

Discussion Guide for Loser

Inspired by *Loser* by Jerry Spinelli

Learning Objective:

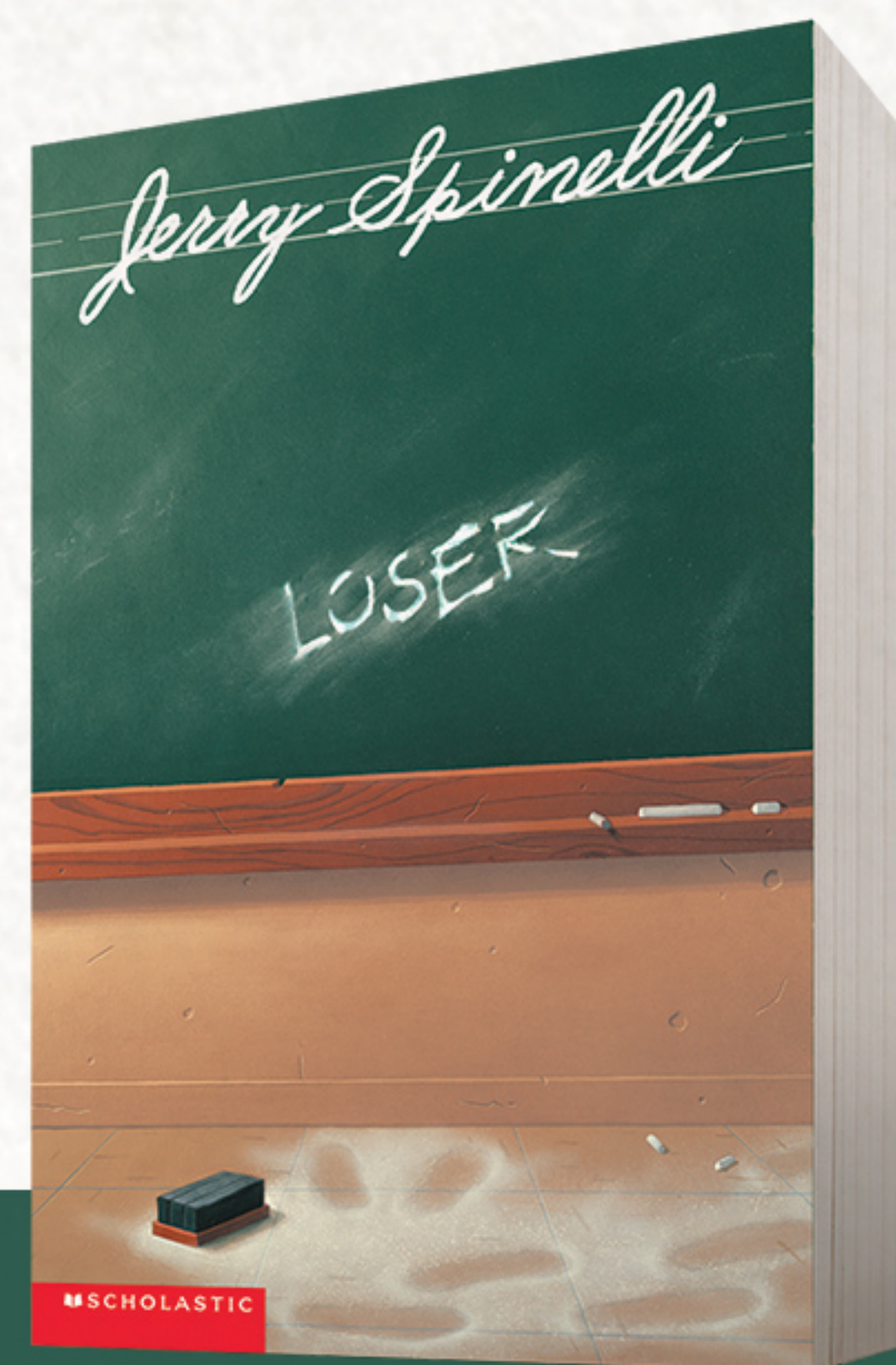
To practise reading comprehension and character analysis; learn about different types of writing perspectives and conflict; and engage students in social-emotional learning — particularly empathy and text-to-self connections.

Materials:

- Discussion Guide for *Loser*
- The book *Loser*

Instructions:

- 1.Begin reading *Loser*
- 2.At the end of each chapter, answer the following questions:



CHAPTER	DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
1	Why does chapter 1 start off in the second person? Who is the author speaking to?
2	What is one word you would use to describe Zinkoff after reading chapter 2? Why did you choose that word? Underline the evidence in your text.
3	Reread chapter 3. Why do you think the author spent so much time describing people’s love for “winning”? How true is this today? Where do you see it in your own life?
4	Did you pay attention to how Miss Meeks reacts to Donald? What do you infer from the sentence in this chapter, “The thought comes to her that Donald Zinkoff, in more ways than cubbyholes, will always be easy to find,” means to Miss Meeks?
5	In chapter 5, Miss Meeks refers to her students’ learning as a journey and adventure. Do you agree with this comparison?
6	Zinkoff does not respond to the fourth grader the way the fourth grader wants him to. What does this tell you about Zinkoff and other kids?
7	Teacher’s Choice: Pose a question of your own or ask your students to come up with their own questions in small breakout teams to practice group conversation.
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9	Zinkoff loves to run, but he is not athletic. What are your thoughts about the author choosing to make Zinkoff this way?
10	What would your current year be like with a teacher, such as Mrs. Biswell, who “doesn’t like children”?
11	What connection can you make between Zinkoff and his dad as a mailman and Andrew with his dad being a banker? How have your parents’ employment affected your life?
12	Reflect on Donald remembering the first time he wanted to be a mailman. Do you know what career you might want as an adult? Do you remember your first time wanting that job? If you are unsure, what are some jobs you would consider and why?
13	How has Zinkoff changed due to his surgery? How has it helped him connect with the Waiting Man?

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	
14	What fears do you have? How have you attempted to overcome them? What connections can you make to Zinkoff in the way he overcomes his fears of the furnace monster?
15	How important would you say the relationship between a student and their teacher is? What happens when it is a positive relationship? A negative relationship?
16	Reread the last paragraph of chapter 16. Reflect on the part that says, “He could lose a thousand races and his father will never give up on him....He’ll always be a honeybug to his dad, never a clunker.” What does this tell you about the type of relationship Zinkoff has with his dad?
17	Zinkoff is changing his thinking on many things. Think back to when you were in kindergarten/1st grade. What have you “grown out” of? What things have not changed?
18	What is worth having more: <i>one</i> best friend or lots of <i>good</i> friends? Which would you say you have?
19	What do you think are the rules of being a best friend, according to Zinkoff?
20	Teacher’s Choice: Pose a question of your own or ask your students to come up with their own questions in small breakout teams to practice group conversation.
21	What are some adjectives you would use to describe the old woman? Please provide the exact words or phrases from the text to support the character trait.
22	Who in your life is your Mr. Yalowitz? Someone who is not a family member but you know has your back and will be there to cheer you on throughout life.
23	Reread the last paragraph in chapter 23. What do you infer Zinkoff makes of himself after the author writes this about him: “Zinkoff is not a loser. He is less than that. He is nobody...he sinks into nobodiness.”
24	Students’ Choice: Free Discussion
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26	Zinkoff sends out whispers of Claudia’s name almost like sonar. Why do you think he whispered instead of yelling for her?
27	In his search for Claudia, Zinkoff remembers the time his sister Polly “ran away,” and wonders if the Waiting Man went to go look for his brother in Vietnam. He also imagines Claudia’s mom becoming like the Waiting Man. Why do you think the author included this detail?
28	Teacher’s Choice: Pose a question of your own or ask your students to come up with their own questions in small breakout teams to practice group conversation.
29	Teacher’s Choice: Pose a question of your own or ask your students to come up with their own questions in small breakout teams to practice group conversation.
30	Go over in your head the thought process that the four boys were going through as they were talking about Zinkoff’s experience in searching for Claudia. How do you think Zinkoff changed in their minds? Think about this passage: “In those eyes Bonce sees something he doesn’t understand, and something else he dimly remembers.” What do you think he doesn’t understand? What does he mean when he “dimly remembers”?
30 and 1 (2nd read)	Read chapter 30 and chapter 1 again. What are your thoughts about how Jerry Spinelli ended and began <i>Loser</i> ? Explain yourself as a reader and an author.

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Bonus Extension Questions:

- Internal conflict is when a character struggles with their own opposing desires or beliefs. It happens within them, and it drives their development as a character. This includes conflicts such as character vs. self.
 - What are some examples from the text of internal conflicts?
 - Which feelings words would you associate with this type of conflict?
 - External conflict sets a character against something or someone beyond their control. This includes conflicts such as character vs. character; character vs. society; character vs. nature (weather, time, animals); character vs. technology; and character vs. supernatural.
 - What are some examples from the text of external conflicts?
 - Which feelings words would you associate with this type of conflict?
3. Share the printout classroom activity as a follow-up to your discussion.