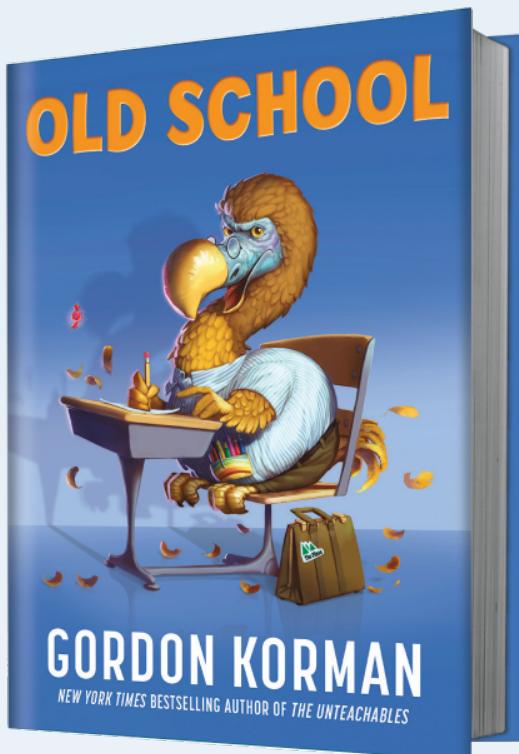


# GORDON KORMAN

# OLD SCHOOL

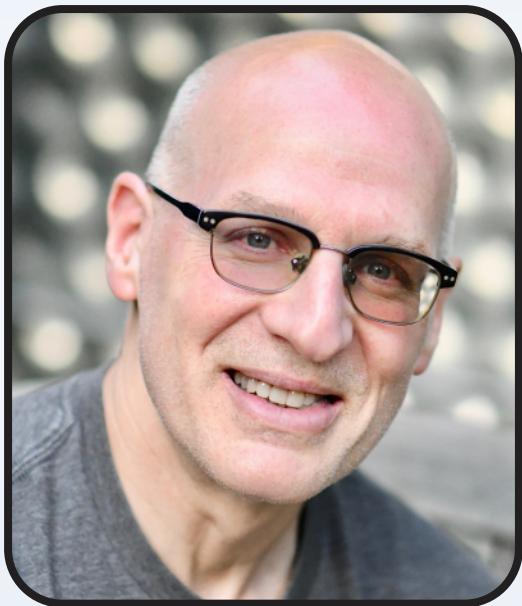


## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



## ABOUT THE BOOK

"This kid is twelve years old going on eighty," says seventh grader Gianna about Dexter, the new student at Wolf's Eye Middle School. Why does Dexter seem old? Because he's been raised and homeschooled at The Pines, the retirement community where his grandmother lives. And Dexter loves it. The old people dote on him. He's learned math from a World War II code breaker and English from a bestselling novelist. But the government insists that Dexter belongs in school, where he doesn't fit in at all! Follow his surprising journey as his fellow students go from shaking their heads about him to seeing him in a whole different light. Sometimes fitting in matters, but sometimes being different changes everything in a good way.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gordon Korman published his first book at age fourteen and since then has written more than one hundred middle grade and teen novels. Favorites include the *New York Times* bestselling *Ungifted*, *Supergifted*, *The Superteacher Project*, *The Unteachables*, *Pop*, *Notorious*, *Unplugged*, *Operation Do-Over*, *Slugfest*, and the *Masterminds* series. Gordon lives with his family on Long Island, New York. You can visit him online at [gordonkorman.com](http://gordonkorman.com).



Guide prepared by Kathleen Odean, a children's literature consultant and former chair of the Newbery Award Committee.

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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is Dexter's living situation when the book opens? Where are his parents? Why hasn't he been in school for the last six years? Why doesn't Dexter want to start at the public school? Talk about why Gianna describes Dexter as, "twelve years old going on eighty" (p. 17). Discuss ways that Dexter's upbringing at The Pines makes it hard for him to adjust to school.
2. How does Dexter change during the story? How does he seem different at the end? How does he stay the same throughout? How do some of his unusual behaviors help him become popular? Talk about the role Teagan plays in his life and how Dexter comes to feel about her in the end.
3. Dexter realizes he didn't fit in partly because "I didn't look like I fit in" (p. 138). How does Jackson inadvertently help Dexter with clothes? Discuss the role of T-shirts in the story. Why are clothes and fitting in important at the middle school? Talk about why Ronny ultimately says about Dexter, "Dude, you don't have to be more like the crowd. . . . The crowd has to be more like you" (p. 217).
4. Dexter's best friend is Leo, who is 99. What is Leo like? Describe his role in World War II. How does he treat Dexter and help him? What is their plan concerning codes for the school board meeting? What are some signs that Leo is slowing down? How does Dexter feel about Leo and about what happens to him in the end? Discuss the fact that each of them is called a "hero" in the story.
5. Describe Gianna's personality and interests, and her relationship with her brother. How does Dexter feel about Gianna in the first weeks? How does that change by the story's end? Why is Gianna intent on writing an article about Dexter? What's her relationship with the newspaper's editor, Traci? Discuss the article about Dexter and the Swiss Army knife that Gianna writes and Traci changes. Why is Gianna angry? How does she deal with it?
6. Describe the evolution of Dexter and Ronny's relationship. Why does Ronny attack Dexter early on? How does Dexter respond? What is Ronny like? Why do you think he's angry so much of the time? How is he struggling in school, and how does Dexter help? What role does the vending machine incident play in their relationship?
7. Jackson says about himself, "I'm not just amazing on the sports field. I'm really smart too, if I say so myself—and I don't have to because everybody knows it" (p. 46). What does this tell you about him? Why is he so upset that Dexter is a better mathlete? How does he try to undermine Dexter? What is Dexter's reaction to how Jackson treats him?
8. Why do you think some of the chapters are from Ms. Napier's point of view? What does she do at the school? What is she like? How does Dexter feel about her? How does Ronny feel about her? Talk about her reaction to the student protests when Dexter is suspended. Who are some of the other teachers or administrators, and what roles do they play in Dexter's time at the school?
9. The middle school building and its furnishings are falling apart. Why hasn't the town fixed it? How does the deteriorating building affect the students? What repairs does Dexter try to make? How do others react to those? Describe why Dexter is suspended for opening the vending machine. In the end, what plan is made about improving the building, and how is the decision related to Leo?
10. How have the residents of the Pines helped Dexter over the years? Why do they enjoy having him around? Why do they enjoy having the middle schoolers visit? Why do the middle school students like visiting? What activities do they do there? Give examples of students who bond with a particular Pines resident and why they do.

# EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

## This Just In

Choose a topic or event in the story other than the vending machine incident and write a newspaper article about it. For example, a local newspaper might cover the middle schoolers visiting The Pines, or the problems with the deteriorating school building. Follow the news formula of “who, what, where, when, and why” in your first paragraph. Then expand on the subject, including real or invented quotes from characters in the book.

## Old School Slang

As a class, make a list of old-fashioned phrases that Dexter uses, which strike his classmates as odd or funny. For example, Gianna doesn't know Dexter's phrase “elbow grease” (p. 62). Sophie also picks up the phrase “out of this world” (p. 210) from Edna, which Jackson mocks. Then brainstorm words and phrases used now that have the same meaning. Discuss why each generation has its own slang.

## “I Wasn’t Born Yesterday”

Dexter likes the residents of the Pines, as eventually do other middle schoolers. Make a list of questions to ask an older person about their life now and in the past, drawing from Old School and your own thoughts. In pairs, find someone over 60 to interview. Start with your list but feel free to add more questions, depending on the interview. Present a summary of the interview and what you learned to the class.

## The Pines vs. WEMS

Was Dexter better off learning at The Pines or WEMS?

Meet in small groups to discuss this question, referring to specifics in the book and considering social as well as academic aspects. Create a graphic organizer with two columns, one labeled “Pros” and the other “Cons.”

Fill in the organizer as a group.

Then take a vote on which was better for Dexter. Share your vote and ideas with the class.

