



## Jack Gantos

### TeachingBooks Movie Transcript

Jack Gantos, interviewed in his studio in Boston, Massachusetts on August 13, 2001.

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I like journaling a lot because it's the one place I can go to and say anything, be anyone, wear any hat, say anything silly, say anything rowdy, be as loud or as quiet or as crazy or as wacky as I can be, and it's also a place where I can discover maybe another little section of myself.

This is a short stack of journals I have. More than 150 journals are packed away in boxes. I try everyday to do a little something in my journal. And a lot of times I just walk around with a packet of Post-It notes in my pocket. It doesn't necessarily mean that the journal entry is a great, thoughtful, heartfelt moment. Sometimes it's just as mundane as a recipe I'm thinking about. This is the journal where when I get an idea that I think this is a keeper, it goes in this journal. This is like the chief of the journals, right here.

#### **Teaching Journaling**

When I work with kids on journaling, which I like to do a lot, one of the things I do is make sure they set that journal up like a real pro. So we have sections for the journal. The first thing, we draw. I make them draw their neighborhoods because I want them to start paying attention to where they live. Then we make lists of things: good days, bad days, embarrassing days, homework, sports, music. And then we start trying to draw connections between where they live, who they know, what they know about, and what they're doing. Get them to think of the connections. That's what a story is. It's a sequence of connections. And the journal is a great place for them to practice that.

#### **On Jack Henry**

When I started the Jack Henry books, and I knew that they were autobiographical, the first thing I always have to do is go back in my old journals as a child, and I reread that section of time in those journals. I pull out all the really good juicy details. And then when I write a story, there is something on the gut level or some incident that really took place that's true. And so whenever I get ready to write a Jack Henry book, first person I look at is me.

### **On *Rotten Ralph***

Rotten Ralph has been around for 26 years. And I think he has been around for 26 years because every kid makes mistakes. Every kid explores the other side. Now, Rotten Ralph is a character that's always violating that line of behavior. But one of the great things for Ralph and, of course, the only reason the books have endured, is because Sarah provides unconditional love. Recently I've started writing Rotten Ralph chapter books. I just wanted to give some of those emerging readers just a little more time with the book. So they're short chapters, high energy, lots of rotten stuff, naturally, to keep them interested, but just a little bit longer.

### **On Joey Pigza**

Probably one of the most attractive qualities that the Joey books offer the reader is that Joey, at the center of his heart, is a very good kid. He's got problems, personal problems. He's got family problems. He's got community problems. He's got school problems. He's got special ed problems. And so for him every time he has a desire to do good, there just seems to be a hurdle for him. Sometimes he gets over it. Sometimes he trips over it. But, still, in the reader's mind, he's trying, and every kid tries.

When I get ready to put together a novel, generally what I do is I try and write all the interesting parts first. I write all the really juicy sections because that's where I'm having the biggest gut feeling for the book, and I trust that gut feeling. I wrote a lot at the Boston Public Library. And they had one of those old pencil sharpeners, you know, with that dial on the front where you can dial the size of the pencil. And I was sharpening a pencil, and I looked at that and I saw this big hole, and I thought Joey would stick his finger in the hole and he'd give that a rip. So I got that little template. The shoe fly pie, got that little template. And so once I started getting those moments, I knew I was going to draw lines from one to the next to the next.

### **On Writing for Children**

I know one of the reasons why I write for children. It's because children are the best readers in the country. They live those books. They imagine those books. They travel emotionally and mentally into the books. They're actually the most absorbent readers there are. They're adhesive to the word. And when I get letters from children, I get letters from children who have read a book, are motivated to write me, and tell me exactly how it changed something in their life. And that would always make me write for children.

### **Books by Jack Gantos**

- HOLE IN MY LIFE, Farrar Straus Giroux, 2002
- ROTTEN RALPH PLAYS FAIR (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), Farrar Straus Giroux, 2002
- WHAT WOULD JOEY DO?, Farrar Straus Giroux, 2002
- ROTTEN RALPH HELPS OUT (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), Farrar Straus Giroux, 2001
- JOEY PIGZA LOSES CONTROL, Farrar Straus Giroux, 2000
- JACK ON THE TRACKS: FOUR SEASONS OF FIFTH GRADE, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1999
- ROTTEN RALPH'S THANKSGIVING WISH (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), HarperCollins Publishers, 1999
- WEDDING BELLS FOR ROTTEN RALPH (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), HarperCollins Publishers, 1999
- BACK TO SCHOOL FOR ROTTEN RALPH (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), HarperCollins Publishers, 1998

- JOEY PIGZA SWALLOWED THE KEY, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1998
- ROTTEN RALPH HAS THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), HarperCollins Publishers, 1998
- ROTTEN RALPH HOWLS (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), HarperCollins Publishers, 1998
- DESIRE LINES, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997
- JACK'S BLACK BOOK, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997
- ROTTEN RALPH'S ROTTEN ROMANCE (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), Houghton Mifflin, 1996
- ZIP SIX, Bridge Works Publications, 1996
- JACK'S NEW POWER: STORIES FROM A CARIBBEAN YEAR, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1995
- HEADS OR TAILS: STORIES FROM THE SIXTH GRADE, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1994
- NOT SO ROTTEN RALPH (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), Houghton Mifflin, 1994
- HAPPY BIRTHDAY ROTTEN RALPH (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), Houghton Mifflin, 1990
- ROTTEN RALPH'S SHOW AND TELL (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), Houghton Mifflin, 1989
- ROTTEN RALPH'S TRICK OR TREAT (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), Houghton Mifflin, 1986
- RED'S FIB, Jim Henson Associates, 1985
- ROTTEN RALPH'S ROTTEN CHRISTMAS (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), Houghton Mifflin, 1984
- WILLY'S RAIDERS, Parents Magazine Press, 1981
- SWAMPY ALLIGATOR, Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 1980
- WEREWOLF FAMILY, THE, Houghton Mifflin, 1980
- GREEDY GREENY, Doubleday, 1979
- PERFECT PAL, THE, Houghton Mifflin, 1979
- AUNT BERNICE, Houghton Mifflin, 1978
- WORSE THAN ROTTEN RALPH (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), Houghton Mifflin, 1978
- FAIR WEATHER FRIENDS, Houghton Mifflin, 1977
- ROTTEN RALPH (illustrated by Nicole Rubel), Houghton Mifflin, 1976
- SLEEPY RONALD, Houghton Mifflin, 1976

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