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# Loser



## Synopsis

From renowned Newbery-winning author Jerry Spinelli comes an incredible story about how not fitting in might just lead to an incredible life. Just like other kids, Zinkoff rides his bike, hopes for snow days, and wants to be like his dad when he grows up. But Zinkoff also raises his hand with all the wrong answers, trips over his own feet, and falls down with laughter over a word like "Jabip." Other kids have their own word to describe him, but Zinkoff is too busy to hear it. He doesn't know he's not like everyone else. And one winter night, Zinkoff's differences show that any name can someday become "hero." With some of his finest writing to date and great wit and humor, Jerry Spinelli creates a story about a boy's individuality surpassing the need to fit in and the genuine importance of failure. As readers follow Zinkoff from first through sixth grade—making this a perfect classroom read—and watch his character develop, it becomes impossible not to identify with and root for him through failures and triumphs. Supports the Common Core State Standards

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 650 (What's this?)

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: HarperCollins; Reprint edition (July 29, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060540745

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Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.4 x 7.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars— See all reviews— (361 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #15,450 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #147 in— Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Self-Esteem & Self-Respect #232 in— Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Emotions & Feelings #622 in— Books > Education & Teaching > Schools & Teaching

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

During the last 5 years of a 29 year career as a classroom teacher I began reading aloud to my middle school students. Shame on me! I should have begun on day one. Not only did my students love it (Southwest Detroit), but I learned that young adult fiction can be as exciting and heartwarming

as anything written for an adult. My students loved Maniac Magee, Crash, and The Library Card by Spinelli. They begged me to read just one more chapter each day. Of course, they also loved when Ms. Kirsch got too teary-eyed and had to call on a student to read. I have been the librarian in our school for the past 3 years and always have a young adult novel alongside my other reads. Jerry Spinelli is my favorite. Winger, Stargirl, and now Loser are among my all-time most special books. I forget the storylines of many other books I have read, but never Jerry Spinelli's. I am able to recount each character and the circumstances that were important in their lives. Loser is a very special book. Donald Zinkoff is an extra-ordinary character. His giraffe hat, his love for school, his uncontrollable giggles, his belief that he runs so fast. He wants to sit in that first seat in class, and yet his last name dooms him to the last seat in the last row. Until the 4th grade when his teacher seats him in the first row. Oh, how he loves that teacher. Yahoo! Zinkoff reminds me of no other student I have ever encountered. Maybe by the time they get to sixth grade, they have had that exuberance knocked out of them. Maybe that is why I cried so hard while reading this book. While Donald becomes a hero in our mind while searching for the girl on a leash in a snowstorm, Spinelli doesn't rally the classmates in a stunning salute. He eases us out, and I guess we know that things are going to be all right for Zinkoff.

As a fifth grade teacher, I picked up Jerry Spinelli's Loser to preview whether it would make an appropriate read aloud selection for my students. Loser tells the story of Donald Zinkoff's childhood. At first, Donald appears to be an average elementary school kid, but as he grows older, his classmates begin to view him differently. Before, Donald was silly and clumsy, but in fourth grade, suddenly he is seen as weird and strange. An important turning point in the story happens when Zinkoff's poor coordination causes his fourth grade classmates to lose an athletic contest. By the end of the day, Donald has a new name-"Loser." Spinelli spends the rest of the book discussing Zinkoff's move to middle school and hinting that somehow, Zinkoff will change from "zero" to "hero." When a neighborhood girl is missing, Zinkoff sees his chance to become popular. When she is finally found, will Donald Zinkoff still be a "Loser?" I enjoyed reading Loser for a number of reasons. First, the plot of Loser is a simple one that I think every human-young and old-can relate to. Everyone's been teased one time or another. I think it would be an interesting experience for all readers to see how one character deals with being teased. Zinkoff is such a complicated character because he doesn't even realize that others see him as a loser. Most people would feel hurt and embarrassed (maybe even angry) if they were in Donald's shoes, but not Zinkoff. Because he is so oblivious to his classmate's taunts, I started to believe that there was more to Zinkoff than Jerry

Spinelli was saying. Is Zinkoff just clumsy and weird or does he suffer from real learning and behavioral disabilities? I kept hoping Spinelli would explain more about Donald and his condition. My class and I just finished Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key by Jack Gantos, which is about the life of a young boy with ADHD. I think that book was better for younger readers because it explained WHY some kids behave as they do. In *Loser*, we never actually learn why Zinkoff acts like such a "loser." My favorite part of the book happens late in the story when Zinkoff tries to rescue a missing girl. I predicted that he would find her, return her to her thankful family, and become the most popular boy in middle school. I was excited to see that *Loser* doesn't have a happily-ever-after ending. If you are a fan of realistic fiction books for children, *Loser* would be a great choice. Still, I have mixed feelings whether I would share this book with my class. The writing is mostly simple sentences, but there is more complicated language that I think they would appreciate better when they are a few years older. I would recommend this book for middle school students through adults because they can all relate to the story and they'd be able to answer many of the questions that come up in *Loser*. Whether or not I decide to use *Loser*, I still think all elementary school students should be exposed to Jerry Spinelli (*Maniac Magee*, *Wringer*, *Fourth Grade Rats*, *The Library Card*) because he writes about real childhood situations and problems. Most children's books do not do this, but *Loser* does. Jerry Spinelli's *Loser* is definitely not a "loser." Check it out!

As a Newbery Award-winning author, Spinelli can expect readers to have high expectations. Especially when he produces a novel in the "young adult" genre. Fortunately, Spinelli rarely disappoints and he doesn't disappoint here. *Loser* is the story Donald Zinkoff as he moves from the first through the sixth grades. In essence, it is the story of how "winners" and "losers" are created. In the early grades, Zinkoff may be a little odd but his peers have not yet learned how and why to exclude certain children. As time goes on, however, Zinkoff's love of school (despite his rather limited abilities) and, in particular, poor performance at sports makes him an outcast. It should be understood that this novel is basically an interesting character study of a single character--Zinkoff. Despite the rather dramatic wandering in the snowstorm near the end of the book, there is not a lot of action beyond the ordinary day-to-day events in the life of a young man. But this is one of the things that gives this book its charm. That, and Zinkoff's own obliviousness to his social status. It is nice to see a character who basically likes himself. On the other hand, this is a clue to the novel's weakness. This is basically a very sophisticated story about a boy who has social problems as well as real problems that are only hinted at. As an adult, I found it very true and interesting but it works on a level higher than a lot of younger readers might be capable of reaching. Teenage readers

might get a lot from this novel but will they read a story about a grade-schooler? I am afraid this novel will have a tough time finding an audience which is too bad because it is well worth reading.

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