**“Joey Pigza Loses Control” by Jake Gantos**

**Excerpt from Chapter 1: Potholes**

1. “Now, Joey,” Mom said, lifting one hand off the steering wheel and pushing me back to my side. “Get serious. Don’t cling to the notion that me and him are going to get back together. No way is that going to happen, so just let it go and focus on your relationship with your father. You have six weeks with him. Figure out what *you* want from this guy before you get there. Give it some thought because he can be, you know, wired like you, only he’s *bigger* .”
2. Even as she talked I didn’t listen because I liked what I was thinking more than what she was telling me so I just hummed, “Mom and Dad, sitting in a tree…”
3. After that she re-gripped the steering wheel and seemed to aim for the holes. Some quiet time passed and since she didn’t pay any attention to me I said, “Are you sending me because of my trouble with Pablo?”
4. “That’s only a part of it,” she said. “But that last little *business* was a wake-up call for me

–and for Pablo. I mean, I can’t keep you locked up in the house all summer.”

1. The little *business* she referred to made me hang my head, because it was all my fault, and like most everything wrong I did, she felt responsible so I just slumped into the corner of my seat. I put my tiny tape-player speakers in my ears and turned on the music. Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass were playing “Lollipops and Roses” and while I nodded along I added up the good and bad things about my behavior that day, which is what my special-ed teacher told me to do when I felt sad.

1. Before I had gone to special ed and got my new meds it would have been impossible for me to sit still and make a list of good and bad things. I didn’t have the time for lists. I didn’t have time for anything that lasted longer than the snap of my fingers. But after I got my good meds, which were in a patch I stuck on my body every day, I started to settle down and think. And not just think about all the bad things that had already happened. I started thinking about the good things I wanted to happen. And the best part about thinking good things was that now I could make them come true instead of having everything I wanted blow up in my face.

1. So, as I sat in the car and took a deep breath, I asked myself what I wanted from Dad. Even though I thought for a long time, my list was short. There was really only one thing I wanted. So after a while I sat up and told Mom.

1. “I just want him to love me as much as I already love him,” I said.

1. She listened, then pursed her lips before saying, “Honey, I’m sure he does.” Her voice sounded like she had a long list of other things to say, but didn’t.

**Except from Chapter 2: Dog-Eared**

1. I must have fallen asleep in the car because I woke up when it stopped and Mom was tugging on the speaker wire from my tape player like I was a fish she was reeling in.

1. “Are we there yet?” I asked, and rubbed my ears.

1. “Almost,” she said. “Your dad’s place is up the street. I wanted to stop and talk over a few things before we arrive. Most of all I want to say my real goodbye to you now, because when I see your dad and grandma everything is going to be weird and I might be weird too and I don’t want you thinking I’m bailing out on your or something.” She held me by the cheeks and kissed me like you would a picture in a frame. “Listen to your dad,” she said. “He’s your dad. But if anything seems out of whack you call me right away and I’ll come get you. Okay?” She held my chin in her hands and stared real hard into my eyes before looking toward her purse.

1. “This is for you,” she said, and handed me an envelope folded in half. “There is money in it. Not play money. But emergency money.” I opened the envelope. There was a twentydollar bill and a page of lined paper with rows of quarters taped to it. She read the puzzled look on my face.

1. “The quarters are for a pay phone,” she explained.

1. “Can I call you now?” I said. “Because I already think this whole thing is out of whack.”

1. “This is not out of whack,” she stressed. “You are starting from scratch with your dad, so everything feels strange.” Then she put the car in gear and I knew she was being brave so I didn’t say another word. We slowly rolled forward and just up the street Grandma was sitting on a porch smoking, and next to her was a thin man dressed in neatly pressed clothes. He was sweeping the porch but leaned the broom handle against the wall when he saw us.

1. Mom stopped and waved, then opened her door. I got out as Grandma and Dad scrambled down the steps. Before he said anything to me he tried to kiss Mom but she yanked her head back as if Dad’s lips were electrified. Then she gave him a frozen look and said to me, “Joey, go get the luggage out of the trunk.”

1. I got the keys out of the ignition and went around to the back of the car with my head spinning so fast I couldn’t pluck one thought out of the blur of them. The two of them being weird together was making me think if I locked myself in the trunk they might forget about being mad at each other and focus on me.

1. But I canceled that thought. And by the time I came back dragging my army duffel bag no one was talking but they were staring so hard at each other, with their mouths slowly opening and closing like big goldfish, I figured I had gone deaf from bad nerves and started twisting my fingers into my ears like when they needed cleaning.

1. “Don’t worry,” Dad finally said. “I’ll take good care of him.” I heard that loud and clear and by then he was holding the box of patches. “I’ll change it every day like I do my nicotine patch, or every other day depending—“

1. Mom cut him off. “Just follow the prescription,” she said sharply. “Joey will tell you.”

1. “Don’t worry,” he said.

1. “But I do,” Mom replied. “You might mess with *my* head. But if you mess with this kid…” She didn’t finish her though out loud because she had finished it in her mind so many times, and it was making her so huffy she was about to lose it. So it was my turn again to help her out.
2. I reached for her hand and when she glanced over at me, I winked our giant eyesquishing secret wink, which was a reminder to chill out. She smiled and instead of going off the deep end, she stooped down by my side, fixed the hair back over my getting-better bald spot, then gave me a hug. “Call me,” she whispered in my ear. “Call often so I can say I love you.” Then she turned, stiffly marched like a windup toy soldier toward the car, got in, and drove off.

Genre: Fiction *Joey Pigza Loses Control*

**Use “Joey Pigza Loses Control”to answer questions 7 – 12. Then fill in the answers on your answer document.**

**8.2E** [Dictionary/Thesaurus]

**7**  Read the following dictionary entry.

|  |
| --- |
| **electrify** *\əˈlektrəˌfī\* vb  1. to charge with or subject to electricity  **2.** to supply with electric power **3**. to equip for the use of electric power **4**. to excite greatly; thrill |

Which definition best matches the

way the word

electrify is used in paragraph 17?

**A** Definition 1 **B** Definition 2

* + - 1. Definition 3
      2. Definition 4

**8.8FIG19D** [Infer elements of sensory language]

**8** What does the sensory language in paragraph 19 help the reader understand?

**F** The silence that had been created by the estranged family members **G** The tension that was brewing amongst the adults.

**H** The frustration his mom felt because she had to wait for him to get his bag.

**J**  The dad’s annoyance with their lack of trust in him.

**8.6 FIG19E** [Inferencing Summary]

1. What is the best summary of paragraphs 5 through 9?

* 1. Joey reflects on how they had arrived at this decision for him to stay with his dad. He reviews the negatives and positives of the events, a strategy recommended by his teacher and realizes that his previous strategies for overcoming obstacles had never been helpful. With this new process, Joey is able to communicate what he needs from his dad.

* 1. Joey’s mom tells him that he needs to figure out what he wants from his father. Joey thinks about the decisions he has made and falls into deep thought. Joey’s mom pulls over to the side to have a last minute talk with him. After she says her goodbyes, Joey is left to endure the awkwardness of his family.

* 1. As Joey rides to his father’s house, he takes some time to reflect on his previous actions. He thinks about what his behavior was like before he had been placed on new meds. Joey’s good meds had enabled him to focus and make better decisions about his future. He could now not only think about good things, but also work on making them happen.

* 1. As Joey rides with his mom to his father’s house for the summer, he reflects on his desire to have a better relationship with his dad. After thinking about it for a good amount of time, he realizes that he really only wants one thing. He expresses his thoughts to his mom and although she is a bit reluctant, she reassures Joey that his father really does love him.

**8.8A** [Similes/Extended Metaphors]

1. Why does the author compare Joey’s mom’s actions to that of a “windup toy soldier” at the end of the excerpt?

* 1. To emphasize the father’s power over her and how uncomfortable she is to be there

* 1. To demonstrate that she is confident with her decision to leave Joey with his dad

* 1. To reveal her robotic departure as she tries to put on a brave face for her son

**J** To show her eagerness in leaving Joey behind so he can bond with his father

**8.6B** [Characters influence theme and resolution of conflict]

1. The father’s response to the mother’s instructions on how to administer the medication adds to the conflict by

* 1. forcing Joey to take more responsibility for his own well-being
  2. leading his mother to be satisfied with his knowledge of patches
  3. increasing the mother’s anxiety about leaving her son with him
  4. creating resentment and hostility between the two

**8.6C** [Point of View]

1. Using the first-person point of view, the author is able to show-

* 1. the mother’s thoughts about Joey’s stay with his father
  2. Joey’s feelings about both his parents
  3. the family’s thoughts about having Joey stay with them
  4. the mom’s hesitation in leaving Joey

# ANSWER KEY

Genre: Fiction Selection: “Joey Pigza Loses Control”