

DEAD WEDNESDAY

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *STARGIRL*
JERRY SPINELLI

ABOUT THE BOOK

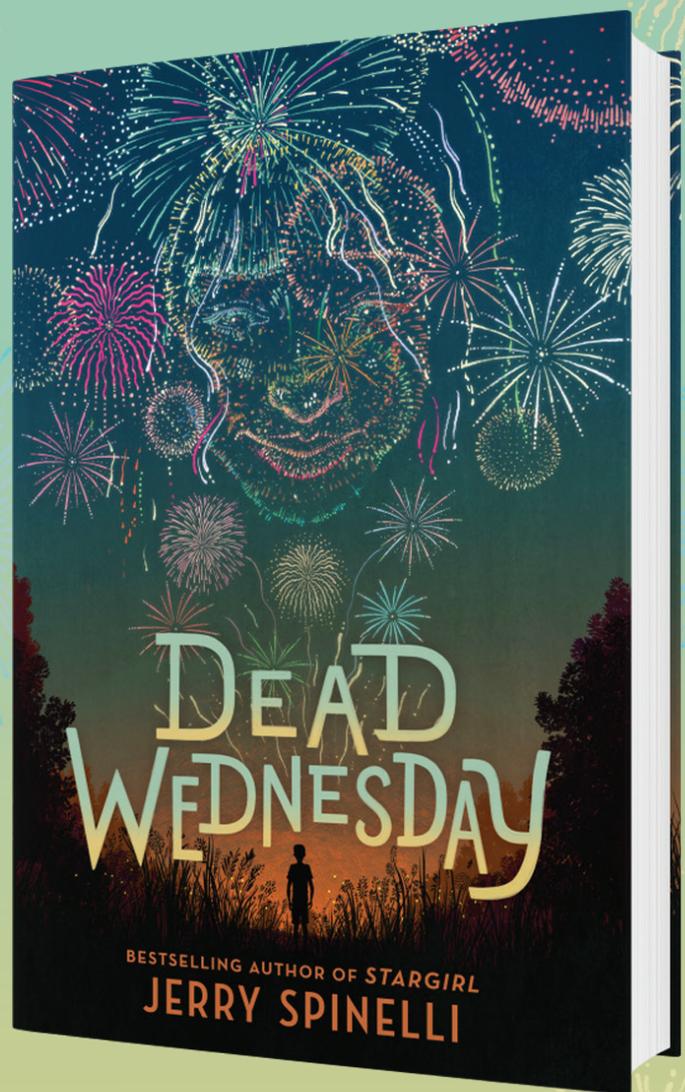
Newbery Medalist Jerry Spinelli delivers a brilliant new novel about being bold and taking charge of your life.

Worm Tarnauer has spent most of eighth grade living *down* to his nickname. He prefers to be out of sight, underground. *He walked the world unseen.* He's happy to let his best friend, Eddie, lead the way and rule the day.

And this day—Dead Wednesday—is going to be awesome. The school thinks assigning each eighth grader the name of a teenager who died in the past year and having them don black shirts and become “invisible” will make them contemplate their own mortality. Yeah, sure. The kids know that being invisible to teachers really means you can get away with anything. It's a day to go wild!

But Worm didn't count on Becca Finch (seventeen, car crash). Letting this girl into his head is about to change everything.

Jerry Spinelli tells the story of the unexpected, heartbreaking, hilarious, and truly epic day when Worm Tarnauer discovers his own life.



Grades 5 and up | HC: 978-0-593-30667-3 | GLB: 978-0-593-30668-0 | EL: 978-0-593-30669-7



Photo courtesy of the author

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JERRY SPINELLI is the author of many beloved novels for young readers, including *Stargirl*; *Love, Stargirl*; *Milkweed*; *The Warden's Daughter*; *Crash*; *Wringer*; and *Maniac Magee*, winner of the Newbery Medal; along with *Knots in My Yo-Yo String*, the autobiography of his childhood. A graduate of Gettysburg College, he lives in Pennsylvania with his wife, poet and author Eileen Spinelli.

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PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Have students write a paragraph that explains their understanding of the term *coming of age*. Invite them to read their paragraphs aloud in class. Then lead a discussion about various cultural or religious rituals that mark an adolescent's coming of age.

Correlates to Common Core State Standards in Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 608.4; Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 6-8.4; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 6-8.1.

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What is the purpose of Dead Wednesday? Who are the Wrappers? Why are the students issued black shirts? Explain why Worm feels the shirts “darken the darkness.” (p. 58)
2. Describe eighth grade classrooms on Dead Wednesday. How does each teacher have a unique way of setting the atmosphere for the day? Explain why room 113 is described as “grim city.” (p. 51) In one classroom, there are posters of the Wrappers. How is this designed to make Dead Wednesday more real to the eighth graders?
3. Discuss how most eighth graders view Dead Wednesday. Which students take the day seriously? Why do some think the day is a gift from the school district and the town of Amber Springs? Explain why Dead Wednesday is a more formative event for Worm than his fourteenth birthday.
4. This year on Dead Wednesday, Jeep Waterstone and Snake Davis are finally going to settle their differences in a fight at Veterans Park. Why are the students so drawn to the fight? How is the anticipation of the fight more important than the actual fight? Debate whether it really matters to the students that the fight doesn't occur.
5. Discuss why Worm likes to be the first kid on the bus in the morning and the last to get off in the afternoon. What does this reveal about his nature? Explain the following: “For a worm every day is Dead Wednesday.” (p. 68) How might Worm describe the culture of the school bus? Why does he think that Bijou Newton is the “girl version of Eddie”? (p. 31)
6. Discuss Worm and Eddie's relationship. How are they different? Why is Worm careful not to show how thrilled he is to see Eddie each morning? Cite examples that show Worm is uncomfortable in Eddie's world. When does he stop needing Eddie so much?
7. What is the first hint that Rebecca Ann Finch's ghost is about to appear? At what point does Worm realize the purpose of Becca's ghost? Explain what Becca means when she says, “This is your life you are missing.” (p. 136)
8. Why is Becca's ghost wearing slippers and pajamas? When does Worm realize the significance of this clothing? Explain why Becca's ghost tells Worm the details of the accident.
9. Worm's parents operate a writers' retreat. Explain why Worm doesn't want his classmates to see where he lives. Why does Worm tell Becca that Daisy Chimes, a famous writer, is staying at his parents' retreat? Discuss how Becca reacts to this news. She insists that Worm ask for a signed copy of *Wendy Wins*. How does Worm win when he follows through on this request?

GROUP DISCUSSION (CONTINUED)

10. Worm is shy and tends to be an observer. How does his keen sense of observation serve him well, especially after he meets Becca? Discuss how he overcomes his shyness by the end of the novel.
11. Worm doesn't really understand girls. Becca says, "Someday you'll fit, Worm. You'll surprise some girl. You'll surprise yourself. She'll call you Robbie." (p.119) Discuss when this happens for Worm.
12. Dead Wednesday changes Worm. Debate whether he is disappointed when he discovers that most of his classmates seem unchanged. Why does Monica wear the black shirt the day after Dead Wednesday? How is this a bold act?
13. Why does Worm call Monica "Mean Monica"? Explain his complicated feelings toward her the day after Dead Wednesday. Discuss why Worm is surprised to discover that Monica doesn't hate him. How does this realization contribute to his coming of age? Explain why Worm thinks that Becca would love Monica.
14. Worm goes to the cemetery where Becca is buried. What is the symbolism of this scene? Discuss what he discovers at her grave site. What gifts does Becca give Worm? Discuss what he gives her.
15. How does Worm realize that he must let Becca go? Explain what he means when he says, "Pooter is the rightful custodian of her memory." (p. 206)

16. Spinelli uses various types of figurative language to create certain images in the reader's mind.

Review the following definitions:

Simile: a comparison of two things using "like" or "as"

Metaphor: an indirect comparison of two things

Personification: gives human qualities to nonhuman things

Then identify examples of each type of figurative language in the novel.

Correlates with Common Core State Standards in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 6-8.1, 6-8.3; Craft & Structure RL. 6-8.4, 6-8.6; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 6-8.1, 6-8.3; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 6-8.1; Knowledge of Language L. 6-8.3; Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 6-8.5.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Return to the pre-reading discussion. Ask students to identify a culture other than their own and research coming-of-age rituals within that culture. At what age does the ritual occur? What must an adolescent do to prepare for the ritual? Write an informational paper that reveals the culture's rite of passage practices. Include a concluding paragraph that explains what is expected once the adolescent comes of age.

Correlates with Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types and Purposes W. 6-8.2; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 6-8.8; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.6-8.1, L. 6-8.2.

Write an acrostic poem, using DEAD WEDNESDAY as the spine words. Share it with the class.

Correlates with Common Core State Standards in Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 6-8.4

WRITING ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

Eddie's signature word is *pathetic*. Define the word, and then think about what it means to Eddie. Worm thinks that Eddie is cool, so he thinks Eddie's word is cool. Write about a scene in the book to which Worm might apply the word *pathetic*. Include a concluding paragraph that explains your scene choice.

Correlates with Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types and Purposes W. 6-8.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.6-8.1, L. 6-8.2.

Rebecca Ann Finch is Worm's Wrapper. Think about the information Worm learns about the accident that killed Becca. Write a front-page newspaper story about her accident. Remember to include what, where, when, why, and how. Include a quote from the police officer investigating the accident, her parents, and her boyfriend, Pooter.

Correlates with Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types and Purposes W. 6-8.2; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.6-8.1, L. 6-8.2.

Spinelli writes that Dead Wednesday is an "official ticket to big-kidhood." (p. 37) Consider all that transpires in the novel, and write an essay that Worm might write at the end of the book that reveals how "big-kidhood" may be different for him because he met the ghost of Becca.

Correlates with Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types and Purposes W. 6-8.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.6-8.1, L. 6-8.2.

Think about the purpose of Dead Wednesday, and how the eighth graders respond to it. Write an opinion piece for the local newspaper that argues whether Dead Wednesday should be continued. Cite scenes from the book that support your view.

Correlates with Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types and Purposes W. 6-8.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.6-8.1, L. 6-8.2.

Worm fantasizes about telling Eddie about Becca's ghost, but he decides to keep his experience to himself. Write a letter that Worm might write to Eddie explaining his encounter with Becca. Then write a reply from Eddie.

Correlates with Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types and Purposes W. 6-8.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.6-8.1, L. 6-8.2.

Take a look at the quote by Emily Dickinson at the beginning of the book:

"That it will never come again / Is what makes life so sweet."

Write a brief paper that explains how this quote applies to Worm's journey.

Correlates with Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types and Purposes W. 6-8.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.6-8.1, L. 6-8.2.

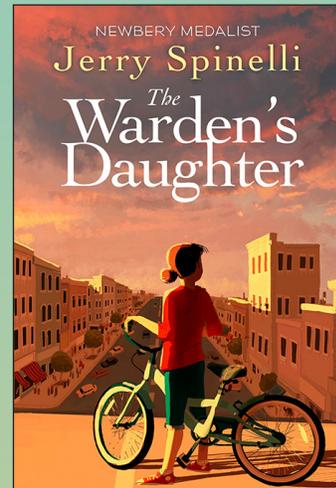
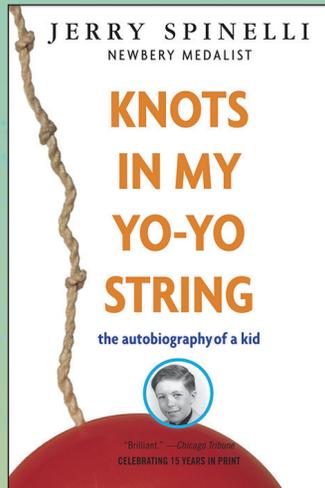
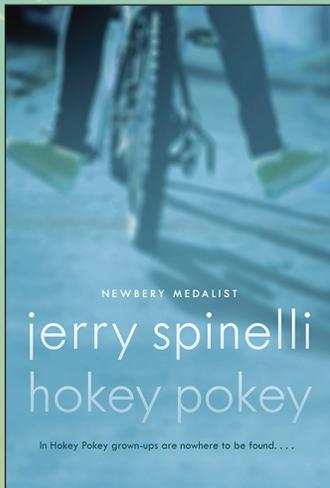
VOCABULARY/ USE OF LANGUAGE

Students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them taking clues from context. Such words may include: *receding* (p. 6), *divert* (p. 12), *detonate* (p. 28), *compel* (p. 31), *vice* (p. 34), *atonal* (p. 49), *devastation* (p. 67), *virtue* (p. 71), *perverse* (p. 71), *percolate* (p. 104), *feinting* (p. 109), *deviate* (p. 154), *peripheral* (p. 186), *futile* (p. 198), and *conspiratorial* (p. 227).

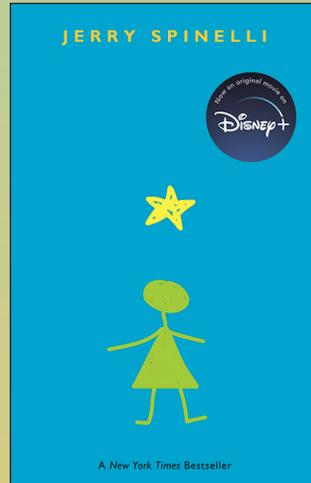
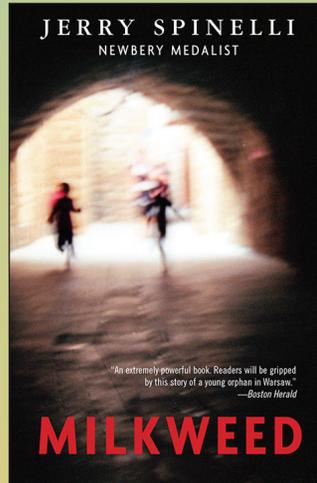
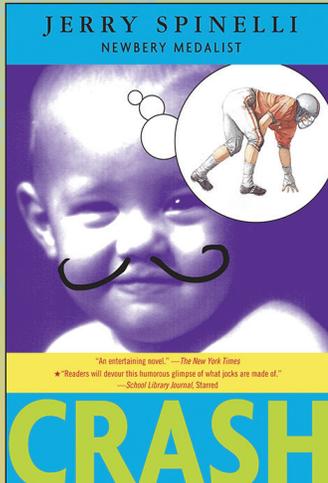
Correlates with Common Core State Standards in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 6-8.4

ALSO BY JERRY SPINELLI

FOR MIDDLE-GRADE READERS



FOR YOUNG ADULT READERS



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Guide written by Pat Scales, children's literature consultant