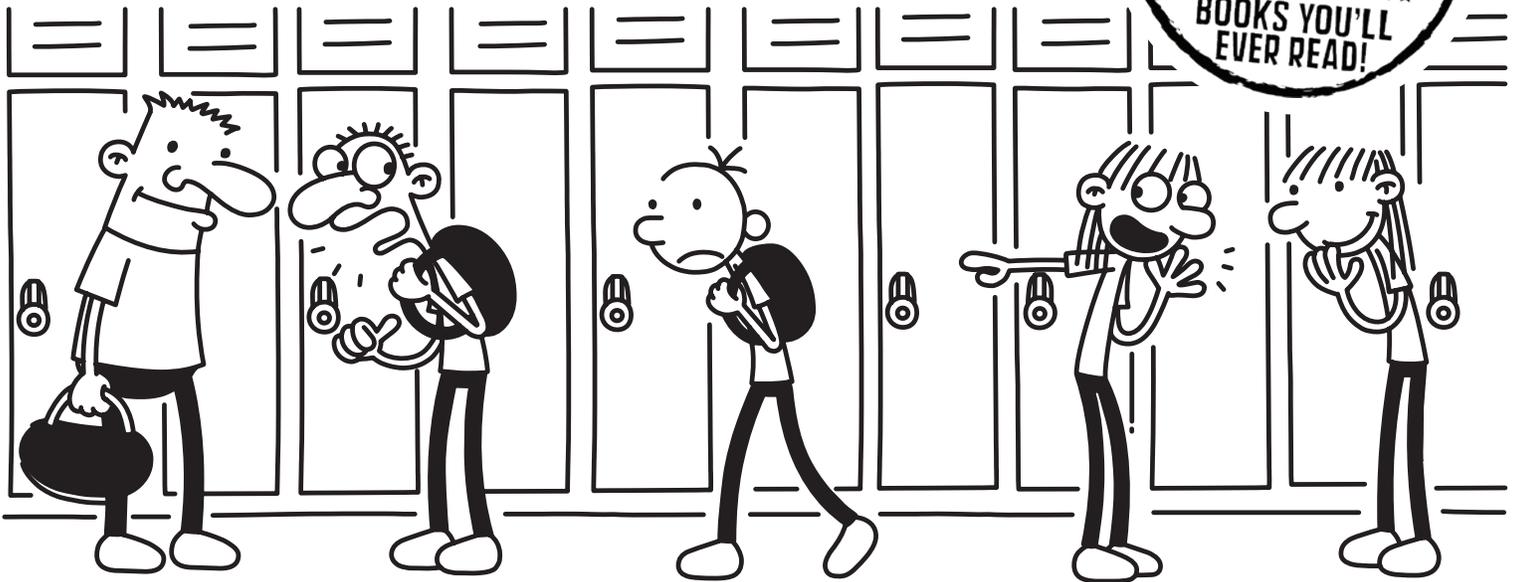


Diary of a Wimpy Kid

A TEACHING GUIDE TO THE SERIES

Encourage self-expression, inspire student writing, spark critical thinking, explore series fiction, and much more.



Includes:

- Assessment
- Teaching rationale
- Student reproducible
- Differentiated instruction
- Technology and research projects
- Discussion questions and writing prompts

WHY WIMPY KID?

Beneath its effective humor and general air of kid-appealing silliness, the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series tackles **themes** that resonate with its readers: conformity, bullying, friendship, loyalty, self-esteem, and the challenge of navigating the sometimes conflicting demands of family, school, peers . . . and one's own conscience. Like many classic comic strips, this is a series that hides its lessons well—and making them explicit for students represents a powerful opportunity to validate kids' love of independent reading.



Of course, the fact that this is also a phenomenally best-selling series does not, by itself, earn it a place in classrooms and school libraries. However, because many, if not most, students will have read one or more of the titles and already shared their enthusiasm with their friends, the popularity of Greg Heffley's adventures can enable you to create a reading community.

In addition, the underlying premise of the entire series—a fictional first-person account of life in middle school told through text and “cartoons”—is one that can easily be leveraged to **promote self-expression** through student writing as well as to engage reflectively and analytically with **multi-modal texts**.

TEACHING WITH WIMPY KID

The ideas in the following pages are intended to be adaptable to a variety of learning contexts and environments at any time of the year. For example, the one-page assessment (p. 8) can be used to follow up on individuals' independent reading, while the discussion questions (p. 4-5) can function as a blueprint for reading circles that focus on Jeff Kinney's work, or as a starting point for connecting the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series to related texts by embedding it into a preexisting thematic unit. Perhaps most promising of all is Wimpy Kid's ability to spark critical thinking about how narratives change in form and substance across media—both through its comic book-like graphics and the movie trilogy that has been made from the series.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide has been developed with flexibility foremost in mind. A good way to introduce any of its projects or discussions, however, might be to have students verbally summarize the books that they have read—reinforcing their own comprehension and filling in gaps in the reading of others. (As memory prompts for these summaries, brief synopses can be found at www.wimpykid.com/books). The Journal Writing Activity (p. 7) can be used as a central part of instruction, or as just another optional project like the ones on the pages that follow it. Similarly, the assessment page (p. 9) can measure the “recall” aspect of comprehension or simply serve as a diagnostic to determine student familiarity with the series. Regardless of how you’d like to use these resources, know that Standards Alignment is provided for handy reference at the end of this guide.

A Note on Grade Level

Experience shows that most readers for the series are in grades 3–7 (ages 8–12). With this in mind, this guide is aimed very roughly at the midpoint of this span, though the material can be adapted up or down to fit your needs. The CCSS correlations are, for example, made at grade 5. The writing exercises and projects can be approached from multiple skill levels, as can the discussion questions.

Making Text-to-Text Connections

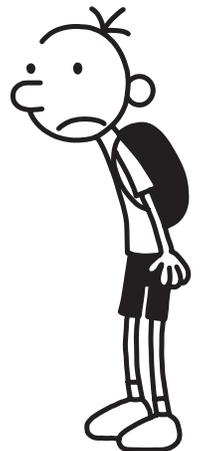
Invite students to link—in discussion, prose, or comics—the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series to their prior knowledge of fiction with similar characters, settings, or themes. For example, challenge them to speculate on how characters they’re familiar with from middle-grade or children’s literature would fare if suddenly transplanted into the world of Greg Heffley. Would they be friends? Foes? How might the appearance of such a character alter the plot of one of Jeff Kinney’s novels?

CENTRAL QUESTIONS AND WRITING PROMPTS: EXPLORING SERIES FICTION WITH DIARY OF A WIMPY KID

Young people interact differently with such books, frequently reading them again and again and reaching out to other fans to discuss them. Indeed, as Victor Watson famously put it in his Reading Series Fiction, a big part of the appeal here is that the experience of children with each new book becomes akin to entering “a room full of friends.” With this notion in mind, you may want to explore with students what it is that makes the Wimpy Kid cast of characters “friends” of theirs. Although deceptively simple, this line of inquiry can lead to unexpectedly personal forms of self-reflection, which is, after all, an important goal of literature.

The following questions, which can be springboards for whole-class or small-group discussion, or as writing prompts for in-class or take-home assignments, can aid you and your students in this exploration.

- How “wimpy” is Greg exactly? Are the reasons that he may think he’s wimpy the same ones that the rest of his world would agree upon?
- How does Greg’s cowardice or anxiety often prompt him to take action that is more bold and risky than others might? Provide examples.
- Why do you think Greg is so good about keeping his “diary” over time? How does it help him in life?
- Compare audience and purpose by considering different media: suppose Greg’s writings were public in some way, published in a school journal or on a personal blog—how would they change?
- If Greg shared some of his thoughts and secrets on social media, what would be the reaction? How might this change if he made posts anonymously?
- How “realistic” is Greg’s world thematically? That is, what issues are covered (and in which books) that exist in the real world every day?
- How do the efforts of Greg and other characters to be popular or avoid embarrassment say something about the price of low self-esteem or the need to be liked above all else? How are “social roles” an important part of the series, both for kids and adults?



- What are the funniest scenes or incidents in the series? What makes them so funny? If you consider your favorite three or four such scenes, what do they have in common?
- How does humor help mask some more serious issues such as trust, loyalty, and fear? In what ways does using humor make it easier for readers to think about such issues and how they surface in their own lives?



- Does the journal/diary structure of each book add to its appeal and readability? Why or why not? Does real life occur as neatly as the dramas in the book? If not, how does Kinney hide the “unrealistic” aspects of structure, pacing, or sequence?
- How do you think Greg would react if he were to look back on his writings as an adult?
- Which characters would be most surprised/flattered/angry if they read the series? Why? In what ways has Greg withheld his true feelings from them? How do social roles affect whom we share our feelings and ideas with?
- How is the series different or similar to other books you have read about young people of roughly the same age?
- How does the art help with the storytelling and make the experience more enjoyable for readers? What would happen if there was much more, or much less, of Greg’s artwork? Would it change how you related to the characters and the situations? Why or why not?

First of all, let me get something straight:
This is a JOURNAL, not a diary.

THE JOY OF JOURNALING

Motivate student writing and connect standards-based curriculum—composing nonfiction, personal anecdotes in particular—by encouraging students to use the Wimpy Kid books as a “mentor text.” Of course, the books themselves are fiction, so you’ll want to emphasize their nonfiction traits such as concision, sequence, coherence, and clarity. Encourage students to record, possibly during a daily in-class writing block, interesting incidents in their everyday lives just as Greg Heffley does. As you inspect student work at periodic intervals, consider drawing attention to the way that the efficient entries in Jeff Kinney’s novels encourage readers to keep reading by revealing the feelings of the “author” (i.e., Greg) while recounting humorous dilemmas that demand resolution.

Here are some additional points to keep in mind with this assignment:

- Entries need not be made on a daily basis in a journal (as opposed to a diary, where it is expected); provide flexibility, then, by setting a minimum guideline such as four per week.
- Make sure the duration of the assignment fits your curriculum map—you can have students journal for a single week, or for a period determined by outside events (e.g., during a holiday period or over a certain sports season). If students wish to continue, what they produce can then become part of their writing portfolios.
- Coach students to respect the privacy of others whenever in doubt. For example, an “author’s note” can explain that real names have been changed.
- Students can incorporate art and doodles as Greg does—or actual photos that they take and then print.
- For that matter, the entire journal can take the form of a blog or digital storytelling text (if sufficiently connected internally); that way, multiple digital media artifacts may be included, whether they’re drawn, photographed, shot on video, or recorded as sound.
- Working with students, develop a rubric in advance with criteria such as organization (main idea and supporting details), voice, consideration of audience and purpose, and so on.

Privacy and Anonymity

Always bear in mind—and make explicit as necessary—that revealing students’ private lives is not only not the point of a personal journal, but not acceptable. Students should therefore record events and feelings they are comfortable sharing. Explain that journals should not be an exhaustive account of everything that happens in their lives, but can focus on specific incidents that can be recounted in roughly one to four paragraphs per entry. And despite such precautions, take care that you do not require students to share their journals without their consent, be it through the peer-editing process, read-alouds, or postings (actual or online) of the finished work.

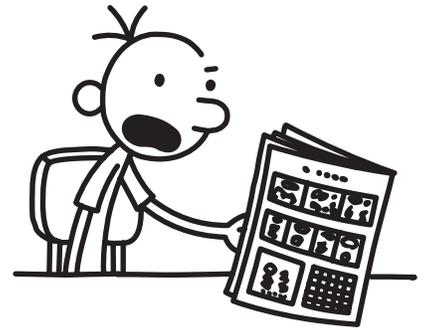
PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

Research

Have students research and write a brief biography of Jeff Kinney, perhaps in a digital form that can use artwork and photos from different points in his life. Challenge students to uncover and relate how he has drawn upon his own memories not just of childhood but of contemporary events (e.g., *Cabin Fever* was inspired by a real-life extreme winter). Another central question might be how Kinney’s background, education, and career prior to becoming a full-time author is similar to or different from those of other creators with whom students may be familiar, whether a graphic novelist (e.g., Jeff Smith of *Bone*) or novelist/humorist (e.g., Michael Buckley of *N.E.R.D.S.* and *The Sisters Grimm* series).

Which is #1?

Spark instant engagement by asking students to identify—and defend—their choice for the best book in the series to date. Coach students to support their opinions with evidence by citing specifics based upon story elements such as plot, theme, and character.



Critical Thinking/Persuasive Writing

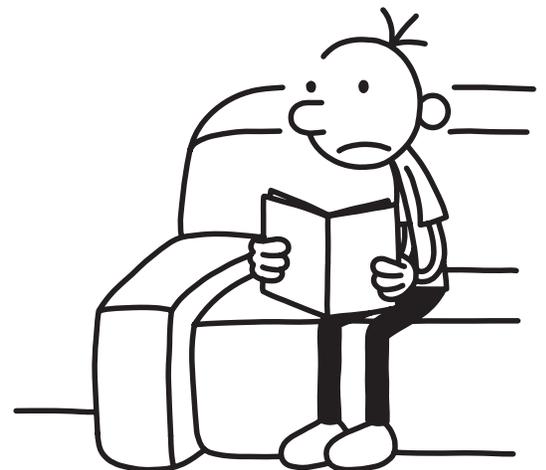
Consider expanding upon the above activity by holding a “Battle of the Books” event that focuses on the series. Allow and support students to craft and deliver (verbally or in writing) position statements that campaign for their particular favorites, and then have individual titles square off against each other in head-to-head competition via student voting. The eight books currently in the series correspond to two brackets of four titles each, thus making competition and advancement very straightforward.

Book Trailers

Official book trailers exist for all the titles in the series, and they can function as models for students working in small teams to create their own alternate trailers. They can take simple digital photos or videos of classmates dressed and posed recognizably as Wimpy Kid characters, and then use recorded voice-over, digital transitions, and their own persuasive writing skills to create multimedia trailers. If there’s no easy access to either cameras or the necessary software, consider having students simply write scripts for their trailers—supplemented by hand-drawn storyboards. If you’d like to show official book trailers to your class to serve as examples, they can be found at www.wimpykid.com/videos.

Fan Fiction

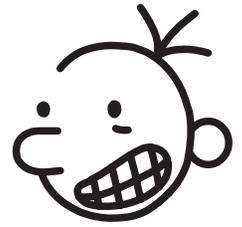
Explain that, in a sense, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* is a franchise—it appears in installments, has certain comfortably predictable elements, and has even been adapted into other another medium, film. Then point out the creative possibilities for fans to repurpose the recurring story elements in a noncommercial context by assigning a brief writing exercise in which students either write or simply propose a spinoff, prequel, or alternate-reality version that leverages a fan’s in-depth knowledge of the series.



WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

Name _____

Date/Class _____



Please list the books you have read:

Fill in the blank.

1. Greg's teacher Mrs. Craig becomes upset when she thinks that someone stole her _____.
2. "The Stealthinator" is a nickname that's incorrectly earned by _____.
3. Greg and some other boys use mascara in order to _____.
4. A character with odd behavior who is a sometimes friend of Greg's but whom Greg does not really respect is _____.
5. The interesting thing about the name of Greg's middle school in the books is that _____.

Circle the best answer.

6. The device that Greg likes to use but that makes it seem like he cheats on a test is his

- a) smartphone.
- b) Magic 8 Ball.
- c) secret agent ring.
- d) "lucky" hollow pen.

7. "The Snurples" is the name of

- a) Manny's favorite TV show.
- b) a rival band to Löded Diaper.
- c) the nickname Greg gives to his old stuffed monkeys.
- d) Rowley's name for something embarrassing.

8. What money-making scheme do Rowley and Greg have in mind for Rowley's basement?

- a) snack bar
- b) haunted house
- c) video game arcade
- d) dance club

9. Greg's mom starts a reading club after Greg

- a) almost fails English.
- b) becomes a big comic book fan.
- c) watches a horror movie.
- d) claims that reading is boring.

10. Why do things start to fall apart in the Heffley household?

- a) Rowley spends part of summer vacation there.
- b) Rodrick's pranks cause the heating and plumbing to fail.
- c) Greg's mother decides to return to college.
- d) Manny has too many kids over for his birthday.

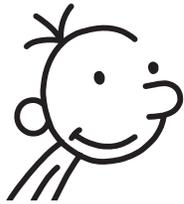
MAKE YOUR OWN CHARACTER CARDS

Name _____

Date/Class _____

Like trading cards?

Well, here's your chance to make your own—by writing your ideas and opinions on the lines provided.

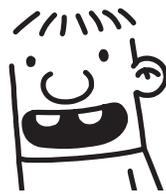


Who I Am:

What I Love To Do:

The Book Where I Shine:

A Quote That Sums Me Up:

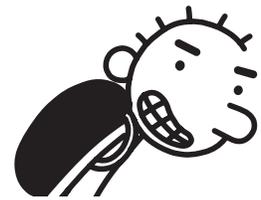


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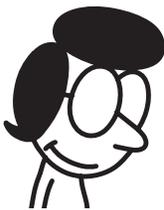


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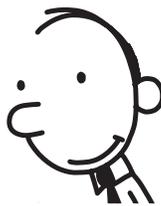


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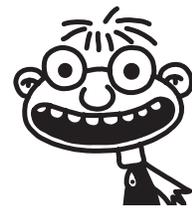


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ANSWER KEY

What Do You Remember? (p.9)

To help gauge reader recall more accurately, please note that the reproducibles on pages 8 and 9 begin with the opportunity for students to list the books that they have read. Their final score, then, should be based upon the number of relevant questions, which is why the book titles are included in this answer key.

1. **dictionary**—*The Last Straw* (3)
2. **Greg**—*Rodrick Rules* (2)
3. **to pretend to have defined “abs”**—*Cabin Fever* (6)
4. **Fregley**
5. **it is never given.**
6. **b**—*Hard Luck* (8)
7. **a**—*The Third Wheel* (7)
8. **b**—*Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (1)
9. **c**—*Dog Days* (4)
10. **c**—*The Ugly Truth* (5)

How To Assess Answers To “Make Your Own Character Cards” Exercise (p. 10)

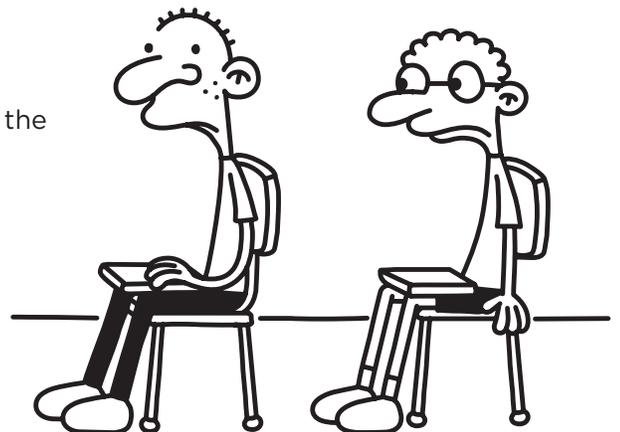
A variety of answers are possible for the items in this open-ended exercise. Make sure each is true to character details as provided in the series, and then be sure to use the completed cards as a springboard for more in-depth analysis and conversation as students should be asked to defend their opinions.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

NCTE/IRA Standards

All of the ELA Standards jointly developed by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association are consistently met both by this guide [partly keyed with page numbers below] or by simply reading the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series itself [keyed with and “R” below]. Note in these excerpts from the standards the use of terms such as visual, graphics, and non-print throughout—in the twenty-first century, literacy in these “languages” is considered essential, not just a tool for struggling or reluctant readers. In any case, these standards specify that “students:

1. read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States . . . Among these texts are . . . contemporary works.” [R]
2. read a wide range of literature.” [R]
3. draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers . . . and their understanding of textual features (e.g., . . . graphics).” [R] [throughout packet/guide]
4. adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.” [throughout packet/guide]
5. employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.” [7-8, 14]
6. apply knowledge of . . . media techniques . . . and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.” [5-10, 14]
7. conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions” [8]
8. use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., . . . computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.” [8]
9. develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in . . . social roles.” [5-6]
10. whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts.” [14]
11. participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.” [throughout packet/guide]
12. use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).” [throughout packet/guide]



COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

While the actual unfolding or execution of the various assignments and discussions in this guide correlate to a range of CCSS items, here are the pertinent standards that are explicitly built into the content. Again, grade 5 is used as a handy midpoint.

Reading/Literature

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.5 Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fit together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.6 Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.7 Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).

Writing

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.7 Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through the investigation of different aspects of a topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.8 Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision).



DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Students can

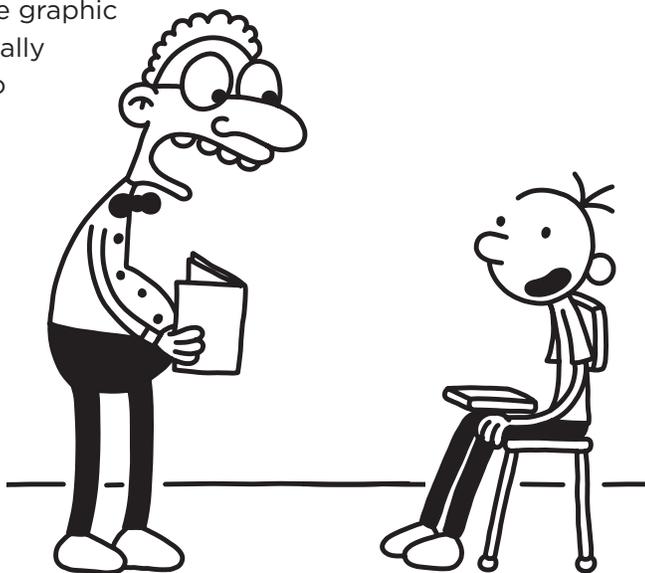
- rely upon the activities in *The Wimpy Kid Do-It-Yourself Book* as a precursor, or alternative, to any of the more challenging activities presented in this guide.
- be reminded to use the graphics in the books as a form of visual scaffolding whenever comprehension proves difficult.
- learn more about the expressive reading, and writing, of dialogue by noting how Kinney is careful to use variations in lettering (boldface, font size) to signal how certain should be “spoken.”

English-language learners can

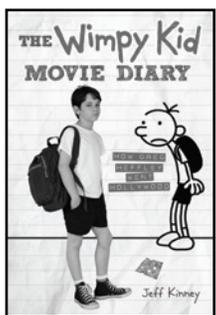
- benefit from a review of the concept of idioms, especially as it relates to the book titles—nearly every one of which is an idiom. Consider having them illustrate, in contrast, what the literal meanings in English would be of phrases such as “cabin fever” or “the last straw.”
- practice oral language skills by first narrating/explaining the graphic elements in the books in their native language, then eventually translating that text into English which they then present to native English speakers verbally; since there is no single “correct” translation of these visual, students will have greater freedom to express themselves.
- pair with native residents of the U.S. in order to review, as needed, the countless cultural customs (e.g., holidays) that are covered in the books.

Advanced students can

- research, analyze, and present to the class how the books were adapted into the films from a narrative/structural perspective. What new characters were added? Which subplots omitted? And how were multiple books combined rather seamlessly into a single screenplay?
- practice their persuasive writing skills by crafting alternative marketing or advertising copy for the books. For example, *Rodrick Rules* features the tagline “Secrets have a way of getting out, especially when a diary is involved.” Could this possibly be improved upon? How?

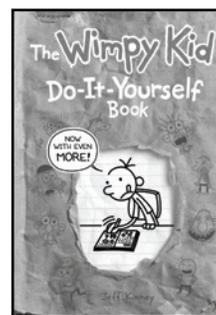


FURTHER RESOURCES



The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary, which tells the story of the making of all three film adaptations, is not just an engaging nonfiction text but an enlightening media literacy primer. A dedicated Teaching Guide, available as a free download, empowers educators to teach film/media production processes in a very user-friendly way.

The Wimpy Kid Do-It-Yourself Book contains countless activities, mostly writing-based, that can be used to support or supplement the activities and assignments presented in this guide.



Series-wide Activity Packets are also available for free online at <https://wimpykid.com/downloadables/>, and much of their content can be used as a source of ideas for classroom games, projects, and activities.