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**WELCOME Educators, Parents, & Caregivers -** this guide is for you!

Filled with conversation starters and resources galore, this guide can be utilized to prepare young audience members for the show, introduce them to the theater, encourage them to reflect on their experience, engage them in an activity, and enrich their overall experience with the play.

We built this guide for you, and we want to hear from YOU! At the end of this guide, there is a link to a survey. Please let us know what you thought - we appreciate your feedback!

# THE WORLD OF

# "DIARY OF A WIMPY KID"

THEMES: **Self Discovery** ~ **Choices** ~ **Belonging**

## SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY:

*Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Musical* tells the story of Greg Heffley, a middle school student navigating the challenges of adolescence. As Greg dreams of becoming popular and making his mark, he faces obstacles like bullies, embarrassing situations, and family dynamics. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* touches on relatable childhood themes of friendship, acceptance, and growing up.

## AUTHOR/CREATOR INFO:



### **Diary of a Wimpy Kid Book Series by:**

**Jeff Kinney** is the best-selling author and illustrator of the wildly popular *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. As a young reader, Kinney was inspired by the books of Judy Blume, Beverly Cleary, and J.R.R. Tolkien. While a student at the University of Maryland, Kinney decided he wanted to become a cartoonist. In the spring of 2007, the first *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* was published and quickly became a New York Times bestseller.

### **Music and Lyrics by:**

**Michael Mahler** is an award-winning actor, musician, composer, and lyricist. His original works as composer and/or lyricist include *Miracle the Musical*, *The Man Who Murdered Sherlock Holmes* (Jeff Award), *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, and others. His songs have been performed in concerts worldwide.



**Alan Schmuckler** writes for the live stage, television, film, podcasts and digital formats. His work has been performed across the US and internationally. Alan has won several awards for musical theatre, sound design, and original music.



### **Book by:**

**Kevin Del Aguila** is a writer, actor, director, and lyricist for the stage and screen. Del Aguila has written for numerous children's television shows. Broadway audiences will recognize him from his roles in *Some Like It Hot* and *Frozen*, and children everywhere have heard his voice as a Troll in the Disney movie *Frozen*.

# “A Novel in Cartoon”

## exploring stories through text and illustration

### Different Ways to tell a story through Words & Pictures

GRAPHIC NOVEL VS COMIC BOOKS		COMIC STRIPS VS COMIC BOOKS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Usually, stand-alone book with panels focused on clearly profiling of the story</li> <li>Focused on storytelling and a chronological narrative</li> <li>Characters undergo major transformation and evolve throughout the story</li> <li>Deep themes, symbolism, and intense plot</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple pages, each with a variety of panel layouts</li> <li>Longer narrative, containing multiple events and characters</li> <li>Pages/panels may include backstory that are not in chronological order</li> <li>Complex character development &amp; plot</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Row of 5 panels or less</li> <li>Short narrative, usually a specific event</li> <li>Panels are in chronological order or sequential order</li> <li>Easy to read, have clear themes that are easy to comprehend</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple pages, each with a variety of panel layouts</li> <li>Longer narrative, containing multiple events and characters</li> <li>Pages/panels may include backstory that are not in chronological order</li> <li>Complex character development &amp; plot</li> </ul>

### Manga

Manga are comics or graphic novels originating from Japan, printed in black and white, read right-to-left rather than left-to-right, and are typically released on a monthly or a weekly chapter-by-chapter basis through manga magazines.

### Novels in Cartoon

The *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* book series are in a “hybrid” category, because it relies heavily on words to move the story along, but the pictures are an extremely important part of the storytelling experience.

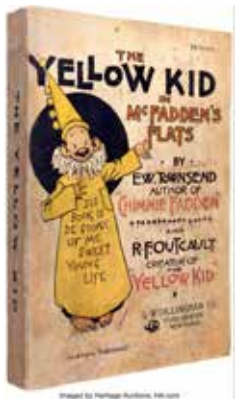


### REFLECTION QUESTIONS!

- What would change about the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series if there were no illustrations in them?
- How does the reading experience change when reading a chapter book without illustrations as opposed to one without illustrations?

# The History of Stories with Illustrations

**Early 1800s:** Satirical and political cartoons printed in newspapers are popular in England and America. Thomas Nast was the most famous creator of these.



**1897:** The Yellow Kid in McFadden's Flats is considered to be the first comic book and was wildly popular.



**1938-1939:** The Golden Age of Comic Books began with the debut of Superman in Action Comics #1. Batman premiered less than a year later in Detective Comics #27.



**1980s:** Graphic novels began to gain recognition as a legitimate art form, with the publication of groundbreaking works such as Watchmen and Maus.



# From Page to Stage (and Screen!)

## Adaptations of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*

### What is adaptation?

Adaptation is the process of being transformed from one medium to another.

### Why aren't the adaptations the same as the original?

Adaptations need to change to work well in their new medium. Books allow for a lot more words to tell a story with, but film adaptations require visual storytelling and musical adaptations require songs to tell the story.

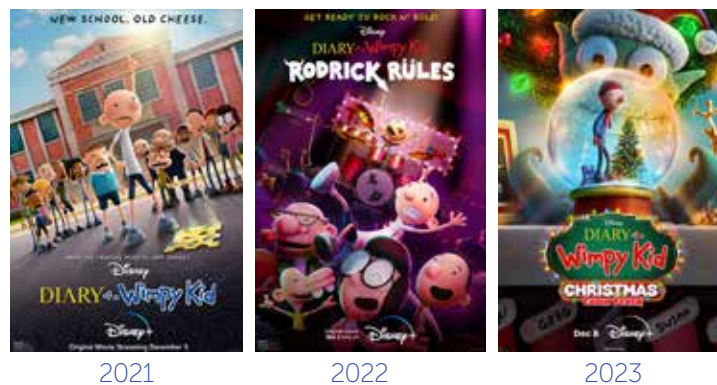
*Diary of a Wimpy Kid* has been adapted for many different mediums!

### Live Action Films



Fun Fact: These four films were each based on one to two books from the Wimpy Kid series.

### Animated Films



Fun fact: Kinney chose to use CGI in spite of the book's hand-drawn-style drawing because he wanted the animation to "feel like the books had come to life."

## Musical



Fun Fact: The musical was developed at Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis, MN.

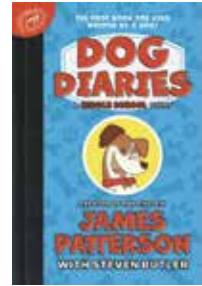
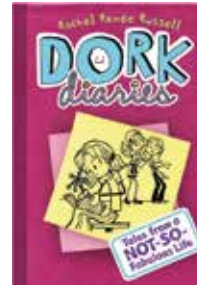
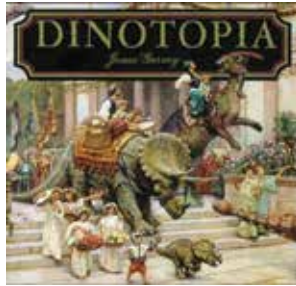
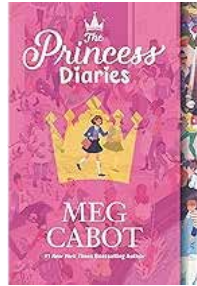
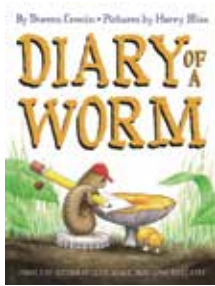
### REFLECTION QUESTION!

How many of these adaptations have you seen? How are they different or the same than the books? Which mediums do you prefer?



# “NOT a Diary:”

## How to tell a story through a character’s diary journal



### What is an Epistolary Novel?

A work of fiction where the story is told through letters, diary entries, and newspaper articles.

### There a lot of great reasons to write a work of fiction in diary form:

- To create a strong connection between the story’s narrator and the reader.
- You want the story to focus on a portrayal of everyday life.
- Diary entries can be as short as a single paragraph, sentence or word, which gives you the opportunity to be more creative.

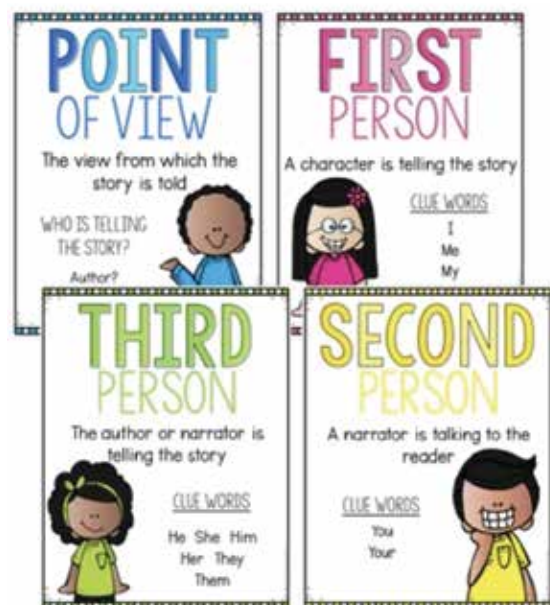
### If choosing to use a diary form, follow these few guidelines:

- Tell the story in first-person from the diarist’s viewpoint

• **Move the plot forward at all times** – The story is essentially a series of flashbacks as each entry is the diarist’s recollections of events that happened to them earlier in the day.

• **Skip the days when nothing of significance happens** – Just as a traditional novel skips those events in the characters’ lives that don’t move the plot forward, so you would do the same in a diary form.

• **Avoid creating a self-absorbed character** – This easily can happen in a book full of “I’s” and “me’s”! Make sure they are curious about the people and world around them.



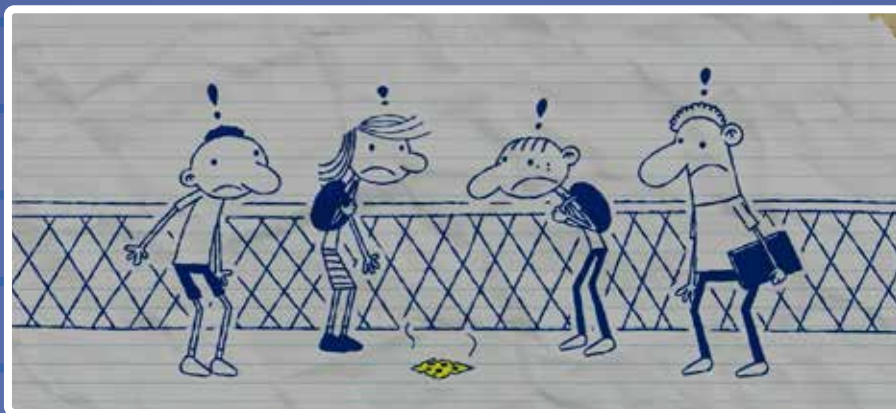
[Thanks to [Bob Bignell](#) for these tips and tricks!]



# BEFORE YOU SEE THE SHOW

## "The Cheese Touch" & Urban Legends

In *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, touching a moldy piece of cheese on the school's basketball court gives the person the "cheese touch," resulting in other students avoiding them. Someone with the cheese touch can only get rid of it by touching someone else.



"The Cheese Touch" is an **Urban Legend**.

What is an Urban Legend?

Folklore about an unusual, scary, or humorous event or rumor that many people believe to be true but largely are not.

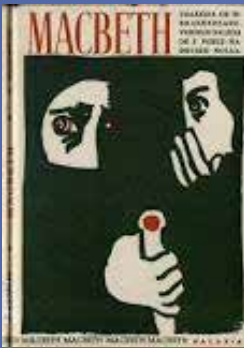
Why do Urban Legends Exist?

Urban legends may confirm moral standards, reflect prejudices, or be a way to make sense of societal anxieties.

# Examples of Urban Legends

## Bloody Mary

This tale suggests that if you are to look in the mirror and say "Bloody Mary" a specified number of times, something will happen. It's the what that legend disagrees on you see. It could be the face of a future spouse, a skull, or the witch Bloody Mary herself!



## The Scottish Curse

According to a theatrical superstition, speaking the name "Macbeth" inside a theatre, other than as called for in the script while rehearsing or performing, will cause disaster. To reverse the curse, the one who spoke "Macbeth" must exit the theatre, spin in a circle three times, spit over your left shoulder, and then request to be allowed back into the theatre.

## Walking under a ladder

Many common superstitions about walking under a ladder originated in ancient Egypt. The Egyptians regarded the shape of the triangle as sacred, much like the pyramids. Since a leaning ladder forms a triangle, walking under one would bring bad luck.



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What urban legends have you heard of? Are there any that are specific to your school or neighborhood?
- What does "The Cheese Touch" say about Greg, his friends, and community? What fears or comforts does that urban legend reveal?



# "Cool vs. Cringe" - The Science of Popularity

## GREG

I WILL NOT GIVE UP HOPE, 'CAUSE IT'S JUST DAY ONE  
BUT BOY, OH BOY, I'M HAVING QUITE A GRAY ONE  
IF ONLY I COULD FIGURE OUT MY RANKING  
AND KEEP MY POPULARITY FROM TANKING

- "The Middle of it All" from the musical "Diary of a Wimpy Kid"



## Greg is not alone! Did you know:

A study found that over 25% of 5th–8th graders consider popularity more important than friendships (compared to 10% of 1st–4th graders). Research on kids and popularity back up this shift.

## What does "Popular" even mean?

In his book, *Popular: The Power of Likability in a Status Obsessed World*, Dr. Mitch Prinstein describes two types of popularity: likability and status.

## Important traits of LIKEABILITY:

sharing, cooperating, and treating others with respect  
(aka the "nice kids" who demonstrate kindness)

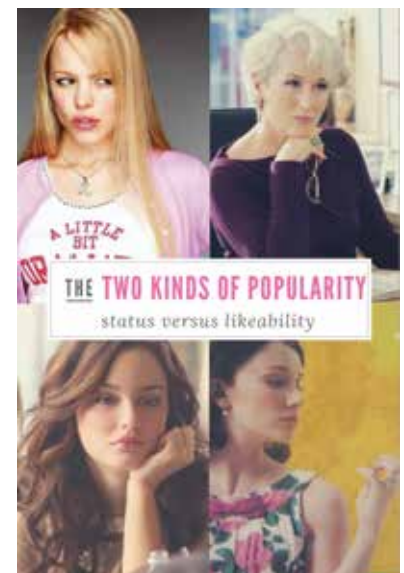
*\*This is the first form of popularity that kids experience.*

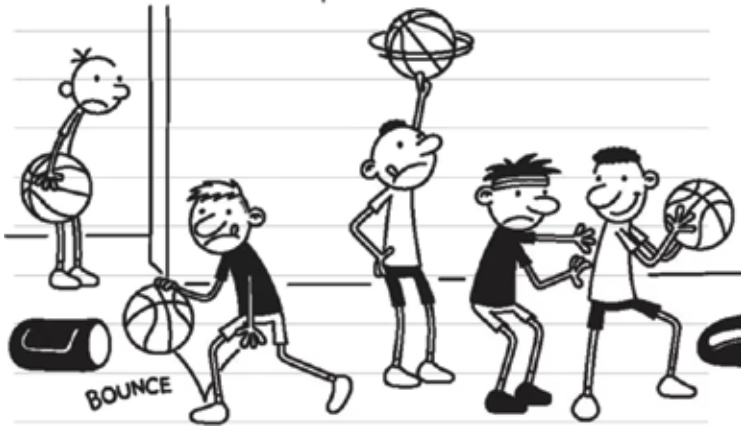
## Important traits of STATUS:

power, influence, and notoriety

(aka the "cool kids" who are socially competent)

*\*In middle school, brains crave attention from peers.  
Status (more than likeability) is the fastest way to get  
that attention*





**When Greg chases STATUS:**  
Greg's preoccupation with his social position undermines his relationships with his friends, especially Rowley. But his plan backfires when the supposedly uncool Rowley in fact becomes more popular than him.

**When Greg demonstrates LIKEABILITY:**  
When Rowley eats "the Cheese," Greg chooses to protect his friend, even at a cost to his own popularity.



### What Greg ultimately learns about popularity vs. friendship:

"Being well-liked by a large group of people cannot take the place of forging deep, supportive friendships." - Rachel K. Narr, a doctoral student in clinical psychology

"The long term outcome of treating other people basically kindly and getting people to like you is more important than getting people to think that you're cool." - Dr. Mitch Prinstein

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- How do your friends demonstrate the traits of likeability?
- Have you ever had an experience like Greg's where you have to choose between popularity and friendship? What did you do?

# Activities for the Classroom!

## Create Your Own Cartoon!

In *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, Greg Heffley expresses himself through creating cartoons for his school paper. Cartoons can be a fun opportunity to tell a story through words and pictures. In the play, the students at Greg's school love the line "Zoo-Wee Mama" as a punchline to these comic strips. "Zoo-Wee Mama does not really have a distinct meaning, but is used to express excitement, amusement or shock.

Practice your illustration and storytelling skills by creating a comic strip with the template below. Use the line "Zoo-Wee Mama" as your final line. We have created an example comic to give you inspiration. You might also consider looking at a *Diary of A Wimpy Kid* book for more inspiration.



Bonus: Want to draw like Greg Heffley does? **CLICK HERE** to watch a tutorial by none other than Jeff Kinney himself!

## Common Core Standards Addressed through this activity:

### Art and Design:

- A.A.Cr.4.i: Investigate Experiment with studio skills, techniques, materials, tools and elements and principles of art and design through practice.
- A.A.Cr.5.i: Plan Brainstorm, discuss, and sketch ideas to solve an art problem.
- A.A.Cr.8.m: Plan Generate original solutions through exploration and practice.
- A.A.Cr.7.m: Investigate Investigate and expand knowledge of studio skills, techniques, materials, tools, and elements and principles of art and design.
- A.A.R.13.m: Interpret Interpret the formal and expressive qualities in a work of art or design and integrate those qualities into their own work.

### Language Arts

- W.1.4 With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are culturally-sustaining and rhetorically authentic to task and purpose.
- W.1.6 Learn to produce writing through printing (including forming most printed upper- and lowercase letters), cursive, and/or typing.
- W.1.7 Participate in shared inquiry and writing projects
- W.2.4 With guidance and support from adults, produce Writing in which the development and organization are culturally-sustaining and rhetorically authentic to task and purpose.
- W.2.6 With guidance and support from adults, learn to produce writing through printing (including forming most printed upper- and lowercase letters), cursive, and/or typing.
- W.2.7 Participate in shared and independent inquiry and writing projects
- W.3.1 Compose reflective, formal, and creative writing, which may happen simultaneously or independently, for a variety of high-stakes and low-stakes purposes.
- W.3.4 With support from adults and peers, produce writing in which the development and organization are culturally-sustaining and rhetorically authentic to task and purpose.
- W.3.6 Learn to produce writing through printing, cursive, and/or typing.
- W.4.1 Compose reflective, formal, and creative writing, which may happen simultaneously or independently, for a variety of high-stakes and low-stakes purposes.
- W.4.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are culturally sustaining and rhetorically authentic to task, purpose, and audience.

# Comic Strip Template

My comic:

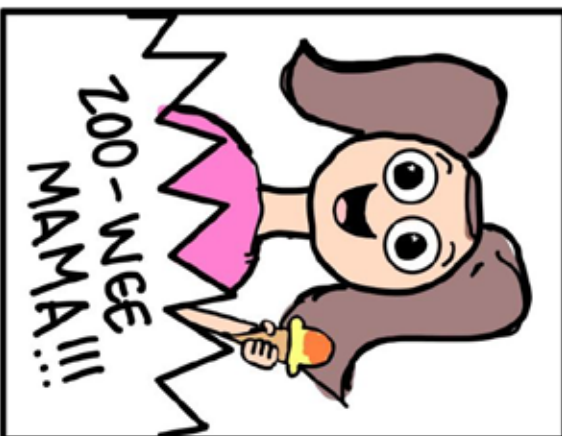
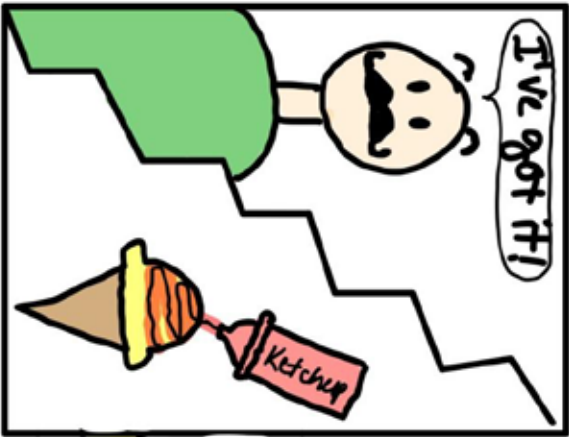
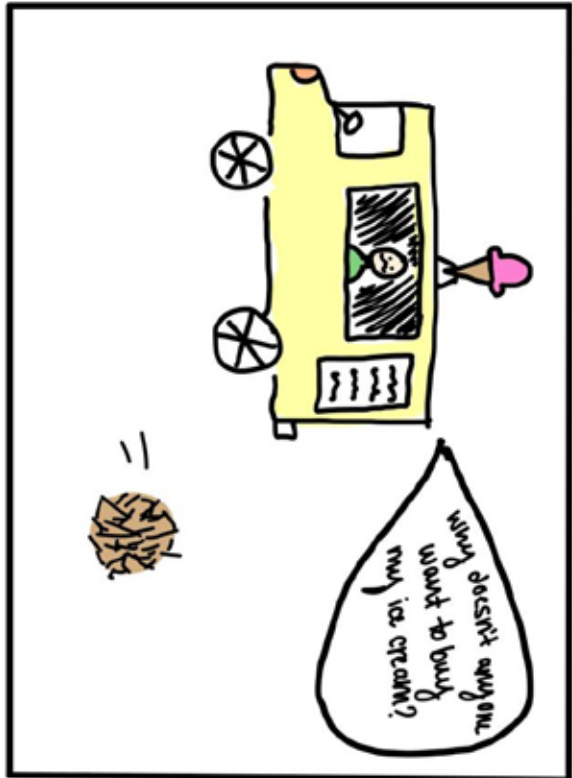
by:

200- WEE  
MAMA!!!

My Comic:

by:

lindsay





## Finding Common Ground

*Diary of a Wimpy Kid* is a story about popularity and fitting in. It can be easy to feel like an outcast, especially in middle school, when we may feel unsure about who we are and who we want to be. Use this activity in your classroom or with your friends to realize how much we actually have in common.

For this activity, you will not need any materials. This game is best played in an open room or classroom.

Begin with all participants standing at one end of the room. Share with participants that this activity will help them to notice what they may have in common with one another, and what makes them unique. Share with the participants that you will be reading a set of statements and if the statement is true for them they should cross the room to the other side. Encourage the participants to notice what they have in common with one another as they move through the activity, and to do their best to be honest in their responses.

1. Cross the room if you like reading *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books.
2. Cross the room if you like to draw cartoons or pictures.
3. Cross the room if you have ever kept a journal or diary.
4. Cross the room if you have a best friend.
5. Cross the room if you have ever worried about not fitting in.
6. Cross the room if you have ever wished you had more friends.
7. Cross the room if you have ever had a conflict with someone who was your friend.

You can invite participants to offer a few statements of their own.

After the activity, engage a discussion with the group exploring the following questions:

1. What similarities or differences did you notice in this group?
2. Were there any responses that surprised you during this activity?
3. What can we learn from this activity? How might this impact how we treat others?

## Common Core Standards Addressed Through this Activity:

### Social Emotional Learning

- Learners will be able to express their emotions in an appropriate and respectful manner using a variety of modalities (e.g., verbal and nonverbal).
- Learners will be able to independently use organizational skills and strategies to focus attention in order to work toward short-term personal and academic goals.
- Learners will be able to provide support and encouragement to others through perspective taking, empathy, and appreciation for diversity.
- Learners will be able to recognize expressions of empathy in society and communities.
- Learners will be able to reflect on similarities and differences between their personal beliefs and those of others.
- Learners will be able to self-reflect on their values and beliefs and how their behaviors relate to those values and beliefs.
- Learners will be able to identify how family and culture impact their thoughts and actions.
- Learners will be able to appreciate diversity by recognizing multiple points of view and perspectives of others across cultural and social groups.
- Learners will be able to build relationships between diverse groups of people.
- Learners will be able to use active listening and assertive, clear communication when expressing thoughts and ideas.

### Pre-Show Questions:

1. Have you ever read any of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books by Jeff Kinney? What did you think?
2. Jeff Kinney has a very specific style of illustrations in his books. How do you think this style will be represented on stage through the production's design elements?
3. Have you ever written a journal or diary? What kinds of things did you write about? How did it feel to have a journal?
4. Why do you think people care so much about being popular and fitting in?
5. Have you ever faced a decision that put you between supporting your friends or fitting in? What was that experience like? What did you do?

# AUDIENCE MEMBER GUIDE



Just like the actors, you have a very important role to play as an audience member. The story of the show and everything you see onstage was created especially for YOU! Your energy and attention will not only be noticed by the actors, but by your fellow audience members as well. So do your best to give all of your attention to what is happening on stage!



# GUIDELINES FOR YOUR ROLE AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER

## BEFORE THE SHOW:

- Leave cell phones, electronics, and any noise-making devices at home or turned off.
- Food and gum are not allowed in the theater.
- Consider using the restroom before the show begins.
- When the lights begin to dim, the play is about to begin!
- **NEED MORE INFORMATION? CLICK HERE** to access our Social Story, which will walk you through seeing a performance.

## DURING THE SHOW:

- Notice the many ways that the story is being told - the characters' journey, the dialogue, costumes, scenery, sounds, lights, and more.
- Give the actors and the play your attention - there will be time to talk to the people sitting next to you after the show.
- The story might make you laugh, cry, or gasp - your reactions let the actors know that you are engaged in the story!
- Texting, taking photos, or recording videos is not allowed.
- **NEED MORE SUPPORT? Ask for a sensory kit!** These are perfect if you are sensitive to sound / lights or need a fidget to focus.
- **NEED A SENSORY BREAK?** Just outside our theater is a monitor that streams the show. Students can watch the show this way as they regulate.

## AT THE END OF THE SHOW:

- The actors will come onstage to take a bow - you can show your appreciation by giving them a round of applause!
- When you leave, be sure to take your belongings with you. If you borrowed a Sensory Kit, please return it to us.

## TALKBACKS:

- After Student Matinees (and some public shows), there will be a talkback, which is Q&A with the actors. Look to your adult to know if you are staying for the talkback.
- If you do stay for the talkback, think of questions that you want to ask the actors about the show - the design elements, the process of putting on a show, what it's like to be an actor, and more. Then raise your hand and someone may choose you to ask your question!



**RUN CREW**

set up the stage before the show and track props and set pieces during the show



**ACTORS**

perform the show for the audience



**DIRECTORS**

bring a unique vision to a production and stage the show

**WHO'S WHO IN THE THEATER!**

**DESIGNERS**

create the look and feel of the world of the show through Costumes, Scenery, Sound, and Lights



**STAGE MANAGERS**

coordinate communication with all roles in the theater and call technical cues during the show



**PLAYWRIGHTS**

write or adapt the show for the stage



(Young Playwrights from CTM's 2024 Festival)





# CTM THEATER REVIEW

Please write or draw in the boxes below.

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I saw \_\_\_\_\_ at CTM on \_\_\_\_\_!  
*Title of Play* *Date*

A moment in the play that I remember most was:

If I could play a character from the show, it would be:

The play made me feel:

Send us your theater reviews!  
- Scan them and email them to [matinees@ctmtheater.org](mailto:matinees@ctmtheater.org)  
- Mail them to us at Children's Theater of Madison, 1055 E. Mifflin Street, Madison, WI 53704

## Suggested Reading From our friends, the Youth Service Librarians, at



### Younger Chapter books

Owl Diaries (Eva's Treetop Festival bk 1) - by Rebecca Elliot

The Best of Iggy - by Annie Barrows

WeirDo - by Anh Do

Penny Draws a Best Friend - by Sara Shepard

Diary of an Awesome Friendly Kid - by Jeff Kinney

### Middle Grade Readers

Ben Yokoyama and the cookie of doom - by Matthew Swanson

Loki - by Louie Stowell

Accidental Trouble Magnet - by Zanib Mian

Fart Quest - by Aaron Reynolds

Stuntboy, in the meantime - by Jason Reynolds

Once upon a Tim - by Stuart Gibbs

Marcus makes a movie - by Kevn Hart

Dork diaries (series) - by Rachel Russell

Airi Sano, Prankmaster General - by Zoe Tokushige

Frazzled - by Booki Vivat

Invisible Emmie - by Terri Libenson

The 47 people you'll meet in Middle School - by Kristin Mahoney

### Inspiration for Journaling, doodling, and keeping your own diary

Journal sparks: fire up your creativity with spontaneous art, wild writing, and inventive thinking - by Emily Neuburger

Doodling 101, a silly symposium - by Mo Willems

Share your smile: Raina's guide to telling your own story - by Raina Telgemeier

Your story matters: a surprisingly practical guide to writing - by Richard Scrimger

*You can check out these books  
and more at your local library!*

## POST SHOW QUESTIONS:

1. How did this version of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* compare to the other versions you have seen or read before? What was similar or different?
2. What lesson do you think this story is trying to teach its audiences? What made this lesson clear?
3. Do you think Greg is really "wimpy" in this play? How does the way he views himself differ from the way the world sees him?
4. How did Greg's relationships with others change throughout the play? Do you feel they were strengthened or weakened?
5. Were there experiences in this play that reminded you of experiences you have had or experiences you have witnessed in real life? How does the play exaggerate these experiences?
6. Why do you think CTM chose to do this musical? Why do you think the team decided to turn *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* into a musical?

# ACT Now!

**Are you inspired to do theater after seeing a play at CTM? There are many ways that you can begin your journey as a performer or theater artist!**

**Here are some ideas:**

## **1. Take a theater class**

Build your skills! In an acting class, you will learn how to use your actor's tools of body, voice and imagination to tell stories and work as an ensemble with other actors. Do some research to see if there are any acting or drama classes offered at your school, or take a class at CTM during the school year or in the summer. You can learn more about our class offerings by visiting our website [ctmtheater.org/take-a-class/!](http://ctmtheater.org/take-a-class/)



## **2. Audition for a play**

Ready for the stage? To participate in a play, you may need to audition / try out first. The director may tell you ahead of time specific scenes or songs to prepare, or they may ask you to bring one you chose. You can audition for plays through your school, at community theaters, or even at CTM!



## **3. Create your own show**

Feeling inspired to create? Find a story that inspires you, or write your own story! Gather friends and practice acting your story out. Think about how you can use costumes, props, or lighting to make your story more clear and interesting for an audience. Invite friends and family to watch your performance and take the stage!



## **4. Start a drama club at your school**

Do you think theater would make your school a better place? Find a teacher who would be excited to support your idea and start sharing your love of theater to inspire other students to join!



**Remember, there are many ways to be involved in theater beyond just performing on stage. Theater needs directors, designers, playwrights, run crew, and more. Whatever skills or interests you bring, they have a place in theater!**

# We'd Love to Hear from You!

**EDUCATORS & FAMILIES!** Send us feedback on this study guide! What was useful? What wasn't in here that you would like to see? Please fill out the survey sent to you after the show.

**STUDENTS!** Send us your theater reviews! You can:

- Scan them and email them to [matinees@ctmtheater.org](mailto:matinees@ctmtheater.org)
- Mail them to us at Children's Theater of Madison, 1055 E. Mifflin Street, Madison, WI 53704

## Attention, Teachers!

Seeing this show at CTM addresses **Wisconsin Common Core Standards** in Theatre Education, Social Studies, English Language Arts, and Social Emotional Learning! For a full list of standards addressed [CLICK HERE](#)

## ABOUT CHILDREN'S THEATER OF MADISON

MISSION STATEMENT: CTM's mission is to spark imagination and build community through the creation and experience of theater

VALUES: Inclusion • Collaboration • Learning • Joy



### SPONSORS for *DIARY OF A WIMPY KID*

Associate Sponsors

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