

Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School Study Guide

Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School by Jeff Kinney

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Contents

Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Section 1: Pages 1 – 48.....	5
Section 2: Pages 49 – 97.....	7
Section 3: Pages 98– 131.....	9
Section 4: Pages 132 – 179.....	11
Section 5: Pages 180-217.....	13
Characters.....	15
Symbols and Symbolism.....	18
Settings.....	20
Themes and Motifs.....	22
Styles.....	26
Quotes.....	27



Plot Summary

“Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School” is a young adult novel by Jeff Kinney which follows the misadventures of middle-schooler Greg Heffley as he attempts both to deal with his Grandpa’s moving in, and dealing without modern comforts while attending Hardscrabble Farm. When the novel begins, Greg’s mom, Susan, is worried her family is too obsessed with technology. She wants her family to unplug and spend time with one another. At the same time, Greg learns that Grandpa will be moving in for an unknown amount of time. While Greg and his dad, Frank, are concerned about this, Susan is delighted to have three generations under one roof.

Greg’s mom manages to get the issue of unplugging before the Mayor and City Council by way of a petition. The elected leaders then vote to voluntarily unplug for an entire weekend. A chief part of unplugging will be volunteerism, in which people can come and help clean up the park. Greg gets roped into volunteering at the park as well. While there, he decides to take a break, but is joined by his older brother’s friend Billy Rotnick, a troublemaker doing community service. Billy has stolen girl scout cookies, which Greg doesn’t like at all. Susan and all of the other adults then show up, having tracked Greg through a GPS chip in his shoelace.

Frank becomes very strict with Greg, not wanting him to goof off and wanting Greg to become more independent. While Frank is away on a business trip, Greg accidentally drops the toothpaste cap down the bathroom sink drain, so he disassembles the pipe to get it back. He causes a huge flood which in turn stains the kitchen ceiling downstairs. Grandpa volunteers to bring Greg to the hardware store to buy stainblocker paint, but Greg then remembers his grandfather doesn’t have a license anymore. The car runs out of gas on the highway, during which time Grandpa goes to get gas, leaving Greg with the car. Greg sees Billy and other community service teens cleaning the highway, so he ducks down and hides. When they pass by, Greg pulls himself out of hiding by grabbing the stick shift. As a result, the car rolls and gets stuck in a ditch.

Hoping to avoid his father’s wrath, Greg chooses to spend the week at Hardscrabble Farms with his classmates and best friend, Rowley, a trip which Greg has been trying to avoid at all costs. There, Greg is subjected to living without junk food, modern technology, and must live and do chores the way kids did a hundred years ago. Greg comes to appreciate the present more and to respect the kids who do such work, but it doesn’t make the trip any more enjoyable for Greg. Greg is even more annoyed to have Mr. Jefferson, cabin chaperone and father of his best friend, Rowley, for a bunkmate. But when Mr. Jefferson and Rowley are both exposed to poison ivy, they must both go home early. Greg and his fellow cabinmates do their best to get along, but fear the legend of Silas Scratch, a crazed farmer who used to own Hardscrabble.

Greg’s father is called in as an emergency chaperone. Rather than helping the boys get ready for their last night which must be spent outdoors, he adds to the legend of Silas, telling the boys to avoid his shack in the woods. That night, while collecting firewood, Greg comes across the shack. Looking inside the building, he discovers a modern



maintenance shed and modern bathroom and shower. He also discovers his father inside, having just showered. Frank explains he attended Hardscrabble when he was Greg's age, and that back then, bathrooms were horrible. When Frank and his friends discovered the shed, Frank made the shed look scary and invented the legend of Silas to keep kids away. Greg is very impressed with his father's scheming. As the week ends, Greg drives home with his father, holding up a sign for the incoming kids that says "Beware of Silas Scratch".



Section 1: Pages 1 – 48

Summary

It is September. Greg complains about how adults think they had things so much better when they were kids. Greg disagrees, because his generation has so much technology that didn't exist back then. Greg's mom, Susan, thinks kids (and adults) spend too much time with technology, and not enough time with each other. She begins a petition for a weekend without electronics. She will need a hundred signatures to take the petition to Town Hall. Greg considers the idea that people are not as tough as their ancestors, who would be disappointed with the way people have turned out. He also considers that inventions – such as baby wipes – have made life easier. The family's new pet pig has become a fixture in the house, from eating at the table with the family to being taught tricks such as standing on two legs by Greg's mom. The pig comes and goes as it pleases.

Seeking to stay out of his crazy house, Greg signs up to be a Homework Buddy for an elementary school kid named Frew. It turns out that Frew is a genius, and does all of Greg's homework for him. Word comes that Grandpa will move in because his rent has gone up. Grandpa chooses to stay in Greg's room, forcing Greg to stay with his toddler brother, Manny. Sue likes the idea of three generations living under one roof, just like the old days. Greg's dad, Frank, is only stressed out having his father around all the time. Frank also thinks Susan is helping Greg out too much, meaning Greg isn't independent enough. Frank goes on to comment about how parents today are overprotective. Frank also insists his oldest son, high schooler Rodrick, now get a job to pay for money for his own gas. Rodrick gets a job at Old-Timey Ice Cream Parlour.

Hoping to give his grandfather a reason to move out, Greg sets him up with an online dating account to find a girlfriend. Rodrick gets a promotion at work to be the mascot, Old Timey Tobias. It is rough work because the kids all pelt Rodrick with food and trash. Greg learns that the annual school trip to Hardscrabble Farms, where students sleep in log cabins and learn about nature, is coming up. Greg does not want to go, meaning his best friend, Rowley, will be hard-pressed to find a bunkmate.

Analysis

“Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School” is a young adult novel by Jeff Kinney which follows the misadventures of middle-schooler Greg Heffley as he attempts both to deal with his Grandpa's moving in, and dealing without modern comforts while attending Hardscrabble Farm. Early in the novel, the theme of family emerges as central to the plot. Susan's efforts to find ways to unplug and avoid technology do not stem from a dislike of technology but, rather, from wanting to spend more time with her family. Family means everything to Susan. When word comes that Grandpa will have to move in at least temporarily, Susan is delighted. She finds it wonderful that three generations



of family will be living under one roof. Greg's dad (the actual son of Grandpa) isn't so sure. He loves his father but is stressed out with his father being around because it puts him in the role of son, open to his father's criticism.

The theme of childhood is also strongly expressed in this section of the novel. Greg comments sarcastically on how adults think they had childhood so much better than children of today, while Greg contends this cannot be true because kids today have much better technology. (Technology itself becomes an important theme as the novel progresses.) Frank recalls his own childhood as being much more independent, and so he urges Greg to become more responsible and independent, while urging Rodrick to get a job to pay for his own gas. Greg does his best to be responsible only to stay out of his dad's way, while Rodrick takes on a job at the Old-Timey Ice Cream Parlour.

The theme of survival is also hinted at early in the novel. This occurs by way of the annual class trip to Hardscrabble Farm, something Greg decidedly seeks to avoid having to do. Hardscrabble Farm is where the kids spend a week without technology and junk food while doing farm chores and learning to survive in the wild. These are things which Greg has absolutely no interest in doing. Greg is very much swayed by modern day comforts, which range from technology to baby wipes. He can't understand why anyone – whether it is his mother for a weekend or a kid for a week at Hardscrabble – would want to do away with such comforts.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Greg so determined to avoid going to Hardscrabble Farms? If you were in Greg's position, would you try to avoid going to Hardscrabble Farms? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why are Greg and Frank unhappy about Grandpa moving in? Why is Susan happy about it?

Discussion Question 3

How does Frank compare his own childhood to Greg's? What similarities are there? What differences are there? How does Frank attempt to alter Greg's childhood?

Vocabulary

technology, gadgets, ancestors, dramatic, overprotective, supervision, dignified, traumatized



Section 2: Pages 49 – 97

Summary

The homework that Frew has been helping Greg out with has had a bad effect. Greg is now being put into a more challenging class. While out at dinner to celebrate, Greg and his family return home to find that Grandpa has thrown a party for all of his girlfriends. Frank chases everyone out, then yells at Grandpa for having a party. He then buys a webcam to keep an eye on Grandpa when he is home alone. This kind of modern technology makes Greg feel uncomfortable, like he is being watched. As the women from the party leave, Greg's mom gets them all to sign the petition to bring to Town Hall. The Mayor and City Council vote to voluntarily unplug all electronics for the weekend. Greg's mom spreads the word.

Part of the unplugging process includes voluntary cleaning at the town park. With everyone walking around in town, Greg's dad encourages Greg and Rowley to open a lemonade stand, which they do. They have a difficult time making the lemonade. Most of the people who stop to buy a glass criticize the lemonade, saying it is too sweet or complaining about hose water being used in the lemonade. When another kid named Cedric sets up a better lemonade stand, Greg and Rowley decide to sell water instead. They bring the water to the park to sell to volunteers, but Greg's mom says this is wrong. Greg and Rowley end up getting forced into planting flowers and raking leaves instead. Teens doing community service are brought to help, as are the local Girl Scouts. The Girl Scouts make organize the volunteers and get serious work done. Greg needs a break, so he escapes to the stream.

Analysis

In this section of the novel, Greg's family continues to spend as much time together as possible except Grandpa, who seems to need a break. As a result, he does not come out to dinner with Greg and everyone else – but stays behind to throw a party. It is just like Grandpa has become a teen, is living part of his childhood over again, and Frank has become the father. As a result, Frank turns to technology to keep order in his house. Interestingly enough, Greg's love of technology comes to a complete halt as Greg learns his father has installed a webcam. The webcam is meant to keep an eye on Grandpa, but Greg knows it can be used to keep an eye on him, too. Greg becomes paranoid, coming to oppose technology where it ends his freedom. The reader should note that the author, Kinney, is not merely crafting a humorous part of the novel, but is making an important political point about technology, privacy, and freedom as well.

Childhood also emerges as a strong theme in this novel. Apart from Grandpa's plunge into the partying ways of his childhood, and Rodrick dealing with the drudgeries of work (a necessary part of childhood for the purposes of growing up), Greg carries on with a classic part of American childhood – having a lemonade stand. Greg's efforts at making



and selling lemonade are, however, disastrous. He cannot properly brew or sell lemonade, so he and Rowley decide selling water to volunteers at the park is a better way to go. This, however, earns disapproval from Susan who puts Greg and Rowley to work – also a classic hallmark of American childhood.

Discussion Question 1

Where does Greg's love of technology end? Why does Greg dislike this part of technology?

Discussion Question 2

What is Greg's experience selling lemonade like? What does he decide to sell instead? Why does his mother disapprove of this?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Susan insist that Greg and Rowley help volunteer in cleaning up the park? What happens as a result?

Vocabulary

awkward, intercepting, voluntarily, apocalypse, criticize, dehydrated, pestering



Section 3: Pages 98– 131

Summary

Frew, who is among the volunteers at the park, decides he also needs a break. He meets up with Greg. A few minutes later, Billy Rotner, a teen doing community service, and a friend of Rodrick's, shows up at the stream. Billy is doing community service for getting caught stealing a pack of sour gummy worms. Greg doesn't want Billy around. They are then discovered by the Girl Scouts, so Greg, Billy, and Frew run. It is then revealed that Billy has stolen a pack of Thin Mints from the Girl Scouts. A few moments later, Sue, the adults, and the Girl Scouts all arrive. Billy is taken away. Sue reveals she found Greg by way of a tracking device in his shoelace, which she followed on her phone. After the park incident, Greg's dad becomes stricter with Greg. While Greg's dad is away on a business trip, Greg drops the toothpaste cap into the upstairs bathroom sink drain. Greg tries to disassemble the pipes under the sink, but causes a huge leak which stains the kitchen ceiling.

Greg begs Grandpa to help him fix the mess. Grandpa agrees, suggests a special stain-blocking paint, and drives to the hardware store. After hitting a trashcan and a mailbox, Greg remembers his Grandpa no longer has a license. After driving the wrong way on the highway, the car runs out of gas. Greg waits in the car while Grandpa goes to get gas. Greg then sees the community service teens, Billy among them, cleaning the side of the highway and getting closer to the car. Greg ducks down and hides. After the teens pass, Greg uses the stick shift to pull himself up, leading to the car rolling into a ditch. Greg knows his father will be angry, so he agrees to go to Hardscrabble Farms since it will have him out of the house when his father gets back. Greg goes on to pack extra baby wipes instead of a raincoat for the trip, knowing electronics and junk food are not allowed. Before Greg leaves, Grandpa gives him a copy of the book "The Essential Book for Young Lads".

Analysis

As the novel continues, so do Greg's misadventures. His efforts to take a break from park volunteerism lead to an encounter with Frew and the cookie-stealing Billy. This in turn leads to Susan using technology – a GPS app on her smartphone, and a tracking chip in Greg's shoelace – to find out where Greg has gone off to. Susan's refusal to abide by the no-technology rule of the weekend stems not from her inability to stick to what she has started, but by genuine concern about the safety of her son. The entire incident brings Frank down hard on Greg, who insists Greg continue to step up his efforts to be more responsible. Frank's strictness isn't a question of unfairness, but of making sure that Greg will receive important life lessons and turn out to be a good person in life.



However, Greg's efforts to behave responsibly lead to disaster. When Greg drops the toothpaste cap down the bathroom sink, his desire to be responsible and retrieve it lead to a massive bathroom flood and stain on the kitchen ceiling. In keeping with the theme of family, it is Grandpa who comes through for Greg, offering to help Greg fix the mess by going to buy stainblocking paint at the hardware store. Yet this too ends in disaster with the car going into a ditch. Greg's scheming to take a break from volunteer work, to retrieve the lost cap, and to cover up the evidence of the disaster in turn leads to the disaster of the car in the ditch. Greg, fully aware that his father will be enraged, decides on a drastic course of action. As a matter of survival, he has been avoiding spending the week at Hardscrabble. Now, as a matter of survival, he will spend the week there.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you believe Grandpa agrees to help Greg fix the stain on the ceiling? What happens as a result? How does Greg handle the situation?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Greg attempt to retrieve the toothpaste cap from the sink himself rather than asking for help? What is the result?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Greg decide to spend the week at Hardscrabble Farms? If you were in Greg's place, would you stay home and own up to the car incident, or go to Hardscrabble? Why?

Vocabulary

blubbering, instincts, harboring, fugitive, paranoid, tempted, penalty



Section 4: Pages 132 – 179

Summary

Greg travels by bus to Hardscrabble Farms. Compared to the other kids, he feels underpacked. As Greg's bus arrives, another bus of miserable-looking kids leaves. A kid at the back holds a sign that says "Beware of Silas Scratch". It is explained to Greg that Silas Scratch used to own the farm, but was kicked out by the county. Silas went on to live in the woods, growing his fingernails really long. The story scares everyone. The students are welcomed by Mrs. Graziano, who lays down rules and regulations, including one forbidding boys and girls from visiting each other's cabins. Greg is assigned a cabin with Rowley, where his dad, Mr. Jefferson, serves as chaperone. Mr. Jefferson ends up being Greg's bunkmate.

The boys are put through teambuilding exercises, including a trust fall. But a fat kid named Jeffrey causes Rowley and Gareth to crash into each other during his fall, leading to one of Gareth's teeth being lodged in Rowley's head. Rowley is sent home from camp to seek medical help. Greg and the other boys must learn to check one another for ticks. Faced with a cold shower in the morning, Greg uses baby wipes to clean himself. Having to do farm chores as an activity, Greg is glad he didn't live a hundred years ago. However, it makes him respect kids who used to, and still do farm work. While heading back, Gareth trips over a stone with scratches on it. Emilio thinks it is the grave of Silas Scratch, and thinks they are all cursed now. At dinner, rumored sightings of Silas Scratch spread like wildfire. Tired of camp food, Greg's cabinmates catch a fish, but unsure of what to do with it, they put it in the toilet. The fish later surprises Mr. Jefferson, who declares it a prank and blames it on Greg.

Analysis

Survival becomes an important theme as Greg arrives at Hardscrabble Farms. There, Greg is immediately introduced to the terrifying legend of Silas Scratch, and to the fact that he and his friends will be forced to do chores as kids did them a hundred years ago. Greg is not thrilled about having to do such hard work, and wonders how he will be able to survive a camp meant to teach kids how to survive on their own. Interestingly enough, however, the reader should note that Greg gains a serious amount of respect for kids who used to – and still do have to – do such hard work. This gives Greg serious perspective about the past and present. Greg has so far been able to get by without relying on technology, but doesn't know how long that will last.

Schemes and misadventures abound early on at the farm. Greg's efforts to be more responsible – such as refusing to fish for dinner – result in Greg being blamed anyways. The attempt Rowley and Gareth make to do a trust fall catch with Jeffrey leads to Gareth's tooth being embedded in Rowley's head. This in turn means that Greg's best friend must leave camp. Unfortunately, Greg ends up with Mr. Jefferson as a bunkmate,



which in and of itself is a misadventure. It was bad enough to have a webcam potentially spying on him at home, but now Greg must sleep in the bunk above the cabin chaperone, severely limiting Greg's ability to carry out schemes.

Discussion Question 1

What sorts of hard work and chores does Greg carry out while at Hardscrabble Farms? How does this ultimately affect Greg and his thinking about hard work? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Of everything Greg and his friends have so far encountered at camp, which seems to be the most difficult and terrifying? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What is the legend of Silas Scratch? Why does this scare Greg and the other kids so much?

Vocabulary

deranged, quiver, intention, homesick, extreme, indigestion



Section 5: Pages 180-217

Summary

Rowley returns to Hardscrabble Farms just in time for the last night, which must be spent outdoors and requires the kids to build a shelter and a fire. While building a test fire, Rowley collects poison ivy for kindling, which his father inhales. As a result, both father and son are sent home. No immediate replacement can be found. Greg's group is now on its own without a chaperone. Thieves raid Greg's cabin, use up all his baby wipes, and flood the toilet. The only thing not ruined is Grandpa's guidebook for young men. Greg realizes the guide includes important survival tips. While sneaking out to steal deodorant from the girls' cabins, Jeffrey scares everyone by mentioning Silas Scratch. The boys manage to steal a bag from a cabin full of Girl Scouts, but the girls wake up and chase them out. Greg suggests bringing the bag back, but the others want to open it first. The bag belongs to Mrs. Graziano. She calls the emergency chaperone as a result. The emergency chaperone is Greg's dad. It turns out Frank, at Greg's age, also attended Hardscrabble and is not happy to be back.

During dinner, Greg's dad confirms rather than denies rumors that Silas Scratch's cabin is in the woods. Everyone is scared to spend the night outdoors now. Greg is forced to collect firewood on his own. He then discovers what seems to be the shack of Silas Scratch. Inside, Greg finds it is merely a maintenance shed with a modern, clean bathroom and shower. He then discovers his father has just taken a shower. Frank explains he and his friends found the shed, made it look scary, and invented the legend of Silas Scratch to keep other kids away. Back then, the only bathroom was an outhouse, and Frank and his friends didn't want to share the shed. This impresses Greg. Outside, it begins to rain. Greg has no raincoat, gets soaked, and his friends have used their shelter materials for a fire. Frank sneaks them all back into their cabin for the rest of the night. The next day, as Greg and his father drive home, Greg holds up a sign that says "Beware of Silas Scratch".

Analysis

Now without a chaperone thanks to poison ivy, Greg and his group must rely on themselves to survive their last night at Hardscrabble Farms. Survival becomes a central theme in the last part of the novel as the Greg and his friends go through another series of misadventures and schemes, all of which fail. Among these are raiding one of the girls' cabins for deodorant, and having their cabin raided. Interestingly enough, family becomes central to the novel once again as the book that Grandpa gave to Greg contains important survival information, which Greg and his friends put to good use. The only emergency chaperone willing to come in to take care of the kids ends up being Greg's father. Even the misadventure of having no chaperone ends in failure with the arrival of Frank.



However, Frank's obvious concern for Greg and his friends leads to a deeper understanding between Greg and his father by way of scheming. Frank helps the kids sneak back into their cabin to spend their last night indoors rather than outside in the rain. The legend of Silas Scratch once again emerges front and center as a scheme concocted by none other than Greg's own father to keep kids away from a secret bathroom. At first, Greg is mad that his father would do such a thing, but then Greg realizes he would have done exactly the same thing. He gains tremendous respect for his father, recognizing a kindred spirit in his father, and realizing that his father's childhood was very much the same as Greg's own.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Greg's father come to Hardscrabble Farms for the last night of camp? Does this ultimately bring Greg and his father closer together? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What is the truth behind the legend of Silas Scratch? How does Greg react to this knowledge? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Greg decide to drive home with his dad at the end of the novel rather than going on the bus with everyone else? What does this say about Greg's relationship with, and respect for, his dad?

Vocabulary

kindling, scrambling, outvoted, immature, shenanigans, hoax



Characters

Greg

Greg Heffley is the main character and narrator of the novel “Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Ugly Truth”. Greg is the son of Frank and Susan, is the younger brother of Rodrick, and the older brother of Manny. He is best friends with Rowley. Greg is a good-intentioned kid whose plans often turn to disasters, or misadventures at best. Greg must contend with his Grandpa moving in, trying to avoid going to Hardscrabble Farms to avoid a week of hard work, and must deal with his father’s insistence on Greg becoming more independent and more responsible. If this isn’t enough for Greg to handle, he must also deal with his mother’s insistence on going unplugged and spending more time with one another instead of electronics. Greg does his best to be more responsible, grows closer to his grandfather, and ultimately decides to attend Hardscrabble Farm when he accidentally puts the family car in a ditch.

At Hardscrabble Camp, Greg gains an appreciation for modern technology and convenience, and gains respect for the kids who have to do hard work every day. As the “Wimpy Kid” series of novels progress, Greg’s character begins to mature and gain a moral bearing. This is exemplified on several occasions in “Old School”, most notably when Greg wants nothing to do with Billy, who has fled his community service group, and when Greg argues that the bag of girls’ belongings be returned to the girl’s cabin. Greg’s father is called to the camp as an emergency chaperone, where Greg learns his father was very much like him at his age. This brings Greg and his dad closer together.

Susan

Susan Heffley is the mother of Greg, Rodrick, and Manny, and is the wife of Frank. Susan is a kind and patient woman who loves and cares deeply for her family. Susan believes her family is not spending enough time together, so she advocates for an electronics-free weekend in a petition that she brings to City Hall. Susan also ensures that Greg volunteers over the weekend to help clean up the park. Susan is also thrilled when Grandpa moves in, because it will mean having three generations of family under one roof like in the old days.

Frank

Frank Heffley is the father of Greg, Rodrick, and Manny, and is the husband of Susan. He is also the older brother of Gary. Frank is a good and decent man who wants his children to be more responsible and more independent. He is stressed out when his father moves in. Frank is later called to Hardscrabble Camp as an emergency chaperone, a camp which Frank attended at Greg’s age. He explains to Greg that he invented the legend of Silas Scratch to protect a secret bathroom in the maintenance shed from being used by other kids. This brings Frank and Greg closer together.



Rodrick

Rodrick is the older brother of Greg and Manny, and is the son of Frank and Sue. Rodrick is a moody teenager who is compelled by his father to get a job. Rodrick takes on work at Old-Timey Ice Cream Parlour where he first handles garbage, and then is promoted to be the mascot.

Manny

Manny is the younger brother of Greg and Rodrick, and is the third child of Frank and Sue. He is a toddler of about three years old. Manny has a pet pig that has increasingly become like a person, eating at the table and coming and going as it pleases.

Grandpa

Grandpa is the father of Frank, and the father-in-law of Susan. When his rent goes up at his own place, Grandpa must move in with Frank and his family. Grandpa is alternatively either fun and causing mischief, such as when he throws a party, or is very critical of the way Frank is raising his kids. When Greg stains the kitchen ceiling, Grandpa drives Greg toward the hardware store, even though he doesn't have a license. Grandpa later gives Greg the book "The Essential Book for Young Lads" which helps Greg out tremendously at camp.

Rowley

Rowley Jefferson is the best friend of Greg. Rowley is a good-hearted, tall, and absent-minded kid. Rowley attends Hardscrabble Camp with his father, Mr. Jefferson, and Greg, but during a trust fall exercise, a collision with Jeffrey causes one of Jeffrey's teeth to become lodged in Rowley's forehead. Rowley is sent home for medical treatment. When Rowley returns, he exposes himself and his father to poison ivy, which requires them both to go home.

Mr. Jefferson

Mr. Jefferson is the father of Rowley. An incredibly overprotective parent, Mr. Jefferson won't even let Rowley play with sticks. At Hardscrabble Farm, Mr. Jefferson becomes the bunkmate of Greg, and later accuses Greg of putting a fish in the toilet. Mr. Jefferson must leave camp early when he inhales poison ivy fumes after Rowley puts poison ivy in the kindling for the campfire.



Mrs. Graziano

Mrs. Graziano is the director of Hardscrabble Farms. She is a kind but no-nonsense woman who wants the farm to run smoothly, and the kids to have a good experience. She hopes that Greg's cabin will be able to handle its last night without a chaperone after Mr. Jefferson leaves, but when Greg's cabinmates steal her bag from one of the girls' cabins, Mrs. Graziano lays down the law and calls Frank.

Silas Scratch

Silas Scratch is a legendary figure that inspires terror at Hardscrabble Farm. According to legend, Silas Scratch is a crazed farmer who originally owned Hardscrabble, but was kicked off his land by the county. He roamed wild in the woods, his fingernails growing long, and built a forbidden shack. In reality, as Greg learns, the legend was begun by his father as a child to protect the comfy bathroom in the shack from being used by other campers.



Symbols and Symbolism

Technology

Technology – including electronic gadgets that range from phones to video games to the computer – is something that Susan believes her family spends too much time using. She believes her family should spend more time with each other rather than just in front of screens. Greg disagrees, believing technology is a good thing until it violates his privacy. Nevertheless, Susan manages to get a petition and vote before the Mayor and City Council, who vote for the city to voluntarily go unplugged for the weekend.

Webcams

Webcams are a form of technology that Greg doesn't like. Frank sets up a webcam somewhere in the house in order to keep an eye on Grandpa, to ensure he doesn't throw any more wild parties. Greg becomes paranoid, thinking he is always being watched by the webcam. Greg explains to the reader that he doesn't like the kind of technology that takes away someone's freedom or their privacy.

Petition

A petition with the goal of getting the Mayor and Council to vote for the town to voluntarily unplug from electronics for a weekend is written by Susan. Susan must receive a hundred signatures on the petition to get it before the Mayor and Council. She successfully completes this by getting all of the women who attend Grandpa's party to sign.

Baby wipes

Baby wipes are a modern convenience that Greg praises throughout the novel. He says that baby wipes are one of the best inventions man has ever made. He loves using them when he goes to the bathroom. When Greg goes to Hardscrabble Farms, he packs three boxes of baby wipes instead of a raincoat. The baby wipes are later used by kids who raid Greg's cabin.

Lemonade

Lemonade is produced and sold by Greg and Rowley during the unplugged weekend at Frank's insistence. Greg and Rowley have a difficult time making the lemonade, as they struggle to cut the lemons, add just the right amount of water, and just the right amount of sugar. The lemonade they make is not a hit, so they decide to sell water instead.



Water

Water is sold by Greg and Rowley after their sale of lemonade doesn't work out. Greg and Rowley package water and bring it to the park to sell to volunteers. Susan frowns upon profiting off of volunteers, and so puts Greg and Rowley to work instead.

Poison ivy

Poison ivy is a kind of plant that causes severe rashes and itching to those who touch it. At the end of the week at Hardscrabble Farms, Rowley collects poison ivy to use as kindling. But the fumes it generates from the campfire cause his father to have trouble breathing, and cause a rash outbreak on Rowley's arms. Both Rowley and his dad must go home.

The Essential Book for Young Lads

"The Essential Book for Young Lads" is an old guide that Grandpa gave to Frank when he was growing up, and which Grandpa gives to Greg as Greg heads off to Hardscrabble Farms. Greg takes the book along just to make his Grandpa happy. But as Greg later learns, the book is full of life-saving survival tips which range from starting a fire to building a shelter. The book becomes critical to Greg and his friends surviving their last night at Hardscrabble.

Bathroom

A modern, comfortable bathroom is located in the maintenance shed at Hardscrabble Farms. It is discovered by Frank and his friends as a child, who then make the shed look like the dangerous home of Silas Scratch, whom they invent a legend about to keep other kids away. Greg is at first annoyed that his father would do such a thing, but then realizes he would have done the same thing. Greg gains a newfound sense of respect for, and closeness with his father over the secret bathroom.

"Beware of Silas Scratch" sign

A sign that reads "Beware of Silas Scratch" is displayed in the back of an outgoing bus by a petrified kid as Greg and his busload of friends arrive for a week at Hardscrabble Farms. The sign warns everyone about the legend of Silas Scratch. When Greg learns the truth about Silas Scratch through his father, Greg happily holds up his own "Beware of Silas Scratch" sign on the way home.



Settings

Town park

The town park, once a beautiful and family-oriented place in town, has fallen into disrepair because the town is short on money. During the unplugged weekend, a volunteer effort to restore the park is put underway. The park includes playgrounds, paths for running, walking, and biking, a beautiful stream, and wide-open spaces for relaxation and sports.

Greg and Rowley are roped in to do volunteer work at the park. Greg, while trying to avoid hard work there, runs into one of Rodrick's troublemaking friends. They are chased through the park by an angry group of Girl Scouts who want them to return to work. Greg is ultimately found by his mother, who uses a GPS tracking device in Greg's shoelace to find him.

Highway

The highway is located beyond the residential section of town. When Greg floods the bathroom and ruins the ceiling in the kitchen, Grandpa volunteers to drive Greg to the hardware store for stainblocker paint. Grandpa accidentally drives the wrong way on the highway at first, and then runs out of gas. Greg must then wait with the car on the highway while Grandpa returns with gas. During this time, Greg sees Billy and the teenage community service crew cleaning the highway's edges, so he ducks down to hide. When the teens pass, Greg uses the stick-shift to pull himself up, at which time the car goes into a ditch.

Hardscrabble Farms

Hardscrabble Farms is a youth camp for kids to experience hard work and what life was like a hundred years ago for kids. Operated by Mrs. Graziano, the camp is not a good experience for most kids - like Greg - who prefer the comforts of modern life. The camp is also home to the legend of Silas Scratch, a crazed farmer kicked off his property by the county who now lives in the woods. Hardscrabble Farms consists of cabins for campers, a mess hall, woods, nature trails, and various scenic features such as a stream. Greg spends the first half of the novel trying to avoid having to go to Hardscrabble, then spends the second half of the novel trying to survive Hardscrabble after accidentally putting the family car into a ditch.

Greg's cabin

Greg's cabin is located at Hardscrabble Farms. It is where Greg, Rowley, and their cabinmates will spend the week. It is a dirty, smelly place with a single bathroom. The



cabin's main room is full of bunk beds. Greg ends up with Mr. Jefferson as a bunkmate, which annoys Greg. The cabin is later raided and flooded by other campers. As a result, Greg and his cabinmates are thrilled to be spending the last night away from the cabin, but when it begins to rain and plans fall apart, they are thrilled to sneak back into the cabin to spend the night there.

The woods

The woods of Hardscrabble Farms are a place that Greg and his friends do not want to venture into. The woods are supposedly roamed by the crazed Silas Scratch, who has a terrifying shack for a home deep inside the woods. Greg is forced to collect firewood from the woods late in the novel, where he comes upon the shack. On closer investigation, he discovers the shack in the woods is actually a modern maintenance shed designed to look scary, in which are maintenance supplies and a comfy, modern bathroom.



Themes and Motifs

Family

Family is an important theme in the novel “Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School” by Jeff Kinney. Family involves mutual love, compassion, loyalty towards, and emotional, spiritual, and physical support of individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who still behave in the fashion of the traditional family unit. Family can be found consistently throughout the novel, and family affects the plot of the novel in various ways.

When the novel begins, Susan announces that her family is spending too much time with technology, and not enough time with each other. Greg disagrees, thinking his family spends more than enough time together. Susan goes on to get the town to voluntarily unplug for the weekend, so that more time may be spent with family, and so that the town park may be cleaned up. Susan’s desire for family time comes not from a hatred of technology, but a genuine love of family.

When Grandpa moves in, Greg and his father aren’t thrilled about the idea. Susan, however, is in love with the idea that three generations will be living under one roof just like in the olden days. Greg later comes to appreciate his grandfather living in the same house, as Grandpa seeks to help Greg fix the stain he causes on the kitchen ceiling. Greg’s father, however, is more stressed than relieved to have Grandpa around, as Grandpa throws a wild party while the rest of the family is out.

Frank also has a deep and abiding love for his family. He wants his children to grow up to be responsible and independent men. As a result, he urges Rodrick to get a job to pay for his own gas, and urges Greg to be more responsible and more independent. Rodrick gets a job while Greg does his best to be more responsible and independent. When Frank learns that an emergency chaperone is needed at Hardscrabble Farms, he drives over in the middle of the night to take care of Greg and his friends. Greg later gains a deeper respect for his father when he learns his father invented the legend of Silas Scratch to keep kids away from the secret bathroom in the maintenance shed.

Childhood

Childhood is an important theme in the novel “Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School” by Jeff Kinney. Childhood is discussed and considered in numerous ways in the novel. This is done largely through comparisons of past and present childhood.

When the novel begins, Greg complains about how adults all think they had life so much better as children. Greg disagrees, because adults did not have the same kind of technology that he and other kids enjoy in the present day. Frank contends that childhood in his day was safer and simpler, and that it was far more enjoyable than childhood in the present. Frank attempts to get Greg to live a classic American



childhood at various points in the novel, such as getting Greg and Rowley to have a lemonade stand.

However, things become uncomfortable for Frank when his dad moves in. Grandpa's presence in the house means Frank goes from being father to being both father and child. Grandpa critiques the way that Frank is raising his kids, causing Frank to compel his children to become more independent and responsible. Strangely, Grandpa also becomes something of a fourth child when he throws a wild party when the rest of the family is at dinner, and when he takes to driving without a license.

Despite Frank's urging of Greg to be more responsible and independent, Greg comes to a deeper understanding of his father based on his father's own childhood. He recognizes that he and his father, in comparison as children, are very similar. This comes through Greg's discovery that his dad invented the legend of Silas Scratch to protect a secret bathroom in the maintenance shed. This earns Greg's respect, because Greg knows he would have done just the same thing.

Technology

Technology is an important theme in the novel "Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School" by Jeff Kinney. Technology – which consists of everything from phones and video games to computers and internet dating sites – plays an important role as the plot unfolds, not only informing the plot but inviting social comment from the author through Greg.

When the novel begins, Susan believes her family is too obsessed with technology. She believes that her family is spending too much time with computers, video games, and phones rather than with each other. Susan does not dislike technology itself – it even comes in handy for her such as when she uses GPS to track Greg's position in the park – but dislikes that it has such control over the lives of her family members.

Greg himself loves technology, and modernity by extension. He loves everything from baby wipes to the internet. He even sets up Grandpa on a dating website in the hopes it will encourage Grandpa to want to move out. Even Frank employs modern technology to keep an eye on Grandpa while he is home alone. Frank installs a webcam to keep watch on Grandpa after Grandpa's wild party.

Technology, however, has its limits for Greg because of the webcam. In a telling social statement, Greg confesses his love of technology ends where technology takes away his right to privacy and his freedom. The webcam is one step too far for Greg, who becomes paranoid in his own home, thinking he is being watched no matter what he does. It is almost a relief when Greg gets to go to Hardscrabble Farms and is able to live without being monitored by a webcam.



Survival

Survival is an important theme in the novel “Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School” by Jeff Kinney. Survival in the novel essentially involves either Greg’s ability to deal with a particular situation or event successfully, or to successfully make it through both family life and camp life. A large focus of the novel includes whether or not Greg can survive without technology.

When the novel begins, Greg considers his two biggest survival threats to be his Grandpa moving in, and his mom urging the town to go unplugged for the weekend. Grandpa causes Frank to stress out as Grandpa criticizes his parenting techniques, causing Frank to become stricter. Greg goes out of his way to be more independent and responsible so as not to anger his father. This is tough work for Greg, whose schemes and mishaps continue and range from being chased by a pack of Girl Scouts to flooding the upstairs bathroom.

Indeed, Greg does not think he’ll survive the flooding incident. Living without technology is the least of Greg’s worries. The flooding incident leads to a stain on the kitchen ceiling, which leads to Greg and Grandpa driving to get stainblocking paint, which in turn leads to the car going into a ditch. Greg believes his father will want to kill him, so to give his father time to cool down, Greg goes to Hardscrabble Farms.

Greg struggles to survive Hardscrabble Farms as well. Survival here comes in three forms. First, Greg must survive the legend of Silas Scratch, who might kill Greg before the week is over. Greg later learns the legend is truly only a legend, and invented by Frank himself. Second, Greg must survive all the activities and hard work, which he has no way out of but must do anyways. This gives him a greater respect and appreciation for his own times, and for the hard work that people do. Third, Greg must actually survive in the outdoors overnight. This is accomplished in part through the survival tips in Grandpa’s book, and in Frank arriving to sneak everyone into the cabins.

Schemes and Misadventures

Schemes and misadventures form an important motif in the novel “Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School” by Jeff Kinney. Throughout the “Wimpy Kid” series, Greg is noted for his scheming, failed plans, and misadventures. There are no shortage of such occurrences in “Old School”. These are just a few of the many found in the novel.

Early in the novel, Greg’s father urges him and Rowley to open a lemonade stand during the unplugged weekend. Greg and Rowley experience trouble making the lemonade, including an incident where Greg gets squirted in the eye with lemon juice. They then have trouble selling the lemonade, as customers complain about the taste. Competition makes things worse, so Greg and Rowley decide to sell water to park volunteers. This backfires when Susan disapproves and puts Greg and Rowley to work instead.



Greg's efforts to be more independent and responsible also don't always work out. Greg's desire to recover a lost toothpaste cap in the bathroom sink pipe leads him to flood the bathroom. This in turn causes a stain on the kitchen ceiling downstairs. Greg gets Grandpa to drive him to the hardware store for stain-blocking paint, during which time the car runs out of gas. While Grandpa goes to get gas, Greg hides from a passing community service group, after which he pulls himself up using the stick shift. This in turn damages the car when it goes into a ditch.

Interestingly enough, at Hardscrabble Farms, Greg aspires to do the right thing more often than not. But these attempts still backfire on him. Greg opposes his cabinmates fishing to make their own food, but still they catch a fish and, not knowing what to do with it, put it in the toilet. Mr. Jefferson discovers this and declares it is a prank Greg set up. When Greg urges his cabinmates to return the girls' bag they have taken from the girls' cabin, they are instead caught by Mrs. Graziano, who gets Greg's dad to come and be an emergency chaperone.

Styles

Point of View

Jeff Kinney tells his novel “Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School” in the first-person reflective perspective from the point of view of Greg Heffley. The entire novel is composed as if to resemble Greg’s diary. It is full of written entries and drawings pertaining to the entries. Because Greg himself is meant to be writing the entries, the narration is in the first-person from Greg’s point of view. The experiences that are described in the diary have all happened to Greg directly, and Greg himself is setting them down on paper. The reflective aspect of the narration comes from the fact that Greg is writing about the events after they have happened, and so Greg is reflecting, recalling, and thinking back about them as he is writing.

Language and Meaning

Jeff Kinney tells his novel “Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School” in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least two primary reasons. First, the language used in the novel is reflective of the target audience of the book – young adults. The language used is reflective of the age and level of education of young adults. Second, the language used in the novel is simple and straightforward because it is meant to be written by Greg, a boy of about eleven or twelve. As a result, the language employed reflects not only his age, but his level of education as well. It creates a level of realism to the plot, and relatability between readers and Greg.

Structure

Jeff Kinney divides his novel “Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School” into numerous entries sometimes noted by day of the week, and sometimes by the month. The diary is essentially one long, continuous story full of numerous events, reflecting a normal human life. The diary is host to not only written entries, but dozens of drawings and sketches depicting events, thoughts, and ideas that Greg has as he writes. For example, the entries on page 163 deal with Greg and his friends passing through the outskirts of the woods at Hardscrabble Farms, where Gareth trips over a rock with scratches on it. An illustration depicts this, as well as the kids worrying the rock is actually the grave of Silas Scratch.



Quotes

Grown-ups are always talking about the 'good old days' and how things were so much better when THEY were kids. But I think they're just jealous because MY generation has all this fancy technology and stuff they didn't have growing up.

-- Greg (Section 1)

Importance: Here, Greg lays the foundation for the entire novel to come. He presents the case that his parents, and other adults, all believe they had things better as children. Greg disagrees because his own generation has technology and things that the adults never had. This presents the coming challenge for the novel – whether the kids of the present can survive without the technology they are used to.

I really don't want to imagine living in a world without baby wipes.

-- Greg (Section 1)

Importance: Here, Greg talks about how his mother has begun a petition to live without modern conveniences – especially electronics – for a weekend. Greg considers the idea but rejects it, because modern conveniences, such as baby wipes, have made life so much easier. Greg explains he cannot imagine living in a world without baby wipes. His statement, however, is a bad omen for things to come.

When you get to my grade, the whole class goes on a weeklong trip to this place where you sleep in log cabins and learn about nature and hard work.

-- Greg (Section 1)

Importance: Greg's classmates begin preparing for a trip to Hardscrabble Farm, where kids will experience real farm life and real hard work. Greg has no desire to go at all. However, Greg will end up having little choice in the matter, as later in the novel he will be compelled to go to Hardscrabble Farm anyways.

I'm all for technology, but not when it's used AGAINST me.

-- Greg (Section 2)

Importance: Here, Greg talks about the limits of his love of modern technology. It ends where his freedom ends. He is especially unhappy about how people take pictures of everything, and how privacy is virtually nonexistent anymore. He is also unhappy about his dad installing a webcam in the house to keep an eye on Grandpa.

I wish I never knew about the webcam, though, because it's got me really paranoid. There could actually be MULTIPLE cameras in the house.

-- Greg (Section 3)

Importance: Following a disastrous chase at the park with Frew and Billy, Greg's dad becomes even more strict. He begins watching Greg like a hawk, using technology to help. This causes Greg to become paranoid, thinking that there is a camera everywhere



he turns. He admits to wishing he never knew about the webcam in the first place, because now he can't relax. It is changing his mind about modern technology.

I realized my only option was to get out of town. And I thought of the PERFECT way to do it.

-- Greg (Section 3)

Importance: After the car goes into the ditch on Greg's excursion with Grandpa to the hardware store, Greg knows his father will be enraged when he gets back from his business trip. Greg decides the best thing to do would be out of town when his father gets back, giving his father time to cool down. Greg does this by agreeing to go to Hardscrabble Farms after all.

I wasn't willing to take any risks when it came to my COMFORT, though. I stuffed three whole containers of Freshies into Rodrick's bag, even though that meant I couldn't fit the raincoat.

-- Greg (Section 3)

Importance: Greg packs and prepares for his time at Hardscrabble Farms. He knows he will have a difficult time without junk food and electronics, both of which are not allowed. Greg refuses to compromise his comfort any further, so he packs several packs of baby wipes instead of a raincoat. This decision will come back to haunt him.

Mrs. Graziano said that in the old days, kids worked from the time they got up in the morning until the sun went down. And they had to start working as soon as they were old enough to help their families out. Which is just ANOTHER reason I'm glad I wasn't alive back then.

-- Greg (Section 4)

Importance: At Hardscrabble Farms, Greg gets a dose of old-fashioned hard work. Greg dislikes having to do farm chores, and having to do any kind of hard work at all. When he learns that kids routinely did such things on a daily basis as soon as they were old enough, Greg is thrilled to be living in the present rather than the past. Nevertheless, it gives Greg an unrealized appreciation for the present.

My group started off in the barn, and our job was to move bales of hay from one end of the building to the other. It was SERIOUSLY hard, and I have a lot of respect for kids who had to do that kind of work every day.

-- Greg (Section 4)

Importance: As Greg does various farm chores, he gains a respect for the kids who had to – and still do have – to do such hard work. Greg himself continues to gain an even deeper appreciation for the present as he moves from one chore to the next. This is a major admission and improvement for Greg's character, who does whatever he can to avoid hard work. Even though he will still avoid it when he can, he has a deeper appreciation for those who have to do it, or who choose to do it.



We've all been preparing for the last night of the trip, which we have to spend OUTDOORS... But I'm not sure my group can even SURVIVE sleeping out in the elements. We're supposed to build a shelter and a fire tomorrow night, and I have no IDEA how we're supposed to pull THAT off.

-- Greg (Section 5)

Importance: The last night that Greg, Rowley, and their classmates spend at Hardscrabble Farms will be the most challenging of all. Not only will they have to sleep outside, but they will have to build a fire and a shelter. Greg has no idea how he and his friends will be able to manage such a challenge, especially when they have had such a difficult time handling things so far.

I was really MAD. But when I started flipping through the pages, I realized the guys who raided our cabin might've done us a huge FAVOR.

-- Greg (Section 5)

Importance: After Greg's cabin is raided and everything is flooded, he finds the only thing to escape being ruined is the "The Essential Book for Young Lads". The book is full of survival tips, which in turn causes Greg to realize that he and his cabinmates aren't doomed for the overnight outdoors event. The book helps teach them to do everything from building a fire to making a potato-powered radio.

I was pretty mad at Dad for causing everyone all this stress. But I have to admit that coming up with a crazy story to protect a secret bathroom is EXACTLY the kind of thing I'd do MYSELF.

-- Greg (Section 5)

Importance: When Greg learns the truth behind the legend of Silas Scratch – his father and his friends creating the story to hide a secret bathroom – Greg at first is annoyed. Greg then realizes he would have done the exact same thing. Greg and his father – at Greg's age – are very much similar. While Frank may be very much a dad now, years before, he was very much a normal kid like Greg. This gives Greg a deeper appreciation for his dad.