Souders Log, Ch. 3

***Joey Pigza Loses Control* by Jack Gantos**

My attention was immediately captured by the title phrases ‘loses control’ the author lets us know through the title that something was possessed, and then lost. The thing lost, control, possession of control has many connotations and to me in this book control is defined as intention. This is a long way around to explain why I think this book should be titled, *Joey Pigza Loses His Intention.* Joey had a specific intention that he took with him on his visit to reacquaint himself with his Dad. As the book unfolds we see Joey loses his intention and in the process nearly loses himself.

Joey let us know early on in the first chapter his main intent. He lets the reader know that before he went to Special Ed and got his new meds it was impossible for him to sit still and do anything that lasted longer than the snap of his fingers. After Joey got his new meds he started to settle down and think. He started to think about the good things he wanted to happen. These good things were his first intention. The trip had an intention and the intention was good things. I’ve repeated this to show how important his intention was.

Joey reveals how important he knows the new meds are when he tells his mother that maybe his meds were wearing off when he accidently struck his dog with a rock. She responds to his self diagnosis with the question, “Do you really think they are wearing off?” His response, “Can I get back to you on that” shows the reader that he has real knowledge concerning the meds ability to keep him focused.

After his mom left him with his dad he experienced his dad wanting to do something that he (Joey) felt was a little to young for him. He decided that it was okay because he remembered his intention and realized that he and his dad had to start somewhere.

There is a clear line of Joey losing his intention when his dad flushed the meds down the commode. His strong intention was changed to hope. Hope is not intention. Hope is passive desire without action. He tells his dad the morning after the flushing when his dad asked him how he felt, “I don’t know if I feel like a new man or my old self. I just don’t know, but I’m hoping for the best.” Here we see Joey’s intention slipping away and his first acknowledgment of that through this dialog.

After several days of no medication Joey’s behavior becomes alien to the Joey we first met in the book. We find him dwelling on the thought that his birth was an accident and he wasn’t wanted. We also encounter him lying to his mom when in phone conversation with her. He tells her, when questioned about his meds, “Yea I have a patch on right now.” This lie is his feeble attempt to remember his intention of good things happening.

After an increasing level of emotions out of control and physical manifestations of Joey’s old behavior he has enough sense of self survival left that he calls his mother and she comes and retrieves him from his dad’s questionable custody. Upon arrival she puts a medication patch on him and he knows that things are going to be better. The reader senses that the genuine care giver for Joey has saved him and knows that things will be better. Joey knows he will be able to once again be in possession of his intentions. The book gives us the idea that for some children medication is a necessity. Taking this medication is a good thing and other children on meds should not only relate to this necessity if they read this novel it may help them to overcome any anxiety that other children may create for them. I see this as a positive novel with a positive message. I know there are many questions concerning early medication of children, however, in some cases medication is an obvious alternative to not medicating.

**Group Discussion**

***The curious incident of the dog in the night-time,* by Mark Haddon**

This strong, mysterious novel was the focus of our reading group discussion. I could go into a long explanation of how this book affected me when I first read it a little over a year ago, but that explanation is now no longer valid. I was so blinded to some of the most interesting elements my group members saw and their enlightened vision was akin to cataract removal. What for me on my reading of this novel was dull and dim the first time read became illuminated with bright youthful eyes. I was deaf to dialog until it was given to me in high fidelity by group members who were blessed with voices that I had not heard in my previous reading. These additional eyes and ears assisted me in hearing and witnessing a completely deeper and more sophisticated novel than the one I read so long ago when I read it alone, deafer and blinder than I am now.

In a small biographical sketch on the title page of this novel it is revealed the Mark Haddon is a writer and illustrator of numerous award winning children’s books. We find also that when he was a young man he worked with autistic individuals. It is obvious through this story that the time period he was working with autistic children he really connected with some of their specific traits and was able through illustration and dialog to bring the thought process of his protagonist into a front and center view.

Different members of our group spoke of experiencing the feeling of isolation and lack of trust that we find in Christopher John Francis Boone. His need to place labels on everything either through numbers or color descriptions. His world was stark and to the point without much ado about refection or rumination on others motives. He reacted to the evidence revealed without too much concern for the nuances of the evidence.

We discussed how the actual horrible image of a dog killed with a pitchfork seemed not as horrible as it would be seen by most of us. One of our group members explained how she thought it was a miniature poodle and realized through discussion it was a large standard poodle. Yet, through Christopher’s eyes and his dialog we pictured this horrible killing in a very clinical way. Christopher’s vision was realized to be a clinician’s vision. His exactitude seemed to shut out emotional responses and the author created this so well that the reader becomes desensitized to what normally would be horrific.

Different group members saw through the lens of desire how much Christopher’s Father felt betrayed by Christopher’s Mother and how this betrayal led to the big lie. Christopher, your Mother has died. This lie discovered by Christopher when he found a stack of hidden letters that were addressed to him and hidden from him by his father.

Christopher’s neighbor reveals to Christopher his mother is not dead when she is surprised at Christopher’s announcement that his mother is dead. She responds that she didn’t know that and when and how.

Our group revealed to me the love that Christopher’s Father still held for his wife. When Christopher’s Father revealed that he was the murderer of the dog Christopher shows us that he can feel terror. He hides and when he realizes he can no longer live with his father he charts out by a graph the different options he has and the only one that seems feasible is to escape and reach his mother’s home in London. The journey with his pet rat is full of many side tracked adventures and run ins with police officers and use of a money machine and many things that others, who thought they knew Christopher, would have been surprised to see his unexpected abilities to complete the journey to his mother.

Another powerful impact that our group discussion had on each of us was that without stating it directly we touched on nearly every narrative component in the story. We developed a common language that allowed us in our diversity to communicate our feelings and discoveries in our reading. We discussed genre, theme, character, plot, setting and points of view. We even got into style of the narrative without coaching it just flowed.

One big surprise was when Dr. Parsons reveal that through our discussion we had used the lens of transactional criticism when we compared our own actions to the characters. How in our discussions we used text to text criticism with *Joey Pigza Loses Control.* How the social and cultural reaction to Christopher’s condition was obvious to all of us.

Christopher’s final resolution was not clear. He was left with his mother but it seemed as if all of us in the group agreed that his father was the more loving and passionate parent. We were left hanging as to what the future held for Christopher, but at the same time we seemed to all realize that he was learning and in his learning there was the possibility that he would develop into an adult with specific strengths to overcome his disabilities.

This reading group experience has given me a tool I will be able to use when I become a group reading leader at the library. I, through actually experiencing a reading group, will be more enabled to lead such a group with skill and a determination to offer others this enlightening experience.