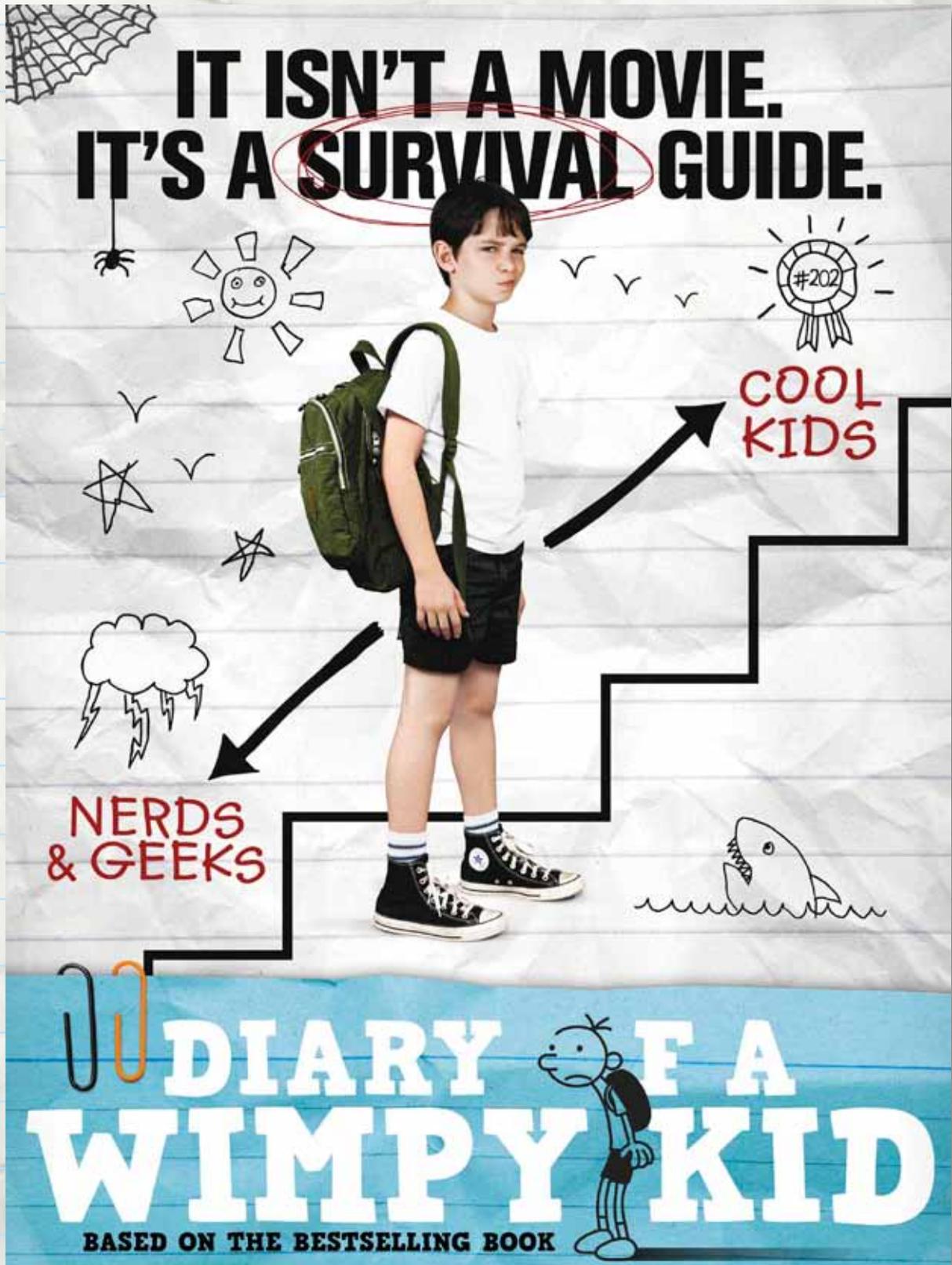


IT ISN'T A MOVIE.
IT'S A **SURVIVAL** GUIDE.



A **STUDY GUIDE** BY CHRISTINE EVELY



<http://www.metromagazine.com.au>

<http://www.theeducationshop.com.au>

Introduction

ABOUT THE BOOK

You can't help but wonder whether there is something autobiographical about the main character in Jeff Kinney's pre-teen illustrated literary series *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, upon which the film of the same name is based.

From its origins as a series of online cartoons, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* exploded onto the pop culture scene when Kinney's first 'novel in cartoons' was published in 2007. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* spent almost three years on the *New York Times*' children's best-seller list, has thus far sold 28 million copies and has been translated into thirty-three languages. The book captured the imaginations of an army of formerly reluctant readers and launched countless video reviews, social networking fan groups and parties celebrating the release of each new instalment.

DID YOU KNOW?

Diary of a Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney has been described as a semi-autobiographical journal/cartoon book. It focuses on the life of seventh-grader Greg Heffley and is available both online and as a traditional hard-copy book.

WHO WILL LIKE THIS BOOK?

The book appeals to both competent and struggling readers who will connect with Greg as the trials and tribulations of his school life unfold. Logging on each day to read the online version offers a fun way to engage today's young people.

While Kinney had originally targeted adults through the book's nostalgic look at middle school life as told through a narrator with fantasies of greatness, kids immediately connected to his blending of the subversive and edgy with fun and wholesomeness. Most of all, they responded to the titular hero's unique voice, summed up by his signature line 'I'm stuck in middle school with a bunch of morons'.

Given such pronouncements, it's no surprise that Greg Heffley is far from a traditional role model – he's judgmental, selfish and lazy, but nevertheless always likeable. 'I wanted to create a character that was realistic,' Kinney explains. 'Many times in children's literature, the protagonist is really just a miniature adult. I wanted to come up with a kid who was relatable and far from perfect. I worked hard to avoid dumbing down the books, talking down to kids, and wanted to make sure the stories avoided lots of lessons learned.'

Kinney's representations of the absurdity of middle school life delighted readers. A particular favourite is the 'cheese touch', which has become the stuff of middle school legend, horror, disgust and gossip. At Greg's school, a mouldy piece of cheese has mysteriously appeared in the schoolyard, growing more foul and powerful by the day. If there's a single thing these middle schoolers dread, it's accidentally brushing against the decrepit slice and thus being branded with the cheese touch's nuclear cooties. The only way to get rid of the cheese touch is by touching some other unfortunate classmate – it's like a game of tag, only grosser.



ABOUT THE FILM

Like the books, the film *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Thor Freudenthal, 2010) focuses upon the life of Greg Heffley (Zachary Gordon), a flawed but likeable kid who has a strong sense of his own importance, but who faces daily battles arising from his own shortcomings. Small in stature, he must deal with bullies, girls, gross bodily functions – his own and others – all the while aiming to be the most popular kid in middle school. His best friend, despite his weight issue, is comfortable with who he is, enjoys what life has to offer and is instinctively loyal.

To Greg, middle school is the dumbest idea ever invented. It's a place rigged with hundreds of social landmines, not the least of which are morons, wedgies, swirlies, bullies, lunchtime banishment to the cafeteria floor and, worst of all, a festering piece of cheese with nuclear cooties. To survive the never-ending ordeal and attain the recognition and status he feels he so richly deserves, Greg devises an endless series of can't-miss schemes, all of which, of course, go awry. And he's getting it all down on paper, via a diary – 'it's NOT a diary, it's a journal!' Greg insists, preferring the less-sissyfied designation – filled with his opinions, thoughts, tales of family trials and tribulations, and (would-be) schoolyard triumphs.

'No one looks back at their middle school years wishing to relive them,' says Kinney. 'You see a lot of movies about elementary school kids, high school students and college students, but very few set in middle school because those years are universally kind of ugly.'

Although live action, the film draws its style from the book's witty dialogue, humorous journal entries and cartoon-style illustrations.

Teaching and learning activities

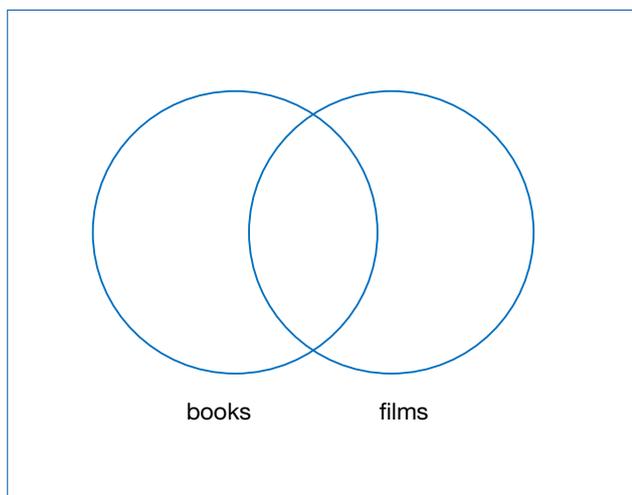
USING DIARY OF A WIMPY KID IN THE CLASSROOM

Diary of a Wimpy Kid has a PG rating in Australia. This study guide provides teachers and students from early primary to lower secondary levels with background information, a range of discussion questions and activities to support the curriculum areas of English, The Arts and SOSE/HSIE.

BOOK TO FILM

Diary of a Wimpy Kid is a film that has been adapted from a series of illustrated novels. Often people criticise films that are based on books because the filmmakers change elements of the story. However, books and films offer two distinct ways to tell a story.

- Create a Venn diagram to show similarities and differences in the ways books and films tell stories.



- Seated in a circle, have students who have read *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* share key story elements from it such as characters, setting, plot drivers and themes. Discourage students from giving away too much of the story.
- Read *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* to the class, or encourage students to read it for themselves.
- Ask students to consider whether the illustrations added to or detracted from the story. Ask them to justify their opinions.

Your turn: act on your emotions

- Take turns to discuss and act out favourite parts of the book, especially events that were funny or that provoked other strong emotions such as pity, disgust or anger.



Your turn: rate the writer

- Use an interactive whiteboard to display the interview with author Jeff Kinney at <http://www.wimpykid.com>.

In pairs, have students use the interview to take turns to role-play being the interviewer and the author. Then, as a class, discuss which things the students found most interesting about Jeff Kinney.

How interesting is Jeff Kinney? Based on the previous activities, ask each student to rate him out of five stars.

Your turn: cast the actors

- Read the entries for September from the book *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* to the class. Encourage students to re-read the entries and to explore the accompanying illustrations.

As a class and based upon the September entries from the book, list qualities you would require of the actors you would select to play Greg and his best friend, Rowley.

Ask individual students to select one of the book's characters and to then create a pen portrait describing the chosen character.

Based on the pen portrait, have each student create a poster advertising for an actor to play the role in the film. Display the posters in the classroom.



In adapting Kinney’s book for the screen, the filmmakers were intent on being true to his characters, particularly Greg’s flawed nature. Throughout the process, Kinney provided essential insights.

‘Jeff was an invaluable asset in the writing of this film,’ says co-screenwriter Jeff Filgo. ‘He was always available for the inevitable question, like ‘would Greg do this?’, ‘would Rowley do that?’ But he also read every outline and draft, and gave priceless feedback.’

Jackie Filgo, another of the film’s screenwriter, adds, ‘Greg is by turns insecure, aggressive, shy, funny, cruel, and kind; anyone who is around kids knows that they can be all of those things at different times, and every now and then all of them at once. It was our challenge to make sure Greg and his friends made the transition from book to screen with all their features and flaws intact.’

Your turn: features and flaws

- Working in pairs, draw an outline on butcher paper around one student’s body. Fold the outline in half down the mid line of the drawing and draw in Greg’s face.

Use the two halves of the body to feature Greg’s strengths on the left hand side of his body and his flaws on the right hand side. Be creative in the ways you feature Greg’s strengths and flaws.

Discuss as a class:

- How could the filmmakers ensure that Greg and his friends make the transition from book to screen with all their features and flaws intact?

Kinney’s book provided all the essential ingredients for the film, but its episodic nature – it’s a diary (journal!), after all – necessitated that the filmmakers come up with a stronger narrative drive. So they focused on the friendship between Greg and Rowley Jefferson (Robert Capron).

Having known each other since elementary school (all those years ago!), Greg and Rowley are connected by their shared experiences.

Your turn: role-play

- As a class, brainstorm other narrative drivers that the filmmakers might have focused upon, such as:
 - the dynamics between Greg, his two brothers and his parents
 - the relationship between Greg and his arch-enemy, Patty Ferrell (Laine MacNeil)
 - interactions and events that occurred with students in the schoolyard.

Work with a partner to create a one-minute role-play for a new narrative driver, then act it out for your class.

Exploring the film

VIEWING THE FILM TRAILER

A film trailer is a preview for a film that will soon be released. The word 'trailer' is used because these short films were originally played after a feature film had finished screening in a cinema.

Discuss as a class:

- Why do you think trailers are now shown at the start of a cinema screening, rather than after a film has finished?
- What are all the different ways viewers might now see a trailer apart from on a cinema screen? (For example, television screens, billboard screens, online, mobile phone screens.)
- Use a large screen or interactive whiteboard to view the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* film trailer, which is available at <<http://www.diaryofawimpykidmovie.com>>.

Make class notes recording what you find out about:

- settings
- characters
- problems encountered by characters
- the story and the narrative drivers
- the genre of the film.

Your turn: rate the trailer

- Create a class rating continuum by standing in a line across the room to show how much you enjoyed the film trailer, with those who thought it was fantastic at one end and those who did not enjoy it at all on the other end.

Allow students to move up and down the line as they listen to one another's reasons for liking or not liking the trailer.

VIEWING THE FILM

View the film in a cinema setting if possible. This provides the best opportunity for students to engage with the film in the way intended by the filmmakers: on a large screen, with clear sound and without interruption.

Thinking about the opening sequence

- Ask students to think about why the opening sequence of the film might begin with the diary. How does this help to tie the film to the book? Consider, for example, the way the live action morphs into illustrations.
- Discuss what you learn about the relationship between Greg and his older brother in the opening sequence (when Greg flies into a panic after his brother tells him he has overslept).



- Greg is keen to let the audience know that he writes in a journal, not a diary. Why is this?
- We quickly learn that Greg is worried about beginning middle school. This is compounded when his older brother reels off a list of things not to do. How do you think this 'advice' from his brother will affect Greg's feelings about his first day?

As a class, list examples from early in the film that tell the audience Greg is clearly image conscious, for example Greg thinks about popularity rankings and makes comments such as 'I'd say you're around the 154 mark'.

Your turn: real life journal

- Ask each student to start his or her own journal. Encourage them to use it each day recording interesting things that happen, their feelings and any issues. They could keep a paper-based or a digital version and could write, draw or paste in photos or other interesting items.

Use of a blog is another alternative, however appropriate hosting and privacy needs to be considered.

SETTING

Like Kinney's books, the film has a contemporary yet timeless quality. The film avoids use of smartphones, portable media players or T-shirts emblazoned with of-the-moment slogans and iconography.

Kinney wanted his stories to relate to kids and to their parents – to have both generations relive their school experiences without the distraction of specific cultural references. To that end, the filmmakers use a mix of songs from different periods, from the 1970s through to today's hits.

- List settings, costumes, props and so on from the film that you think *do* position the film in a particular place or period.

Do you think the filmmakers have done a good job in



trying to make the film timeless? Why do you have this opinion?

What changes would you have made to ensure the film has a timeless feel and why?

Your turn: technology today

- Create a large class collage showing as many different tools as you can that are used for communication today.

Diary of a Wimpy Kid was filmed in Vancouver, Canada, which doubled for the book's unspecified town.

Production designer Brent Thomas and cinematographer Jack Green transformed three Vancouver-area schools into Greg's middle school.

- Locations for the film have been selected in such a way that most kids watching the film could relate to it as if it happened to them. Do you agree? Why or why not?



- List clues that suggest the film is probably set in the United States, for example the celebration of Halloween.

Your turn: real-life set

- Work in a small group as 'location scouts'. Your job is to take a camera outside and find what you think would be the perfect location for a scene if an Australian version of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* was to be filmed.

Use the camera to take three shots of your location from different angles.

Film a scene in your location for your class to watch.

CHARACTERISATION AND CASTING

Producer Nina Jacobson believes the book created by Kinney is highly original and written in a smart, sophisticated way. She enjoyed sharing it with her own children and notes that 'Greg is blissfully unaware of what a jerk he can be, and kids find that refreshing and entertaining.'

- As a class, discuss the character of Greg, particularly his lack of self-awareness.

Is Greg a likeable character? Is he a believable character? Why or why not?

Greg and Rowley are connected by their shared experiences, though in most respects they're polar opposites. Greg is battle-weary and hyper-ambitious. He has a harsh view of the world, yet is optimistic about his ability to work the system to his advantage. Rowley is the omega to Greg's alpha – and happily so, at least to a point. He's an innocent kid without an agenda, whereas Greg is all agenda.

Your turn: compare and contrast characters

- Use the 'Greg vs Rowley' worksheet on page 20 of this study guide to compare and contrast the two characters.

As a class, discuss and explain how the attributes of both characters underpin the narrative, specifically Greg's search for his identity through recognition and popularity at school.



In addition to Rowley, Greg's inner circle includes Fregley (Grayson Russell), a thin, hyper, weird kid and the proud owner of a secret freckle. Fregley's secret weapon, with which he terrorises Greg, is a deadly 'booger finger'.

'Everyone knows a Fregley, and if you don't then you might be one!' says Kinney. 'He's the weird kind of kid who stays in his front yard and attacks kites with sticks, and things like that.'

- Do you agree with Kinney's statement?
- As a class, describe Fregley. How has the casting of the actor who plays Fregley helped to create this character?
- What dialogue and actions contribute to actor Grayson Russell's effective portrayal of Fregley?

Greg's arch-enemy is Patty Ferrell. Greg used to taunt her

in kindergarten and she still holds a grudge – now she is out for payback! When Greg tries to achieve wrestling stardom, Patty's there to stop him.

- Do you think the casting of Laine MacNeil has helped to portray Patty as an arch-enemy? Why or why not?

In what ways does the actor contribute to the characterisation of Patty as an arch-enemy?

A less threatening female classmate is Angie Steadman (Chloë Grace Moretz), whose sophisticated and mature perspective on middle school provides a sharp contrast to Greg's wheeling and dealing. She calls middle school an 'intellectual wasteland' and a 'glorified holding pen'.

- What do you think is the purpose of this character in the film version of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*?
- How does this character help to move the narrative forward?

Chirag Gupta (Karan Brar) is a diminutive Indian boy whom Greg tolerates because he is the only classmate smaller than him.

- What qualities do you think the filmmakers would have been looking for in casting the role of Chirag? Why do you think these qualities are important?
- Do you think Karan Brar was a good choice for the role? Why or why not?

Rodrick (Devon Bostick) is depicted as quite an evil older brother, but the film satirises him too – for example, quite blatantly through the name of his band, Löded Diper (com-





plete with the very 'rock' diacritic marks), and the fact that the band plays very poor music.

- Discuss the type of character portrayed in Rodrick.

List physical and personal qualities of the actor that help him to portray the role effectively.

How have costumes and dialogue added to the actor's portrayal of Rodrick?

- Rodrick plays in a heavy metal band. What does this tell you about this character and his friends? Why do you think this?
 - How would you describe heavy metal music? Explain the instruments, sounds and lyrics you associate with heavy metal.
 - Who are some heavy metal bands or musicians?
 - What image or characteristics do people associate with heavy metal music? Why?
 - Why has heavy metal been popular among many adolescents? What is it about the music that appeals to them? Is it still popular? Why or why not?
 - Why do labels on heavy metal music CDs often have parental warnings or advice? Should young people be able to buy and listen to this type of music? Why or why not?
- Why do you think the author of the book and the director of the film both decided to have Rodrick play in a heavy metal band? (You might like to bring in some age-appropriate heavy metal music to listen to. Be sure to check the suitability of the lyrics first.)
- Do you think Greg should actually be described as 'wimpy'? Why or why not?

If you could pick one adjective to describe Greg, what would it be? What adjective would describe Rowley? Rodrick?

Your turn: wimp yourself

Take a photo of your face and print it out on A4 paper. Paste it onto a large piece of paper and create a humorous 'wimpy' body below it. What is the 'wimpy' action that you are doing?

- Compare and contrast Greg with other characters from the film using the 'Character Analysis' worksheet on page 21 of this study guide.
- The filmmakers believe they populated the school with kids who looked like real middle school students, kids with whom audiences would respond and relate.

Do you agree? Why or why not. Give examples from the film to support your ideas.

Your turn: create a character

- Imagine the film is set in an Australian school. Find out what is meant by stereotypes. Use what you know about stereotypes to create a character with as many Australian attributes as possible.

Act out a short scene to introduce your character to the class.





Interestingly, there appear to be a few qualities that author Jeff Kinney and director Thor Freudenthal share.

Visit Freudenthal's blog chronicling his experiences making the film at <http://www.thewrap.com/blog-entry/diary-director-diary-wimpy-kid-15400>.

Read the entries from October 2008 and November 2008 (reproduced below):

OCTOBER 2008

My movie Hotel for Dogs is in the final stages of post. I'm still recovering from shooting with a herd of animals and a whole ensemble of wild kids when producer Nina Jacobson shows me a book called Diary of a Wimpy Kid.

It looks unlike any book I've ever seen. Greg Heffley's experiences in middle school are handwritten on lined paper and illustrated with simple stick figure drawings that make me laugh out loud as I turn the pages. It feels fresh and honest. Also, it features a whole ensemble of wild kids. Do I really want to do this again?

NOVEMBER 2008

I can't get the Wimpy Diary out of my head. One day, as I clean out my office I discover why. In a box I find old notebooks I kept from fourth to sixth grade. They're loaded with anecdotes and drawings akin to Heffley's diary, illustrating my life in those days. There's even drawn fantasy scenarios of fame and fortune. A realization grabs hold: Was I a wimpy kid myself?

- As a class, list qualities you believe Kinney and Freudenthal might have in common.

As work continued on the script, the filmmakers focused on the critical task of finding their 'wimpy kid'. In Kinney's books, Greg is a stick figure with a round head, three hairs and big shoes on a skimpy, slumped frame. It's a rendering beloved by *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* readers but one that wouldn't work in a live action film.

In Freudenthal's January 2009 blog entry he records the following:

After our first casting session, I know it's going to be a long search. Greg Heffley has to be selfish, lazy AND make us care about him! Can we find an eleven year old who meets those demands and can carry a feature-length comedy?

- As a class, discuss whether those responsible for casting the character of Greg met Freudenthal's requirements? Encourage students to justify their ideas.

The filmmakers were looking for a young actor who could convey Greg's charisma and many flaws, while always keeping him likeable and fun. 'Finding the right actor who could capture that certain "Greg Heffley" quality while remaining sympathetic, was very difficult,' admits Nina Jacobson. 'He had to be cute and endearing, but also have a lot of chutzpah.'

The actor playing Greg would have the formidable task of being likeable amidst the character's non-stop shenanigans, schemes and attitude. 'One of the ways we had to make Greg likeable was finding the right kid to play him,' says producer Brad Simpson. 'If you don't have the right actor – if you don't find the real "Wimpy Kid", who combines charisma with a bottom-rung quality – then it's not going to work.'

For Zachary Gordon, playing Greg was both exciting and the most natural thing in the world. For one thing, he was already a huge fan of the books. In addition, Zachary is in many ways similar to Greg physically and, more importantly, he captures – even channels – his inner wimp. 'Well, I'm small and thin like Greg, and that helps me play him,' says Zachary. 'But I can also think like him. If you say something about Greg, I can sort of picture it in my mind, and imagine myself doing those things or having them happen to me. And that just puts me into the character.'

- Ask students to think about the decisions they would make if they were responsible for casting the film's main characters.

As a class, list each of the lead and supporting characters. Beside each name, record students' ideas about the casting decisions. Make notes to indicate decisions that may have differed if students had been in control of casting.

Discuss as a class:

- Do characters in books and films need to be likeable for the story to be successful? Why or why not?

PRODUCTION ROLES

Early films tended to have no credits or only a short list of major cast and crew that opened the film. The trend to include closing credits listing the full production crew and cast became more established in American films around the 1970s. There is quite a long list of people acknowledged in the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*'s credits.

- Estimate how many people may have been part of the film's production team.

Visit the entry for *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* on the IMDB website at <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1196141>> and read through the full credits list. How close was your estimate?

- Ask each student to select one of the jobs listed, for example gaffer, sound mixer, lead graphic designer or scenic artist, and to research what tasks might be involved with that job.
- Share students' findings and then consider whether these jobs are likely to be in demand by the time they leave school.

Your turn: real-life roles

- Create a labelled cartoon of yourself engaged in a film production job you would enjoy.

Discuss as a class:

- Are the tasks involved in each job likely to change? Why or why not?
- Who would like to train for one of these jobs? Why?
- What might be involved in preparing yourself for this type of career?
- What would be most and least enjoyable about this job?

Your turn: calling for crew

- Work in pairs. Take turns to be a person applying to be part of the production crew for this film and to be an interviewer. Remember to plan some interview questions before you begin.

NARRATIVE HUMOUR

A storyboard is a little like a comic, telling stories visually via sequential panels. However, while storyboards include a range of additional information to assist with the filming of the story, such as arrows to show movement, they don't include thoughts or dialogue in speech bubbles.



As part of the pre-production planning process, Freudenthal created detailed storyboards. While a storyboard artist will often do this task, Freudenthal created his own. Some of these can be seen in *The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary*, a tie-in book written by Kinney, including the complicated fight scene.

Your turn: changing the scene

- Think of a scene from the film that you would like to change in some way. Create a storyboard to show the changes you would make to the scene.

Rodrick busts Greg and Rowley in his room without permission when they are looking at the yearbook. Rowley, ever loyal, distracts Rodrick while Greg makes a run for it. Greg locks himself in his room, but he really needs to go to the toilet. He finally makes a run for it when he thinks Rodrick has gone. However, Rodrick bursts in on him, and Greg turns in surprise and urinates all over him.

- Discuss why many people think something like this is funny.
- In pairs, list other humorous parts of the film. In each case, try to explain why the incident is humorous.
- Identify another one of Greg's problems, then use the graphic organiser to summarise its cause and any related effects using the 'Cause and Effect' worksheet on page 22 of this study guide.

Your turn: embarrassingly funny

- Create a new scene for the film in cartoon form, showing another embarrassing moment for Greg that the audience would find very funny.



Themes

SCHOOL: FITTING IN, POPULARITY AND STUDENT TENSIONS

The audience quickly discovers that middle school is a terrible place – we even hear the words ‘This is a terrible place’. Along with dialogue and narration, the audience is provided with visual evidence that middle school is not a friendly environment, including the scary toilets with big guys and cubicles without doors. We also learn that the cafeteria is the ‘cruellest place on earth’.

Yet still Greg is deluded about his popularity, saying ‘I was making some kid’s day by sitting next to them’. He soon discovers all the seats are ‘taken’ and he and Rowley end up sitting on the floor by the bins, where Fregley joins them.

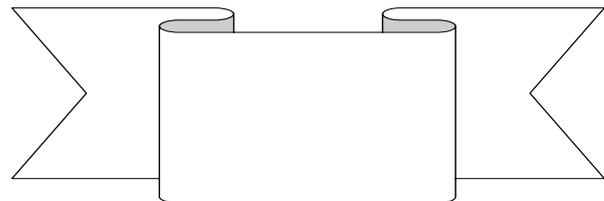
- As a class, discuss how the middle school motto of ‘respect, honour and dignity’ is (and is not) reflected in the actions of the film’s characters.



Your turn: what’s your motto?

As a class, brainstorm qualities that could be the basis of a personal motto, such as honesty, loyalty, fearlessness, kindness.

Encourage individuals to select several qualities or attributes to form their own personal motto, and then to draw and illustrate a shield or crest that includes the motto.



- Consider the gym class with Coach Malone (Andrew McNee), which seems violent and all about who is bigger and better at sports. What things occur to make Greg and Rowley uncomfortable, for example the make-up of the teams, the tackling of Chirag?
- List other examples from the film that explore ideas about fitting in, popularity and tensions between students at school.

When Greg and Rowley hide under the bleacher, they meet Angie, who seems to provide the voice of experience. She comments on the school social environment, labelling it ‘an intellectual wasteland’ and ‘glorified holding pen’.

- As a class, consider what she means by each of these phrases.

While Rowley is happy talking to Angie, Greg is not that keen. They return to the violent game – it seems getting crushed is better than being seen talking to this girl.

- Explain why each character responds to Angie in a different way.
- Discuss the role of Angie in the film.



At the end of the school day, Greg is horrified when Rowley yells out, 'Hey Greg, you wanna come over and play?'

- Why is Greg embarrassed and why doesn't Rowley realise the problem that Greg thinks he is creating?

There are many indications that Greg sees his friendship with Rowley as a handicap when it comes to popularity among his peers, for example the interaction related to Rowley's bike with the basket and ribbons. When Greg is sorting through Rowley's clothing and discussing image Rowley says, 'My mum told me to be myself.' Greg responds, 'That would be good advice if you were someone else'.

- List other examples that indicate that friendship with Rowley has become a problem for Greg.

Discuss as a class:

- Rowley is the opposite of Greg – he is happy and loyal. Discuss.

Chirag explains that a kid touched the mouldy cheese in the playground and became a social outcast, then that kid touched another kid to get rid of it. This passing on became known as the 'cheese touch'. Eventually, it was passed on to an exchange student who took it overseas with him and things quietened down, but everyone – including the cleaners – have been avoiding the mouldy cheese ever since.

- What is the significance of the legend of the 'cheese touch' as recounted by Chirag?



Your turn: pitching playground legends

- Work with a partner, to think of a new playground legend that could form the opening scene for a sequel to the film *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* that explores Greg's next year at school.

Pitch your idea to the class.

As a class select several of the ideas, work in groups to storyboard them and then film them.

Make popcorn as a class and watch your new playground legends.

FRIENDSHIP, POPULARITY AND LOYALTY

In a last-ditch effort to become more popular, Greg and Rowley join the Safety Patrol, thinking it to be a high-profile and responsible role. While Mr Winsky (Rob LaBelle), the teacher in charge, takes it very seriously, describing the role as involving 'sacred trust' and noting 'with great power comes great responsibility', Greg is particularly disappointed in the task of walking the kindergarten children home from school. A series of events follow on from this point that revolve around Greg's friendship with Rowley and Greg's popularity – or, rather, lack of it.

Your turn: design a vest for the safety patrol

- Imagine you are the company designing a vest for the Safety Patrol. Use textas and paper to create a life size mock-up of a style of vest you think would help to keep you safe while leading a group of young children. Add an image on the back that would amuse any young children following.

Greg continues to be deluded about the role of friendship. While walking home with Rowley and throwing a football at his friend he is considering how lucky Rowley is to have him as a friend. When the football hits the wheel of Rowley's bike, he flies off and breaks his wrist.

- Discuss the irony of Rowley's popularity among the girls when he returns to school with a plaster cast and the effect of this upon Greg.
- When Rowley cracks a joke, one of the girls tells him he is funny and asks if she can sign his cast. What does it

tell you about Greg when he interjects with 'I'm the one who broke his arm!'

- Do you agree with the girl who responds by calling him a jerk? Why or why not?
- How do you think Greg feels when Rowley becomes somewhat of a celebrity among the girls and also friends with the most popular boy at school?

Despite the lack of success, Greg's attempts to improve his popularity continue. Another opportunity arises when the school newspaper's cartoonist becomes sick and they need a replacement. While Greg can clearly draw, Rowley has his own idea for a cartoon, Zoo-wee Mama, which Greg discounts as he doesn't think it's very good.

Your turn: friendship report

- List qualities of friendship exhibited by Greg and Rowley throughout the film.

Create a report card assessing the friendship skills and qualities of both boys.

Who do you consider to be the better friend and why?

- Create a storyboard showing alternative scenes related to the discussion around the selection of a replacement cartoonist, in which both boys exhibit positive friendship behaviours.

When Rowley is unable to walk the kindergarten children home in the rain because of his plaster cast, Greg does it on his own. He is wearing Rowley's raincoat, which has a very large 'R' on it.

- There are a number of things we learn about Greg in this sequence. For each of the following, explore the personality traits that are exposed:
 - the judgement by the kindergarten children that Rowley walked them better
 - Greg's need to hide from the bullies from Halloween
 - sending all the children down a large hole in the ground
 - leaving all the children in the hole
 - Greg's flight from the bullies.

Greg is unimpressed when everyone applauds the announcement of Rowley as the new cartoonist, responding 'Am I the only one who gets comedy?' This response, along with his lack of response when Mr Winsky lectures Rowley under the assumption that he was the one who left the children in the hole, sheds even more light on Greg's shortcomings as a friend.



Discuss as a class:

- Why didn't Greg own up to Mr Winsky?
- Why didn't Greg own up to Rowley at this time?
- Even though Greg thinks of things he has heard such as 'It's our choices that make us', he decides to let Rowley 'take one for the team'. Why? Was it the right call?

Rowley's loyal friendship for Greg has not faltered until this point. He has even written Greg into a Zoo-wee Mama cartoon. However, Greg's comment that 'I should be more careful what I do in front of Mrs Irvine's house, and you should be more careful who you lend your raincoat to' is the final straw. Rowley is furious and proclaims, 'You're not a good friend. You break my hand – you don't even say sorry.'

- What attitude is reflected in Greg's statement that he 'was willing to let bygones be bygones'?
- Do you think Rowley would want to patch things up while Greg has this attitude? Why or why not?

Your turn: badge of apology

- Create a large badge or button that Greg could present to Rowley as a gesture of apology. Include a humorous cartoon character on the badge.

Greg persists in his attempts to become popular, this time by auditioning for the school production of the *Wizard of Oz*. While he can sing, his voice is so high that – much to his horror – the teacher considers casting him as Dorothy. Fortunately for him, Patty, his determined nemesis, is successful in securing the role and Greg is cast as a tree. Not surprisingly, the play becomes a complete fiasco complete with an apple fight.

- What is the significance of Greg's mother's commenting 'I think Dorothy deserved it'?

In view of your responses, consider Greg's treatment of Rowley and whether he deserved such treatment.



While dancing with Greg, his mother suggests that he try to patch things up with Rowley, saying 'When someone's worth it, you just have to put yourself out there'.

- What does Greg's mother mean?
- What happens when Greg tries to take his mother's advice? Why do you think the outcome is not what Greg had hoped would happen?

What impact does this have on Greg and Rowley?

Rowley and his mum also dance to 'Intergalactic' by the Beastie Boys. They look dorky but everyone enjoys the moment.

- Why do you think the filmmakers included this scene?
- Why do you think they chose this music for the scene?

Back at school, a showdown occurs between Greg and Rowley. It appears they will fight with each other, but you can tell they don't really want to.

- Explore how this is shown by the filmmaker by using a point-of-view shot of them dancing around one another.

All ideas of a fight are forgotten when the bullies from Halloween show up. All the other students run and the bullies force Rowley to pick up the cheese.

- Explore how this scene is created. Although Rowley has his back to us, we know the bullies have made him pick up and eat the cheese. Consider the use of carefully structured camera shots and menacing music.
- When does the audience realise that Rowley has the 'cheese touch' and, worse, that he's actually eaten the cheese?

Upon their return, the students are horrified. Greg finally steps up for Rowley. He announces it was him who ate the cheese with the rousing speech 'I ate the cheese. I ate the cheese to show you how stupid the whole school is. It's meaningless, just like this cheese. Step forward! Join me!'

Discuss as a class:

- Greg was not protecting his friend by helping him to avoid being ostracised, rather he was placing himself in the spotlight through his heroic speech. Discuss.
- Greg was looking for fame by leading a revolt against the 'cheese touch'. Discuss.
- In the final scenes, what is the significance of:
 - the line 'Wanna come round after school and play?'
 - the school yearbook listing Greg and Rowley as 'cutest friends'
 - Greg giving Patty the 'cheese touch' unbeknown to her.
- Explain how the smelly, mouldy cheese could be a metaphor for friendship in this film, or a metaphor for another quality.

IDENTITY

When Greg and Rowley are in Rodrick's room looking at the high achievers in the yearbook, Greg says, 'This is where a person like me needs to be. They're famous.'

- As a class, discuss why Greg wants to be in the yearbook. What does this tell you about him?
- Contrast this with the scene where Greg is looking at the list of school activities. We learn here that Greg is quite lazy when he comments that 'Activities are so much work'.
- Discuss the qualities people need to become high achievers. Consider the roles of hard work, effort, dedication and application – and not just ability – in becoming a high achiever.

Your turn: class yearbook

- Write your own biographical piece to include in a yearbook that will be a keepsake of your class this year.

Angie suggests Greg could sign up for the school paper, which she works on. She says it's the 'voice of the people, make fun of the people', but Greg replies, 'I'm going to be in the paper a lot so it would be a conflict of interest'. Angie retorts, 'I get it – you **are** one of the people.'

- Explore the significance of this exchange.
- Discuss the way that dream sequences are used to present a contrast between how great Greg will be and his reality.

Early on in the film, when the geeky Fregley outwrestles Greg, the only clap comes from the supportive Rowley. Without acknowledging this support, Greg links his issues

back to a lack of popularity, bemoaning the fact that 'No-one's ever gonna let me sit at their table'.

When Greg is beaten again – by a girl! – he is photographed for the school paper. Everyone is reading it and laughing. Rowley, however, is excited that Greg is in the paper and doesn't seem to realise that it's embarrassing for him.

Greg decides that the way to popularity is to become the best dressed at school. He strolls in slow-mo with classmates shooting him admiring glances. All is lost, though, when the ever-loyal Rowley arrives wearing an identical outfit – because he wanted to match Greg.

- What do these scenes tell you about Rowley?
- What do the scenes tell you about the relationship between the two boys?

'Reading the book was like looking at a scrapbook of your own adolescent bravado and stupidity,' says co-screenwriter Jeff Judah. Gabe Sachs, another of the film's screenwriters, echoes this sentiment: 'I think that writing for the screen version of Greg Heffley felt very natural because in middle school I would often do what I thought was cool, only to quickly discover that it was anything but cool.'

Your turn: 'uncool' scrapbook

- Ask each student to identify a real or imagined incident, then using a comic book style, sketch a moment or two related to the incident with notes explaining how the incident made them feel or might make them feel.

Make a class scrapbook titled 'Not cool at School' that



shows these or other incidents at school where students have acted in a way that makes them feel anything but cool.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

While the word 'wimpy' appears in the title of both the books and the film, the theme of being in the middle is equally important. Greg is stuck in every kid's nightmare – he is the middle child caught between a mean older brother and a three-year-old, potty-training-challenged sibling. He is also about to confront the humiliations surrounding being in middle school.

- Have students work with a partner to list advantages and disadvantages of being the middle child in a family.

Share and develop possible solutions for each of the disadvantages.

While much of the action is set in Greg's middle school, the film presents hilarious snippets of his home life. Greg's family experiences, like middle school life, are not ideal. His parents are well-meaning but they have no idea about Greg's day-to-day struggles at school.

Greg's father, Frank (Steve Zahn), looks at his three kids and wonders to himself, 'who are these people?' Between Greg's video games and Rodrick's rock band, they're completely alien to him. 'Each of his three boys distresses him in a different way,' says Simpson.

Greg's mum, Susan (Rachael Harris), is the only woman in a household of men and is a constant source of embarrassment for Greg. 'Susan's heart is in the right place,' says Harris, 'but she's not cool enough to sneak her good intentions in under the radar.'

Rodrick makes a sport of picking on Greg. He's constantly dreaming up practical jokes and other ways to antagonise his younger brother. But, says Freudenthal, Rodrick is not your typical bully: 'There's an amused danger about him and an inventiveness that makes him likeable.'

Another thorn in Greg's side is three-year-old brother, Manny. While not yet possessing a teen's conniving ways, the youngster's obsessive potty-training is a constant annoyance to Greg.

Your turn: this is Greg's life

- Plan and script a television panel show in the style of *This is Your Life* that focuses on Greg's life.

You will need to cast a student as the host, while other students can take on the roles of Greg's family members, Rowley, Fregley, Chirag, Patty, Angie, Coach Malone, and other students and teachers from school.

Greg gets lots of advice from various characters, including his mother and older brother. Like most kids, Greg doesn't always listen.



However, a theme that emerges in both the book and the film is that sometimes it is a good idea to listen to your mother, father or other carer.

- Ask students whether they agree with this statement. If so, ask them to explain why and, if not, why not?

Your turn: listen up!

- Have students write an entry in their journal or diary that explores a time or an imaginary episode where he or she did not listen to their parent or carer. It might be fun to do this in a cartoon using two or three panels and speech bubbles.

ADVICE FROM THE AUTHOR OF DIARY OF A WIMPY KID

Kinney offers the following advice: 'I would tell them that [middle school] will all be over quickly, and you'll be done and through it.'

Your turn: Dear Greg

- Imagine you are the editor of a school magazine and are responsible for responding to letters from students asking for help. Select one of Greg's problems and write a letter giving him advice on how to handle the situation.
- Predict Greg's future. Imagine Greg has a son of his own. Write a letter from Greg to his son giving advice about starting middle school and explaining how to be popular at school.

In the book version, author Jeff Kinney adds to the text with cartoons.

Your turn: cartoon yourself

- Ask each student to draw self-portraits in the form of line drawings.

- Visit these websites for instructions to help you to draw a variety of cartoons:

<<http://home.howstuffworks.com/how-to-draw-cartoons.htm>>

<<http://www.how-to-draw-cartoons-online.com>>

Encourage students with an interest in comics to visit the following site for instructions to help them to create a short comic:

<http://www.teachingcomics.org/attachments/132_MakingAMinicomics.pdf>

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Borders Media: Jeff Kinney

<<http://www.bordersmedia.com/liveat01/kinney>>

Videos and an interview in which Jeff Kinney discusses the widespread appeal of his book.

National Association of Comics Art Educators

<<http://www.teachingcomics.org>>

Contains teaching ideas, lesson plans and handouts for teaching about comics, as well as information about creating and using comics in the classroom.

Teacher Vision

<<http://www.teachervision.fen.com/childrens-book/diaries/28677.html>>

Lesson plans, printable sheets and other resources.

Christine Evely writes educational materials for teachers and students across the curriculum and works part-time as an Education Programmer for the Australian Centre for the Moving Image.



This study guide was produced by **ATOM**. (© ATOM 2010)
editor@atom.org.au

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If you are interested in taking your school or class to see DIARY OF A WIMPY KID, please contact your local cinema for more details. Highly discounted rates are available, and teachers go along free of charge (at participating cinemas). Contact your local cinema and book a screening today!

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WORKSHEET

Greg vs Rowley

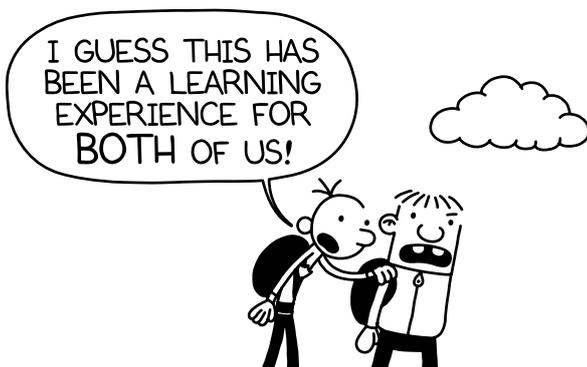
NAME: _____



Make notes to show how Greg and Rowley are polar opposites. List their similarities below the chart.

CHARACTERISTICS OR FEATURES	GREG	ROWLEY
Physical appearance		
Clothing		
Personal qualities, for example, honesty, loyalty		
Actions		
Relationships with others		

Similarities



WORKSHEET

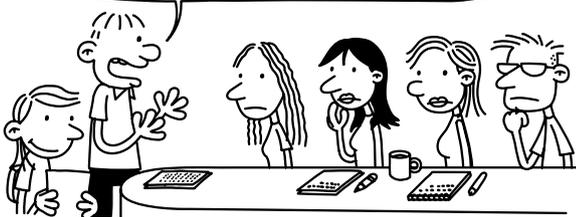
Character Analysis

NAME: _____



CHARACTER	APPEARANCE – PHYSICAL FEATURES	COSTUME	DIALOGUE	ACTION
Greg				
Fregley				
Patty				
Rodrick				
Angie				

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...



DIARY OF A WIMPY KID



WORKSHEET

Cause and effect

NAME: _____



What is one of the problems Greg had in the film *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*?

Use the flowchart to show what caused the problem, then add any further effects that happened in relation to this problem. Add more events on the back if necessary.



Was the problem resolved? Why or why not?

