

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**

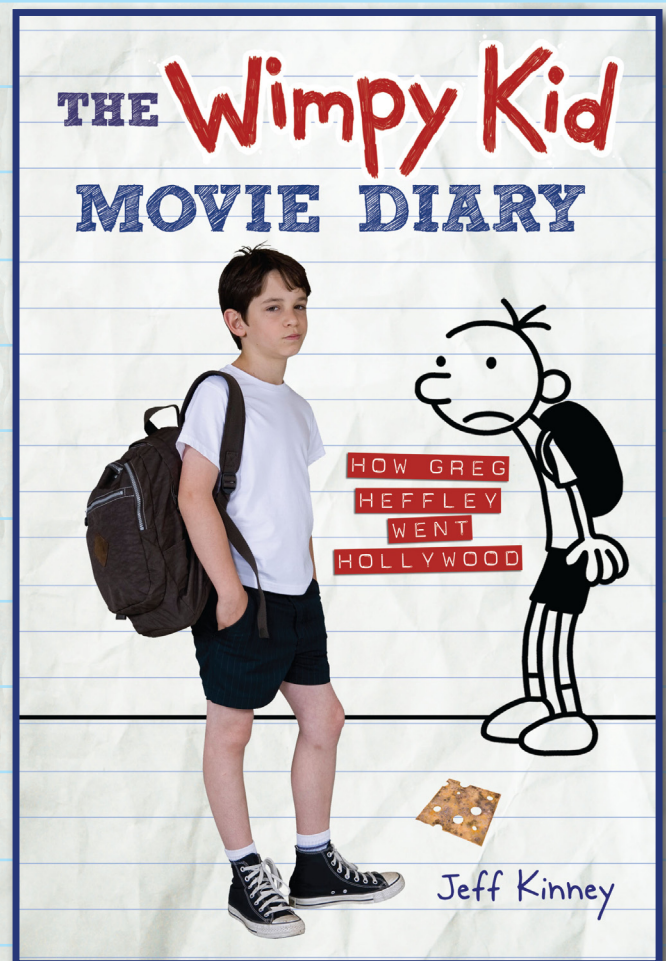
MOVIE DIARY

Teaching Guide

Engage Students with:

Differentiated instruction that helps you support all your students!

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

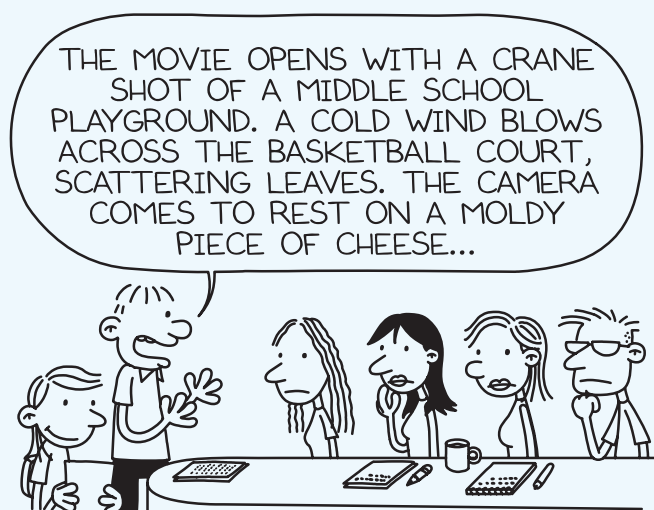


Correlated to Standards and Benchmarks!

The instructional content of this Teaching Guide is aligned with

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

DISCUSSION GUIDE



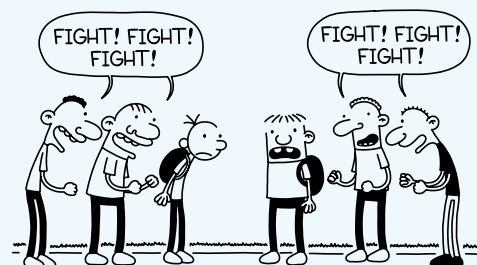
Use these questions to encourage students to recall and reflect upon the wealth of information and ideas in *The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary*. Although some students may have already seen the movie, doing so is by no means a prerequisite for joining the conversation. The questions themselves are organized 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 book *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* 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)

Identify: What were some changes, additions, or deletions that were made to the film? What were the reasons for these changes? For example, why was the Sweetheart Dance created, and why was the scene of Greg chasing the kindergartners replaced? (pp. 110, 128)

Recall: Who are Zach Gordon and Thor Freudenthal, and what were their contributions to the film? (pp. 14, 18, 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 movie's production. (e.g., pp. 126-130)



UNDERSTANDING

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

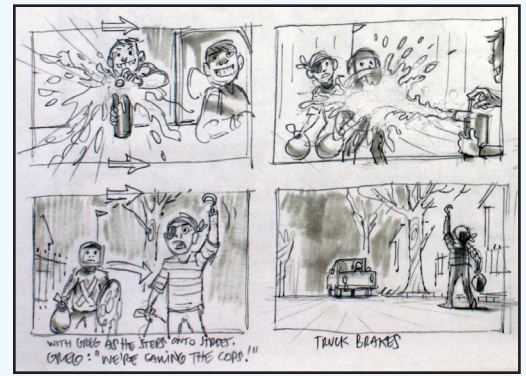
Practice Visual Literacy: What aspects of the images of Fregley's home on pages 140-141 might make viewers share Greg's discomfort? (Prompt students to note props, lighting, and set design.)

Connect: Often to create movie illusions more than a single filmmaking element needs to come into play. Select an example such as the “fake snow” and describe how makeup, props, and acting need to work together. (p. 127)

Infer: Why does the author suggest that taking “fantasy” photos of Greg/Zach on the final day on the set seemed like an appropriate way “to end things”? (p. 172)

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, 52-63, 132-141, 160-169) 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 *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* or any other fictional text that they feel would make a great movie. How would they go about transforming the real location so that it resembles the made-up one?

ANALYZING

Categorize: How is this book different from other titles in the *Wimpy Kid* series? Help students grasp the fact that, though they 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 just apply their skills in a different way? (pp. 116-117)

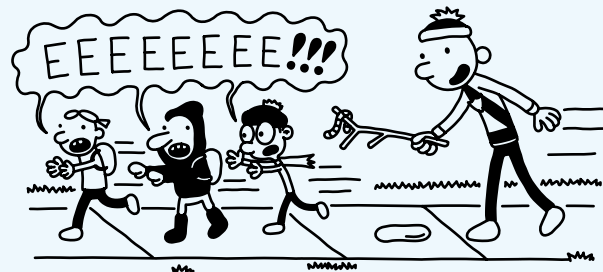
Decide: Review with students the movie credits that appear on pages 200-201. Then ask students which job they'd most like to have, either in the case of this particular movie or as part of an ongoing career, and ask them to explain why. If faced with a lack of response variety, consider having students 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 editor (pp. 176-179) or Foley artist (p. 180) as needed—or invite students to choose from ones not included, such as animator. (pp. 182-185)



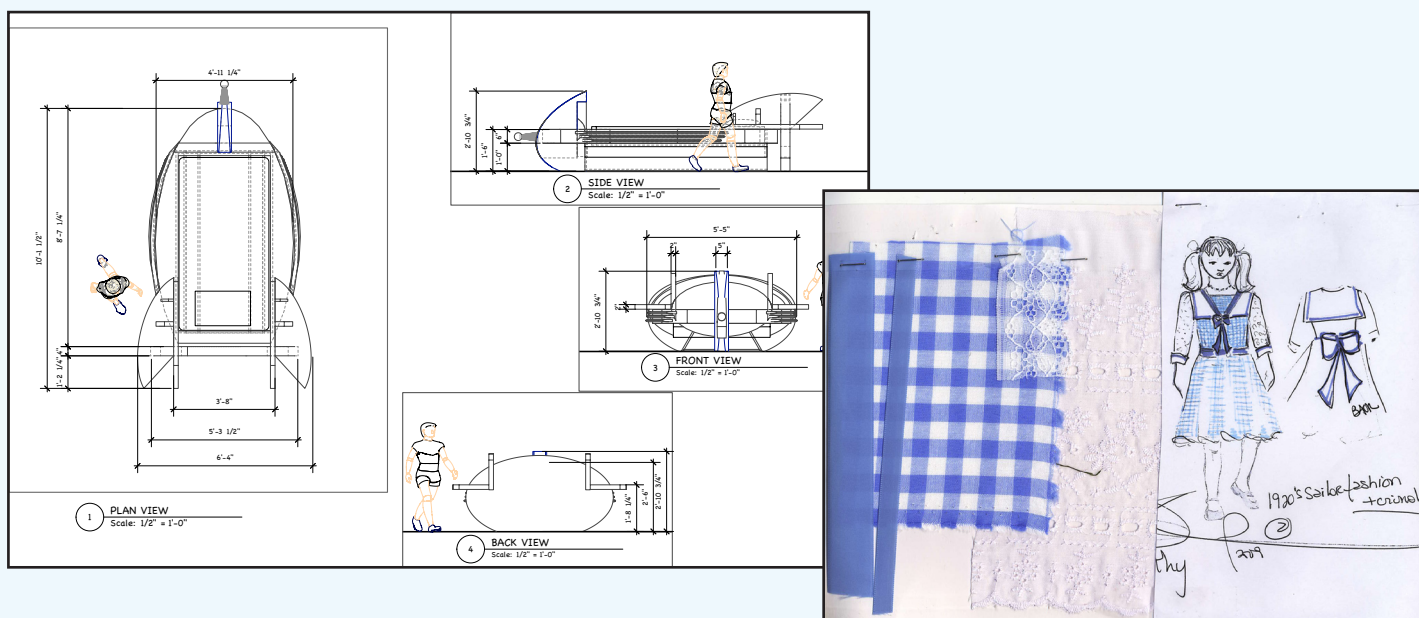
Extend: You can both extend learning and activate prior knowledge by asking students what other movie jobs they're familiar with. Screen a "closing credits" sequence for students or reproduce a "cast and crew" page from the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), defining terms as necessary. For example, 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 other 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? Would it be worth it?

Practice Critical Thinking: Challenge students to voice an opinion about the test-screening process. (**pp. 186–187**) Does getting feedback from audiences 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? Whom do you think is usually invited to test screenings, and what is the “target audience” for *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*?

Evaluate: Have students apply what they have learned about adapting books for the screen to evaluate other movies they’ve seen. Did some boast exceptional production values but were fundamentally flawed, perhaps at the conceptual stage? (**pp. 8–9**)

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 *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, 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. As a form of preparation 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)** Finally, as with most of the activities in this Guide, consider using a text from your class reading rather than *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* if that would fit your curriculum better.



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 these, 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 |
| ☆ ironic comedy | ☆ footage |
| ☆ choreographer | |

Once students have researched the meanings of these terms, they can be compiled into a glossary that the group can display as a wall chart. That way it can be used as a handy reference for other activities or projects included in this Guide, or for future assignments involving movies and media.

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,” to 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 5 and 7 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 film, tape, or edit a trailer but 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 or graphic novel that students wish were made into a movie, an imagined sequel to an existing movie, or their own creative writing. Regardless of what students choose as the basis of 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.



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** ★

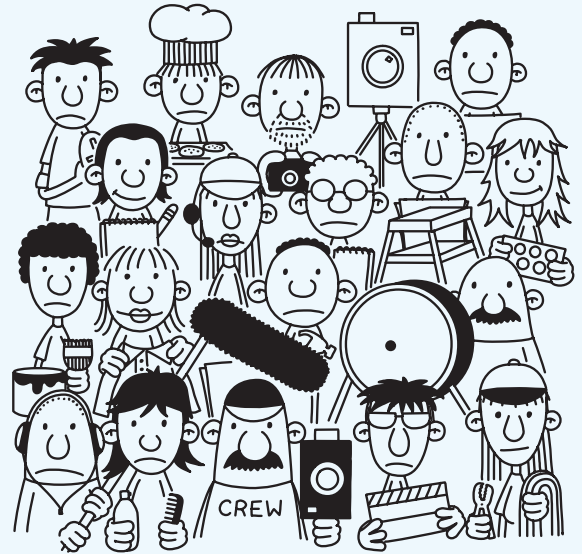
BLACKLINE MASTERS

MINIMUM MOVIE REQUIREMENTS

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 9**.

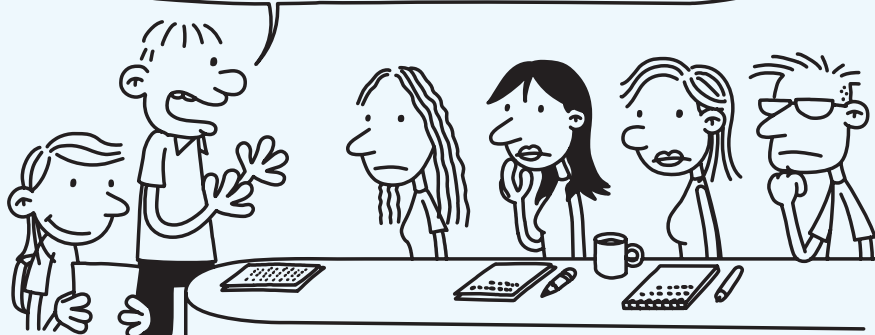
Answer Key: 1E; 2G; 3B; 4A; 5F; 6I; 7D; 8H; 9C; 10J



You're the Screenwriter

Reproduce, distribute, and assign the annotated screenplay on **page 11** of *The Wimpy Kid Movie Diary*. 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 and 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 on **page 10**; 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**

A. Creates “wireframe” version of a drawing

2. **Director**

B. “Doubles” for a lead actor in some scenes

3. **Stunt Person**

C. Works with blueprints

4. **Animator**

D. Runs the audition process

5. **Line Producer**

E. Helps keep young stars prepared

6. **Costume Designer**

F. Is in charge of the shooting schedule details

7. **Casting Director**

G. Decides on a filmmaking style for a movie

8. **Composer**

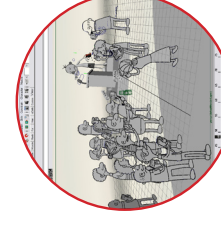
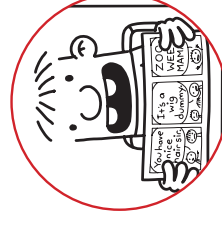
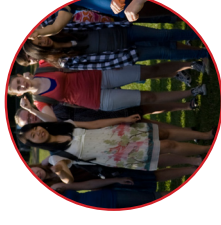
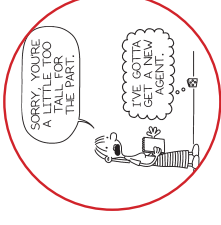
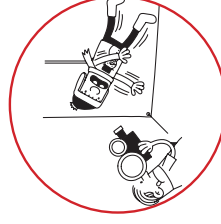
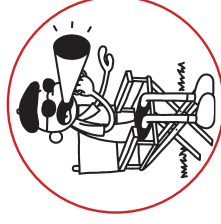
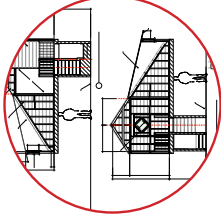
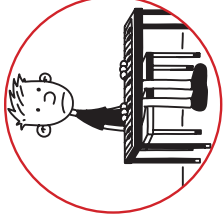
H. Writes a film’s score

9. **Set Designer**

I. Creates a wardrobe to match each character

10. **Extra**

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.

Stands for "point-of-view."

RODRICK (O.S.)

Greg.

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

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?

"Line directions" always accompany the dialogue.

RODRICK (CONT'D)
Greg!

GREG
(half asleep)
What?

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

Stage directions are always set off from the dialogue.

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?

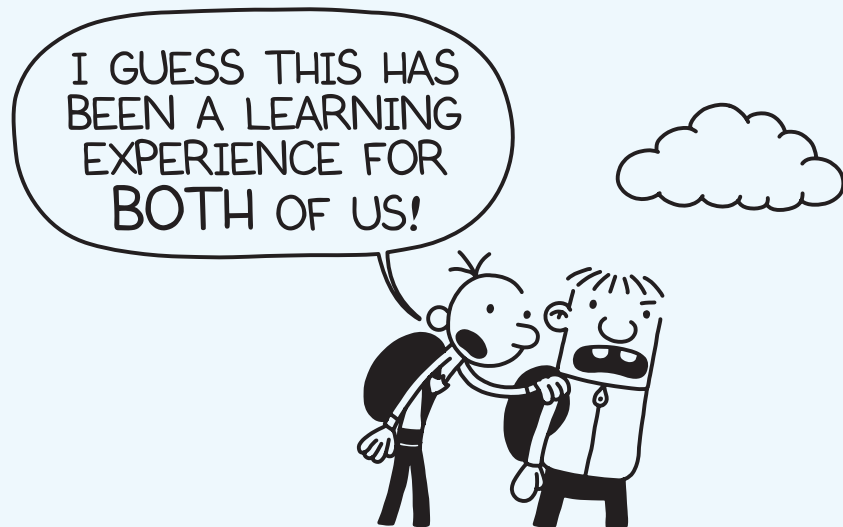
RODRICK
What are you doing? Get up! Mom and dad have been calling you for an hour. You're gonna be late for your first day of middle school.

GREG
What?

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

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

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION



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 190-199** and having students describe what they depict.

BELOW-LEVEL LEARNERS

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. (p. 187) 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)

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 of Foley art 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)

CONTESTS

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

Create a movie poster for an upcoming or imagined film. Be sure to include credits, a tagline, and “key art,” and to mention whether it is based on a popular book or other property.

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, on 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: namle.net/core-principles
- ☆ The AFI Screen Education Center: <http://www.afi.com/Education/>
- ☆ 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.

Conceived and written by **Peter Gutiérrez**. Peter is a member of the Commission on Media of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and a former board member of the National Association for Media Literacy (NAMLE). A frequent contributor to *Screen Education*, his book on scriptwriting in the classroom will be published by Scholastic in 2011.

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