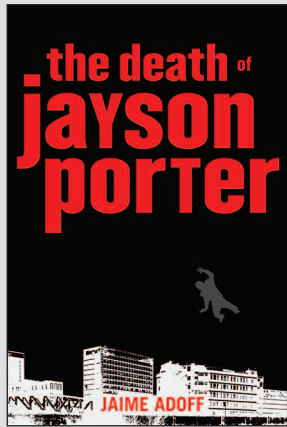


This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and children's author. Visit her Web site at www.tracievaughnzimmer.com to find hundreds of other guides to children's and young adult literature.

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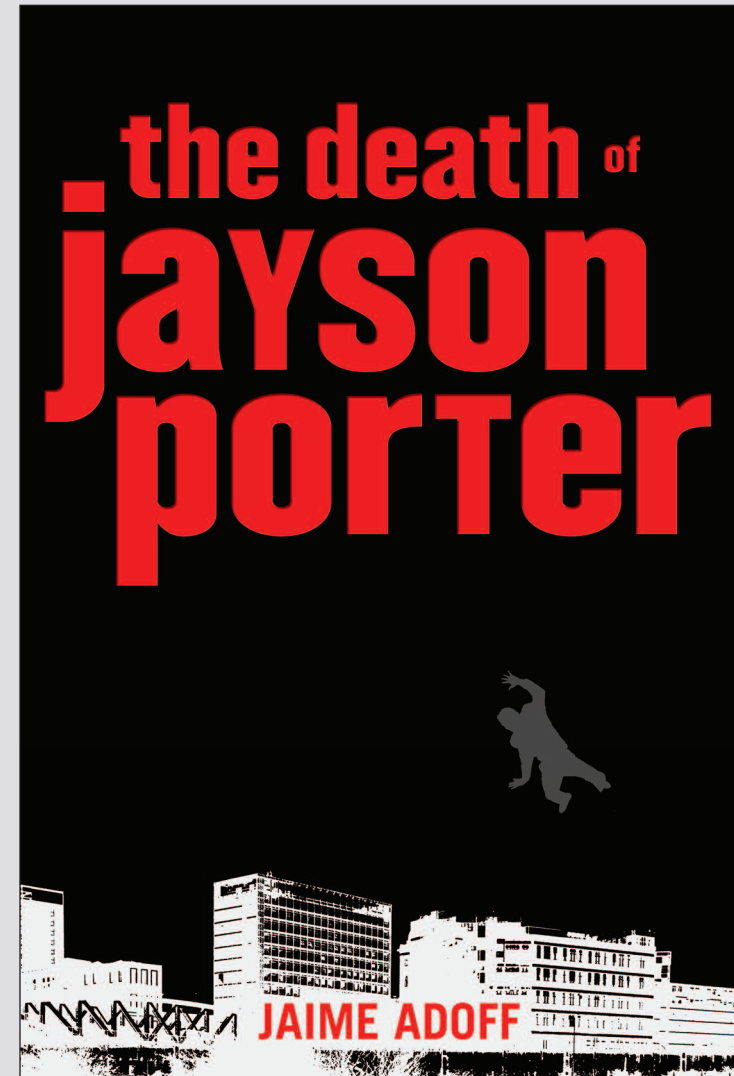
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DISCUSSION GUIDE

DISNEY • JUMP AT THE SUN

Disney • Jump at the Sun

114 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011

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About the Book

Sixteen-year-old Jayson Porter wants to believe things will get better. But the harsh realities of his life never seem to change. Living in the inland Florida projects with his abusive mother, he tries unsuccessfully to fit in at his predominately white school, and struggles to maintain even a thread of a relationship with his drug-addicted father. As the pressure mounts, there's only one thing that Jayson feels he has control over—the choice of whether to live or die. In this powerful, gripping novel, Coretta Scott King Award-winning author Jaime Adoff explores the gritty reality of a teenager's life, finding hope even in the bleakest of hours.

About the Guide

This guide includes discussion questions and projects intended to extend the use of the novel into classrooms, book clubs, and literature circles. It should promote discussion on the themes of the novel, including depression, poverty, despair, race, friendship, family life, teen sexuality, betrayal, violence, and abuse.



Pre-reading

Read the poems in “After” (pages 5–6) and discuss what you think of the opening. Do you think this scene will become real later in the story? How do you think the main character gets to this point in his life? Predict what the consequences of his decisions will be.

Questions to Consider

- 1 Why do you think the author decided to divide the novel into parts, “After” and “Before”? The author also uses a prose/poetry style to tell this story. Why do you think he picked this format? What does it add to the narrative?
- 2 What do you learn about the main character in chapter one? Describe him and the realities of his life. Compare them to your own. How would you cope under his extraordinary circumstances?
- 3 Bandon is a community divided “There’s the white section—the haves. And the black section—the never had shit.” (page 21) Is your community divided as well? Could things ever become more equal? How? How can kids be given the same opportunities for education and success?
- 4 What is Jayson’s “outside game”? Do you have one too? Do you think everyone shows the world a face that is not really who they are? Who gets to see the real side of Jay? Who sees your real side?
- 5 Describe Jay’s relationship with his mother, Lizzie. Do you consider the way she treats him abusive? Is there a line between discipline and abuse? Does Jay have some alternative choices to taking his mother’s treatment? Why doesn’t he react?

- 6** Explain why Jay’s relationship with his dad is so tenuous. How has addiction controlled his father’s life? Why do you think Jay bothers to see his father at all? Would you stay in a relationship with a parent who had a drug problem? Would you blame the addict or the addiction? Why?
- 7** Why doesn’t Jay confide in Trax about his life at home? Does Trax share the whole truth with Jay? How does this add to Trax’s tragedy? Do you think Jay could’ve prevented the accident if he had known? Could Trax have prevented Jay’s decision to kill himself?
- 8** Compare and contrast Milburn (where Jay goes to school) to Bandon. Do you think the school gives Jay hope, or does it contribute to his despair to see how other people live? Why? Why does Jayson prefer being at school rather than at home?
- 9** Who is April? What does she mean to Jay? Is their love for each other real? What makes you think so or not? Why isn’t their relationship enough to prevent Jay’s decision to end his life? Why didn’t he turn to April about his feelings of hopelessness?
- 10** What does Jay finally learn about his own true parents? Do you think this contributes to his decision to kill himself? Why? Is there ever a good reason to keep the truth from someone? Why or why not?
- 11** Discuss the consequences of Jayson’s decision to jump. What are the physical, psychological, and emotional aspects of his decision? Does he regret it? Why? What other choices did he have? Why do you think he felt unable to do any of them?
- 12** Where is Jayson at the end of the story? Do you think there will be long-term consequences for his decision? What type of parent will Trina be? Will his new life with Trina help him to live a better life?

Projects

Language Arts

Write a letter from one character to another at any point in the story. Be sure to stay “in character” as you write and explore the relationships that make up this story.

Health

Create a poster or pamphlet about suicide prevention. Be sure to list the signs and warnings associated with it, and include local numbers to services that provide help for people at risk. After the project has been graded, distribute the posters or pamphlets to local restaurants, teen hotspots, and service agencies.

Math

Find statistics that compare America’s “haves” to the “have-nots.” Create a bar or pie graph comparing each group’s access to education, health care, nutrition, and housing.



About the Author

Jaime Adoff is the author of the critically acclaimed *The Song Shoots Out of My Mouth: A Celebration of Music*, a Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award Honor Book; *Names Will Never Hurt Me*, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults nominee; and *Jimi and Me*, winner of the 2006 Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent. He is the son of the late Newbery Award-winning author Virginia Hamilton and renowned poet Arnold Adoff.



Author Interview

1 How did you develop your unique style of writing? What's your writing process like?

I would say that my writing style began when I started writing songs.

From my teens into my twenties, I was really writing poetry—but with music. Later, when I started writing professionally, I already felt comfortable with words and how to express myself. It was not that much of a stretch from songwriting to writing poetry; and from writing poetry to writing poetic novels was, I feel, a natural progression. Starting small then expanding. Just seeing one piece, working on that, giving it a title, then going on to the next. . . .

Writing a poetic novel is very freeing, I love how I can make a piece more proselike if I wish, or more poetic, depending on what is best for the book at that particular time. Ultimately, for me, this style of writing gives the story an immediacy and a raw emotional impact that sometimes is lacking in a more traditional YA novel. More important, the poetic novel is all-inclusive in its readership, bringing together the facile reader with the reluctant and the “I never even finished a book before” reader. It truly is a win-win situation for author and teen alike.

My process is kind of like an artistic recipe: Drink 2–4 cups of strong coffee early in the morning; add a large block of “uninterrupted” time to create; throw in many hours of sweat, frustration, and pure joy; add a pinch of magic, a gallon of inspiration, a boatload of confidence (real or imagined), and months of writing and rewriting and rewriting and revising and revising. Did I mention revising? Oh yeah, revising. . . .

2 How did you find Jayson's story? What do you hope reader's take from it?

I think Jayson's story found me. I had been working on the idea for this story on and off for a few years—working on other books at the same time and never getting too far with this one. Then, after a school visit, it became crystal clear that this was the book I needed to write next.

I met a teenage boy who read me a poem, which I first thought was a work of fiction. Then he switched from third to first person and began reading in a calm voice about how his sister had found him “hanging there” in his room and had cut him down, saving his life. It wasn't just what he had done that affected me so deeply, but how he *dealt* with what he had done. The person he became after.

There is so much to take and learn from this book, I think it is left best for each reader to see what that is for themselves. I did not intend to make some sort of statement with this book, but just to tell a story that I felt very strongly needed to be told.

I will say that I believe in the strength and resiliency of teens. I believe in hope; even when things look the bleakest, there is always hope.

I think it is also worth mentioning that when all else fails them—that is, adults and society as a whole—It never ceases to amaze me how a kid can get back up from what most of us would think was a sure knockout punch. Jayson's story is very tough; sometimes it was quite hard for me to write it. But it's real and it happens, sadly, every day. . . .

3 What can your fans look forward to next?

More unique and powerfully told stories. More great books. . . .