



Pigboy

Vicki Grant

Interest level: ages ten to fourteen

Reading level: 2.0

978-1-55143-643-2 PB

978-1-55143-666-1 LIB

AR Quiz # 110019

Book Summary

Dan is not sure he'll survive the boring field trip to a remote heritage farm. How could a place with no running water, telephone or electricity be anything but dull? The farmer knows nothing about farming and is angry about having to conduct the tour. And what's with his tattoo? The teacher requests a private word with the farmer and then mysteriously disappears. After a messy allergic attack, Dan is excused to find a tissue. He sneaks back to the school bus and discovers that the driver and teacher have been bound and gagged. The farmer is really an escaped convict with nasty plans. Will Dan be able to find help in time?

Author Biography

Vicki Grant is the popular author of several books for children and young adults including *Puppet Wrangler* and *Dead End Job*. Vicki lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Connecting to the Text

Foreshadowing

When Dan first sees Mr. van Wart, he senses that something isn't quite right. Dan says, "He looked kind of mad—and he didn't look much like a farmer either. I expected some old guy in a straw hat and overalls" (p. 26). This use of foreshadowing hints that something important is going to be revealed later about Mr. van Wart.

Ask students to complete the following writing exercise:

- Think of an example of foreshadowing used in *Pigboy*. Follow the plotline that has been foreshadowed through the story to see how it takes shape.
- Did the use of foreshadowing make *Pigboy* more interesting to read? When parts of the story were foreshadowed, did it make you want to find out more?

Character Description

1. Early in *Pigboy*, Dan says, "I'm a scrawny buck toothed nerd named Hogg." (p. 7). Ask students to write a brief description of the other main characters in *Pigboy*.

- Shane Coolen is
- Ms. Creaser is
- Mr. van Wart is
- Archibald James Dobbin is

Creating Pictures using Metaphor and Simile

Metaphors and similes connect ideas, giving us images that expand our understanding of situations and characters. Some examples in *Pigboy* are:

(p. 14) *Shane...was leaning against my back like I was a beanbag chair.*

(p. 33) *The sneeze was like a rocket...It exploded out of my face.*

(p. 39) *My body was moving all fast and jerky, but my brain was like Jello.*

There are seventeen chapters in *Pigboy*. Ask students to break into small groups and assign a few chapters to each group. Ask students to complete the following.

- Carefully read your chapter, finding sentences where metaphors or similes are used.
- As soon as you find one, write it on the board. Underline the simile or metaphor.

When the class has finished, lead a group discussion on the use of metaphor and simile. What connection is being made and how does it lend meaning to the text?

Connecting to the Curriculum

Economics

Dan's teacher, Mr. Benvie, is interested in farming and learning about where food comes from. He takes Dan's class on a field trip to visit a heritage pig farm.

Ask students to complete the following research exercise:

- Choose one of the following foods: a carton of milk, a can of sliced pineapple, a can of refried beans, a bag of potato chips, a can of tuna, a bag of microwave popcorn, a box of macaroni.
- Write a timeline for this food, tracing it back to its origin and recording what happened to it in the time before it appeared on your neighborhood grocery shelf.
- How old is it?
- Where did it come from originally?
- How was it harvested or caught?
- Where did it go after it was harvested? How was it stored along the way?
- Where was it processed? Where was it packaged? Did these functions happen in the same place?
- What method of transportation was used for the long journey from its origin to your neighborhood grocery store?

Drama

1. Ask students to work in small groups to improvise skits based on key scenes from *Pigboy*. Have students improvise their own scenarios or choose from the examples below:
 - Dan has a nice home, a reasonably supportive family, and he is doing well in school; however, because he is being bullied, his school life is very difficult. Sometimes Dan finds that his mom doesn't understand what he's going through. How can Dan tell his mom what's really going on?
 - Imagine you are sitting in the aisle across from Dan when Shane sits down and smashes Dan's face against the bus window. Dan's glasses have snapped off and Shane is laughing. What could you do? Would you talk to Shane? The bus driver?
 - Imagine you and a friend are with the kids sitting in the building with Mr. van Wart. You are very scared and it looks like there's no way out, but together you make a plan to escape.
 - Imagine Dan's classroom the first day back at school after the incident at the farm. What are the kids talking about? Do they treat Dan differently? How does Shane treat Dan now?
 - Imagine you are a teacher and you are talking to Shane about how he treats Dan. What can you tell him? How can you help him change his ways?

Language Arts—Writing Exercises

Invite students to complete one of the following writing exercises:

1. Dan’s backpack had lots of things in it: “...allergy pills, Kleenex, duct tape—all the stuff you’d expect a nerd like me to have...” (p. 11).
 - Describe how each of these items came in handy for Dan in *Pigboy*. Give from the novel.
 - Write an alternative set of items for Dan’s backpack. Be silly if you want, or serious; whichever you like. For example, candy canes, a piece of carpet, face paint and a soup ladle. Now write about how Dan’s experience would have been different.
 - How would the story have changed?
 - What’s in your knapsack? Imagine that Dan took your knapsack on the field trip instead of his. Now write about Dan’s experience on the field trip. How would the story have changed?
2. Dan complains that he is a runt and the scrawniest kid in his class, but later, his stature becomes an advantage: “It was the first time in my life I’d ever been glad I was so skinny. There was a little bush in front of me. I pushed myself flat against the side of the log building and prayed the guy couldn’t see past it.” (45–46).
 - Think of something about Dan that he initially felt was a shortcoming and which later became an advantage. Using examples from the novel, describe how he used his shortcoming to his advantage. Some examples might be his stature, his allergies, his personality.
 - Shane has many bad qualities. He is a bully, both verbally and physically. Think of ways that Shane could change for the better. For example, Shane finds humor by making fun of other people. Perhaps he could take a weekend course in improvisation or learn to be a standup comedian. He also seems to like physical activity. Perhaps he could join a school sports team. Write a letter to Shane explaining how he can take one of his negative personality traits and turn it into something positive. Be sure to give Shane clear instructions.

Current Events

The experience at the van Wart farm was covered by the local newspaper with the headline “Boy goes Hogg-wild!” (p. 99). The newspaper article described Dan as a hero. Ask students to complete the following research project:

- Go through recent copies of your local community newspaper. Find examples of people who, like Dan, did selfless things to help others. You may not find examples quite as dramatic as Dan’s experience at the pig farm, but there will be examples of citizens who perform selfless acts, perhaps on a smaller scale (for example,

volunteers who work with children, seniors or animals in the community, or those who volunteer to make the community a better or more safe place to live).

- Cut out two of these examples from the newspapers and write a short report describing the selfless acts you chose. Who is profiled? What did they do? What do you think motivated them? How did their selfless act affect other people in your community?

Science

Invite students to research one of the following topics:

1. Dan's class visits a heritage farm that raises pigs. Research pig farming.
 - What do farm pigs eat?
 - Where do they sleep?
 - How many piglets are in a litter? How many litters does a typical sow have?
 - How long do farm pigs live?
 - Find out two interesting facts about farm pigs.
2. Early in the visit to the heritage farm, Ms. Creaser asked how old the cows are when they start producing milk. As a research project, find out about dairy farming.
 - What kind of cows are dairy cows?
 - How old do they have to be to start producing milk?
 - How long do they produce milk?
 - When they're too old to produce milk, what happens to them?
 - Find out two interesting facts about dairy cows.

Connecting to the Students—Bullying

Dan is bullied by his classmates, particularly Shane. Because Dan's family name is Hogg, Shane finds every opportunity to laugh or make fun of Dan. When they visit the heritage pig farm, Shane refers to the pigs as "some of your relatives" (p. 4) and Dan wonders why he is bullied:

(p. 3) *There's this poor guy in our class called Dan Hogg who everybody hated. I don't know why exactly, maybe it was his hair. Or his teeth. Or his glasses. Or the fact that he answered Mr. Benvie's questions as if he might actually have a brain.*

Dan tries to cope with being bullied:

(p. 3) *He just tried to sort of disappear, but it never worked.*
(p. 10) *It takes a lot of energy to act like those idiots don't bother me.*

1. In a group discussion, ask students: Is trying to disappear and or pretending that it doesn't bother you an effective strategy for coping with a bully? What could Dan do instead?
 - Is bullying something one can ever get used to? Do you think Dan is really used to it? How can you tell?
 - Ask students to brainstorm ways to cope—and appropriately respond—when another student is teasing or bullying them. What helps you cope? What is the best way to respond? Does your school have a Code of Conduct, guidelines or rules in place that deal with bullying? Where are they published or posted? Does your classroom have a copy?
 - If you were Dan's friend, what advice would you give him?
 - Dan feels Mr. Benvie doesn't do an effective job of stopping Shane. Dan said, "Mr. Benvie saw what was going on" (p. 4). If this happened to you and you felt your teacher wasn't helping, what could you do? Would talking to your teacher or a school counselor after school help?
2. Divide the class into small groups to create anti-bullying campaigns.
 - Pretend you are in the advertising business and it's your job to make a powerful anti-bullying campaign for your classroom or school—something kids will really connect and associate with.
 - What will be your campaign's message? Write a catchy slogan.
 - How will you get your message across? Think of methods that kids will respond to. It could be a poster, a brochure, a flyer, a radio jingle for the daily announcements or a skit to perform in front of the class.
 - Create your anti-bullying campaign and present it to the class. You may wish to research your school's policies and guidelines around student conduct and incorporate them in your campaign.

Personal Reflection

Invite students to complete one of the following writing exercises:

1. Like many teens, sometimes Dan has a very negative image of himself. Consider the following quote: *I'm a scrawny bucktoothed nerd named Hogg* (p.7). What would happen if we make statement that describes Dan more positively? Perhaps we might say, "I'm light on my feet, I'm doing well in school and I come from a family that has a long, proud heritage."
 - If you look at the two statements, how is your image or perception of Dan different?

- Take a moment and think about something about yourself that you don't particularly like. Think of a sentence in which you describe yourself.
 - Now write a sentence about yourself that switches that perception to a positive image, like the alternate sentence describing Dan.
 - You don't have to share this positive sentence with anyone—just keep it for whenever you're feeling blue.
2. Being a teen isn't easy. Teens crave independence from parents but, at the same time, are dependent on them, so there can sometimes be a struggle. Dan demonstrates this when he says, "My mother told me to take a carsickness pill before I left. She kept saying I'd be sorry. I hate it when she treats me like a kid" (p. 11). As it turns out, Dan could have really used those carsickness pills!
Think of how Dan could approach his mom in a different way. If he feels she's always treating him like a kid, what could he do to change his mom's perception of him? Make a list of five concrete, safe and realistic goals for Dan.
 3. Dan says, "Why couldn't I be lucky the way these other kids are lucky? [They] get to be tall and good-looking and funny and rich and athletic and popular, and all the other things I have no hope of ever being" (p. 7).
Write a letter to Dan, giving him advice on how to cope in school and build his self-confidence. How can Dan make some friends?

More Ideas, Topics and Activities for Pigboy

1. Many field trips are mentioned in *Pigboy*, including a trip to a heritage farm, a tire factory, a television studio, a fire station and a museum. If you could design your own field trip, where would it be?
 - Research this field trip destination.
 - How will you get there?
 - How much will it cost?
 - Create an agenda for the day.
 - Write a paragraph describing why you chose this destination.
2. Dan does many brave things in *Pigboy*. Is he a hero? How do you know?
 - What does it mean to be a hero? Can anyone be a hero?
 - Do heroic acts have to be big, like Dan's, or do small acts count too?
3. Dan's teacher, Mr. Benvie, spent his summer building a well in a village in Africa. If you wanted to learn more about organizations that help people and communities in developing parts of the world, how could you find out more?

- Besides going to a foreign country and helping a community directly as Mr. Benvie did, what are some other ways to help communities in other countries?
 - Are there ways you can help people closer to home—in your class, school or community?
4. Dan knows to call 9-1-1 the first chance he gets. What happens when one calls 9-1-1?
- Who answers 9-1-1 calls in your community?
 - What kind of information should you have ready if you call 9-1-1?
 - What kind of emergencies would be handled by police, ambulance or fire services?
 - Why should people never call 9-1-1 as a prank call or in a non-emergency?