

Diary of a Wimpy Kid Study Guide

Diary of a Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney

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Plot Summary

The book "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" by Jeff Kinney chronicles the experiences of Greg Heffley as he went through his first year of middle school. Though he was self-absorbed and generally a brat, Greg's actions were surprising when he took on the curse of the dreaded Cheese Touch to save his friend's reputation. His journal entries throughout the school year address a variety of issues including his relationship with his family members and his best friend as well as his desire for popularity. A variety of lessons, such as the importance of loyalty, can be learned from the novel.

In his first year of middle school, Greg decided it was time to start improving his image and popularity. He worried about the typical middle school drama, like getting a good seat in class and avoiding the Cheese Touch. The Cheese Touch was a derogatory game played during his previous year in school. Someone had dropped a piece of cheese on the school's basketball court where it became moldy and gross. One day an unlucky student touched the cheese, an action that began the Cheese Touch game. The Cheese Touch was passed along from student to student like the game Cooties. The last boy to be infected with the Cheese Touch moved away during the summer. Greg hoped no one would reincarnate the game this school year.

Through his year in school Greg was involved in a variety of escapades. He refused to sing in the school play because his brother was videotaping the performance, and then threw apples at the main character of the play. He got his best friend, Rowley Jefferson, into trouble for setting up a haunted house in Rowley's basement, and then later broke Rowley's hand when he threw a football at the boy and knocked him off the Big Wheel he was riding. On a more positive note, Greg did get the position as cartoonist for his school's newspaper but probably did so only because he hid some of the entries he thought were better than his. After the teacher in charge of the newspaper edited Greg's comic, making it seem as if Greg was trying to get favor with his teachers, Greg lost interest in being the cartoonist.

Greg's relationship with best friend Rowley, a boy who lived down the street from Greg, is one of the main topics of the novel. Greg claimed he was best friends with Rowley even though he was always criticizing Rowley and trying to get his friend to behave ways Greg felt was more appropriate. On Halloween night, Rowley and Greg taunted some high school students, a mistake that came back to haunt them at the end of the school year. By that time, Greg and Rowley had split up as best friends because Greg let Rowley take the blame for terrorizing some kindergarteners. As safety patrols, the two had been assigned the duty of walking the kindergarteners home from school after their half-day classes were finished. One day Greg walked the students home alone and taunted them with worms he found on the sidewalk. An adult had seen what was happening but mistook Greg for Rowley. Greg told Rowley it was actually he who had done the terrorizing, but did not tell the school principal the truth. After that, Rowley began giving Greg the cold shoulder.



Greg confronted Rowley when Rowley took over the school newspaper comic after Greg lost interest. A group of students surrounded the boys as they argued on the school's basketball court, believing there was going to be a fight. The group dispersed, however, when a trunkful of teenagers drove up to the court. It was the teens whom Greg and Rowley had taunted Halloween night. They made Rowley eat the cheese that had been left on the basketball court. Greg claimed he was allergic to dairy and was not forced to eat any of the cheese. When the other students noticed during the following school day that the cheese was gone, Greg knew he couldn't tell them Rowley had been made to eat it. He knew if he did, Rowley would be so ridiculed he'd have to move out of state. Although he didn't realize what he was doing at the time, Greg told the other kids he'd gotten tired of looking at the cheese and had thrown it away. Even though he saved Rowley's reputation, the kids accused Greg of being infected with the Cheese Touch.



September

Summary

New middle schooler Greg Heffley begins his journal on the first day of class. He is upset because his mother bought him a book with the word “diary” on the front instead of a plain journal like he’d asked. He also clears up the fact it was his mother’s idea for him to start a journal, not his, but thinks that if he’s ever famous, he can just hand out copies of his journal instead of having people ask him questions. He thinks middle school is a bad idea because there are boys who are well matured in the same class with those who haven’t even hit puberty yet, a situation that he says factors into the bullying problem. Greg suggests classes should be determined by a person’s size, not age.

It is his first day of school and he is dealing with the challenges of seating in his classes. Any seating arrangement, including sitting with the girls, has its disadvantages. The boys, however, have all begun getting interested in girls, students in whom Greg was interested all along. He ranks his popularity as being in the 52nd or 53rd place in his class. He thinks he better off than his friend Rowley, whom he believes ranks about 150th.

On the second day of school, a Wednesday, Greg checked out the basketball court to see if the cheese someone had dropped on the pavement was still there. It was. A student had touched the cheese, setting off a derogatory game called the “Cheese Touch.” This Cheese Touch was like Cooties, Greg explains, and could be passed along by touching another person. The only way to keep from getting the Cheese Touch was to keep one’s fingers crossed. The last kid to have gotten the Cheese Touch moved away. Greg hoped the game wouldn’t be reincarnated.

In his Thursday entry, Greg writes about how his older brother Rodrick tricked him into believing summer was already over a few days into his summer vacation. Greg got in trouble with his father for being up at 3 a.m. eating breakfast. When Greg told his father Rodrick had tricked him, Rodrick had covered his tracks by pretending to be fast asleep in his bed. On Friday, Greg writes that he was put in the gifted reading group despite his efforts to be put in the easy group.

On Saturday, Greg went to Rowley’s house. Although Rowley is technically Greg’s best friend, Rowley had already embarrassed Greg once during this new school year by asking Greg if he wanted to come over and “play.” Greg believes being friends with Rowley might be bad for his image, which he was trying to keep in better shape. He describes how he met Rowley when the boy moved to his neighborhood a few years prior.

In his Monday entry, Greg rants because he little brother, Manny, drew a self-portrait in permanent marker on a bedroom door. Greg thought his parents would be mad, but



they weren't. He shares that he is most afraid the kids in his class will learn that Manny calls him "Bubby." On Tuesday, Greg writes about his relationship with his father. He writes that his father doesn't like Greg's habit of playing these games and believed he should be more active. When his father made him go outside to be active, Greg just went to Rowley's house to play video games. On the way home, he ran through the sprinkler to make it look like he'd been sweating.

In his Wednesday entry, Greg introduces Fregley, who lives on the block between Greg's house and Rowley's. He writes that Fregley, who is very strange and communicates in his own made up language, is in his physical education class. Even though Greg hates to walk past Fregley's house, especially since the boy was almost always in the yard, he went to Rowley's because his brother's band was practicing at Greg's house.

In his Thursday entry, Greg writes about his attempts to listen to Rodrick's new parental warning CD. He describes in his Friday entry that he decided to listen to the CD on his family's stereo after everyone went to bed. Even though he put on headphones, Greg forgot to plug the headphones in so the music came through the speakers and woke up his father. As a punishment, Greg was grounded from video games for two weeks.

On the following Monday, Greg writes that Rodrick was also in trouble with his parents because Manny took one of Rodrick's heavy metal magazines with a picture of a woman in a bikini in it to show and tell at his day care. On Wednesday, Greg shares that Manny was being allowed to play educational games on Greg's game system since Greg was grounded from it. The next day, Greg wrote that he had decided to run for class treasurer. He believed getting this position would help him be more popular at school. On Friday when he went to sign up for treasurer, however, Greg saw that Marty Porter was also running for that position. Greg asked his dad for advice. His father told Greg he should make campaign posters. Greg writes that he spent the rest of the night making his posters. On the following school day, a Monday, Greg brought in his posters. When the vice principal saw the posters, Greg had to take them down as he'd put things in his posters about Marty suggesting that Marty was irresponsible. One poster reminded other students of Marty's case of head lice. Greg believed his political career was over.

Analysis

The basic details about Greg Heffley and his life are lined out in this section of the book. He's just beginning middle school. It is assumed that he's in the sixth grade, which is typically when middle school begins. He has a younger brother, Manny, who never seems to get into trouble no matter what he does. Greg also had an older brother, Rodrick, who likes to play tricks on Greg. Because Greg is gullible, Rodrick seems to get away with his tricks quite frequently. Greg doesn't seem to be particularly close to either of his parents. His father is frustrated because Greg spends his time playing video games. His mother is making him write in a journal and even bought a book with



the word “diary” on the front even though Greg specifically asked her to buy a journal that didn’t say “diary” on it anywhere.

One of the themes of the novel that is addressed early in the book is Greg’s obsession with his image. He’s ranked the boys in his class and put himself in the 50th percentile. Since the reader doesn’t know how many boys are in Greg’s class it is hard to know the impact of this standing. It is known that Greg had ranked himself at least in the top of the second third of his class as he writes that his friend, Rowley, ranks at about 150. Greg’s attitude toward Rowley lets the reader know that Greg thinks Rowley is a loser, but he continues to consider Rowley his best friend. While Greg doesn’t seem to have any other close friends, he indicates that his friendship with Rowley was subject to change as he was afraid that Rowley might negatively impact the good image he was trying to create for himself.

The structure of the novel is interesting and intricate. Greg includes in his journal not only his own thoughts about what is happening to him but illustrates his thoughts and circumstances with cartoons. Greg’s self-portraits depict him as a skinny kid with a tuft of hair and no distinguishing facial features or marks. Other characters are depicted as being taller and bigger than Greg. Some of the boys even have facial hair and piercings. The cartoons are part of the story, helping Greg to make his points not only through words but also through images. The pages of the novel are lined, like a journal might be giving the reader the idea that he is reading Greg’s journal, just as he wrote it.

Notice that even though Greg indicates in his first entry that he didn’t plan to share his feelings and emotions in the journal, he does quite a bit of sharing, particularly in this first month. The entries for the month of September account for nearly 25 percent of the book’s total content. Just as all people do, this shows that Greg has a tendency to really work hard on something during his first few months on a project, and then slack off as the new wears off.

Notice also in the section Greg’s concern about the return of the Cheese Touch. Apparently students had begun a game when a student touched a piece of old cheese someone had dropped on the school’s outdoor basketball court. They passed along the Cheese Touch just like the Cooties. Apparently one of Greg’s main concerns during the school year was not getting infected with the Cheese Touch. Unfortunately, the Cheese Touch will come back to haunt Greg later in the novel.

In the theme of school challenges, Greg complains about being put in the same class with boys whom he describes as “gorillas who need to shave twice a day” (p. 3). He argues these well-matured boys shouldn’t be in the same class with those like himself who “haven’t hit their growth spurt yet.” He reasons that it is because there is so much disparity between the weights, sizes and maturity of boys that bullying is such a big problem. While he has a legitimate point, his answer to the problem might not be the best. He suggests that students be assigned grades based on size, not age. Even Greg seems to realize there are problems with this solution as he recognized there was at least one kid in his grade who was still so small he might be classified as first grader.



Also in the theme of developing his image Greg decides to run for treasurer of his class. He believes he can earn favors with the girls as well as getting revenge on the jocks by being elected to this office. Greg, however, goes about his campaign all wrong. He takes his dad's idea of making campaign posters and instead of promoting his own positive attributes he uses the influence of modern day smear campaign politics and points out the bad aspects of his opponent instead. Since he's still in middle school, his vice principal won't allow the posters to be displayed.

Notice also the use of over-exaggeration or hyperbole in parts of the novel, typical of an adolescent child. One of the instances in the novel where this exaggeration is really obvious comes when Greg considers running for treasurer. When the cheerleaders come to him wanting not to have to ride a bus with the band members to games, Greg imagines himself buying them a limo. On the other side of the coin, Greg imagines himself being able to turn down the football players when they come asking for an air pump to blow up the only football they have.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Greg's concerns about his popularity. How are his concerns typical of those of a boy in middle school?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Greg's relationship with his family. How are these relationships and his opinions of his family members typical? Are they unusual in any way?

Discussion Question 3

What does Greg see as positive things that could come from his journal? In what ways does he think the journal might have a negative effect on him?

Vocabulary

specifically, hovering, expectations, practically, eventually, considerate, definitely, avoiding, dismantle, sarcastic, ban, fabrications



October

Summary

In Greg's first entry of October, he writes about his father's Halloween tradition of hiding in the bushes outside their house to soak any teenagers that walk by with a trash can full of water. He also writes about his mother taking him and Rowley to the Crossland High School haunted house that day. Greg was frustrated because Rowley wore his Halloween costume from the previous year even though Greg had told him to wear regular clothes. Greg had been looking forward to being allowed to go to the haunted house for about three years. Once he was there, he almost didn't go in because he was scared. Once inside, a guy with a chainsaw chased them until Greg's mom made him stop. Even though he was a little embarrassed by his mother, Greg indicates he was willing to overlook it that once.

At the end of the week, on Saturday, Greg and Rowley decided to make their own haunted house in Rowley's basement. They planned out their house and made up flyers to advertise it before they even started work on putting the house together. When they saw kids were actually waiting outside Rowley's house to go through their haunted house, they jacked up the admission price from 50 cents to two dollars. The first kid to go through, however, got so scared he wouldn't come out from under the bed the boys had set up as the Hall of Screams. The haunted house came to a close when Rowley's father came downstairs wanting to know what was going on.

On the following day, Greg wrote that he had learned Rowley was grounded from television and having Greg visit the house for one week because of the haunted house incident. Greg felt punished as well because he believed he hadn't done anything wrong, but now had no place to play his video games. He writes that he felt bad for Rowley so he tried to give Rowley a play-by-play of his favorite television show over the phone.

A week later when Rowley was ungrounded Greg visited him again and admitted he was jealous of Rowley's Halloween costume, a store-bought knight's outfit. Greg had still not decided what he would be for Halloween but had never had a store-bought costume before. He admitted he'd been too busy trying to come up with a trick-or-treat route that would allow them to collect more candy than they did the previous year to come up with a good costume.

On Halloween, Greg's mom surprised him a pirate costume. Before he and Rowley could leave, however, Greg realized it was a trick as she told Greg he had to take Manny with him. Their next-door neighbor and his son joined the group and Greg's father even decided to tag along. Between the men talking and the younger boys refusing to go to any houses with scary decorations Greg figured they were going to one house every 15 minutes. When their fathers decided to take the smaller boys back home, Greg and Rowley finally began to make some progress on their candy collection.



They headed home about 10:30 p.m. but some teenagers drove by them in a truck and shot them with water from a fire extinguisher. When Greg hollered after them that he was going to call the cops, the teens turned their truck around and came after them. They took refuge in Greg's grandmother's house. Because the teens in the truck stayed outside the house waiting for the boys to come out, Greg called his mother to say he wouldn't be coming home but would spend the night at his grandmother's house. He was told by his mother to come home now. The truck was gone from outside so Greg and Rowley made a run for their own neighborhood, taking refuge in the dark of Snake Road. They made it home without getting caught but Greg forgot about his father's Halloween tradition and the two got soaked when he dumped a trashcan full of water on them.

Analysis

Halloween is the major topic of Greg's October journal entries. Notice again in this section of the journal that Greg was again very concerned about how the things that Rowley did would affect Greg's image. In this section Rowley wears his Halloween costume from the previous year to a haunted house hosted by the high school even though Greg instructed him not to do so. Although Greg was embarrassed by Rowley's outfit choice and frustrated with him for not listening, Greg was so excited about getting to attend the haunted house that he overlooked Rowley's faux pas. Another embarrassment that Greg choose to overlook during this section of the novel was his mother's act of getting them out of the haunted house when the boys got scared.

In the theme of family issues, Greg writes that he believed he was tricked into taking his younger brother along trick-or-treating when his mother bought him a store-bought costume. He had never had a store-bought costume before and believed his mother had intentionally tricked him so he could have no choice but agree to take Manny along.

Some aspects of Greg's personality are demonstrated through the haunted house incident. Even though he knew that his mother wouldn't let him make a haunted house out of their house, he didn't have any trouble assuming that Rowley's father would let them turn his basement into a haunted house. In fact, when Rowley's father came downstairs to find out what was happening, Greg thought that Rowley's father would help them. He seemed to have the opinion that the Rowley's father would want to help them out. He seemed surprised that Rowley's father was not happy about what they'd done. Even though Greg knew that his mother would not let him have a haunted house at her house, he seemed surprised that Rowley's father wouldn't want one there. This is an example of a lesson that can be learned from this novel. Children should ask permission before they set up a money-making venture in their parents' house. Greg, however, doesn't seem at any point to realize what he and Rowley had done was wrong. In fact, he seems offended because Rowley's punishment had conflicted with his video game playing abilities.

Another important aspect of this chapter to remember is the run-in that Greg and Rowley had with the teenagers on Halloween night. Greg threatened to call the cops on



the teens after the teens sprayed Greg and Rowland with water from a fire extinguisher. Later, at Greg's grandmother's house Greg and Rowland made fun of the teens through the window once they were safely inside. These teens will later come for revenge.

Discussion Question 1

Consider Greg's willingness to forgive his mother for embarrassing him at the haunted house. Is this conditional forgiveness typical of a child or do even adults practice this?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Greg believe his self-image is so tied up in what Rowley does and doesn't do? Is this typical of a middle school student? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Should Rowley and Greg have known that their idea for a haunted house was not a good idea? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

convert, advertisement, original, legitimate, reflective



November

Summary

On the bus ride to school the day after Halloween, Greg noticed that his grandmother's house had been rolled with toilet paper. In his journal entry on Wednesday, the following day, Greg writes that the boys in his class are doing a six-week unit in wrestling. He checked out some professional wrestling video games to learn some moves in advance. In his Thursday physical education class, however, Greg learned that professional wrestling was not the kind of wrestling he and his classmates were going to learn. The P.E. teacher used Greg to demonstrate the moves. Greg felt like he was used for the demonstrations because he was the smallest kid and could be tossed around the easiest. When the boys begin practicing the moves, they were divided into weight groups, a division that made Greg happy at first. When he learned that Fregley was the only other boy in that weight division, he wasn't so happy. Fregley was able to pin Greg several times during their first session.

On Tuesday, Greg decided he needed to bulk up so he could move up into a new weight classification. He thought gaining weight by building muscle could help him in other areas as well. He talked to his mom and dad about his plans. His mother wasn't too excited but his dad was enthusiastic. His mother told him that before they bought him an expensive weight set, he needed to prove he could stick with an exercise regimen. They told him he can ask for a bench press for Christmas.

On Saturday Greg wrote that he decided to make his own exercise equipment by dumping out the gallon jugs of milk and orange juice and filling those containers with sand for his barbell. He made Rowley try out his equipment first. Believing he was challenging his friend, Greg put on his brother's fake mustache and glasses. When Rowley had the bar in the down position, Greg leaned over him. Rowley was so distracted he wasn't able to push the bar back up. Greg finally helped him get the bar off his chest. After that, Rowley went home. Greg comments in his journal that he has learned he couldn't expect everyone to have the same level of dedication that he had.

In his Wednesday Geography class, Greg thought he would get a perfect score on the quiz about state capitols since he sat right next to a map of the United States. His plan was busted when Patty Farrell suggested to the teacher he should cover up the map. On Thursday Greg writes that his mom made him sign up for school play tryouts even though he begged her not to make him. Greg writes on Friday that the teacher in charge of the tryouts had singled him out because he had a lovely soprano voice. He knew that wasn't a good thing when he heard the girls giggling. On Monday Greg writes that he decided to sign up to be a tree because he would get to throw apples at Patty Farrell, who had been given the part of Dorothy.

In his Wednesday entry Greg writes that he felt getting chosen as a tree wasn't going to have the perks he thought because the tree costumes didn't have armholes so he



couldn't throw apples. On Friday, Greg writes that he's learned that he only has one word to say in the whole play. He's upset because he has to attend two-hour practice sessions but only has one word to say.

Analysis

A good bit of this section of Greg's journal is dedicated to his newest school challenge. His physical education teacher had decided to teach a unit about wrestling and Greg doesn't like having to wrestle with Fregley. He was stuck with Fregley, however, because they were the only two in the lightest weight class. A second school challenge for Greg came when his geography teacher gave a quiz on the state capitols, a quiz on which Greg planned to cheat because he sat next to the map of the United States with all of the capitols listed. A girl in his class messed up Greg's plan to cheat by telling the teacher he needed to cover up the map. A final challenge Greg faced in his school life during the month of November was that his mother made him sign up for a part in the class play. Greg didn't want a singing or speaking part so he signed up as a tree. He realized even his decision to get this "easy" part was a bad decision because he still had to attend rehearsals.

The theme of Family Relations is expanded upon in this section of the book. Greg's parents, his mother especially, tried to teach him to be disciplined in his exercise by promising to think about buying a weight machine only if he proved he could stick with a regimen that didn't require expensive equipment. Greg, however, interpreted from his mother's attempt to teach him dedication that she didn't want to help him and made his own exercise equipment out of things he found around the house. Greg's mother also tried to motivate him by making him try out for the school play. Greg, like most adolescent boys, hated the idea of a school play and tried to get an easy part.

Friendship is another theme that is addressed in this section of Greg's journal. As usual, Greg used Rowley as a guinea pig for his weight equipment. All through his coaching of Rowley on using the "weights" he had made, Greg had it in the back of his mind that Rowley wasn't as dedicated to the weights as Greg was. Notice, however, that Greg made Rowley use the weights first. After Greg left Rowley pinned under the bar when Greg surprised him with his brother's disguise, Rowley decided to go home. Greg never indicates if he tried out his equipment. He only criticizes Rowley for not being dedicated.

Discussion Question 1

Although Greg didn't mention the fall out, do you imagine his parents were happy with him using the things he found around the house to make his exercise equipment? How might your parents have reacted if you had done as Greg did?



Discussion Question 2

Consider Greg's treatment of Rowley with the weight lifting. What kind of friend was Greg to Rowley?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the school play for which Greg was forced to try out. Do you sympathize with him for not wanting to be part of the play? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

volunteers, gymnastics, singled, regimen, experiment, dedication, finale



December

Summary

Greg writes in his Thursday entry that even though the play was coming up in just a few days, the students still didn't know their lines and Mrs. Norton kept adding scenes and lines. To Greg's dismay Mrs. Norton had even come up with a song for the trees to sing. He was happy only because he believed that Rodrick wouldn't be attending to watch the play because it would be a semiformal occasion. In Greg's favor, he writes that one of the other boys assigned to play a tree fell and chipped a tooth because he couldn't use his arms to break his fall. Because of that injury, the teacher had allowed armholes to be cut into the tree costumes.

On Tuesday, the day of the school play, Greg writes that he knew the performance wasn't going to go well when he saw his older brother in the audience. Then Rodney James, the bush, got stage fright and held up the start of the play for 30 minutes. When Greg was on stage, Manny called out "Bubby." Greg pretended he was talking to another tree actor. Rodrick had a video camera and Greg decided he wouldn't allow himself to be humiliated so he didn't sing. The other trees followed suit and wouldn't sing either. Greg noticed Patty Farrell glaring at them offstage and threw an apple at her. The other actors followed his example. Patty's glasses were broken and the play came to an abrupt halt. Greg noticed his mother threw the bouquet of flowers she brought for him in the trashcan.

On Wednesday, Greg writes that his act of deflecting his nickname onto another character worked. That following Sunday Greg realized Christmas was coming up fast. All he really wanted was a new video game called Twisted Wizard. He remembered one year he'd asked for a Barbie Dream House for Christmas because he thought it would make a good fort for his soldiers. Even though his parents had decided against getting him the Barbie house Greg's Uncle Charlie had said he would get Greg the toy. Instead of a dream house, however, Uncle Charlie got a beach fun Barbie.

On Thursday, Greg writes that he went with his mother to pick out a gift for their Giving Tree at church. His mother chose a red wool sweater, which Greg thought was a bad gift choice. On Christmas morning, Greg writes there were hardly any gifts with his name on them. He got mostly socks and books including a "L'il Cutie" book from Rodrick even though Rodrick knew that Greg hated that cartoon. When Uncle Charlie came, Greg writes that he thought his uncle had fixed him up with the game but his gift turned out to be a framed picture of his uncle. Later that day, Greg's father had come to him telling him he had another gift in the garage which turned out to be a brand new weight set. Greg writes he thought his dad was disappointed because Greg didn't even try it out, but Greg had lost interest in working out when the wrestling session in school had ended.



After all the relatives had finally left, Greg's mother gave him one last gift. She said it was from Santa. When Greg opened the gift, there was a red wool sweater inside. He noticed even his mother looked confused. She told him that she had bought the Twisted Wizard game for him and thought it was in that box. The two decided the Giving Tree man must have gotten the video game while Greg got the sweater.

Christmas evening at Rowley's house, Greg gave Rowley the L'il Cutie book his brother had given him. Rowley liked it. Rowley bragged he had picked out Greg's gift himself. It was a Big Wheel. Greg tried to act happy. Meanwhile, Rowley had gotten a lot of Christmas gifts including the Twisted Wizard game Greg had wanted.

At 9 p.m. on New Year's Eve, Greg writes that he had been sent to his room because of Manny. He'd been playing with Manny in the basement where he'd found a tiny ball of string he'd told Manny was a spider. He kidded that he was going to make Manny eat the spider. Manny got the string away from Greg and swallowed it then ran upstairs to their mother. Knowing he was in trouble, Greg followed. Manny indicated to their mother that Greg had made him eat a ball of string the size of an orange. Greg was sent to bed at 7 p.m. He writes that his New Year's Resolution was to never play with Manny again.

Analysis

There are a variety of lessons that can be learned from this section of the novel. For instance, Greg seemed oblivious that he had been wrong in messing up the entire school play. He noticed that his mother threw away the flowers that she had brought for him, but he seemed to think there was nothing wrong with the way he'd acted. Not only did he refuse to sing his part because he believed his brother would humiliate him, he caused harm to come to one of the other actors (Patty) whose glasses were broken when she was hit by one of the apples being thrown. When Greg left the school auditorium, his only hope was that people were as amused as he was.

Another lesson that could be learned in this section of the novel was one for Greg's parents. Despite Greg's earlier remarks in his journal about his newfound dedication to weight lifting and working out, his interest in that pastime dwindled when the wrestling unit was finished at school. Apparently his father didn't notice that Greg was no longer working out, or perhaps thought a new weight set would rekindle the boy's interest in working out. In any case, Greg was not impressed with the set of weights even though he realized it was expensive. Remember also that Greg's mother had promised him they'd buy him a weight set if he showed he could stay dedicated to an exercise routine for two weeks. Since he didn't keep his end of the bargain, Greg didn't learn anything when the weight set was bought for him anyway.

In the theme of Family Relations the reader learns in this section of the novel just how far Greg would go to keep his family from embarrassing him. When Manny referred to him as "Bubby" from the audience, Greg tried to make it look as if Manny were talking to another of the actors. When he realized his brother was going to record the play, Greg refused to sing his part at all. Apparently Greg mistakenly thought he'd look like less of a



fool by destroying the school play instead of doing as he was supposed to. Greg noticed his mother was not happy with him after the performance, but didn't seem to think anything of her anger.

Greg showed his gullibility in this section of the book when he assumed his Uncle Charlie would get him the Christmas gift he wanted. Uncle Charlie doesn't have a good track record as he'd already messed up once by getting Greg a Barbie instead of the Barbie Dream House he wanted as a fort for his soldiers. Despite this major mistake, Greg still counted on Uncle Charlie to get what he wanted this Christmas. The reader doesn't really know if he should feel sorry for Greg or if he should feel Greg has gotten his just deserts as far as his Christmas gifts go. The ultimate irony came when Rowley loved the comic book that Greg had given him. In truth, Greg had given Rowley that comic only because he didn't want it.

Discussion Question 1

In maturity level, how do you think Greg compared to other sixth graders?

Discussion Question 2

How do the cartoons that the author includes in the journal add to the story?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the lessons that can be learned from Manny's experiences. Do you think a child would pick up on these lessons if they were reading the book alone? Do you think an adult needs to read the book along with the child to help him understand why Greg's behavior is not acceptable in some places? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

degrading, humiliate, semiformal, predicted, adlibbing, glen, technically, lyrics, hassled, charity, bandit, hyping, loot, violent,



January

Summary

In the first part of January, before school started, Greg writes that he came up with a new game where Rowley would ride the Big Wheel down the hill on their street while Greg tried to hit him with a football. The following day, Thursday, Greg writes that his mom made him finish writing his Christmas thank you notes before he was allowed to go back to Rowley's house. It was not until Friday that Greg was successful in knocking Rowley off the Big Wheel. The ball went under the front tire of the bike causing Rowley to fall off. He tried to use his left hand to break his fall. When Greg couldn't cheer Rowley up using any of his jokes, he figured Rowley was really hurt.

Greg writes that in school on Monday, Rowley had his hand in a cast. Greg was jealous because some of the girls felt so sorry for Rowley that they even fed him during lunch. The next day Greg tried to fake a hand injury but he didn't get the same sympathy. On the following Monday Greg writes that he was now in a class called Independent Studies. The teacher assigned the students a project of designing a robot and determining what they would like that robot to do. Greg and the other boys in the class wanted to make a robot that would talk but knew it couldn't say any dirty words. They began making a list of all the words the robot couldn't say. When the teacher saw the sheet, the boys were taken out of the Independent Studies class.

Greg writes that during school on Thursday his class was shown a movie telling the students to be happy with themselves and not try to change who they were. Greg thought the message was a dumb one as all the bullies took this message to heart. Greg decided that for their own safety, he and Rowley should become safety patrols. A person who picked on a safety patrol could get suspended. The boys were given the task of walking home the students who participated in a half-day kindergarten. Greg was happy because the assignment meant he'd be missing half a day of pre-Algebra.

Analysis

Greg's friendship with Rowley is one of the major areas of focus in this section of the novel. In a prior section of the book, Greg recorded that he had gotten Rowley into trouble for convincing him to have a haunted house in his basement. In January Greg got Rowley hurt in a game Greg invented. Greg had decided it would be fun to see if he could hit Rowley as Rowley rode down the hill on their street on Greg's Big Wheel. Of course, it was always Greg doing the throwing and Rowley doing the riding. Greg's refusal to ride the bike down the hill indicated that he realized there was a certain amount of danger in the activity. The game ended when Rowley was finally knocked off the bike and broke his hand. Notice that when Rowley got special attention for being hurt when he returned to school with a cast, Greg was jealous. Instead of feeling bad for Rowley, Greg wanted the attention for himself.



Under the theme of lessons learned, it was the school administration that should have learned a lesson in this section of the novel. Having middle school students study independently is not a good idea even though the boys who got into trouble were technically compiling a list of dirty words so that their robot would not say these words. Had the students had just a bit more supervision and adult direction, it is possible their class would not have ended as early as it did.

Also in this section of the novel, Greg believed he had overcome one of his school challenges by becoming a member of the safety patrol. He thought this job would keep him safe from bullies as those who bullied members of the safety patrol could be suspended. Greg additionally believed he'd made a good decision to be on this patrol because his assignment, walking the students home who participated in the school's half-day kindergarten, got him excused from part of his pre-Algebra class.

Discussion Question 1

If you were Rowley's parents, would you suggest he stay away from Greg since Greg was the one who kept coming up with the ideas that got Rowley hurt or in trouble? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think an Independent Studies class is a good idea for middle school aged students? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Greg's new role as a member of the safety patrol. Has Greg taken this position for the right reason? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

swarmed, embroidered, independent, brainstorming, invent, contributors, technically



February

Summary

Greg writes on a Wednesday in February that it finally snowed. He and Rowley decided to try to build the world record snowman they'd been wanting to build for the past couple of years. As the bottom ball for the snowman got bigger, Greg realized the weight of the ball was pulling up all the sod his father had laid that fall. It had also stopped snowing so they decided instead to use the ball to punish the kids from Whirley Street who used their hill for sledding by rolling it down the hill when they began playing. On Thursday Greg writes that he destroyed the tiny snowman that his brother, Manny, was building. His father reacted by coming out with a snow shovel and destroying Greg's big snowball. When Rowley showed up, he was really mad at Greg when he saw their snowball had been destroyed. As the boys were fighting, they were bombarded with snowballs by the Whirley Street kids.

In his next journal entry on Wednesday, Greg writes that the job for cartoonist at the school newspaper had come open and he had decided to apply for the position believing that it will make him popular. Greg writes on Thursday that he and Rowley decided to team up and write the comic strip. Because it was hard to come up with jokes, Greg decided to have all of the jokes end up with the punch line "Zoo-Wee Mama!" Rowley complained that Greg wasn't letting him do enough so Greg allowed him to write one of the strips, and then do an entire strip by himself. Greg thought there was a drop in quality in the work produced by Rowley. Finally Rowley got frustrated with Greg and went home.

On the following day Greg writes that he got an idea for Creighton the Cretin based on a main character who was stupid. When he added his comics to the pile of entries for the position, he also hid a few of the comics he believed were pretty good under a pile on Mr. Ira's desk. The following Thursday Greg writes that he was notified he would be the comic writer for the paper. When his first comic came out, however, he wondered why no one was laughing or asking him to sign their newspapers. He looked at it and saw that Mr. Ira had edited the comic and completely changed the meaning of his character and comic.

Analysis

Image continued to be an issue for Greg as he decided to apply to be the cartoonist for the school's newspaper because he believed the position would make him more popular. He believed that if his comics made the other students laugh and they liked what he had to say, he would finally have the popularity he wanted. His plan for his writing career backfired, however, when the teacher in charge of the paper changed Greg's comic strip making it look like Greg was trying to get favor from the teachers instead of make fun of dumb students.



In the theme of Greg's friendship with Rowley, Greg originally worked with Rowley to put together a comic strip. As he usually did, Greg criticized the quality of Rowley's comics. Rowley could just never do anything to please Greg. Rowley liked the "Zoo-Wee Mama!" idea that Greg originally came up with but Greg soon grew tired of it. Greg seemed happy when Rowley went home so Greg could work on his own comic alone.

Notice also in this section that Greg admitted to cheating twice. The first time he admitted to cheating was when he won the honorable mention award for the antismoking campaign. He writes that his idea was not original. He traced the picture from a heavy metal magazine but no one noticed. He then criticized the boy who did win the contest because he believed that boy smoked at least a pack of cigarettes a day. Although Greg believed it was okay for him to win by cheating, he believed it was not okay for the other boy to win because he won an antismoking contest even though he smoked. In his second round of cheating, Greg admitted in his journal that he picked out the good comics from the pile on Mr. Ira's desk and hid them under other stacks of papers. It was not known if Greg was caught at this attempt to make himself look better by getting rid of some of the competing cartoons. It almost served Greg right when his comic was chosen as the winner but didn't have the desired effect of launching him into popularity because the teacher changed the meaning and content of his strip.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Greg's opinion of Rowley's comic strip work. Do you think Rowley's work was all that bad as compared to Greg's? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Greg seemed surprised that Rowley got mad at him when Greg's father destroyed their snowball. Do you think Rowley's anger was justified? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Consider the teacher's act of editing Greg's comic. Why do you think Greg's comic was chosen if it had to be edited so severely?

Vocabulary

psyched, opportunity, ambushed, ironic, celebrity, obvious, operation, detention, autographs



March

Summary

Greg writes in his first entry for March that Rowley had been called to Mr. Winsky's office while they were enjoying their morning hot chocolate, a bonus for safety patrols. Mr. Winsky had gotten a call from an adult saying that she'd seen Rowley terrorizing some of the kindergarten kids as he was walking them home. Greg realized it was he who had terrorized the kids with worms that had been on the sidewalk. Mrs. Irvine had seen him and promised to tell the principal. Because of what Greg did Rowley was going to have to apologize to the kindergarteners and then have his safety patrol badge suspended for one week. Greg didn't say anything because he knew that if he did, he'd lose his hot chocolate privileges. He talked to his mother that night. She didn't question what he'd done, but encouraged him to do the right thing.

In his entry on Thursday, Greg writes that he decided not to tell the principal about what he had done. He did tell Rowley on the way home, however, and lectured him on being more careful about whom he let borrow his coat. Greg writes that he didn't think his lecture was getting through to Rowley. Even though they were supposed to hang out together after school, Rowley went home claiming he wanted to take a nap. At home, Greg told his mother he did the right thing. She rewarded him with ice cream.

On the following Tuesday, Greg writes that he was called to the office. He had figured he would get busted for what he did to Rowley. Mr. Whinsky said an anonymous source had told him who was really responsible for terrorizing the kindergarteners. Greg was fired from his safety patrol position. He was angry with Rowley for backstabbing him. He was even angrier when Rowley was reinstated to his position and given a promotion for the way he behaved when he was falsely accused. Even though he wanted to get mad at Rowley for telling on him, Greg remembered the safety patrols and one friend got to take a trip to Six Flags Amusement Park. Greg decided to be nice to Rowley as Rowley was now his only chance to get to go on the trip. A week later Greg writes in his journal that Rowley had been giving him the cold shoulder. Greg thought it should be the other way around as it was Rowley who told on him.

Analysis

It was in this month's entry that Greg seemed to have made the biggest mistake of all in his friendship with Rowley. Although Greg realized that he was the one who had been caught terrorizing the kindergarteners with worms, he chose to let Rowley take the blame for his actions. More disturbing than Greg's decision to let Rowley take the blame for his actions was Greg's anger at Rowley after he suspected that it was Rowley who told the principal that it was really Greg who did the terrorizing of the kindergarteners. The reasons that Greg didn't step up and tell the truth about the incident was a selfish one. He didn't want to lose his hot chocolate privileges, a bonus for the safety patrols.



Ironic in this section are Greg's actions as a safety patrol. He had decided to become a safety patrol because he did not want to get bullied. He felt that as a safety patrol he'd have a certain amount of protection from bullies as students risked being suspended for picking on safety patrols. Greg apparently never learned the lesson that he should treat others, as he wanted to be treated as he was caught terrorizing, or bullying, the kindergarteners that he was assigned to keep safe.

Discussion Question 1

Why was it ironic that Greg should get into trouble for bullying the kindergarteners as a safety patrol?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Greg's mother should have questioned her son more closely about the incident in which he was involved and his act of "doing the right thing" before she rewarded him with ice cream? Do you think that in his own way, Greg really believed he had done the right thing?

Discussion Question 3

When Greg looked back at the incident with Rowley, he believed Rowley had been disloyal to him. In reality, who was disloyal? Did Greg deserve the cold shoulder he was getting?

Vocabulary

terrorizing, disrespected, incident, confessed, privileges, episode, anonymous, culprit, loyalty, promotion, dignity, exhibited



April

Summary

In his first entry for the month of April, Greg writes that Rowley had started being best friends with Collin Lee. When he saw Collin headed to Rowley's house with an overnight bag, Greg decided to get even but the only kid he could think of to spend the night with was Fregley. Even though he wanted to leave several times, Rowley and Collin were in Rowley's yard. Greg didn't want them to see him leave. Even though Fregley was not supposed to have sugar, he got into Greg's backpack and ate a whole bag of jellybeans. Fregley then chased Greg around the upstairs of the house until Greg locked himself into the bathroom. He writes that Fregley slipped a note under the door apologizing for chasing him with a booger on his finger. He put the booger on the note so Greg could get him back. Greg believed he passed out for a couple of hours. When he woke, he slipped out of the house.

In another April entry Greg writes that he believed he was better off without Rowley as a friend. He's had time to go through Rodrick's stuff. When he found Rodrick's middle school annual, Greg had a new idea about how he could get the popularity that he wanted for himself. He decided he would have to be chosen as a class favorite. In his entry on the following day, Greg writes that he had decided he had the best chance of making the class favorites in the category of class clown.

Analysis

Greg continued to be obsessed with his image and his popularity in this section of the novel. He goes so far as to attempt the night with Fregley, a boy that Rowley probably realized Greg doesn't like, in order to prove that he had other friend options. Greg felt pressed to prove this point when he saw another boy spending the night with Rowley. Along with trying to prove to Rowley that he has other friends, Greg looked for some way to salvage his school year. He finally decided the best way to earn the immortality he wanted was to earn a spot as one of the class favorites.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Rowley was fooled by Greg's show of spending the night with Fregley? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why was it so bad of Rowley to have taken Greg's "backup friend" as his own new best friend?



Discussion Question 3

Do you think Greg will qualify as a class clown? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

options, enthusiastic, maniac, eventually, immortal, permanent, category



May and June

Summary

In his first May entry Greg writes that he'd learned he would have a substitute teacher in one of his classes the following day. He believed the substitute would be the best option for him to use to earn his class clown status. In his Friday entry Greg writes that he was disappointed to learn that the substitute was his mother. To make matters worse, on Wednesday, Greg learned that his cartoon had been replaced with one that Rowley wrote using Greg's "Zoo-Wee Mama!" idea. The students and even the teachers were giving Rowley the attention Greg believed should have been his.

In his entry for the following Monday Greg writes that he decided to confront Rowley about the "Zoo-Wee Mama!" cartoon. The conversation became heated and a group gathered believing the two boys were going to fight. Neither Greg nor Rowley knew how to go about starting a fight but before they had time to do anything, they heard a screeching sound and all of the other kids running from the basketball court. It was the same three teens that had chased Rowley and Greg around on Halloween night. Even though the teens wanted revenge on the younger boys, Greg was more nervous because they were standing so close to the cheese. The teens made Rowley eat the cheese. They tried to make Greg eat some but he claimed he was allergic to dairy products. Greg and Rowley walked home together.

In his Tuesday entry, Greg writes one of his fellow students noticed the cheese was missing from the basketball court right away. Greg realized some of the kids would figure that Greg and Rowley had something to do with the missing cheese so Greg made up a story about him deciding it was time to throw the cheese away. Even though he thought he'd perhaps be considered a hero, all of the kids ran from Greg because his act of touching the cheese meant he had the Cheese Touch.

In his only entry in June, Greg writes that he and Rowley had started hanging out after school again. On that day, which was the last day of school, yearbooks had been handed out. When Greg flipped to the class favorites page, Rowley was listed as class clown. He threw his yearbook in the trashcan. He knew, though, that if Rowley ever got out of hand, he could always bring him down to size by reminding him he was the one who ate the cheese.

Analysis

In this section of the novel, Greg finally got the notoriety he was hoping but not in the way he wanted. Instead of the class clown or the most popular kid in his class, Greg earned the name for himself as being the one with the Cheese Touch. Since getting the Cheese Touch was the thing that Greg felt the most stress from during his prior year in school, it was surprising that he put himself in the position that he'd get saddled with the



title. In reality, Greg accidentally took on the title when he tried to save Rowley's reputation because Rowley had actually been made to eat the cheese. Greg knew that if the students in their class learned that Rowley had eaten the cheese, they'd pick on him so badly he'd have to leave the state.

Even though Greg often criticized Rowley for being unpopular, it was Rowley who wound up with all of the fame for which Greg had hoped. Rowley wound up with the job of cartoonist for the school newspaper. The students and even teachers liked the comic. Rowley additionally wound up being named as class clown, the title for which Greg had thought he might qualify. Greg was disgusted enough that he threw his school yearbook away. He did keep in mind if Rowley ever got a big head from all his fame, he could remind him that he did have to eat the cheese.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think that Rowley was wrong in using the "Zoo-Wee Mama!" idea for his comic even though he and Greg had come up with idea together? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Consider the idea that the teen bullies didn't make Greg eat any of the cheese because he said he was allergic to dairy. Do you think that the bullies would have taken this into consideration? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Even though Rowley had to eat the cheese, he had also gotten the notoriety that Greg hoped would be his. Do you think Rowley comes up with the short end of the stick in the end of the novel? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

execute, volunteered, chaperone, foiled, landslide, leprechaun, taunting,



Characters

Greg Heffley

The content of this book is the journal that main character Greg Heffley wrote during his first year of middle school. Greg is best friends with Rowley, another boy in his class who lived down the street from him. Through his journal entries Greg describes himself as a boy who was not particularly popular but wished he could do something great to earn popularity for himself. Greg appears to be most concerned with avoiding being bullied and avoiding getting the Cheese Touch, a derogatory game played by the members of his class.

Greg is an intelligent boy but one who doesn't have a really good grasp on right and wrong. For instance, he knew his mother wouldn't let him create a haunted house in their house, so he convinced his best friend Rowley they should do it at his house. After Rowley got in trouble for the haunted house, Greg seemed shocked that his friend got in trouble. Since he knew that type of behavior was not allowed at his house it seems he should have had some idea it wouldn't be allowed at Rowley's house either. Greg is critical of his best friend and wished Rowley would take his advice on how to be more popular.

Most of the things that Greg does through the course of his first year of middle school are motivated either by his desire for popularity or his desire not to get bullied. He applied for the position as the cartoonist for his school's newspaper, for instance, because he thought it would make him famous. He signed up as a safety patrol because he knew students who picked on a member of the safety patrol stood to get suspended. As was typical for Greg he acted in a way that was completely opposite the behavior expected of a safety patrol: he bullied the kindergarteners he'd be assigned to walk home from school. When an adult who witnessed the bullying confused Greg with Rowley, Greg did not correct the error or come clean to the principal that it was he and not Rowley who was mean to the kids. Greg thought Rowley needed a lesson in loyalty when Rowley reported to the principal that Greg had been the one who'd tormented the kindergarteners. In reality Greg was disloyal for letting Rowley take the blame for Greg's actions.

At the end of the novel Greg redeemed himself somewhat when covered up the fact that Rowley had been made to eat a piece of old cheese off the school's basketball court. Greg believed that had the other students known Rowley was made to eat the cheese, he would had to have moved in order to get away from the ridicule. Greg told the other students instead that he'd gotten tired of seeing the cheese there and thrown it away. It was not until after he'd spoken the words that he realized he'd just given the other kids the ammunition they needed to start the Cheese Touch game again. This time he was the one with the dreaded Cheese Touch.



Rowley Jefferson

Rowley Jefferson is Greg Heffley's best friend. He lived down the road from Greg and was in the same class in school. Rowley was probably a better friend to Greg than Greg deserved to have. Rowley got in trouble with his father because Greg convinced Rowley to help him host a haunted house in Rowley's basement without getting permission from Rowley's parents. Greg also came up with an idea for a Big Wheel game that wound up getting Rowley hurt, his hand broken. Rowley, however, stuck with his friend until Greg got him into trouble at school by refusing to take responsibility for terrorizing some children. Greg instead let Rowley take the blame for that incident.

Rowley tried to make a new friend for himself but was eventually reunited with Greg when the two were tracked down by the teens with whom they'd had a run-in on Halloween night. The teens made Rowley eat the famous slice of cheese that had been dropped on the basketball court at the school. Because the cheese has a reputation at the school, Greg did Rowley the favor of not telling the students that Rowley had been forced to eat the cheese.

Manny

Manny was Greg's younger brother. In Greg's mind his younger brother was never punished for anything that he did. For example, Manny drew a self-portrait in permanent marker on a bedroom door. Even though Greg thought Manny would get in trouble for that, his parents did not punish him. Even though Greg warned him not to do so, Manny circled every item in the Christmas catalogue. Even though Greg thought Manny wouldn't get everything he wanted, he was wrong. Manny got everything he had circled in the magazine. Greg seemed to enjoy tormenting his younger brother. For instance, when Manny built a snowman, Greg destroyed it. Greg also kiddingly told Manny he was going to make him eat a small ball of thread he said was a spider. Manny turned the situation around on Greg by telling his mother that Manny had made him swallow a ball of thread the size of an orange.

Mom

Greg's mother was never given a name during the course of the novel. She seemed to be frustrated with her son's lack of ability to achieve the things of which she felt he was capable. Greg pointed out in his journal that his mother would often tell his teachers that Greg was smart but didn't apply himself. She was visibly angry with Greg when she threw away the flowers she'd brought for Greg at his school play after his actions brought the play to an end. Greg's mother tried to motivate him to stick with an exercise routine by telling him that if he could do exercises for two weeks, she would consider buying him a weight machine. Later, Greg's mother tried to give Greg advice about how to handle his situation with Rowley without asking too many questions. Her plan backfired because she took Greg's word when he told her that he had done the right thing in handling his situation with Rowley.



Rodrick

Rodrick was Greg's older brother. He was a member of a student rock band. He enjoyed playing mean tricks on Greg like telling him that he'd slept through summer vacation. Rodrick attended Greg's school play even though the event was considered semiformal and he had to wear a tie. Because Rodrick had a video camera and was preparing to record Greg's performance in the play Greg refused to sing the song as he was supposed to do.

Frank Heffley

Frank Heffley was Greg's father. He and his son were at odds because Greg liked to play video games while his father wanted his son to be more athletic. Frank encouraged his son to run for treasurer of his class by showing him some of his old campaign posters. For Christmas, he also bought Greg the weight set he'd wanted back when the students were doing a wrestling unit. When Frank witnessed Greg being mean to his younger brother, Manny, by destroying the small snowman the little boy had made, Frank retaliated by destroying the huge snowball that Greg and Rowley had made.

Patty Farrell

Patty Farrell was the girl in Greg's class who nixed his hopes of passing the quiz over the state capitals in the United States by telling the teacher that he needed to cover up the map hanging on the wall in the classroom near Greg's desk. Patty also got the part of Dorothy in the school play. The only positive Greg could find in being in the school play was that he would get to throw apples at Patty, his idea of getting revenge on her for keeping him from getting a good grade on the quiz he hoped he'd ace because he sat next to the map.

Fregley

Fregley was a kind of a misfit kid in Greg and Rowley's class at school. He got overly hyper when he ate sugar and had a made up language that few people understood. When the boys in the class were required to go through a wrestling unit in their physical education class, Greg was paired up with Fregley. Unfortunately, Fregley was good at wrestling and pinned Greg often. Later it was Fregley that Greg chose as his backup friend when Rowley began giving him the cold shoulder.

Mr. Winsky

Mr. Winsky was the principal of Greg's school. He was the one who called Rowley to the office after Mr. Winsky received a call reporting that Rowley had been terrorizing the kindergarteners. After someone, whom Greg suspected was Rowley, told Mr. Winsky



that it was actually Greg who terrorized the kindergarteners, Mr. Winsky called Greg to the office. He told Greg that he was fired from his safety patrol job.

Uncle Charlie

Uncle Charlie was the relative that Greg depended upon to give him the presents he wanted for Christmas. Greg had thought that Uncle Charlie would get him the Twisted Wizard video game that he wanted even though the man hadn't gotten him the right gift a previous Christmas. Greg was highly disappointed because his uncle got him a framed picture of himself rather than the video game he wanted.

Mrs. Irvine

Mrs. Irvine was the woman who reported to the school that she saw Rowley tormenting the kindergartens when he was walking them home. In reality, however, it was Greg who was tormenting the children. Because he was wearing Rowley's jacket, Mrs. Irvine thought Greg was Rowley. Greg did not correct her mistake.

Darren Walsh

Darren Walsh was the student who originally touched the cheese that had been dropped on the school basketball court and began the "Cheese Touch" a derogatory game the middle school students played somewhat like Cooties.

Abe Hall

Abe Hall was the last student in Greg's class during the prior school year to be infected with the "Cheese Touch." Abe moved away during the summer taking the Cheese Touch with him. Greg hopes the game isn't reincarnated in his current year of school.

Vice Principal Ray

When Greg tried to hang up his campaign posters belittling his opponent, it was Vice Principal Ray who made Greg take the posters down.

Mrs. Norton

Mrs. Norton was the teacher who was the director of the school play. She did not require students to learn their lines and instead whispered their lines to them from off the stage.



Symbols and Symbolism

Greg Heffley's Journal

Greg Heffley's journal is the basis for this novel. It is an important symbol in that it represents all of Greg's important experiences during his first year of middle school. It allows Greg to have a space for self-reflection and a place to process what happens to him. This helps him move towards maturity as he comes of age.

The Cheese

This piece of cheese that was dropped on the school's basketball court becomes a symbol of torture and stress as the students used it as the basis of a derogatory game they called "Cheese Touch." Having the Cheese Touch could potentially lead to unpopularity and social alienation, both of which Greg feared as someone who was very image-conscious. Also, the cheese is introduced early on in order to set the stage for the major scene at the end of the novel when Greg comes to his friend Rowley's aid with the Cheese Touch.

Greg's Video Game System

Greg's video game system is a symbol of the friction between father and son as Greg's father wanted him to do less playing of video games and more physical activity. Greg believed his father would dismantle his game system if he could figure out how to do so.

Headphones

These headphones are representative of a lesson Greg should have learned during the course of his first year of middle school. Greg's older brother Rodrick was allowed to listen to a CD with a parental warning on it but Greg was not. Greg was so determined to listen to this CD that he got up in the middle of the night to listen to it on his family's stereo. The only problem was that he forgot to make sure that the headphones were plugged in before he played the album.

An Expensive Weight Set

Greg's mother had told him that if he could show that he was able to stick with an exercise regimen for two weeks, she and his father would consider buying him an expensive weight set. The weight set symbolized the hope on Greg's mother's part that he could stick with a goal if he were promised a reward. Even though he didn't stay with his exercise regimen, Greg's parents still bought him a weight machine for Christmas. By that time, Greg had lost interest in working out.



L'il Cutie Book

Rodrick got this cartoon book for Greg for Christmas because he knew that his brother hated that particular cartoon. The book symbolizes Greg's selfishness as he gave it to Rowley not only because he didn't want it but also because he'd forgotten to get a gift for Rowley.

USA Map

This map of the United States of America had all of the state capitols listed on it in red letters. The map is a symbol of Greg's willingness to cheat if he could get an easy good grade that way. This symbolizes his tendency to be dishonest and foreshadows later events when he will lie or deliberately not tell the truth. Greg was angry when a girl in his class pointed out to the teacher that the map needed to be covered up prior to their quiz.

Bouquet of Flowers

Greg's mother brought a bouquet of flowers to the school play as a surprise for Greg. Greg noticed that she put the flowers in the trashcan instead after he disrupted the school play. The flowers symbolized the hope that Greg's mother had in him. The act of her throwing the flowers in the trashcan was a symbol of her disappointment in him.

A Giant Red Wool Sweater

Greg got this giant red wool sweater as a Christmas gift from his mother as a complete accident. He had told his mother when she bought it for their church's Giving Tree that he thought it was an awful gift. It was ironic and almost poetic justice when Greg, who had acted so selfishly all Christmas, wound up with what he had deemed a bad gift instead of the video game he wanted.

Hot Chocolate

The hot chocolate was a symbol of prestige as only students who acted as safety patrols were allowed to have this treat each morning. This motivated Greg to lie and try to hold onto his safety patrol position and redirect suspicions onto Rowley with the accusations of a safety patrol member being mean to little kids.



Settings

Basketball Court

The basketball court at Greg's school was where someone had dropped a piece of cheese. That cheese had laid there since the previous school year. One of the final scenes described in the novel, where the teens come back to get their revenge on Greg and Rowley took place on this basketball court.

Rowley's House

Rowley's house was a common scene in Greg's journal. Greg often went to Rowley's house to play video games. It was also at Rowley's house that Greg and Rowley attempted to make money by setting up a haunted house. Even though Greg has mixed feelings about Rowley being his friend, he still enjoys going over there and it is a place to escape his family.

Greg's House

The house where Greg lived with his father, mother, and two brothers is a frequent setting in the novel. It was at Greg's house that several scenes, including the Christmas scene, took place.

Greg's School

Several scenes in his journal, like his first day of school and the tryouts for the school play, took place in the school building that Greg attended his first year of middle school. School represents a minefield in terms of bullying, popularity, and social status. Greg never feels quite comfortable and does not seem to find his place. He is very image-conscious and worried about how others see him and where he fits into the larger social hierarchy at school.

The School Gymnasium

It was in this school gymnasium that Greg and the other boys learned how to wrestle from the physical education teacher.



Crossland High School Haunted House

It was at this haunted house that Greg almost didn't go in because he was scared. His mother went with Greg and Rowley to the haunted house and helped them find a way out after both boys were scared by a chainsaw.

Snake Road

Snake Road is the road along which Greg and Rowley planned to trick-or-treat. The boys returned to their own neighborhood by way of Snake Road because the street had no lights. They thought they'd have a better chance of staying clear of the teens on that dark road.

Greg's Grandmother's House

When Greg and Rowley were chased by the teenagers Halloween night, they took refuge in Greg's grandmother's house. Later that night, the teens covered the house in toilet paper.



Themes and Motifs

Friendship

Friendship is a major theme in this novel as Greg discusses his friendship with Rowley quite a bit in his journal. While both Greg and Rowley had their good and bad qualities, Greg's behavior was for the most part an example of bad friendship. Rowley was a much better friend than Greg deserved to have though Rowley had his shortcomings as well. Despite their disagreements, the boys managed to salvage their friendship at the conclusion of the novel.

Although Greg credited Rowley as being his best friend, Greg treated Rowley in a manner that was very critical and even cruel at some points. For instance, when Greg ranked the boys in his class on what he perceived was their popularity he put Rowley in the 150th spot. Apparently, Rowley was more popular than that as he not only had girls helping feed him when he broke his hand, he also won the class favorites category for class clown. Even though Greg believed he needed to school Rowley on popularity, it appeared that Greg might have needed to take a few lessons from his friend.

Of all of the things that Greg did to Rowley through the course of their first year of middle school the worst was allowing Rowley to take the blame for Greg's act of terrorizing the kindergarteners. An adult had called the school reporting she'd seen Rowley taunting these kindergarteners, whom he was supposed to walk home as his assignment as a safety patrol. She'd actually seen Greg but got him confused with Rowley. When Greg heard what had happened, instead of confessing to his actions and getting his friend's name cleared, Greg kept quiet because he didn't want to lose his hot chocolate privileges.

Rowley seemed to be a better friend to Greg than Greg was to Rowley with a few exceptions. For instance, Rowley was proud of himself for getting Greg a Big Wheel for Christmas. Greg was disappointed as these toys are meant for children much younger than he and Rowley. Greg again was angry with Rowley when Rowley submitted a "Zoo-Wee Mama!" cartoon to the school newspaper and got the positive attention for it that Greg had wanted. Rowley was slightly wrong in submitting this cartoon as completely his idea as the boys had come up with it together.

In the end, however, Greg was uncharacteristically good to Rowley. He kept the rest of the students from learning that Rowley had been forced by some teenaged boys to eat a piece of cheese that had been laying on the school's basketball court for months. Greg was afraid that if the students learned Rowley had eaten the cheese he would be bullied so badly he'd have to move out of state. In return, Greg was ridiculed by the students because he had the Cheese Touch since they knew that if he threw it away like he said he did, he would have to have picked it up. Greg was satisfied knowing that he did have dirt on Rowley that he could use if he ever needed it.



Image/Popularity

As he started his first year in middle school, Greg decided he needed to pay more attention to his image. He came up with all sorts of ways to improve his popularity rating, none of which turned out exactly the way he hoped they would. His ideas to improve his popularity included becoming the cartoonist for the school's newspaper and acting out enough so he could qualify as the class clown.

In order to be competitive when it came to attracting girls Greg believed he needed to improve his image and popularity. Even though he believed hanging around with his best friend, Rowley, was dragging down his popularity rating, Greg did not just ditch his friend. He tried to talk to Rowley about being more popular but didn't think that Rowley really paid attention to anything he said.

As the school year began to come to an end, Greg made a last ditch effort to launch himself into popularity. He decided the way to do that was to apply as the cartoonist for the school's newspaper. Instead of getting him the popularity he had wanted, however, Greg did not gain many friends with his first comic strip. When he looked at the comic, he realized his teacher had edited his cartoon to the point that it appeared he was trying to get favor from his teachers instead of entertaining his classmates.

A final effort for Greg to get the popularity for which he hoped was when he decided to try to get voted as class clown. He's planned his day of glory to come on a day when the students will have a substitute teacher. To Greg's chagrin, it was his mother who was scheduled to be the substitute teacher that day. He was unable to pull any of the antics he had hoped to on his mother. He felt the only category he had any hope of winning was the one for biggest mamma's boy.

Family Issues

One of the important themes in the novel is Greg's relationship with his family members. In his journal Greg describes the challenges he faced with each of the members of his family. His older brother tormented him. His younger brother always got his way. Greg's father didn't like Greg's habit of playing video games while his mother thought he'd be able to achieve more if he just applied himself.

Greg describes Rodrick as being an older brother who enjoyed tormenting Greg. One of the first things that Greg writes about Rodrick doing was a bad trick near the beginning of summer vacation. Rodrick had woken Greg up and told him that he had slept through the entire summer. It was because Rodrick was videotaping Greg's school play that Greg refused to sing his son as he was supposed to. Instead of getting his brother a gift he knew he'd like, Rodrick got Greg a L'il Cutie comic book, a book that he knew Greg would hate.

Manny was Greg's younger brother. Greg believed that Manny never got into trouble even when he deserved to be punished. For instance, Manny drew a self-portrait in



permanent marker on Greg's bedroom door. Even though Greg had thought for sure Manny would get into trouble for that, his parents thought it was cute. It was Manny who got Greg sent to bed early on New Year's Eve night when he told his mother that Greg had made him swallow a ball of string the size of an orange. Greg, however, described the ball as tiny. Throughout his year in school Greg was afraid his fellow students would learn that Manny called him "Bubby." During the school play, Manny called out to his brother using the nickname, and Greg was so embarrassed that he made it appear his brother was calling to another actor in the play.

The biggest conflict between Greg and his father seemed to be that Greg's father wanted Greg to be more active. Greg, however, would rather play his video games. His father tried to get him to be more active by making him go outside. Instead of playing outside like his father wanted him to, Greg would go to his friend's house to play video games. Greg would make sure to make a pass through a neighbor's sprinkler to make it look like he was sweaty.

Greg's mother believed that her son was intelligent and had the ability to achieve great things. She believed his downfall was his unwillingness to apply himself. Even though Greg had tried to get himself put into an easier reading group by pretending he couldn't read well, he felt his mother had interfered with his test results as he was put in the gifted group anyway. Greg's mother also challenged him to prove to her that he could dedicate himself to an exercise routine before she would promise to buy him expensive exercise equipment. Greg took her deal not as a promise, but instead as her refusal to help him.

School Challenges

The challenges that Greg faced on a day-to-day basis at school are an important theme in his journal. These challenges include the bigger boys with whom Greg attended class and their habit of bullying the smaller boys. Greg was also challenged with a girl in his class whom he considered a goody-goody, foiling his plans to cheat. Greg also created challenges for himself at school. In one of these episodes, he almost lost his best friend.

Bullies are a major issue of concern for Greg. In one of his first entries Greg writes that he thought it was unfair that bigger, more mature boys were in the same class with boys who hadn't yet hit their growth spurt just because they were the same age. Greg argued it was this disparity in size that added to the problem of bullying in his school. In a later journal entry, Greg writes that all students in his school watched a video instructing them to be happy with who they were and not try to change. Greg thought the video was a stupid one to show to middle school students as the only ones who seemed to take the message to heart were the bullies. Greg decided to become a safety patrol as he felt this position would save him from bullying because those who picked on safety patrols were in danger of being suspended. Although Greg wanted to protect himself from being bullied, he did not give others this same kindness as he bullied the kindergarteners he was assigned to walk home safely as his job in the safety patrol program.



Another challenge for Greg at school is the class nerd, Patty Farrell. Greg had hoped that he would get a good grade on a quiz covering the capitals of the United States of America because he sat next to a map that listed the capitals. Patty, however, reminded the teacher that the map needed to be covered before the quiz was given therefore obstructing Greg's plan to cheat. Greg decided he needed to get revenge on Patty. He got this revenge through the school play. His role as a tree gave him an opportunity to throw apples at the girl who was the lead character. When Greg began throwing apples, the other characters did as well. One of the apples hit Patty and broke her glasses, bringing the school play to an end.

While Greg didn't have control over some of the challenges he faced at school, he did create some of these problems for himself. For instance, he decided to run for treasurer of his class. At his father's suggestion he made campaign posters. Instead of using these posters to point out his own positive attributes, Greg used them as a platform to publish what he believed were bad characteristics of his opponent. The vice principal would not allow him to hang these posters in the school.

One of the problems that Greg created for himself almost caused him to lose his best friend. This happened when Greg taunted some kindergarteners with worms as he was walking them home from school. A woman who saw what Greg was doing reported his bullying to the school principal. The woman, however, believed it was Rowley who was tormenting the kindergarteners. Instead of straightening up the situation when he realized what had happened, Greg let Rowley take the punishment. For about a month after that Rowley gave Greg the cold shoulder. The two boys were able to mend their differences and soon began to hang out together again.

Lessons to Learn

There are a variety of lessons that can be learned from Greg's adventures. As Greg is kind of clueless when it comes to right and wrong, these lessons are not often clearly defined. Of course, the main intent of the novel seems to be to entertain rather than to teach. However, there are lessons that can be learned, especially if an adult were to read the book along with the child in order to clarify how Greg might have acted differently in some situations.

One of the main lessons that can be gleaned from Greg's journal is that of being loyal to friends. The lesson comes when Greg let his friend, Rowley, take the blame for Greg's act of tormenting some kindergarteners when he was supposed to be making sure they got home safely. Even though his mom had instructed Greg he needed to "do the right thing" she didn't get a clear picture of what had happened in the first place. Greg seemed to believe he had done the right thing when he came clean with Rowley that he had been the one who tormented the kindergarteners, but did not confess to the school principal that Rowley was not responsible for the bullying. In this instance, Greg even went so far as to get angry with Rowley when Rowley told the school principal who it was that actually Greg who tormented the children.



Even though Greg had been dicey when it came to right and wrong through much of the novel, he did do what was right when it came to Rowley at the end of the novel. He and Rowley were tracked down by some teens that they had taunted on Halloween night. These teens made Rowley eat the cheese that had been lying on the pavement of the school's outside basketball court for several months. Greg knew that the other students in the school would never let Rowley live down his embarrassment if they learned he ate the cheese. Instead of letting his friend be embarrassed, Greg made up a story about how he decided to throw the cheese away. Although he didn't realize it until the story was out of his mouth, Greg set himself up to be identified as having the dreaded Cheese Touch. In saving his friend's reputation, Greg had put his own in jeopardy.



Styles

Point of View

This story is told from the first person point of view of Greg Heffley. The story is told in the form of a journal. For this reason the only appropriate way to tell the story is in the first person point of view. Since a good deal of the themes of the novel come from Greg telling his story in his own words, this first person point of view is ideal. However, with this first person point of view, the other characters do not get any say in the content of the novel. The reader has to take it at face value that the situations have happened as Greg writes that they have. For this reason, the story is slanted very sharply in Greg's favor. He is not likely to admit any of his own failings or say that he is in the wrong in any of the instances in the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language in the novel isn't particularly difficult as the journal is written in proper English and spelling despite the fact it was written by a male student in the first year of middle school. The vocabulary is not particularly difficult. There are no foreign words or phrases used. Significant in the novel is the way the author uses the comic illustrations as a way to get his ideas across instead of using just words. The words and the language of the comics work together to make the journal tell a complete story.

Structure

The most interesting part of this book is its structure. It is written in the form of a journal that Greg kept during his first year of middle school. Greg began writing in the journal in September and ended with a final entry in June. Greg identifies each new month in the body of the journal. Each entry is labeled with the day of the week that entry was written. Greg does not always write in his journal every day. In fact, when he first began his journal he wrote in it more often than he did as the school year drew to a close. The entry for September accounts for nearly 25 percent of the novel. Also interesting in the novel is the use of both the written word and cartoons throughout the book. Both the written words and the cartoons together tell Greg's story.



Quotes

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

-- Greg (September paragraph 1)

Importance: Afraid he will seem like a sissy because he is writing in a journal, Greg attempted to clear up any misconceptions right away. He was writing in a journal, not a diary like a girl.

The only reason I agreed to do this at all is because I figure later on when I'm rich and famous, I'll have better things to do than answer people's stupid questions all day long. So this book is gonna come in handy.

-- Greg (September paragraph 5)

Importance: Greg reasoned that his journal could be useful to him one day when he got rich and famous as he could give it to people who wanted to learn about his childhood.

I've been trying to be a lot more careful about my image ever since I got to middle school.

-- Greg (September paragraph 58)

Importance: Greg's concern with cleaning up and improving his image is one of the most important aspects of this novel.

You'd figure that someone whose job it was to sit on the stage and do nothing could just suck it up for one performance

-- Greg (December paragraph 17)

Importance: Greg wrote about his frustration with Rodney James whose only part in the play was to be a bush yet he held up the beginning of the play for 30 minutes because he developed stage fright.

And that's also why my only New Year's resolution is to never play with Manny again.

-- Greg (December paragraph 110)

Importance: Manny accused Greg of making him swallow a ball of string the size of an orange while they were playing together. In reality, Greg did not force Manny to swallow the tiny ball of string he found. Because Manny told on Greg and expounded on the story Greg had to go to bed early New Year's Eve night.

To make a long story short, Independent Studies is cancelled the rest of the year.

-- Greg (January paragraph 46)

Importance: Because Greg and the boys in his Independent Studies class were found making a list of dirty words they didn't want their robot to be able to say, the class was canceled for the remainder of the semester.



The snowball had gotten so heavy that it tore up all the sod Dad had just laid down this fall.

-- Greg (February paragraph 8)

Importance: While trying to build a snowman that would qualify for the Guinness Book of World Records, Greg and Rowley accidentally tore up the sod that Greg's father had just laid the previous fall.

And if Mrs. Levine, my English teacher, was there, I'm sure she would have said the whole situation was 'ironic'.

-- Greg (February paragraph 23)

Importance: Although Greg and Rowley had intended to ambush the Whirley Street kids with a huge snowball, Greg and Rowley instead were instead ambushed by the Whirley Street kids. Greg realized the situation was one that fit the definition of irony, as the situation turned out to be the opposite of what he and Rowley both had expected.

I had a taste of what it's like to be famous at my school when I won honorable mention in this antismoking contest they had.

-- Greg (February paragraph 29)

Importance: Greg believed he had tasted a bit of popularity as he'd won honorable mention in an antismoking poster competition.

There were actually one or two decent comics in the bin. But I slipped them under a pile of paperwork on Mr. Ira's desk

-- Greg (February paragraph 52)

Importance: Greg didn't seem to think there was anything wrong hiding the comic strips submitted by his competitors during a contest to be the new cartoonist for the school's newspaper. This shows his dishonesty.

I got to give Mom credit for how she handled it. She didn't try to pry and get all the details. All she said was that I should do the 'right thing,' because it's our choices that make us who we are.

-- Greg (March paragraph 14)

Importance: Although he probably didn't deserve the credit she gave him, Greg's mother believed that he would do the right thing when it came to his decision about whether or not he would tell the truth about the safety patrol incident.

You know, Rowley can have Class Clown for all I care. But if he ever gets too big for his britches, I'll just remind him that he was the guy who ate the _____.

-- Greg (June paragraph 7)

Importance: Greg decided that if Rowley ever gave him any troubles he had the information about Rowley begin forced to eat the cheese that he could use as blackmail.



In the novel the word "cheese" is not written and there are blank spaces in the place of the letters. It is possible Greg did not write it because if the journal was found people could implicate him.