8. Choose a chapter from the novel and create a storyboard that shows that chapter from another character's point of view. For an extra challenge, use the T-chart layout to compare the original point of view with another character's point of view!
9. Create a book jacket of the novel using one of Storyboard That's [book jacket templates](#). Use Storyboard That art to create the cover, and write a summary of the story on the back, just like real books have!
10. Using one of Storyboard That's [social media templates](#) as a starting point, create a social media page for one or more of the characters in the novel. Be sure to think how the character thinks while creating this page.
11. Create a scrapbook page made by one of the characters in the novel. Storyboard That has lots of premade templates that you can use as is, or change to fit your character's personality! Check out our [scrapbook templates](#) today!

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How to Teach Theme for "The Wringer"

1

Read the Book

Familiarize yourself with the story, characters, and events in "Wringer" by Jerry Spinelli. Gain a deep understanding of the narrative, its context, and the author's style.

2

Identify Potential Themes

Start by brainstorming potential themes that emerge from the book. Themes in "Wringer" may include the cruelty of peer pressure, the conflict between personal values and societal expectations, the importance of empathy, or the consequences of violence.

Analyze Key Events and Characters

Examine significant events, conflicts, and character development in the story. Look for patterns or recurring motifs that may

3

shed light on the book's central ideas. Discuss with students how these elements contribute to the overall themes of the story.

Connect to Real-Life Experiences

4

Help students make connections between the themes in "Wringer" and their own lives or experiences. Engage them in discussions about situations in which they have faced similar challenges or dilemmas, encouraging them to consider the lessons they can draw from the book.

Include Creative Activities

5

Foster deeper engagement by incorporating creative activities. Assign projects such as storyboards or staging dramatic interpretations that explore the themes of the book.

Frequently Asked Questions about *Wringer* by Jerry Spinelli

Who is the main character in *Wringer*?

The main character in *Wringer* is a 10-year-old boy named Palmer LaRue who has been dreading his 10th birthday. In his town, when a boy turns 10 they are promoted to being a "wringer" at the town's annual

Pigeon Day festival where 5,000 pigeons are released from crates and shot down in a competition for a sharpshooter award. The "wringers" job is to ensure that the fallen pigeons are dead by wringing their necks.

What is "the treatment" in the book, *Wringer*?

"The treatment" refers to a birthday tradition wherein an older boy named Farquar punches a child in the arm on their birthday, one punch for each year of their life, extra punches for crying.

What is the main problem in the book, *Wringer*?

The main problem in the book is not only that Palmer is repulsed and afraid of the prospect of becoming a "wringer" when he turns 10, but also that he happens to befriend a pigeon and take it in as a pet! As he becomes closer with his pigeon friend, Nipper, Palmer grows more and more wary of his secret being revealed to his "friends" and of the impending Pigeon shoot festival.

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Example: Romeo and Juliet

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