Learning doesn't take place only in classrooms. It can happen at home, in a library, a bookstore, or an afterschool program—anywhere, really.

**So we've developed**

# THE Wimpy Kid
# MOVIE DIARY
## Teaching Guide

*Creative projects in writing, acting and video!*

*The integration of high-interest subject matter with your existing curriculum!*

THE Wimpy Kid
MOVIE DIARY
HOW GREG HEFFLEY WENT HOLLYWOOD

Jeff Kinney

THE STORY OF ALL 3 MOVIES!

## Correlated to Standards and Benchmarks!

The instructional content of this Teaching Guide is aligned with

- ☐ NCTE's Definition of 21st-Century Literacies
- ☐ NAMLE's Core Principles of Media Literacy Education
- ☐ The Film Foundation's National Film Study Standards
- ☐ McREL's Viewing Standards and Skills
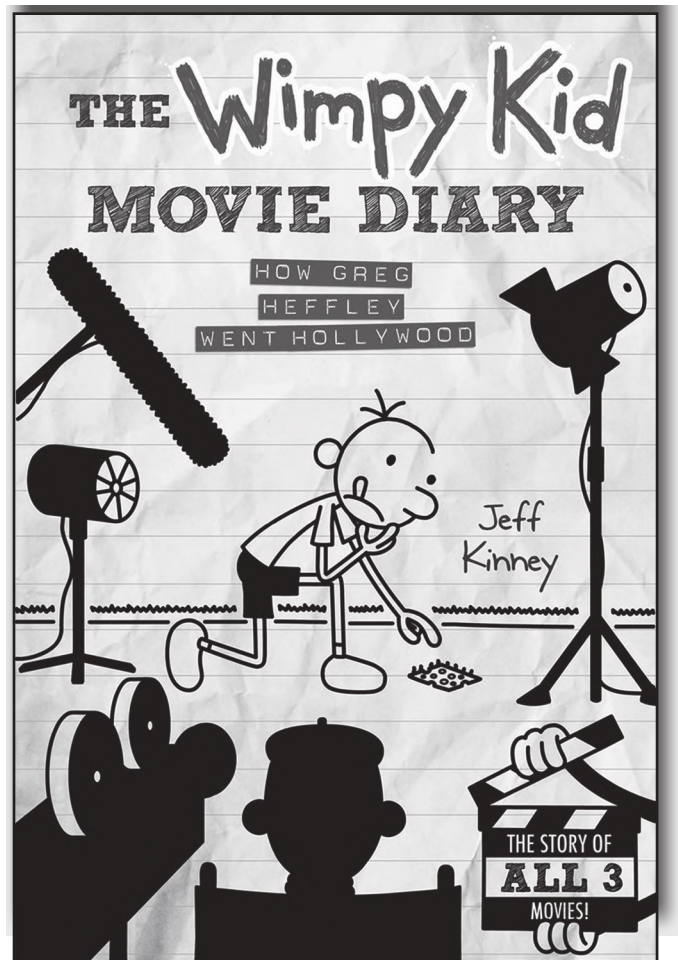
# DISCUSSION GUIDE

Use the exercises below to recall and reflect upon the wealth of information and ideas in *The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary*. Although some students may have already seen these movies, doing so is by no means a prerequisite for joining the conversation. The questions themselves are organized in ascending order according to Bloom's Taxonomy—although you'll notice that its highest level, Creating, is covered in the activities in the following pages.

## REMEMBERING

**Activate Prior Knowledge**: To kick things off, consider having volunteers provide background on the Diary of a Wimpy Kid books by recounting key story elements such as its plot, setting, and main characters. Then follow up by having them "narrate" the movie stills that appear throughout *The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary*, such as those in the "Page to Screen" section. **(p. 152, 224, 242)**

**Identify**: What changes, additions, or deletions were made in adapting the Wimpy Kid books? What were the reasons? For example, why was the Sweetheart Dance created, why was the scene of Greg chasing the kindergartners replaced, why did the filmmakers decide to set the first scene of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules* in a roller rink, and why did they seemingly skip over *The Last Straw* and go straight to *Dog Days* for the third film? **(p. 110, p. 128, 198–199, 216–217)**

**Recall**: Who are Zach Gordon, Thor Freudenthal, and David Bowers, and what were their contributions to the films? **(pp. 14, 18, 197, and throughout)** Why did it make sense to cast twins for the role of Manny? **(pp. 36–37)** How did the filmmakers get them to cooperate during the school play scene? **(pp. 108–109)** Name events and conditions that needed to be "faked" during the movies' production. **(e.g., pp. 122-124, 126-131, 208-209, 231, 236-237)**

## UNDERSTANDING

**Clarify**: What's the difference between film and video, or a film camera and a video camera? **(p. 117)**

**Practice Visual Literacy**: What aspects of the images of Fregley's home on **pages 140–141** might make viewers share Greg's discomfort? (Prompt students to note props, lighting, and set design.)

**Describe**: Creating effective movie illusions often requires more than a single filmmaking element. Select an example, such as the "fake snow" or "fake ants" or one of the action scenes with the boys, and describe how props, special equipment, and acting work together to create movie magic. **(p. 127, 241, pp. 202–203)**

**Connect**: Think about the crucial job of the film editor. **(pp. 174-177)** How is it like or unlike other forms of editing that you know?
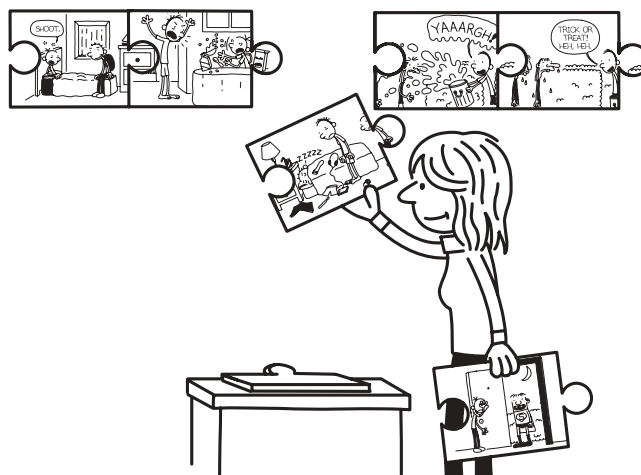
# APPLYING



**Distinguish**: Review the role of storyboards in making a movie. **(pp. 45, 100, 184)** Then have students compare them to comics, citing both how they're similar (they tell stories in a series of sequential panels) and how they're different (storyboards include arrows to indicate movement and don't include word balloons).

**Share**: Select one or more aspects of the filmmaking process discussed in the book (casting, story adaptation, set design) and invite students to share their opinions about them in terms of other movie adaptations with which they're familiar. What creative choices make more sense to them now that they've read *The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary*? What choices are now more puzzling?

**Interpret/Apply**: The importance of an authentic-looking and true-to-the-book set is a major theme in *The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary*. **(pp. 26–27, 52–71, 132–141, 162-169, 198, 204–207, 226–229)** Have students examine its many photos, perhaps in conjunction with revisiting the original descriptive text from the book series, and interpret the items shown, determining why they were included. What other details would they add to the school or the characters' homes? Encourage students to think like a "location scout" by identifying spaces in their own school or community that would be a good fit for filming a Diary of a Wimpy Kid movie or any other fictional text suitable for screen adaptation.

# ANALYZING

**Categorize**: How is this book different from other titles in the Wimpy Kid series? Help students grasp the fact that, though the books share a first-person "diary" format, *The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary* is an example of nonfiction. Therefore, in addition to cartoon-style drawings, it also features photos and other graphics that document real-world people, places, and things.

**Draw Conclusion**: What does the author mean by stating that the filmmakers got to "lower their standards" by making the "It's Awesome to Be Me" video? And did they really lower their standards, or did they just apply their skills in a different way? **(pp. 116–117)**

**Decide**: Review with students the movie credits that appear on **pages 248–249**. Then ask students which job they'd most like to have, either in the case of this particular movie or as part of an ongoing career, and ask them to explain why. If faced with a lack of variety in the responses, consider having students rank their first three choices, so that as a group you can discuss general trends, such as which jobs are the most or least popular. Revisit job descriptions such as those for line producer **(p. 44)**, editor **(pp. 174-177)** Foley artist **(p. 178)**, and animator **(pp. 180–183)** as needed.



**Extend**: You can both extend learning and activate prior knowledge by asking students what other movie jobs they're familiar with. Screen a "closing credits" sequence for students or reproduce a "cast and crew" page from the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), defining terms as necessary. For example, you could explain that a "gaffer" is an electrician and that a "key grip" is in charge of moving camera tracks and other important equipment. Ask students how people in such positions might interact with set designers, cinematographers, and others.

# EVALUATING



**Consider**: Explore the concept of characterization by discussing the search for an actor to play Greg, as recounted on **page 16**. Do characters always need to be likable? What happens if a character is "too nice"—does the movie run the risk of not appealing to a certain audience segment?
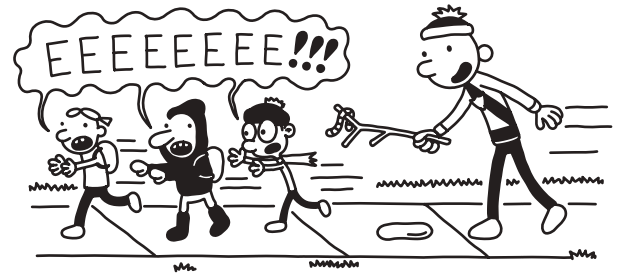
**Reflect**: What part of making movies is the most challenging? Rewarding? Frustrating? Be sure to point out that while of course there are no "right answers" to such questions, students should still support their responses with specific evidence from the book.
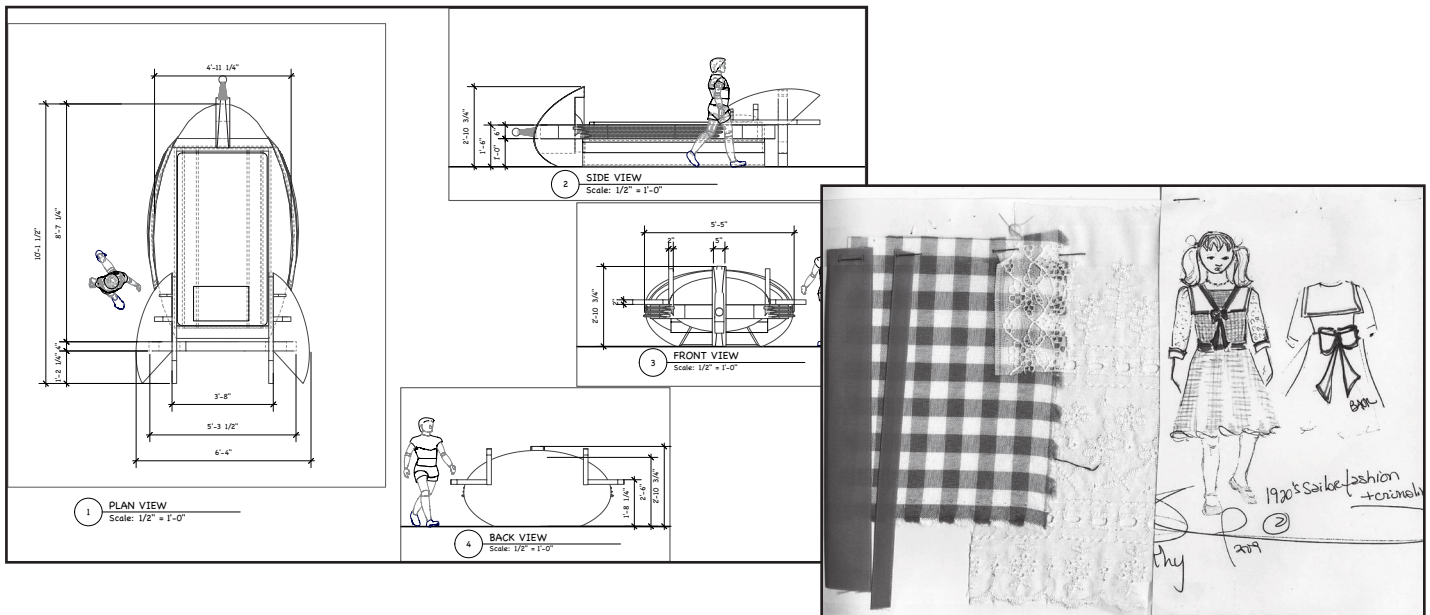


**Debate**: Aside from excitement, what are some feelings Jeff Kinney might have experienced when Hollywood initially expressed interest in *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*? To fuel discussion, review the various ideas for the movie that are presented on **page 8**. Use Kinney's case as a springboard to debate the pros and cons of cinematic adaptation in general. What decisions might anger fans or creators of the source material? If you were an author, would you be open to giving total creative control to others if that was a requirement for your book becoming a movie?

**Practice Critical Thinking**: Challenge students to voice an opinion about the test-screening process. **(pp. 184–185)** Does getting feedback in this way alter the process or purpose of filmmaking—making it less artful, for example? Or is test screening just a way of getting valuable input for movies, which, after all, are always developed with an audience in mind? Who do you think is usually invited to test screenings, and what is the "target audience" for *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and its sequels?

**Decide**: Explore the page-to-screen process with a reminder that *Dog Days* was based upon parts of books 3 *and* 4 **(p. 216)**. What storylines of later books might be combined into a single movie? Make sure students identify the area of overlap—is it theme, setting, or something else?

# AWESOME ACTIVITIES

Reinforce and apply learning through these group-based and independent projects.

## CASTING CALL

Connect writing in the "response to literature" mode to the performing arts and students' newfound knowledge of the movie-making process. Create your own casting call ads using the model provided on **page 17**, which is a form of character profile, or, better yet, have students compose them. These can serve as benchmarks for assessing auditions. **(pp. 16–18)** Students can write their own monologues, choose a passage from one of the Wimpy Kid books, or work in pairs, auditioning with a scene of dialogue instead. You can act as the casting director—or students can do this themselves, voting on those who aren't in direct competition with them. To prepare for this activity, or as an alternate form of assessment, have students write essays about their characters just as the film actors did. **(pp. 24–25)**
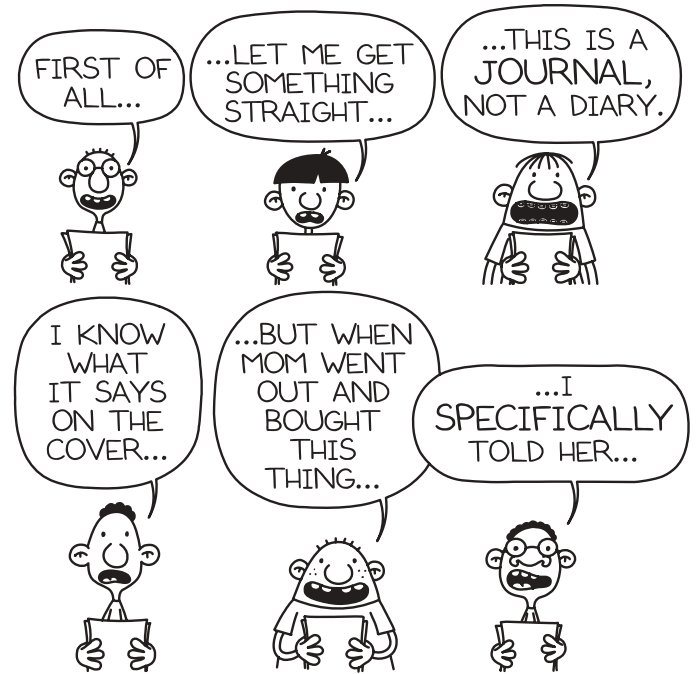
## GLOSSING IT OVER

*The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary* contains many "content area" vocabulary words that are specific to filmmaking, media, and the arts. Students should be familiar with many of them, but since others are not defined in the text, you can create a "Glossary of Filmmaking" by working as a group. Have students identify the words that deserve entries, or assign them yourself using the following as examples:

- ✏ live-action
- ✏ score
- ✏ exec/executive
- ✏ special effects
- ✏ crane shot
- ✏ studio
- ✏ choreographer
- ✏ footage

## REBOOT ME

As new books are published and new fans discover the series, it's conceivable that a reboot of the film franchise will one day be produced. Have students draw upon their outside-of-school knowledge and their media literacy skills to propose what this should look like. Who should star or direct? Should the tone or approach be different? Why?

# TABLE READ

Enhance your creative writing unit by having students conduct a table read **(p. 32)** as part of the revision stage of the writing process. Peer actors can be assigned parts, including "narrator," and read aloud from prose compositions, original dramatic scenes, or skits. Or use this table read in conjunction with the "You're the Screen Writer" activity on **pages 10 and 12** of this Guide.
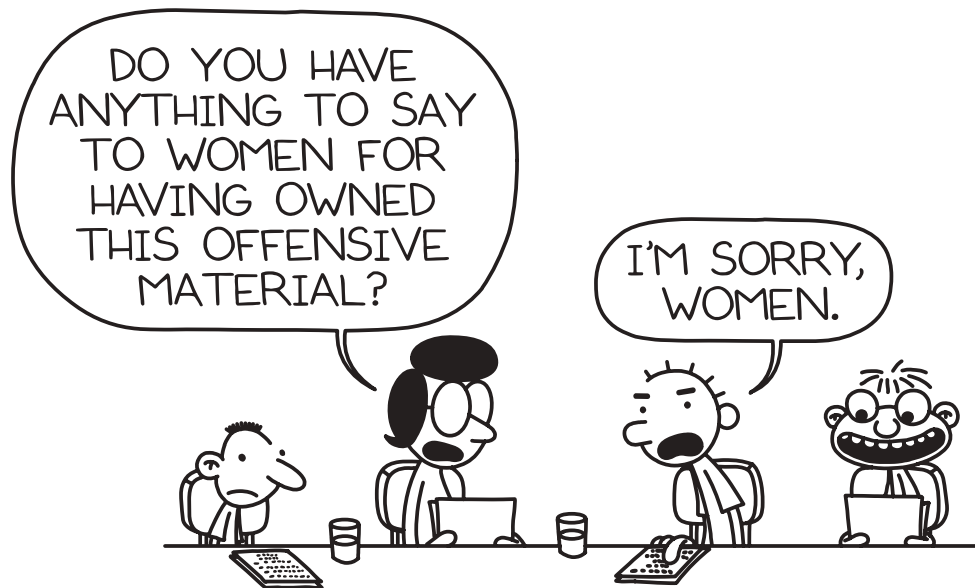


# A "LIVING" TRAILER

As *The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary* shows, writing, preparing for, and shooting a film or video—even a short one—can be a lot of work, often more than is feasible in most educational settings. However, you can get students to work with many of the same creative elements—casting, script development, props, set design, staging, and music—in the form of a trailer. In fact, you don't even need to make a video trailer. Instead, guide students to put on a live performance that runs only a couple of minutes; a visible narrator can deliver the text one usually hears in voice-over while other students act out the dramatic parts or supply sound effects. The subject of the trailer can be a book that students wish were made into a movie, an imagined sequel to an existing movie, or their own creative writing. Regardless of the basis for their trailers, make sure they approach the project from a media-literate perspective by considering their target audience, grabbing its attention, using persuasive language, and so on.

# POSTER WORKSHOP

Combine media literacy with some graphic arts fun by having students design original movie posters. This potentially cross-curricular activity can take just a few minutes or considerably longer, depending on the size of the poster and the extent to which students revise it with visual details and multiple drafts. It's your choice. You can emphasize a basic design that demonstrates understanding of movie marketing techniques, or a finished product suitable for displaying in the classroom or other public area.

**Introduce the Concept.** Revisit the text on **pages 186–187** and stimulate critical thinking with questions such as:

- ✏ What posters have actually made you want to see a movie? Why?
- ✏ Why do you think the poster shown was revised from the first version to the second?
- ✏ What features make a movie poster effective? Are these different from other types of posters or advertisements?
- ✏ How do posters grab a consumer's attention?

**Identify Key Elements.**

- ✏ A <u>central image</u> is critical—that's what people see first, before they read any text.
- ✏ A catchy <u>tagline</u> delivers a quick, memorable idea. Point out how the final poster for *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* is a playful variation on a catchphrase from the book that fans would instantly recognize.
- ✏ <u>Main credits</u> are usually provided at the bottom of every one-sheet. When adding credits to their posters, have students call out important information only, such as the studio, director, and the stars.

**Create the Poster!** First, help students choose a movie— rather than a familiar one, encourage creativity by having them select an upcoming release or even a wholly imagined film. Then, students can work individually, with partners, or in small groups to plan and sketch their posters before working on the final product. Remind them to include the key elements discussed above, and, if the film is based upon a popular book or other property, to highlight this fact.
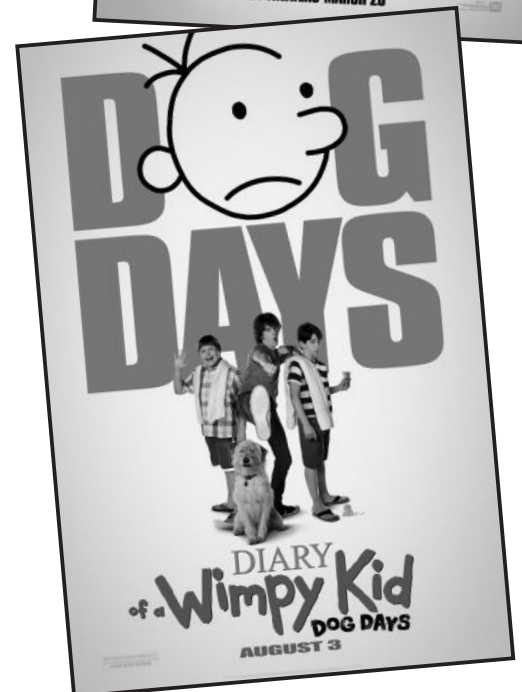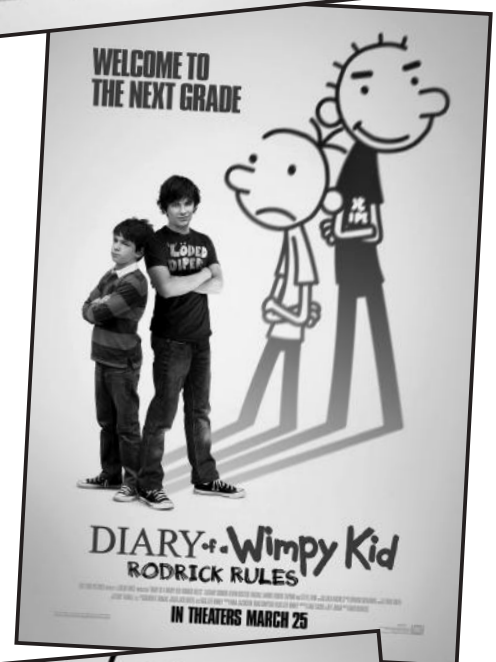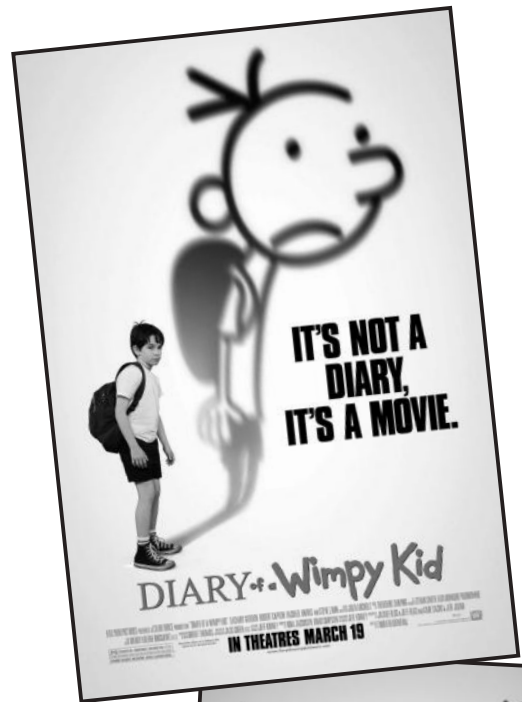
# SEQUEL-MANIA
## New Movies, New Faces

Movie sequels usually mean seeing new faces up on the screen. In fact, casting decisions about upcoming sequels are often hotly discussed issues among fans—who will play the new villain or the new love interest? Use this engaging topic as a springboard for a more far-ranging exploration of both acting and casting and how the two are distinct. The latter must of course take into account a given performer's skill at the former, but also consider factors such as physical resemblance, as well as the box office 'bankability' of a particular actor.

Think of a popular movie that as yet has no sequel (if that's possible!). Or use a hypothetical screen adaptation of a TV series or novel—even a book drawn from your class reading. Then list the main characters on the board and have students nominate and then vote on actors to fill these roles. Help them understand that casting directors and producers often try to create a balance of veteran "name" actors and talented newcomers.

If selecting a sequel that all students can easily discuss is too challenging, consider using a "reboot" instead. For example, if the *Harry Potter* series were to start again from scratch with younger actors, who would be a good fit for playing its trio of main characters? Or what stars of stage or screen should become the latest incarnation of a famous comic book character? Why? Encourage students to cite evidence, such as an actor's past performance in a similar role.

## What Matters Most?

Movie fans enjoy few things as much as debating the merits of the many sequels that are released each year. However, rarely do they engage in in-depth conversations about the criteria they use for judging these sequels against the original films. You can encourage higher-order analytical thinking and meta-cognition about media by having students prioritize the filmmaking elements on which they base such evaluations.

First, create a T-chart with headings for two installments in a successful film franchise (e.g., *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *Spider-Man*). Under each film, list the elements that a class consensus identifies as it "winning" relative to the other film—acting, set design, action, costumes, humor, music, camerawork, visual effects, and so on. Then challenge students to explain why some elements seem to count more than others when evaluating the films overall. If time permits, consider having students, either individually or collectively, assign a weighted point value for each of these items, which can be revisited when comparing any two films in the future.

# ORDER IT

Assess understanding of the creative and technical processes outlined in *The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary* by having students sequence the steps presented in the book. Simply make photocopies of this page and cut out the filmmaking tasks or events below (which are presented in their correct order). Then have students work in pairs or small groups to order them. If they believe that some steps can be done concurrently, they can place them side by side—but they should be prepared to explain why. If you wish, you can make the activity more competitive by providing a time limit, and you can make it more challenging by providing additional tasks mentioned in the book. For extra credit, have students group the items into the categories of pre-production, production, and post-production.

★ **Select Book for Adaptation** ★

★ **Craft Services Provides Snacks** ★

★ **Pitch Ideas for Screenplay** ★

★ **The Movie Wraps** ★

★ **Draft Screenplay** ★

★ **Edit Film** ★

★ **Audition Leading Actors** ★

★ **Test Screening** ★

★ **Build Sets, Create Props** ★

★ **Movie Premiere** ★

# USING THE REPRODUCIBLE PAGES

**Pages 11 and 12** of this guide are student worksheets that you can copy and distribute; they can be used as assessment or as part of direct instruction.
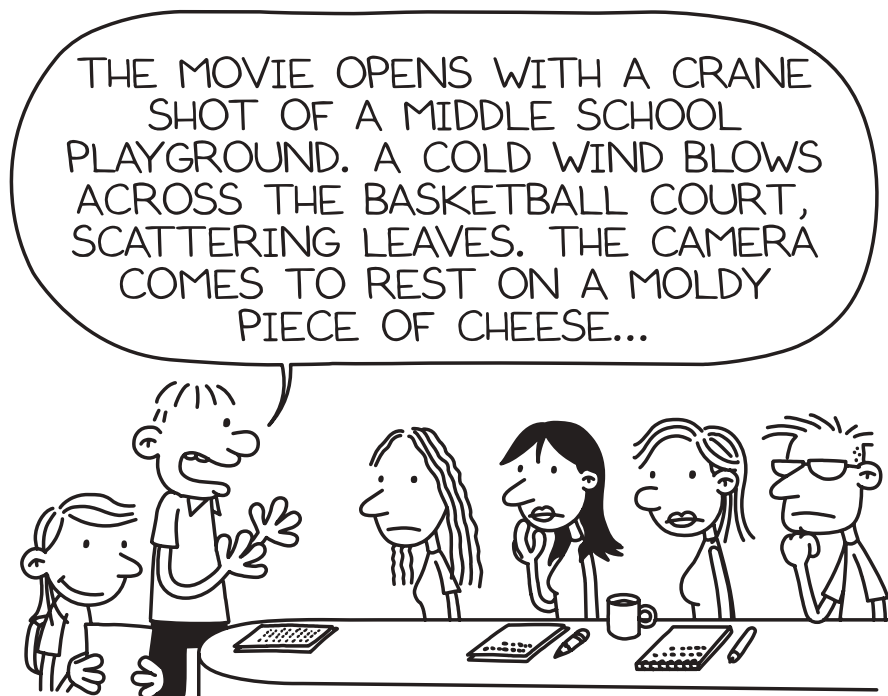
## Who Does What?

Understanding collaboration is at the heart of understanding filmmaking itself. To reteach or review various key jobs in the process, reproduce and distribute the matching-style activity on **page 11** of this Teaching Guide.

Answer Key:  1E; 2G; 3B; 4A; 5F; 6I; 7D; 8H; 9C; 10J

## You're the Screenwriter

Reproduce and distribute the annotated screenplay on **page 12** of this Teaching Guide. Draw attention to screenwriting conventions such as using all caps to introduce characters and describe shots, or using abbreviations such as "SUPER" for "superimpose." You can use this professional model from **page 11** of *The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary*, as well as the one on **page 13**, to introduce screenwriting in a general way, or as exemplars for student writing. If the latter, have them write a single script page as well. Suggested prompts: rewrite this opening scene; write the continuation of this scene; flesh out the scene described in the cartoon below; write an opening scene for an original movie idea or one based on a favorite book.

THE MOVIE OPENS WITH A CRANE SHOT OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL PLAYGROUND. A COLD WIND BLOWS ACROSS THE BASKETBALL COURT, SCATTERING LEAVES. THE CAMERA COMES TO REST ON A MOLDY PIECE OF CHEESE...

# WHO DOES WHAT?

Draw a line to connect each filmmaking job with its correct description and an image that illustrates it.

1. **Acting Coach**

2. **Director**

3. **Stunt Person**

4. **Animator**

5. **Line Producer**

6. **Costume Designer**

7. **Casting Director**

8. **Composer**

9. **Set Designer**

10. **Extra**

A. Creates "wireframe" version of a drawing

B. "Doubles" for a lead actor in some scenes

C. Creates the "world" of the film

D. Runs the audition process

E. Helps keep young stars prepared

F. Is in charge of the shooting schedule details
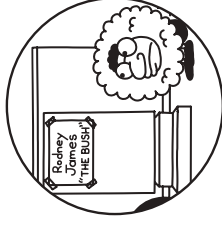
G. Decides on a filmmaking style for a movie
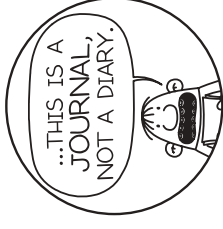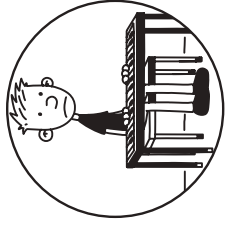
H. Writes a film's score

I. Creates a wardrobe to match each character

J. Walks through the background of a scene
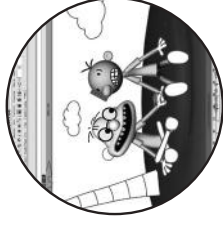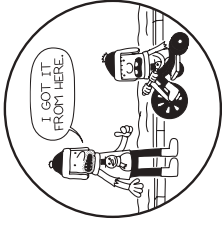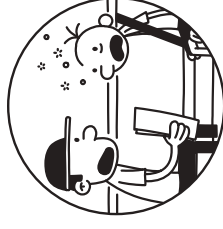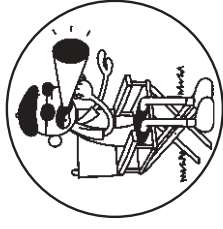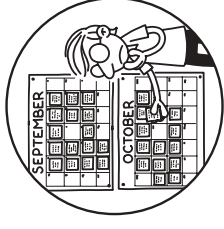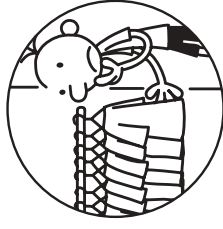
# MODEL SCRIPT PAGE

INT. GREG'S BEDROOM 1
BLACK SCREEN. Soft breathing.

> Each scene starts with a "slugline" that states where it takes place. What do you think "INT." means?
> _____

SUPER: "SEPTEMBER" is scrawled across the screen in Greg's handwriting. Then BLINDING LIGHT.

                    RODRICK (O.S.)
                Greg.

> This means "off-screen." Another good term to know is "VO," for voice-over.

> Stands for "point-of-view."

GREG'S POV: we find RODRICK HEFFLEY, an insolent sixteen-year-old, in our face. Rodrick is dressed for school.

> How will what the audience has seen so far make it feel?
> _____
> _____

                    RODRICK (CONT'D)
                Greg!

> "Line directions" always accompany the dialogue.

                    GREG
                (half asleep)
                What?

Rodrick shakes GREG HEFFLEY, 12, awake in his twin bed.

> Stage directions are always set off from the dialogue.

                    RODRICK
                What are you doing? Get
                up! Mom and dad have been
                calling you for an hour.
                You're gonna be late for
                your first day of middle
                school.

> Movies try to establish characters quickly. If this were the first time you encountered these characters, what would your impression of them be so far?
> _____
> _____

> It's okay to spell words the way you want actors to pronounce them. What might be another example of this?
> _____

                    GREG
                What?

Greg looks over at his clock. It reads 8:01AM

# DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION



Wherever possible, use the numerous visuals in the book to scaffold comprehension, but don't assume that students will always "get" the main idea in the Jeff Kinney cartoons, which can require that readers draw upon specific background knowledge to draw conclusions or make inferences. Also, take time to go over graphics that include text that might be small or difficult to read. **(pp. 3–5)** Support students who may find all the subject-specific vocabulary challenging by reminding them to use a word's more common definition as a clue to its meaning in the context of filmmaking. Such words include "extra" **(p. 96)**, "frame" **(p. 98)**, "double" **(p. 118)**, "composite" **(p. 123)**, "dailies" **(p. 150)**, and "take" **(pp. 154–155)**.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

*The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary* is written in an accessible, almost conversational style that most students will find inviting. However, you may need to help ELLs with the resulting idioms, which include:  "pitch" **(p. 10)**, "over the edge" **(p. 110)**, "shot down" **(p. 111)**, "break-dances" **(p. 117)**, "over-the-top" **(p. 118)**, "strike a deal" **(p. 132)**, "wrap/wrapped" **(p. 170)**, "cut loose" **(p. 171)**, and many more. You may also want to foster oral language development by presenting the textless stills that appear on **pages 190–195** and having students describe what they depict.

## ADVANCED STUDENTS

Provide enrichment opportunities that leverage these students' increased knowledge of the filmmaking process. Examples include taking on leadership roles in the many projects suggested in this Guide or writing critical pieces about specific movies that analyze their strengths and weaknesses according to the creative variables outlined in the book. You might even want to help these students create a weekly or monthly podcast that includes spoken reviews of current releases.

# EXTENSION IDEAS

## RADIO DRAMA

Build upon the book's section on Foley art **(p. 178)** by having students script, perform, and produce old-style radio dramas, the kind in which sound effects play a significant role. Free and easy-to-use software, such as Audacity, can make the editing process painless and fun.

## CROSS-CURRICULAR COLLABORATIONS

Work with a drama, visual arts, shop, or science teacher on the production of a short video. While students can work on the script under your guidance, other educators can inspire students to be as creative as the propmaster in the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* movie. **(pp. 142–147, 207)**

## CONTESTS

Stimulate creativity and enhance media literacy by having groups or individuals tackle the following projects:

**Stage a "deleted scene."** Screen DVD examples of extended/deleted scenes, and then invite students to script, rehearse, and perform original scenes that could have conceivably been part of a major Hollywood film.

**Transform the real world into a set.** Using the details in *The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary* as models, students can construct their own sets from the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series or from other books. The sets students create can be used for a performance piece, a party, or to celebrate a particular holiday or occasion.

**Hold a "pitch fest."** Enhance writing and speaking skills by having students work in teams to pitch you, or a panel of "executives" made up of other adults, a movie idea. Encourage them to use persuasive language but also to include plenty of specifics, drawing upon their knowledge of how movies are produced and marketed.

## JOURNAL WRITING

Have students keep a "diary" that traces the history of a collaborative project much like Jeff Kinney does in his book. The topic can be a school play, a research/science project, a community service project, or even a trip. Provide guidelines and coach students to use the writing skills they have developed in terms of expository, anecdotal, and autobiographical texts.

# FURTHER RESOURCES

✎ The Core Principles of Media Literacy: https://namle.net/publications/core-principles/

✎ The educational projects of The Film Foundation: http://www.film-foundation.org

✎ Two middle-grade programs that teach movies and media literacy: Holt McDougal's MediaSmart and Pearson Education's Media Studio.