

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Crash

by

### Jerry Spinelli

### Book Information

Jerry Spinelli, Crash  
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Interest Level: MG

Seventh-grader "Crash" Coogan is comfortable with his tough, aggressive behavior, until his relationship with a Quaker boy and his grandfather's stroke make him consider the meaning of friendship and the importance of family. The plot contains profanity.

**Award:** Misc./Other; State Award; Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

**Topics:** Behavior, Misc./Other; Family Life, Misc./Other; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; Read Now Power Up Recommended Lists, Onward and Upward: Change; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 6-8; READNOW - Renaissance Learning, RLI - Grades 4-6 (Theme: Friends and Family); Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Recommended Reading, Children's Literature Choice

### Main Characters

Abby Coogan Crash's younger sister; she is a tomboy and an environmental activist

Jane Forbes the beautiful girl who moves into town; Crash has a crush on her

John (Crash) Coogan a boy who grows from being a materialistic jock to an understanding friend and family member

Mike Deluca Crash's friend; a rough and crude jock

Penn Webb a unique boy who helps Crash learn the true nature of friendship and family

Scooter Crash's grandfather, who comes to live with the family; later he is debilitated by a stroke

### Vocabulary

**habitat** the environment in which an animal or plant thrives

**prehistoric** taking place before history was recorded; old

**stroke** a medical condition resulting from the blockage or rupture of a blood vessel in the brain

**swabbies** a nautical term referring to the sailors in charge of swabbing, or mopping, the deck of a ship

**thrift shop** a store that sells used clothing, furniture, and miscellaneous household items at a discounted price

### Synopsis

John Coogan earned the nickname Crash as a child and has been living up to it ever since. He begins the story remembering how he first met Penn Webb, the new boy in his neighborhood. From the beginning, Penn puzzles Crash, as he never gets mad or holds a grudge regardless of how Crash torments him. Instead, Penn tries harder to be friends and even invites Crash over to dinner. At dinner, Crash discovers the Webbs are not a typical family. Penn's parents are older than most and, because they are Quakers, their lifestyle and home are much different from those of average Americans. Despite what looks like disadvantages to Crash, Penn's parents are supportive and attentive, something that Crash's parents always seem too busy to be. After that dinner, Crash avoids Penn and only takes interest in him again after a new kid, Mike Deluca, moves into the neighborhood.

Mike and Crash are alike and become best friends almost immediately. They also quickly target Penn as a person to torment, mainly because he is different. They pick on him throughout grade school, and by the first day of seventh grade things have not changed. That year Jane Forbes moves to town. Her beauty surpasses the other girls', but she wants nothing to do with Crash, who is smitten with her. After school, Crash and Mike go to football practice and discover that Jane is trying out for cheerleading ... and so is Penn!

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The next few weeks are relatively uneventful. Crash is busy with football, and he tries to get his father to come to their first game. He plays brilliantly the entire time, but his parents never show up. Penn's parents, however, are there and cheer him on the whole time. When Crash returns home that night disappointed, his spirit is lifted when he finds his grandfather, Scooter, has come to visit and plans to stay with them for quite a while. Since he is a man who gives his grandchildren love, attention, and a sense of security, Scooter's visit is timely, for Crash's mother announces that because of the new mall being built, she will be working even more. However, trouble threatens when Crash's sister, Abby, comes home and announces that she and other protesters are planning to prevent the mall from being built.

At the school dance, Jane turns down Crash and dances with Penn instead. The next week Crash's ego is somewhat soothed when Jane and Penn are kicked off the cheerleading squad because they left a game early to protest the construction of the mall. Abby is present at the protest as well and is featured on TV, which leads to a confrontation between her and her mother.

During a family football game at Thanksgiving, Crash recklessly tackles his grandfather. Scooter is okay, but that night, Crash realizes Scooter is getting old. A few weeks later, Crash's fears mount when Scooter ends up in the hospital after having a serious stroke. Penn brings his precious "Missouri mud" to the house for Scooter as a gift for healing. At this time, Crash begins to change, finding that he has less in common with Mike and more in common with his sister and Penn.

Crash and Penn both are fast runners and must compete to run at the Penn Relays. In the race-off, Crash, who has never lost before, gives Penn a gift, a fair win that lets Penn compete with the relay team and impress his great-grandfather, who once had run in the Relays and had chosen Penn's name for them.

After the race-off, Crash's life is very different. His

mother only works part-time so she can spend more time at home, Scooter climbs the stairs alone, and the family plans activities together. Crash has learned to value the essential things and to place less value on material things. Because of his changed attitude, he has become friends with Penn and Jane.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

Near the end of the story, why does Crash's mother decide to work less?

*There are two main reasons for her decision. First, Scooter is home and needs more care than he had in the past. Second, she thought about how little time she was able to spend with her kids, and she wants to change that. By working part-time, she can give her children and her father more time and attention.*

### Literary Analysis

Why is Crash's name so appropriate for his character? Give examples of the different ways he "crashes" through life.

*Crash's name fits him through most of the story because he rarely seems to give much consideration to the words and actions of others or give much thought to his own. Instead, he just says or does whatever he wants without considering how he might affect the people around him. Some of the best examples of this are when he blurts out comments during dinner at Penn's house, the way he asks Jane to dance, and the way he tackles Scooter in the football game. In each case, Crash is focused on himself and unconcerned about the people around him.*

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#### Inferential Comprehension

Why is Abby so excited when the whole family finally sits down to eat a meal together?

*Because her parents both work full-time, it is not often that all four members of the family have the opportunity to eat and talk together. As a result, Abby is very happy when they have the chance to do so. She senses what things are most important in life.*

#### Constructing Meaning

The author uses a lot of figurative language in the story. Find at least two examples of figurative language in the story and explain what they mean.

*There are many examples that students could cite from the story, so responses will vary. In chapter 29, Crash describes the feeling of tackling Scooter as they play football: "he felt like sticks ...." This simile suggests how frail Scooter is and how easily he falls to the ground. Another example can be found at the beginning of chapter 25. Crash remembers "the look on Jane Forbes's warthog face." This metaphor is used to show how angry Crash is because Jane refused to dance with him. In reality, Crash thinks she is beautiful.*

at Penn's house, Mr. Webb tells Crash that "in a lot of ways we're rich." Besides the amount of money someone has, ask the students how a person can be rich. In what ways do they think they are rich? Have students make a list of all the "riches" they have in life and illustrate them.

**Differentiating Fact and Opinion** At the end of the story, Crash says he is not surprised that Scooter climbed the stairs, because he had dipped Scooter's big toe in the Missouri mud. In Crash's opinion, the mud is a magical cure. Have students think of one "magical" cure they have heard of and research that cure to find out if there is evidence to support the effectiveness of it. They should decide whether the cure actually works or if the claim is false. Have students share their results with the class.

## Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** Before Scooter's stroke, his bed is a safe retreat for Crash and Abby. Ask students where they go to feel safe and comfortable. Have them draw a picture of this special place and title it. Students who wish to explain their drawings to the class may be encouraged to do so.

**Comparing and Contrasting** There are many diverse characters and personality types in *Crash*. Ask students which character they are most like. Have students choose one and make a collage, using newspaper and magazine clippings, personal drawings, or anything else that shows how the character and student are alike.

**Understanding Dialog** When Crash eats dinner