

Double Down: Diary of a Wimpy Kid #11 Study Guide

Double Down: Diary of a Wimpy Kid #11 by Jeff Kinney

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Kinney, Jeff. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Double Down*. Amulet Books/Abrams, 2016.

The eleventh book in Kinney's *Wimpy Kid* series, the young adult novel *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Double Down* follows middle-schooler Greg Kinney on his humorous experiences that he encounters while being forced by his mom to spend less time on video games and more time on being creative.

It is October, and Greg and the kids at school are all looking forward to Halloween, including Mariana Mendoza's forthcoming Halloween party. Mariana gives legendary parties, and Greg cannot wait to go. At the same time, the school hosts its autumn book fair. Greg's Mom gives him money to buy books – but instead, Greg buys things like pens that can write under water. This annoys Mom, who forces Greg to bring everything back to exchange for actual books. Greg opts to go with a handful of books from the *Spinetickers* horror novel series, which are very popular among everyone at school. Mom is disappointed yet again, having hoped Greg would have gone with books more challenging. Mom herself has returned to college to get her master's degree, and she is very happy having her mind challenged and learning new things. She decides that both her older sons – Greg and Rodrick – should get away from television and video games to apply their minds in creative ways in the hopes of challenging themselves and discovering new talents.

From the start, things begin to backfire on Greg. Greg's Mom sets up a get-together with a kid named Maddox, who lives in a rural area, does not watch television, and builds things with Legos. Mom hopes Maddox will be a good role model. Greg is excited about the prospect of Legos, but Maddox will not let Greg touch any of his completed models – and then accuses Greg of stealing when a Lego accidentally gets stuck to Greg's elbow. When Greg's Mom brings Greg to college for a visit, he decides to pretend to read a psychology book to fit in. A gorgeous college girl asks Greg to help her study, and Greg agrees. He spends all night cramming for the tutoring session the next day, actually learning about psychology – only to learn the girl has a boyfriend. When Greg learns that Mariana's party will only be open to kids in the school band, Greg begs his parents to let him join. They agree, but do not know why Greg is so anxious to play an instrument.

When Greg learns that Mariana will only be invited the band's woodwind section, he forces his best friend, Rowley, who plays an instrument, to change his costume to that of a two-headed monster so Greg will have to be allowed into the party. Greg's Mom crashes the party by bringing along party games – which everyone loves. The night of the autumn band concert, Greg and Rowley accidentally get locked off-stage, and are discovered later by Greg's dad who thinks they have been goofing off.

Greg ultimately decides that he and Rowley will make a homemade horror movie using gummy worms as monsters. However, putting the gummy worms in the yard attracts

angry migrating geese, who trap Greg and Rowley in the house. When Greg and Rowley go into the basement to retrieve a wolf mask to scare the geese away, they accidentally set off an old Halloween decoration – an electronic witch – which scares Rowley so bad he runs outside and climbs a tree. The fire department must get Rowley down, which attracts the local news station. Rowley becomes a local celebrity, but never mentions Greg in the interviews. Greg is angry, because he knows he is the one who made Rowley famous.

Pages 1 – 44

Summary

It is October. Middle-schooler Greg Heffley wonders if his life is secretly a television show, and so he begins to live as if this is the case. He talks to mirrors, imagining cameras are hidden behind them, and announces his return when he comes out of the bathroom. He also wonders if the events of his life are real or scripted, because Greg believes he should have a girlfriend and a motorcycle – neither of which he has. Greg hopes to at least cash in on the show when it is done by doing things such as coming up with personal catchphrases like BITE MY BISCUITS. Greg also considers he is simply living an ordinary life, but also imagines he is being watched by aliens using flies as drone cameras. He also thinks about how Nana is watching over him from Heaven and how, if he gets into Heaven, he will spend his time zapping his descendants when they do something wrong. Greg also considers that his Mom has told him all of his dead relatives are watching over him, which makes him feel even guiltier about doing things like cheating off Alex Aruda's spelling test paper.

On Thursday, Mom gives Greg money for the book fair, hoping he will buy books. Instead, Greg buys everything from a pen that writes underwater to a sarcastic cat poster. Mom is upset with Greg, and tells him he must return everything for books. Mom tells Greg the brain is a muscle and needs exercise, like reading and doing creative things. Mom encourages Greg to stop playing video games, to exercise his mind, and try to discover a talent he never knew he had. Greg is skeptical about this because he dislikes putting in effort, and because of bad past experiences such as when his mom tried to get him into the school's Talented and Gifted program, but Greg flunked the entrance test. Greg knows all parents think their children are special, but he believes his Mom is out of control. On Friday, Greg trades in his purchases for books from the Spinetickers horror series, but Mom is still unimpressed. Greg explains that he did not buy the junior Spinetickers horror stories like his best friend, Rowley, did, but that he bought the full-fledged horror novels all his other friends are reading.

Analysis

The brain is a muscle that must be exercised, Jeff Kinney argues through Mom. This is the problem Greg faces through the course of the book. His Mom wants him to be challenged creatively and intellectually – and wants him to put away the video games and turn off television to do so, even if it is something as simple as doing a little reading. Readers should note that Greg's Mom gives him money for the book fair – a chance for Greg to prove his maturity and responsibility. Instead, however, the money comes to symbolize Greg's immaturity and irresponsibility, when he elects to purchase useless trinkets instead of books. This only makes things harder on Greg, as his Mom makes him return everything for books.



Greg's response to his Mom – to buy Spinetickler books – demonstrates, as Kinney argues, that you can never underestimate the resourcefulness of a kid. Forced to read, Greg chooses books that are popular with everyone at school. If he is going to read, he is at least going to be mindlessly entertained. Therein, Kinney lays the groundwork for another important thematic argument which will recur throughout the novel against Greg's resourcefulness (and later, creativeness) – that parents mean well, even if their ideas do not always pan out. This is clearly the case here: Mom wants Greg to read and exercise his mind. First, he brings home junk. Then, he brings home popular reading material that is not an intellectual challenge. Clearly, Greg's resourcefulness demonstrates a level of intelligence in his cleverness.

Additionally, Kinney argues that kids can be creative without even realizing it. Even just this far into the novel, Greg's imagination – the epicenter of creativity – is on clear display. From predicting what he will do once he gets to Heaven (punishing descendants) to imagining he is on a television show and needed a catchphrase to cash in on, Greg's mind is in overdrive. This is further demonstrated by the drawings and doodles Greg makes – including illustrations of him participating willingly in the television show he believes himself to be on.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Greg believe he is on a television show? How does he live his life according to the idea that he is on a television show? What changes his mind about this?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Greg's Mom insist he needs to put down the video game controllers and turn off television to exercise his mind? What does Greg feel about this? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Greg's Mom give Greg money for the book fair? What does Greg buy? Why? Does this meet with his mom's approval? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

permission, catchphrase, alien invasion, obnoxious, prestigious, promising

Pages 45 – 88

Summary

One of the Spineticklers novels Greg buys is about a man who is frozen and wakes up in the future to find everything has changed. Greg wishes he could afford to be frozen and awakened in the future. Saturday, Greg and his family decorate for Halloween, which is a few weeks away. Greg recalls how the previous year, Mom sent his older brother Rodrick to the store to buy more decorations, but he came back with a witch that screamed or cackled when a loud noise was made. Greg reflects on how no one knew how to turn the volume down or turn the witch off, so it now rests in the basement and goes off all the time, scaring everyone. Now, Mom tells Dad to take the batteries out of the witch, but it still continues to go off. Greg is not only unhappy about the witch, but also about the migrating geese in town who like to chase after people, including him and Rowley. Greg is also annoyed that Mom will not let him have any candy until Halloween, so he hopes to win the Balloon Brigade Contest at school. Each student writes his or her name and address on a card attached to a balloon and releases it. When the balloon pops, deflates, or gets caught, the person who finds the card is supposed to make it back. The farthest-flying balloon gets a prize. This time, the prize is a jar of candy corn.

On Monday, Vice Principal Roy brings all the students outside for the Balloon Brigade launch. By Wednesday, Greg has not heard back from anyone about his balloon. Meanwhile, Greg continues to read through the Spineticklers series, but realizes it is affecting his life. One book, about a kid's dentist being the Devil, causes Greg great fear when he has to go to the dentist. He even begins to have nightmares, such as one where he grows a tail and is hunted down by the townspeople and one where he is made to walk the plank by zombie pirates. Greg tries to make sense of his dreams with his Mom's guidebook for dreams, but not all of Greg's dreams make sense – such as one where he is playing football with his own head.

On Thursday afternoon, a woman named Mrs. Selsam and her son, Maddox, appear at Greg's house. They have found his balloon and note. Greg now regrets writing the note on the balloon, because it promises a large cash reward from his rich uncle (which he does not have) for the note's return. When Greg plays computer games, Maddox gets excited, but Mrs. Selsam turns the game off because Maddox is not allowed to play them. When they leave, Greg realizes they did not return the balloon.

Analysis

Readers will note that, just as with Greg, the best intentions of parents can go awry – such as with Mom and Rodrick. Rodrick, sent out to buy Halloween decorations, comes back with only one, which continues to terrify the family to this day. Rodrick thought he was being creative, even if his family did not think so. Kids can be creative without even



realizing it, Jeff Kinney continues to argue in this section of the novel. Ironically, the Spineticklers novels, which Greg's Mom considered to be cheap kids' entertainment, have put Greg's imagination into overdrive. He is now having nightmares about things like growing a tail, and he is beginning to wonder if the books are true. For example, he wonders if his dentist is actually the Devil. At the same time, Kinney also argues that one can never underestimate the resourcefulness of a kid. This is especially true when imagination and resourcefulness combine. Desperate for Halloween candy, Greg uses his imagination to pen a note promised a reward from a wealthy uncle if the balloon and note are returned – which brings Maddox into Greg's life. Clearly, the balloon note symbolizes poor planning and poor choice-making on Greg's part.

Greg, who writes his experiences down as though they were diary entries, has no filter and tells readers exactly what he thinks. When Maddox shows up, Greg explains he has no interest in making friends, wants his balloon back, and wants Maddox and his mom to leave as quickly as possible. Greg relates how annoyed and shocked he is when his Mom invites Maddox and his mom in. Greg's dislike of Maddox can be noted in the way he refers to Maddox as "this kid" and talks about how eager he is for them to leave. Here, Greg demonstrates his usual state of sometimes being selfish. Greg is poised to win a prize because of the balloon contest, but he will not even accept Maddox and his mom being around for even a little while. However, Greg's rashness and desire to get Maddox out of the house results in Greg forgetting to ask about the balloon. Greg's selfishness has backfired on him.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Greg so determined to win the Balloon Brigade Contest? How does he seek to win the contest? What does this demonstrate about Greg's character, from his creativity to his selfishness?

Discussion Question 2

When Maddox and Mrs. Selsam arrive at Greg's house, why is he so surprised to see them? Why is he so anxious to get rid of them?

Discussion Question 3

How do Greg's selfishness and desire to rush Maddox and Mrs. Selsam out of the house backfire on Greg? How does Greg respond when he realizes this? Why?

Vocabulary

bloodcurdling, ambushed, gourmet, predicted, decode, bonkers, animated

Pages 89 – 132

Summary

Vice Principal Roy tells Greg he cannot win the prize if the balloon is not returned. Mom later announces to Greg that he and Maddox have a get-together while she and Mrs. Selsam go out for coffee. The Selsams live in a rural area, and do not have television. Instead, they have lots of books. Greg believes he will be bored until he sees Maddox's room, which is full of Lego creations. Maddox will not let Greg touch anything he has built, so Greg must play with the random pieces in the leftovers bin. When his mom returns, Greg heads out with the balloon, but Maddox accuses him of stealing a Lego piece. Mrs. Selsam and Maddox pat Greg down, but find no Lego pieces. Maddox finally spots a Lego piece stuck to Greg's elbow. Greg's Mom is disappointed that Greg did not hit things off with Maddox, because she believes Maddox is a good role model. Greg does not think so. Over the weekend, Mom begins a new chore policy from Family Frolic Magazine to help enable her to finish her master's degree. A pillowcase will be filled up with strips of paper, with each strip bearing a chore that must be completed by the person who draws the strip. Greg agrees to do this because Mom promises she will bring out the Halloween candy a little early for anyone who helps.

Greg wins the balloon contest, but the pet pig of Greg's baby brother, Manny, eats all the candy corn. The pig seems ill, so Greg and Rodrick rush the pig to the vet in Rodrick's band's van. Mom says she will meet Greg and Rodrick at the vet. On the way, the pig throws up in the van, which causes Greg to throw up outside the van in front of a woman who is raking leaves. The woman calls the police, thinking it is a prank, so Greg must explain the situation to the responding police officer. From there, Mom arrives as the pig throws up again. That night, Mom tells Greg she is disappointed in him. She tells him that, between the Lego incident and the pig situation, she does not feel as if Greg can be trusted. Greg is punished with three times as many chores.

Greg admits he is never happy about lying, but that he is not the only person in the family who bends the truth. He recounts how his mother told Manny he could not touch the gingerbread house until Christmas the previous year, or it would turn into spiders – leading Manny to spray the gingerbread house with bug spray. Greg also remembers how, in second grade, Rodrick told him camouflage would make him invisible, leading Greg to put on camo clothing and sneak into the girls' locker room, which did not end well. Meanwhile, Mom becomes happy attending college because she says her mind is being challenged, and that everyone should seek to learn new things. She wants Greg and Rodrick to apply themselves in school so they can have options when they grow up.

Analysis

Parents mean well, even if their ideas do not always pan out, Jeff Kinney continues to argue in this section of the novel. Greg's Mom sets up a get-together with Maddox so



that Maddox might be a good role model for Greg, and some of Maddox's habits might rub off on Greg. Maddox, while he might be intelligent and creative, is not very friendly or welcoming. Indeed, he turns out to be even more selfish than Greg. Maddox will not let Greg touch any of his completed Lego models, and then even goes so far as to accuse Greg of stealing when a Lego piece is discovered stuck to Greg's elbow. Maddox is clearly not the kind of role model that Greg needs.

Frustrated at getting her kids to do creative and intellectual things, Mom – who has returned to college and who also needs some help around the house – decides the time her kids waste playing video games and television would be better left doing chores. The chore pillowcase therein comes to symbolize both Mom's desire to finish her master's degree, and her desire to get Greg and Rodrick to be more active and engaged. Between the Maddox incident and the pig incident, Mom comes to believe that Greg cannot be trusted right now – and so Greg ends up with three times the chores.

Mom, who feels fulfilled and challenged because of college, takes the thrill of being challenged as even more proof her children need to learn and do more things. The brain is a muscle that must be exercised, Kinney continues to argue through Mom. Learning helps people to grow and become better people overall – something Mom clearly knows. She wants her children to have options when they get older. Rodrick is posed for college while it will not be long before Greg is in high school. However, what the reader realizes – and what Mom does not realize (through no fault of her own because she is genuinely worried about the future of her children) – is that Greg already is very creative, but that this is often mistaken for simply being a kid.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Mom love college so much? What does it inspire her to do regarding Greg and Rodrick? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What does Mom hope might be gained by a get-together between Greg and Maddox? Why? What happens instead? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Mom unable to see that Greg already is pretty creative? Is she to blame for being unable to see this? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

humiliating, satisfying, juvenile, disturbed, deception, fumigated, inherited, ambitious

Pages 129 – 173

Summary

Greg wants to be a video game tester when he grows up, but Mom does not like this idea, believing Greg will just end up being a garbage man. This does not bother Greg at all. At school, Albert Sandy says that people must learn how to use the 20% of the brain they never use.

Mom makes Rodrick begin looking into colleges. She also brings Greg to college with her one day so he can get a feel for it. In the library, he grabs a stack of psychology books to pretend to be reading them so he can look like he fits in. A gorgeous college girl asks Greg to help her study for a psychology exam, so Greg agrees to do so the next day. He brings the books home that night, studies like crazy, and returns to college with his mom the next day. Greg helps the girl, only to learn she has a boyfriend.

At school, Greg learns everyone is talking about Mariana Mendoza's Halloween party on Friday night, limited this year to only her fellow band members because last year, the party was so crazy the police were called. Greg knows if he wants to be invited to such a party, he must join the middle school band with Rowley. Mom and Dad agree to support his desire to pick up an instrument, so they opt for a French horn because Mom played that as a kid. Greg agrees because it looks easy to play.

School band is open to anyone who wants to play an instrument. There are no tryouts, so Greg gets in right away. He wishes Rowley would have told him, however, that there are no girls in the brass section, but that there are lots of girls in the woodwind section. Band is overseen by Mrs. Graziano, who is retiring at the end of the year so she is laid back. Greg passes gas when he attempts to play the horn. Not wanting his reputation to suffer, he blames it on a fat kid named Grayden Bundy, who has gas all the time. At home, Greg plays a video online of a high school girl playing her French horn, so his parents will think he is practicing. Greg is stunned when Mariana only invites the woodwind section to her party, but he hopes Rowley will be his in for the party because Rowley also plays in that section.

If Rowley goes as a two-headed monster, Greg will have to go along with him. He talks Rowley into this. Greg's Mom supports the costume and the party, thinking it will allow Greg to branch out. Greg is horrified when Mom comes into the party with him and Rowley – and even more horrified when she breaks out Halloween games inspired by Family Frolic Magazine. Greg is then surprised when all the kids actually end up enjoying the games. Rowley announces he must use the bathroom – and without a way for a two-headed monster to do this – Greg's Mom decides it is time to leave, which annoys Greg even more. But Mom says it is better to leave a party when it is going strong than when it fizzles because it makes them look cool like they have somewhere better to go. Greg is not convinced.

Analysis

The brain is a muscle that must be exercised, Jeff Kinney continues to argue through Mom, who continues to push Greg to be more creative and to apply his mind in intellectual ways. Mom's well-meaning but otherwise unseeing concern about the future of her children leads her to bringing Greg to visit college while Rodrick is forced to research colleges – even though the music Rodrick plays and the imagination Greg has are far more creative than she otherwise considers. Parents mean well, even if their ideas do not always pan out, Kinney therein argues. Greg's visit to college becomes a comedic failure to pick up a college girl by pretending he is smart – but which is, ironically, something that forces him to learn about psychology. Although Mom's attempt to let Greg get a feel for college does not go exactly as intended, it does interest Greg in college (at least for the girls).

When Greg approaches both his Mom and Dad with the desire to play an instrument, both are willing to help make this possible because they believe it will increase their son's creativity and allow him to use his mind. Greg, however, has no interest in joining the band for the sake of learning to play an instrument or to do something creative. As Kinney argues, never underestimate the resourcefulness of a kid. Greg's ulterior motive in joining band is to be able to attend Mariana's party. The French horn therein becomes symbolic of Greg's cleverness and resourcefulness. Greg will do whatever he needs to do in order to get to go to the party – but when it is announced that only the woodwinds will be invited, Greg must appeal to Rowley. Once again, Greg proves – as Kinney argues – that kids can be creative without even realizing it. Combined with Greg's resourcefulness, this is an unstoppable combination – even if the results are not always those expected.

Greg's selfishness, in coordination with his creativity and resourcefulness brings about the two-headed monster costume he forces Rowley into wearing so that Greg will have no choice but to go to the party. Ironically, Greg's Mom approves of Greg and Rowley's costume plans, and their desire to socialize. She would rather have them creating a costume and hanging out in person with other kids, than spending the night in front of the television. However, Mom takes things a step further by actually attending the party with Greg. Surprisingly, nearly all of the partygoers enjoy Greg's Mom being around, and enjoy the games she brings. Greg's shortsightedness about the costume, however, leads to Rowley's being unable to use the bathroom, and leads to them having to leave early. Mom even gives Greg some sound advice about when to leave a party, but Greg does not believe her even though she has been right about everything else at the party.

Discussion Question 1

Why do Greg's parents agree to allow him to join the band at school? Why does Greg actually want to join the band? What does this say about Greg?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Greg insist upon Rowley changing his costume? What does this demonstrate about Greg's character and his creativity? What does Greg's Mom think of the costume and the party? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Mom bring Greg to college with her? What does she hope Greg will gain out of the visit? How does Greg's visit turn out instead? Why?

Vocabulary

fallback, capacity, legendary, blowout, miserable

Pages 174 – 218

Summary

It is now November. At school, Greg is being teased by the guys in the woodwind section for being a “momma’s boy” after the Halloween party. When Greg considers quitting the band, Greg’s Dad tells him he must remain committed. Greg has no choice. The day of the big fall school concert arrives. Greg hopes he will be able to piggyback off of Evan Pittman, who also plays the French horn, just as Greg has been doing all along at practice. But Evan is getting his braces off, and so will miss the concert. As everyone heads out onto the stage, Greg and Rowley both end up locked off stage. Rowley begins to panic, which makes Greg panic and try to pull open the door, which in turn causes Greg to rip his black dress pants. He has Rowley color in his underwear where the rip is, right as Greg’s Dad walks in. Dad is angry, thinking Greg and Rowley have been doing nothing but goofing off as usual. Greg is grounded for two weeks, and may only practice French horn. In the meantime, Greg tries to find where his mom has hidden the Halloween candy (because the geese prevented any trick-or-treaters from getting to the house, as Dad explains), but only finds a bag of chocolate chips. Even though Greg is told not to eat them, he does.

Greg calls Rowley and asks him to bring over some chocolate chips to replace the ones Greg has eaten. When Rowley arrives, the chips have melted and Rowley gets chocolate everywhere. When Greg grabs a new roll of paper towels out of the laundry room, he finds the Halloween candy, including gummy worms. Greg pretends one is coming out of his nose, and eats it in front of Rowley, which scares Rowley. This gives Greg the idea of making their own horror movie. Greg decides to call it *Night of the Night Crawlers*, and will use the gummy worms as the monsters. Rowley will act while Greg directs. Greg then writes a script in which a man and his wife are attacked and eaten by night crawlers. However, the pig eats many of the gummy worms, and the gummy worms scattered around outside attract the geese. Greg and Rowley go into the basement to find a wolf mask to scare off the geese, but end up setting off the witch instead. The scares Rowley so bad that Rowley climbs a tree. It is then that Greg’s Dad gets home, and grounds Greg. The fire department is called to get Rowley down, and Rowley ends up famous on the news. Greg is annoyed because Rowley does not mention him once, and it is Greg’s fault Rowley is famous.

Analysis

The role Greg’s Dad plays in his life is very important, and is on clear display in this section of the novel. Greg’s Dad provides the example of a grown, strong man – someone who refuses to quit and sees things through. This builds Greg’s character and toughness when some kids make fun of Greg in band for Mom’s participation at Mariana’s party. You cannot quit something just because it is hard, Jeff Kinney argues through Dad. Life is going to be full of challenges of all different kinds, and these



challenges have to be met head on. Greg realizes he has no choice but to stick band out. Here, the French horn symbolizes Greg's shortsightedness in full: Greg's parents took his insistence on joining band seriously, even though Greg only wanted to join band as a means to an end (getting to go to Mariana's party).

However, despite all of Greg's setbacks and misadventures, his greatest feat of comedic disaster concludes the novel. Never underestimate the resourcefulness of a kid, Kinney argues – and then proceeds to demonstrate how creative Greg actually is through Greg's desire to make a homemade horror movie. Greg's continued attempts at creativity are not always easy, but to his credit – just as his father insists – Greg does not quit. Here, both the gummy worms and the electronic witch symbolize comedic horror. The gummy worms attract a flock of angry geese while the cackling witch sends Rowley up a tree – at which time Greg's Dad gets home. Greg, for all his efforts, does not receive credit for making Rowley locally famous. Although things do not turn out exactly as Greg's parents had hoped, their insistence on Greg challenging himself have made Greg a better person, and have allowed him to challenge his mind and be creative – even if the results are comically disastrous. From Greg's very diary itself to band to college to the party to the movie, Greg demonstrates he is indeed very creative – and very much using of his mind.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Greg's Dad encourage Greg to stick out band and see things through? How does Greg respond? Why? Do you believe Greg's Dad has given Greg good advice? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Greg decide to film a movie? How does Greg use both his mind and his creativity in order to do so?

Discussion Question 3

Do Greg's parents ultimately recognize his creativity? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

commitment, perseverance, piggybacked, millionaires, hyperventilating, babbling

Characters

Greg

Greg Heffley is the main character and narrator of the novel *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Double Down*. Greg is the son of Frank and Susan, is the younger brother of Rodrick, and the older brother of Manny. Greg is a good-at-heart, imaginative middle-schooler who is prone to mishaps, misadventures, and sometimes selfishness. When the novel begins, Greg's Mom believes he is spending too much time playing video games and watching TV when he should be exercising his mind through reading, learning, and doing something creative. As a result, she propels Greg down a series of paths through the novel which lead to both comedic disasters and Greg's growth as a person. Greg, to his credit, attempts to find ways to be creative, but these more often than not land him in trouble, from the band concert to the gummy worm horror movie. Greg creates a clear creative streak by the end of the novel, even if his ideas did not always work out.

Mom

Susan Heffley (Mom) 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 is a big fan of *Family Frolic Magazine*, and is currently back in school for her master's degree. Susan worries the minds of Greg and Rodrick will turn to mush without real stimulation, so she encourages them to do intellectual and creative things – such as Greg joining the band at school.

Dad

Frank Heffley (Dad) is the father of Greg, Rodrick, and Manny, and is the husband of Susan. Frank is a kind man who is very responsible, and very loving toward his family. Frank works hard to support his family, and goes out of his way to ensure that he can spend time with them, such as taking off work to go to Greg's band concert. It is Frank who puts his foot down and refuses to allow Greg to quit band, urging him to keep his commitment and follow-through. Frank also has a bad habit of stumbling upon Greg in the worst possible situations, in which Greg's mishaps make him look irresponsible or untrustworthy, leading Frank to ground Greg.

Rodrick

Rodrick is the older brother of Greg and Manny, and is the son of Frank and Sue. Rodrick is a moody teenager who enjoys sleeping and playing in his garage band *Loaded Diaper*. Rodrick is known for the pranks he plays on Greg, and also comes to the rescue in the book by driving Greg and the pet pig toward the vet when the pig becomes sick from eating candy corn.



Manny

Manny is the younger brother of Greg and Rodrick, is the third child of Frank and Sue, and is the owner of a pet pig. Manny is a quiet toddler who only makes a brief appearance in the novel, but his pig causes Greg serious trouble. Manny's pig constantly eats the candy that Greg comes into possession of, denying Greg the candy and getting sick in the process.

Rowley

Rowley is the former best friend of Greg. Rowley is a kind and gentle kid who is tall and often quiet. Rowley is very passive, and allows himself to be talked into things by Greg – from going to the Halloween party as a two-headed monster to starring in a horror movie. Rowley climbs a tree when he becomes scared during the course of making the horror movie, leading to the fire department having to get him down, as well as leading him to being a local celebrity on the news.

Vice Principal Roy

Vice Principal Roy is the assistant principal at Greg's school. Roy is a kind and fair man who oversees the Balloon Brigade Contest. It is Roy who informs Greg that Greg needs the balloon in order to win the contest, which in turn means Greg has no choice but to hang out with Maddox for the day.

Maddox

Maddox Selsam is the kid who finds Greg's balloon, and is the son of Mrs. Selsam. Maddox is a quiet kid who loves to read and build things out of Legos, but he is very selfish and very unkind. He refuses to allow Greg to touch any of his completed Lego models, and then he accuses Greg of stealing when a Lego piece gets stuck to Greg's elbow.

Mrs. Selsam

Mrs. Selsam is the mother of Maddox. She is strict and humorless, and believes her son can do no wrong. When Maddox accuses Greg of stealing a Lego from him, she does not ask questions, but merely pats Greg down to make sure Greg did not steal it.

Mariana Mendoza

Mariana Mendoza is a popular girl in band at Greg's school. She is known for the wild parties she throws, even though she is only in middle school. It is to her upcoming

Halloween party that Greg endeavors to be invited, and ends up crashing the party with Rowley.

Symbols and Symbolism

Book fair money

Book fair money symbolizes Greg's irresponsibility. Greg is given money by his Mom for books at the book fair, but instead, he spends it on things like pens that can write underwater and posters featuring sarcastic cats. Greg is forced by his mother to return the items to the book fair for books.

Spineticklers

Spineticklers novels symbolize popular reading. Everyone at school is reading the Spineticklers horror novels, so Greg decides to give them a shot as well. Greg hopes this will appease his mother, but she is not impressed by Greg's choice.

The Balloon Brigade Contest

The Balloon Brigade Contest symbolizes Greg's desire for candy. The Balloon Brigade, which makes a contest out of seeing how far balloons will travel, has for its prize for the farthest-traveling balloon, a giant jar of candy corn. Greg will do anything to win, and so he writes a very misleading note to go along with his balloon.

Greg's balloon note

Greg's balloon note symbolizes poor choice-making. Greg's balloon note – written because he is so desperate to win the Balloon Brigade Contest – includes a promise of money from a rich uncle for whoever returns the balloon. Greg does not have a rich uncle, and meets Maddox as a result of the note.

Chore pillowcase

A chore pillowcase symbolizes both Mom's desire to finish her master's degree, and her desire to get Greg and Rodrick to be more active. The pillowcase is full of slips of paper with chores written on them. Whatever slips Greg and Rodrick draw from the pillowcase, they must do those chores.

College

College is symbolic of fulfillment. Mom attends college to finish her master's degree. It makes her very happy because she feels as though her mind is being challenged, and she is becoming a better, smarter person as a result.



French horn

A French horn symbolizes Greg's cleverness, shortsightedness, and an attempt to get invited to a party. Greg, who wants to be invited to one of Mariana's legendary parties, must be in band to do so. Greg has no interest in actually playing an instrument, but merely being a part of the band. His parents allow him to join, thinking it will be a good creative experience. Greg decides to play the French horn since it looks easy and because his mother played it when she was young. However, Greg is never able to actually play it.

Electronic witch

A witch symbolizes comedic horror. Rodrick purchases an electronic witch for Halloween, but it screams and cackles so loudly and so scarily that no one wants it up anymore. The witch is put in the basement, where it continues to cackle on occasion without the batteries in. At the end of the novel, while in the basement with Greg, the witch goes off, scaring Rowley so bad that Rowley runs outside and climbs a tree.

Two-headed monster costume

A two-headed monster costume symbolizes both Greg's selfishness and his creativity. Greg, upon learning that only the woodwind section of the band will be invited to Mariana's party, forces Rowley into being a two-headed monster with him so that Rowley (who plays a woodwind) will have no choice but to bring Greg. Greg's efforts are creative (in creating a two-headed monster) and selfish (in that he is only thinking about himself to get into the party).

Gummy worms

Gummy worms symbolize comedic horror. Gummy worms, which are leftover candy from Halloween, are used by Greg and Rowley as horror movie props where they will portray killer night crawlers. The use of gummy worms, however, attracts the geese, which in turn traps Greg and Rowley inside the house, which leads to their attempt to find something in the basement to scare the geese away, and finally results in the witch going off.

Settings

School

School is where Greg attends class every day and learns about the Balloon Brigade Contest. Greg realizes his only chance to get some candy before Halloween will be to win the contest, which he manages to do. School is also where Greg joins band, attends band practice several times a week, and later gets locked out of the autumn band concert. It is where Greg's Dad finds him and Rowley attempting to fix Greg's ripped pants problem, and where Greg's Dad thinks they are doing nothing but goofing off.

The basement

The basement is the one place in the house where Greg will not go unless he has to. The basement is full of all sorts of things being stored, such as old Halloween decorations. Among those decorations is the witch, which cackles on its own without batteries from time to time. It is only during the filming of the horror movie that Greg and Rowley venture into the basement to find a mask to scare away the geese – and the witch goes off, scaring Rowley outside up a tree.

Mariana's house

Mariana's house is where Mariana hosts legendary parties in her basement, especially on Halloween. It is where Greg and Rowley go to attend her latest Halloween Party, and where Greg's Mom takes control of things by organizing games and activities, which everyone ends up loving. It embarrasses Greg at first, but he comes to accept it later on. It is from Mariana's house that Greg, Rowley, and Mom must leave as Rowley must use the bathroom and has no way out of the two-headed monster costume.

Maddox's house

Maddox's house is located in the rural area outside of town, what Greg calls the middle-of-nowhere. Maddox's house is unique, for it is full of books and has no television. Maddox's house seems boring until Greg sees Maddox's room, which is full of Lego models. However, Greg is not allowed to play with the models, and may only play with the leftover pieces bin.

Local college

The local college is where Greg's Mom attends classes to earn her master's degree. Mom brings Greg along to visit the college in the hopes he will get a feeling for what college is all about. When a gorgeous college girl sees Greg pretending to read a

psychology textbook to fit in, she assumes he is a genius and asks him to help her study. Greg agrees, only to learn later she has a boyfriend.

Themes and Motifs

The brain is a muscle that must be exercised

The brain is a muscle that must be exercised, argues Jeff Kinney in his novel *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. Kinney makes his argument through the character of Mom. Mom, who has gone back to college to earn her master's degree, feels both challenged and fulfilled because she is engaging her mind. She wants her children to challenge their minds intellectually and creatively as well.

Mom wants to engage the minds of her children in such a way not only to make them better people, but so that they will have better options for their futures. Because of this, Mom will spare no expense to make sure that her sons fulfill their potential and develop their talents. This begins with encouraging Rodrick to actually research colleges he could attend, and bringing Greg along with her to visit college when she herself is attending classes.

Greg's Mom continues to encourage Greg to do creative and mind-challenging things. When she sees him designing a costume for a party with Rowley, Mom is supportive because she wants Greg to have social interaction and because the costume creation itself is stimulating Greg's mind. When Mom sees an opportunity for Greg to have a friend like Maddox who would be a good role model, Mom leaps at the chance to have a get-together between Greg and Maddox. She approves of Maddox's love of reading, and building with Legos.

When Greg's Dad and Mom learn Greg wants to join band, they decide to support him (they do not know he has other motives). They think the cultural exposure to music will help make him more well-rounded and challenge his mind in a new way. When Greg considers quitting, it is Greg's Dad who encourages him to tough it out. Greg's parents, while good-intentioned, do not quite see that, even though Greg has more misadventures and mishaps in trying to do what they want him to do, he is indeed already quite creative and quite imaginative.

Kids can be creative without even realizing it

Kids can be creative without even realizing it, argues Jeff Kinney in his novel *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. In the novel, Greg's parents want him get away from the television and video games in order to challenge his mind by doing creative things. Greg's parents do not recognize, however, that Greg is actually already very creative.

Readers first note Greg's creativity in his keeping of a diary. Greg's writing and drawing – which recount, reflect on, and even imagine events in his life – are a demonstration of his mind in action. Writing and drawing requires intelligence as well as passion. Indeed, the entire novel takes the form of one of Greg's journals. Even that Greg's imagination



should run away from him because of the Spineticklers novels is proof that he is indeed creative and using his mind.

In order to make sure he wins the Balloon Brigade Contest, Greg invents a rich uncle to use as leverage to get the balloon back. In order to make sure he gets to attend Mariana's party, Greg joins band and pretends to have learned how to play the instrument to get away with it. When Greg goes with his mom to college for a visit, he gets creative and pretends he knows psychology in order to fit in – and attracts a college girl's attention on the process.

Greg's most creative moment comes at the end of the novel, where he writes, directs, and films a movie starring Rowley. It is a project that takes time and commitment from Greg – and requires even more creativity in the filming, such as using gummy worms as prop monsters. Unfortunately, the film does not pan out. But just because your creativity does not succeed in meeting goals, does not mean you are not creative. Just because something creative does not happen the way Greg's parents want it to, does not mean Greg is not creative.

Parents mean well, even if their ideas do not always pan out

Parents mean well, even if their ideas do not always pan out, argues Jeff Kinney in his novel *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. In the novel, Greg's parents, like any parents, worry about their sons' futures. They want the best for their kids, and so in the present, they want their kids to meet their potential in order to grow, find talents, and learn more.

Greg's Mom is thrilled to be back at college because it challenges her mind. Greg's Mom wants Greg to have a taste of college, so she brings him to campus one day. Greg gets a taste of college when he attempts to pick up a college girl by pretending to know something about psychology. While all parents hope their sons will do well in college and learn something for life, the sons are often heavily focused on girls.

When Greg's Mom meets Maddox and Mrs. Selsam, Mom believes she sees a wonderful role model in Maddox, someone Greg could hang out with and learn something from. It turns out, however, that Maddox is selfish, unkind, and falsely accuses Greg of stealing. Greg's Mom is disappointed that the friendship with Maddox does not turn out, but she is glad to know Greg wants to attend Mariana's party because it will allow him to socialize rather than being alone in his room playing video games.

Greg's parents also believe it will be good for Greg to be in the band, so when Greg asks them to join, they agree. Little do they know, however, that Greg has no interest in actually playing. He only wants to go to Mariana's party, and he must be in the band to go to the party. However, Greg's Dad refuses to let Greg quit when Greg takes some slack for his Mom coming to the party, leading Greg to tough it out. This is actually to the credit of both Greg and his Dad, because it forces Greg to actually attempt to learn the

French horn, and because it is an important lesson for Greg in the issues of commitment.

Never underestimate the resourcefulness of a kid

Never underestimate the resourcefulness of a kid, argues Jeff Kinney in his novel *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. Greg Heffley, if nothing else, is resourceful. He is intelligent and clever, and this shows in his (usually failed) attempts to get himself out of trouble or to make something happen. Greg's resourcefulness shows throughout the novel.

When Greg must return his book fair items for books, Greg finds a way to make it more enjoyable. He buys books from the *Spineticklers* series to entertain himself, rather than to actively engage his mind. His Mom gets part of what she wants, but so too does Greg. When Greg and Rodrick are given chores in the pillowcase, Rodrick sneaks in his own easy chores (such as eating ice cream or taking a nap) to avoid having to do anything strenuous. To ensure Greg gets back his balloon from the contest, Greg invents a story about a rich uncle and a reward.

When Greg goes to college for a visit with his mom, he resourcefully uses psychology books to make himself look like he fits in – and then attempts to pick up a college girl by pretending to actually know what psychology is all about. When Greg learns that Mariana's upcoming party is only for band members, Greg decides to join band. When Greg learns that Mariana's party is only open to the woodwind section of the band, Greg cleverly comes up with a two-headed monster costume for him and Rowley that means Greg, too, will have to attend the party to make the costume work.

Thinking about the future, Greg decides he and Rowley will make a homemade movie and try selling it to Hollywood. Greg demonstrates his resourcefulness by writing and directing the movie. He uses a pack of gummy worms to stand in as night crawler monsters, and has Rowley put up his hood to pretend to be a girl. Anything that does not fit or work, Greg tries to alter or make passable, demonstrating that he is very resourceful.

You cannot quit something just because it is hard

You cannot quit something just because it is hard, argues Jeff Kinney in his novel *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. This very sound advice comes through words spoken by Greg's Dad when Greg is thinking about quitting band. The advice, however, is important for the entire novel and beyond.

As readers learn, Greg has a habit of quitting things when they become too difficult, but in this novel, he finally begins to stick things out. Overall, he goes the distance in attempting to find something creative or challenging at the request of his Mom. Although everything Greg does may not pan out – from exploring college to being in band to making the movie – Greg keeps at it.

It is only with band that Greg finally seems ready to quit due to teasing at the hands of other kids. Greg's Dad encourages Greg to stick it out, to persevere and succeed in the end. Doing this will make Greg a better person, and will build his character and respect for commitment. Greg knows he has no choice, so he decides to stick with band –even though this ends up leading to a series of mishaps.

Readers should note that there is, indeed, something mentally stimulating and creatively challenging that Greg does which he does not give himself credit for, and which his parents do not give him credit for. This is his keeping of diaries. It is a creative and mentally engaging thing to do – writing about events of the day and the past, reflecting on them, or even imagining things about the future, as well as drawing pictures to illustrate everything. Keeping these diaries is the one thing that Greg proves to be successful at like nothing else. And he shows no signs of quitting.

Styles

Point of View

Jeff Kinney tells his novel *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Double Down* in the first-person reflective perspective. The entire novel is composed as though it was a diary, full of written entries, and black-and-white drawings and doodles. Because Greg himself is the author of the diary entries and the illustrator of its drawings and doodles, the perspective is that of first-person. The experiences in the novel happened to Greg, and Greg himself is relating them on paper. The reflective aspect of the narration comes from the fact that Greg is writing about the events after the events that he is describing have occurred. As such, he is reflecting on them, recalling them, and thinking back about them as he writes his diary entries.

Language and Meaning

Jeff Kinney tells his novel *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Double Down* in language that is simple and straightforward. The language used in the novel is reflective of the target audience of the book – middle-school children. The language used is reflective of their age and level of education, and to make the book relatable and easily readable for them. Also, the language used in the novel is simple and straightforward because it is meant to be written by Greg, a boy of about 11 or 12 who is in middle school. As a result, the language employed reflects not only his age, but his level of education as well as the fact that Greg hates expending effort on anything – and so his journal entry language is no different. He uses simple words because he does not wish to try using larger words and more complicated language.

Structure

Jeff Kinney divides his novel *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Double Down* into numerous entries noted by day of the week, and sometimes by the month. The novel, structured like a diary therein, essentially becomes one long, continuous story reflecting a human life over the course of several weeks between October and November. 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. The drawings also help to provide comedic context in places that words cannot. For example, Greg's mom talks about the intelligent people in their family on page 131, whereas on page 132, Greg writes about the dumb people in their family, such as Uncle Gary, who broke his collarbone cutting down an overhanging tree branch above his driveway. The illustration Greg actually draws shows Uncle Gary sitting on the tree branch he is sawing through.

Quotes

Mom says the brain is like a muscle, and if you don't exercise it by reading and doing creative stuff, it'll get weak and mushy.

-- Mom (n/a)

Importance: Here, the root of Greg's major problem for the novel is spelled out by his Mom. His Mom does not believe that Greg is exercising his brain enough, as demonstrated by his failure to buy books at the book fair. She believes Greg must do something creative to kick his brain into action.

Mom said if I turned off the television and put down my game controller, I might discover a talent I never knew I had.

-- Mom (n/a)

Importance: Here, Mom lays out the specifics. She wants to see Greg put away TV and video games in the hopes that he will find a way to exercise his brain by reading or doing something creative. And if he does something creative, she believes Greg may find a talent he did not know he had. Greg, however, is skeptical because of past experiences, and because he does not want to put in the effort.

I guess EVERY parent thinks that their kid is special, even when they're not. But I think it's starting to get a little out of control.

-- Greg (n/a)

Importance: Greg knows his Mom wants him to do something brain-related and to try to find a special, unknown talent because she thinks he is special. But Greg argues that not everyone is special. Greg believes his mom overdoes it with him, constantly pushing him to try new things that end up being disastrous. That she keeps urging him to branch out because she thinks he is special means she is out of control, according to Greg.

She said she was disappointed I didn't hit it off with Maddox, because she thought he was a good 'role model' for me.

-- Greg (n/a)

Importance: In her quest to make Greg use his mind more, Greg's mom creates a get-together with Maddox. Maddox reads and builds with Legos, but will not let Greg touch any of his constructed pieces. Greg is very bored and does not get along well with Maddox. He only later finds out that his Mom hoped Maddox's studiousness and creativity would rub off on him.

She said she's disturbed by my 'pattern of deception' and that between the incident at Maddox's house and what happened with the pig, she didn't feel like I could be trusted.

-- Greg (n/a)

Importance: Mom is disappointed in Greg after Manny's pig gets sick from eating the



candy corn Greg hid, so she decides he must be punished. Greg now has to do three times the chores from the pillowcase. Greg knows he does not deserve the punishment this time, even though in the past he has very much deserved the punishments his mother has given him. This causes his Mom to reevaluate her strategy to get Greg to do something constructive.

Mom said I'm a smart kid with a good imagination, but I just need to DO something with it.

-- Greg (n/a)

Importance: Here, Greg's Mom lays things out for Greg. She knows he is a good kid and is smart, but she also knows he needs to do something with his imagination. Greg needs an outlet, and needs to apply himself in other ways that are not deceptive. This annoys Greg, because he does not deserve his current punishment, and because Mom's analysis means Greg will probably have to do something new.

Mom says she's happy because she's being challenged at school and the rest of us should try learning new things, too.

-- Greg (n/a)

Importance: Greg is interested to see that his mom is so happy being in school when she does not have to be. Mom explains this is because she is learning new things, and that this is challenging her mind. She wants Greg and Rodrick to apply themselves now in school they will know what they can do when they grow up.

Mom's always saying we have a lot of brains in our family, and that one of my great-great-great aunts helped invent a cure for a disease way back when.

-- Mom (n/a)

Importance: Here, Greg reveals that his mother believes Greg should naturally be inclined to doing great things because it runs in the family. However, Greg knows that there are just as many dumb people in the family as there are smart people, and so this does not bode well for him. He wonders how this will affect him as his mom pushes him to expand and challenge his mind.

Now, I don't know the first thing about psychology, but I realized an opportunity like THIS only comes up once in a lifetime.

-- Greg (n/a)

Importance: When Greg visits college with Mom, a gorgeous college girl mistakes Greg for someone who knows a lot about psychology because he is pretending to read a psychology book to fit in. Greg agrees to tutor her just because he has the chance to spend time with a college girl. However, Greg's plans backfire when he learns the girl has a boyfriend.

He said I can't just quit something because it's HARD, and if there's anything he's gonna teach me, it's PERSEVERANCE.



-- Dad (n/a)

Importance: Here, Greg wants to quit band after some of the guys make fun of him because of his Mom's reorganizing of Mariana's party. Greg's Dad refuses to let Greg quit. Things in life are tough, he agrees, but that does not mean you can quit. You have to stick them out and make the best of them, because this makes you a better, stronger person.

And once he got out of the house, Rowley didn't STOP. He climbed halfway up the big tree on the side of the house, and that's where I found him, babbling nonsense.

-- Greg (n/a)

Importance: When Greg and Rowley attempt to make a horror movie, they attract angry geese. In the attempt to scare them off with a wolf mask in the basement, the boys set the scary witch off. This causes Rowley to flee the house and climb a tree. This sets up the conclusion of the novel.

What's really annoying is that in all these interviews, Rowley hasn't mentioned my name ONCE, even though I'm the one who MADE him famous.

-- Greg (n/a)

Importance: The fire department must get Rowley down from the tree, which is in turn filmed by a local news station. Because of this, Rowley becomes a local celebrity and appears on multiple television shows. He never mentions Greg, which is a fitting irony given Greg's goading the reluctant Rowley into everything from the double-headed monster costume at Halloween to participating in the horror film.