

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Best-Laid Plans of Jonah Twist by Natalie Honeycutt

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## Book Information

Natalie Honeycutt, The Best-Laid Plans of Jonah Twist

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115 Pages

Book Level: 3.5

Interest Level: MG

Busy third-grader Jonah Twist must endure giving a school report on elephant seals with the bossy Juliet Fisher, while worrying that his new kitten may have eaten his older brother's hamster.

**Topics:** Animals, Cats; Community Life, School; Family Life, Brothers

## Main Characters

Granville Jones best-at-everything friend in the eyes of Jonah

Jonah Twist third-grader who is the main character and at first felt himself inferior but develops more confidence in his own plans and abilities

Jonah's father separated or divorced from Jonah's mother who lives in a condo and works in public relations

Jonah's mother hard-working, separated or divorced live-in parent to Jonah and Todd

Juliet Fisher "bossy," intelligent and unpopular third-grader, who becomes friends with Jonah and Granville through working together on a social studies project

Mr. Rosetti elderly neighbor and friend of Jonah who disappears when he breaks his hip and is taken to the hospital

Mrs. Fisher Juliet's mother and dietitian at the hospital

Mrs. Lacey third-grade teacher who helps Jonah and Granville and Juliet through the difficulties of working as a team and encourages them to become friends

Ms. Garrett school librarian

Todd Twist older brother of Jonah who likes to talk and have things his way

## Vocabulary

**bond** to establish an attachment, as between a parent and offspring

**calico** an animal having a spotted or parti-colored coat

**docent** a knowledgeable guide, especially one who conducts visitors through a museum

**reluctant** disinclined; marked by hesitation due to unwillingness

**sarcasm** harsh or bitter derision or irony; sneering or cutting remark

## Synopsis

This is the story of the plans of an average boy named Jonah Twist during a portion of his third-grade life--plans which at first seemed to go awry, but reveal a growing boy who as Juliet Fisher put it, was not as bad as he had been. In the end, Jonah's real plan of just being a "very good and thoughtful friend" prevails.

First, Jonah plans to adopt a kitten from his friend Granville Jones. Jonah's older brother, Todd, threatens to thwart Jonah's hopes, since Todd fears for his hamster, Woz. However, their mother decides in favor of giving the kitten, dubbed Mrs. Einstein, a chance.

Woz disappears soon after, with accusations by Todd against Mrs. Einstein. Not believing his kitten would kill the hamster, Jonah comes up with a plan to determine if Woz is still alive.

In addition, Jonah believes Mr. Rosetti is missing. He plans to discover the whereabouts of his missing neighbor and friend.

In school, Granville Jones and Jonah plan to rid themselves of their social studies project partner, Juliet Fisher. But when that fails, together with Juliet, they turn their planning skills toward developing their project about elephant seals.

After many setbacks and twists, Jonah succeeds in fulfilling his plans, particularly, his ultimate plan of

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being a good friend.

## Open-Ended Questions

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

### Initial Understanding

What characteristics made Granville more popular than both Jonah and Juliet at the beginning of the story? Do you expect that to change with time?

*The characteristics could include his ability to plan, awareness of how to get what he wants, sense of humor, and self-confidence. However, as to how these three characters will evolve over time is more debatable, since each has potential strengths and weaknesses as already revealed in the story.*

### Literary Analysis

By the end of the story, the reader has much more respect for the main character than at the beginning of the book. Why did the author portray the character this way and how did she achieve the results she wanted?

*Since the story is one of growth and maturing of its characters, it downplays the abilities of the central character at first in favor of how he views other characters and himself (for better and worse than they are). Eventually, however, each of the main three characters is seen in a clearer light and more comprehensive fashion, while those that dominated early are overshadowed (or at least on more equal footing) later. Reversals (hence the name Jonah "Twist"?) are a main technique of this author for this story, even though it is woven throughout and adequately balanced with good use of foreshadowing.*

### Inferential Comprehension

Which is the more valuable skill, being able to make detailed plans or being able to respond well to situations as they arise?

*Each could be argued, naturally, but the choice may rely more on character tendency than actual inherent value. Choice also helps determine style of leadership and ability to adapt well to others.*

### Constructing Meaning

The story shows how even the best-laid plans often fail or must give way before greater knowledge, conflicting viewpoints, or even fate takes over. What plan supersedes all the rest of Jonah's plans and seems best suited to his nature?

*The answer would probably emphasize his talent for being "a very good and thoughtful friend."*

## Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** The story is set in Westmont, California, in the present (1988). Like Jonah himself, the setting seems to be middle class, although Jonah's parents live in two separate households. Jonah attends Mills Elementary School as a third-grader. Another setting in the story is Point Ano Nuevo, where Jonah, Juliet and Granville go to research the elephant seals and their habitat. A way in which to link story and life would be for students to write descriptions of their "habitat" or environment, whether school or home. For a greater challenge, as a means of practicing comparison (and metaphor), they could research an animal habitat they believe compares to some aspect of their own description, or research it unknowingly first and then try to compare (or contrast) if that works better for them.

**Understanding Literary Features** As indicated under characterization, major themes of *The Best-Laid Plans of Jonah Twist* are friendship and teamwork and how sometimes conscious (selfish) plans must give way to the larger, more primordial plan that shows itself to be beneficial to all. Therefore, even as takes place in the story,

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a group project could be undertaken that ostensibly is to examine animal habitat, but actually is a social study engaging the students themselves. Through being "forced" to take part in teams and encouraged to set their attention on how a particular animal of their choice lives in its natural environment, the students may respond by developing a project that may benefit the students themselves. Teams may realize that working together as "good and thoughtful" friends really is a good plan in the end.

development--offering a better understanding of the author's technique and characterization.

**Understanding Characterization** *The Best-Laid Plans of Jonah Twist* is a book about characters and the development of a third-grader and his friends. The story reveals how to accept and value others first thought to be too different or unworthy and that the individual or even pair of friends can improve as people -- who all together are able to accomplish more than they would otherwise have been able to. The students could write about how Jonah, Granville and Juliet experienced the pangs of development. They might also enjoy discussing or writing about times things didn't work out the way they or others had planned. (Murphy's Law might be cast on one side of the scales and seen if it balances out in the end against "everything turns out for the best.") How are they changing, showing themselves more responsible, more accepting of others and of themselves? What are they looking for in friends? How are they showing themselves to be "thoughtful friends" to others?

**Understanding the Author's Craft** The author's techniques of characterization, foreshadowing and reversal are all very well done in *The Best-Laid Plans of Jonah Twist*. The contrasting characters and how their best-laid plans are reversed to reveal an even better plan make what seems a simple story into a subtly powerful one. It may be instructionally useful to have the students examine the story more closely for those examples of foreshadowing that become apparent only after the story is complete and the reversals revealed. Together they show both the strengths and limitations of each character, as well as where was the greatest