

Diary of a Wimpy Kid



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JEFF KINNEY

Jeff Kinney was born in 1971 in Fort Washington, Maryland to Madeline and Bruce Kinney. Kinney attended the University of Maryland, College Park, where he studied Computer Science. In college, he published a comic strip called *Igdoof* in the university's newspaper, which catalyzed his career as an author and cartoonist. Kinney best known for the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, which started as daily cartoons published online. The cartoons were wildly popular, and Kinney went on to publish the *Diary* as a book in 2007. Since then, he has released thirteen more titles in the series and served as executive producer on the film versions of his books. Kinney married his now-wife, Julie, in 2003, and the two currently reside in Plainville, Massachusetts. The couple has two children, Will and Grant.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the 1950s, American entertainment, culture, and sociology became increasingly preoccupied with the period of a child's life known as adolescence—a time when teenagers explore their newfound independence, separate from parents, and experiment with new identities and relationships. For the first time, adolescence was thought of as a distinct period of life, and the experiences of teenagers became the subject of psychological studies and non-fiction as well as literary works. This historical shift has left a lasting legacy in the popularity of “Young Adult” fiction like *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Diary of a Wimpy Kid is a coming-of-age story, charting Greg Heffley's social, intellectual, and emotional development over the course of his first year of middle school. Classic examples of the genre first known as *Bildungsroman*—literally a “novel of education”—include Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850). More modern coming-of-age stories include novels like J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) or Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* series (2008), which focus on teenage or young adult characters who experience various forms of physical or mental transformation on their way to adulthood. All these narratives share a common interest in a young person's transition from childhood to the world of adult responsibilities. With its intricate depiction of the social world of Greg's middle school and his quest for popularity, *Diary* also recalls non-fiction works on the social lives of teenagers like Rosalind Wiseman's *Queen*

Bees and Wannabes (2002), which emphasize the importance of social relationships and “fitting in” for teenage life in American middle schools and high schools. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* is also part of a wave of popular and influential graphic novels, such as Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000), which tells the story of a young Iranian girl growing up in pre-revolutionary Tehran, and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006), a family memoir. Graphic novels like these use a visual language of comics and drawings to tell stories and convey the narrator's state of mind or private imaginative world.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*
- **When Written:** Late 1990s-mid 2000s
- **Where Written:** Plainville, Massachusetts
- **When Published:** 2007
- **Literary Period:** Twenty-first century fiction
- **Genre:** Young Adult fiction
- **Setting:** An American middle school
- **Climax:** Greg tells his classmates that he was the one who touched “the Cheese,” protecting his best friend Rowley.
- **Antagonist:** School bullies
- **Point of View:** First-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Four Feature Films. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* has been adapted into four feature films: *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (2010), *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules* (2011), *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Dog Days* (2012) and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Long Haul* (2017). Kinney served as executive producer on the film versions of his books.



PLOT SUMMARY

Greg Heffley begins the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by stipulating that it is definitely not a “diary,” because he is afraid that other kids would make fun of him if they knew he was writing about his feelings.

At the beginning of the new school year, Greg laments that “this whole popularity” thing has become so much more complicated, now that he's in middle school. Greg knows that he is only “around 52nd or 53rd” most popular in his school, but he wants to move up in the school hierarchy. At the moment, however, Greg's best (and only) friend is Rowley, who doesn't care what people think of him. In the first few months of school, Greg engages in various schemes to try to become more

popular and raise his social status. He runs for treasurer in student government, but loses, as his campaign centered exclusively on making fun of his opponent. He tries to open a haunted house in Rowley's basement, but gets in trouble with Rowley's dad. He is horrified to be partnered with the "weird kid" Fregley in physical education class—the only boy lightweight enough to wrestle with Greg—but his attempts to build muscle by weightlifting don't go as planned because he hates exercise.

There are other problems in Greg's life too. He lives in terror of "the Cheese," a moldy bit of cheese left out on the basketball court that will condemn anyone who touches it to the "**Cheese Touch**" and a life of social ostracization. He is frequently bullied by older and more physically intimidating kids, like the teenagers who spray him and Rowley with water on Halloween. Greg loves playing video games, but his dad is always telling him to go outside and enjoy the sunshine or punishing him by taking away his video gaming time. And perhaps worst of all, Greg's mom makes him audition for the school play. Greg is cast as a tree in *The Wizard of Oz*, but he manages to sabotage and shut down the entire performance after he pelts the lead actress with apples, breaking her glasses.

At Christmas, Greg is dissatisfied with his gifts and jealous of his younger brother, Manny, who he thinks gets an unfair amount of attention from their parents. In his ongoing quest to gain a position of authority in the middle school social hierarchy, Greg and Rowley volunteer for the Safety Patrol, a group of students who walk the kindergarteners home from school. Greg also makes a bid for the role of the school newspaper cartoonist and gets the job—but this backfires when the math teacher in charge of the newspaper, Mr. Ira, re-writes Greg's comic strip so that it contains a message about how to properly add fractions.

Meanwhile, Rowley gets in trouble for reportedly "terrorizing" the kindergarteners during Safety Patrol, although it was actually Greg who terrified the children with a worm—he was misrecognized by a neighbor because he was wearing Rowley's hat. Greg lets Rowley take the blame, so Rowley stops speaking to him and instead begins having sleepovers and hanging out with another friend, Collin Lee. Greg tries to get back at Rowley by hanging out with Fregley, but admits that he misses Rowley. To make matters worse, Rowley suddenly becomes popular. He breaks his hand and has to wear a cast, which garners sympathy from girls. He also writes a comic strip called "Zoo-Wee-Mama," that all the students and teachers seem to find hilarious. This makes Greg jealous, since he had hoped to be elected "Class Clown" in the school yearbook, and "Zoo-Wee-Mama" was originally his idea.

The conflict between Greg and Rowley comes to an end, however, when both are bullied by the same teenagers who chased them on Halloween. To get back at Greg and Rowley for running away that night, one of the teenagers drags Rowley

over to the Cheese and makes him eat it. The next day, all the students wonder where the Cheese went, and Greg knows it's only a matter of time before someone figures out that he and Rowley were involved. If people found out that Rowley ate the Cheese, Greg knows that they would bully and ostracize him. To protect Rowley, Greg tells everyone that he was the one who threw away the Cheese—meaning that it is Greg, not Rowley, who now supposedly has the "Cheese Touch." Greg and Rowley become friends again, and Rowley is voted "Class Clown" in the yearbook. Greg decides that he'll only tell people about what really happened to The Cheese if Rowley gets a big head about being the class clown.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Greg Heffley – Greg Heffley, the author of the diary, has just started middle school. He is best friends with Rowley Jefferson, who is extremely unpopular and cares little about the middle school social hierarchy. Greg, however, is much more conscious of his social status and how others perceive him now that he's in middle school. For example, although he writes in a notebook throughout his first year of middle school, he is adamant that it is not a "diary" because he is afraid his classmates would make fun of him for writing about his feelings. Despite his reluctance to admit that he has a diary, he is highly creative and sensitive, which his observations and comics about his family, friends, and teachers reflect. Greg constantly gets in trouble with his mom and dad, is wary of his bully of an older brother, Rodrick, and is jealous of his little brother Manny's ability to get away with anything. Greg is often selfish and prioritizes his own self-interest, like when he allows Rowley to take the blame for bullying local kindergarteners. At other times, however, he shows loyalty to his friends and family, like when he protects Rowley from social isolation or feels bad for his grandmother when teenagers cover her house in toilet paper.

Rowley Jefferson – Rowley has been Greg's best friend ever since Rowley's family moved to the neighborhood a couple years ago. Greg thinks that Rowley has always been a bit uncool—when they met, for instance, Rowley had a book called "How to Make Friends in New Places," which Rowley's mom gave him. Despite Greg's obsession with gaining popularity, Rowley is completely unconcerned about what people think of him. Greg has tried to explain "this whole popularity thing" to Rowley, but it just "goes in one ear and out another" with him. For example, he still asks Greg to come over and "play," even though Greg reminds him to say "hang out." Indeed, Rowley has protective parents and is in some ways quite childish, since his parents safety-proof his Halloween costume and put a parental lock on his television to restrict violent content. In other ways, however, Rowley is far more emotionally mature than Greg. He writes a successful comic called "Zoo-Wee-Ma" for the school

newspaper, which earns him lavish praise from classmates and teachers alike. In general, he also tends to be better-liked by teachers (he wins an award) and students (girls express sympathy when he breaks his hand) than Greg is. Perhaps this is precisely because of his lack of interest in social status; unlike Greg, he isn't self-conscious or easily embarrassed and is thus able to be true to himself. This also means that Rowley is a much more loyal friend to Greg than Greg is to him.

Greg's Mom – Greg's mom (who is also Roderick and Manny's mom) is a supportive parent who encourages Greg to try a range of activities. However, Greg doesn't always see the value in his mother's attempts to make him a more well-rounded person, and he resents that she makes him to try out for the school play. Greg's mom has strong morals, which she attempts to impress upon her boys. For instance, she makes her eldest son, Roderick, apologize for owning a magazine that is "degrading" to women. Likewise, when Greg comes to her to ask for advice, she encourages him to "do the right thing," even if it might entail sacrifices on his part. Greg's mom is known for taking a long time to devise punishments for her boys. Her levelheaded, fair parenting style differs from that of her husband, Greg's dad, who punishes his children impulsively.

Greg's Dad – While Greg's mom tends to want Greg to explore different interests, Greg's dad has more specific ideas about how he'd like Greg to spend his time. He encourages athletics, frequently telling Greg to go outside and exercise and buying him a weightlifting machine for Christmas. He is uncomfortable with Greg playing with a Barbie Dream House, and tells him instead to choose toys "more appropriate" for boys. In this sense, he is more concerned with cultivating a particularly masculine identity in Greg than Greg's mom is. However, he is also a supportive and engaged parent, as he encourages Greg to run for student government and plays pranks like spraying passing teenagers with water. Greg's dad is also Roderick and Manny's father.

Rodrick Heffley – Rodrick is Manny and Greg's older brother. Like many teenagers, he doesn't want to have much to do with his mom and dad. For instance, when his mom tries to dance along to his music (to support his interests and connect with him), Rodrick turns it off in frustration. Rodrick loves music and plays in a heavy metal band, which Greg finds very annoying. Rodrick's other hobby is picking on Greg and playing pranks on him. During the summer, for example, he woke Greg up at 3:00 A.M. and convinced him that it was time for school and he had slept through the entire summer.

Manny Heffley – Manny is Greg and Rodrick's younger brother and is only about three years old. Greg resents the attention and indulgence that their mom and dad give Manny, and Greg thinks that Manny can get away with anything. For example, when Manny draws on the wall with permanent marker, the boys' parents think it's cute. Greg is also annoyed at having to be responsible for getting Manny ready for daycare in the

morning, since Manny throws his cereal down the toilet. Manny, on the other hand, seems to adore Greg, calling him "bubba" (a nickname that Greg finds excruciatingly embarrassing).

Rowley's Dad – Rowley's dad is somewhat protective, since he puts a parental lock on the family entertainment system and forbids Rowley from playing violent video games. He also punishes Rowley and Greg for turning the basement into a haunted house and terrifying neighborhood kids. Rowley's mom is similarly strict and protective, though she's more concerned with Rowley's safety.

Fregley Fregley is a "weird kid" who lives near Greg's house. Greg thinks Fregley is weird because he makes strange comments, seems oddly interested in gross things, and uses a "secret language," like shouting "Juice!" when he wants to go to the bathroom. He is the only student light enough to be in Greg's weight class during the wrestling unit in physical education class, so Greg has to wrestle him every day—which he finds excruciatingly embarrassing. When Greg is fighting with Rowley, Greg tries to become best friends with Fregley to make Rowley jealous. Greg immediately regrets his decision when, during a sleepover, Fregley goes on a sugar high and begins chasing him around with a booger on his finger.

Marty Porter – Marty runs for the position of treasurer in the student government, competing against Greg. Worried that Marty will win because of his talent at math, Greg puts up posters around the school reminding people of Marty's lice problem in elementary school. However, this backfires when the vice principal makes Greg take down the posters and Marty gives out lollipops, winning the election.

Shane Snella – Shane is a younger and easily frightened kid in the neighborhood who pays two dollars to visit Greg and Rowley's makeshift haunted house, which is actually the basement in Rowley's house. Shane is terrified by the "Hall of Screams"—which involves Greg and Rowley screaming over and over again—and so hides under the bed and refuses to come out. Rowley's dad then grounds Rowley, since he thinks the boys have been bullying Shane.

Patty Farrell – Patty is a girl in Greg's grade. She is something of a teacher's pet, and Greg develops a vendetta against her when she stops him from cheating on a geography test. She has dreams of becoming an actress and is cast as the lead role of Dorothy in the school's production of *The Wizard of Oz*. However, her chance at stardom is ruined when Greg pelts her with apples on stage, breaking her glasses and cutting the entire play short.

Mrs. Norton – Mrs. Norton is the drama teacher at Greg's school. She is very enthusiastic but somewhat clueless about middle school social dynamics, as when she tells Greg he has a "soprano" voice, embarrassing him in front of the girls. Because of her passion for drama, Mrs. Norton thinks everyone should

have the chance to perform—even going so far as to write new roles and songs for the school’s production of *The Wizard of Oz*. Her efforts are unrewarded, however, when Greg and his friends refuse to sing on stage and instead pelt the lead actress with apples and sabotage the play.

Mr. Ira – Mr. Ira is the teacher who runs the school newspaper. He publishes Greg’s comic strip, but with some “minor edits.” Unfortunately for Greg, these edits involve entirely changing the comic strip beyond recognition. In the original, Creighton the Cretin ate a math test, whereas in Mr. Ira’s version, Creighton explains fractions.

Uncle Charlie – Greg likes Uncle Charlie because he usually gives good Christmas and birthday gifts. Greg is frequently disappointed by his gifts from his parents, so he tends to ask his indulgent uncle for the things he wants. However, Uncle Charlie is also a bit out-of-touch. For instance, this year he gives Greg a framed picture of himself, which perplexes Greg,

MINOR CHARACTERS

Bryce Anderson Bryce is the most popular boy at Greg’s middle school and is the best-liked by girls. Greg is envious and resentful of him, pointing out that he liked girls while Bryce was still calling girls “stinky poos.”

Abe Hall Abe, one of Greg’s classmates, made the mistake of touching the “Cheese” and was thought to have the “**Cheese Touch**,” which made him a social outcast. Abe moved to California at the end of the school year.

Rowley’s Mom – Rowley’s mom is very protective of Rowley, much like Rowley’s dad is. She even goes so far as to make her son’s Halloween costume safer, which makes the knight costume unrecognizable.

Archie Kelly – Archie is one of Greg’s friends who also plays a tree in the school’s production of *The Wizard of Oz*. When Manny shouts “bubby” during the performance—Greg’s embarrassing nickname—Greg pretends that the nickname refers to Archie. Consequently, Archie is made fun of at school the next day.

Collin Lee – Collin is, in Greg’s words, a “back-up friend.” After Rowley and Greg fight, Rowley starts hanging out with Collin, inviting him over for sleepovers and even wearing matching “Best Friends” t-shirts with him. Greg is jealous of Collin and Rowley’s friendship, although he is determined not to show it.

Mr. Winsky – Mr. Winsky is the teacher in charge of the Safety Patrol, a group of students who escort younger kids across the street. He initially punishes Rowley for terrorizing the kindergarteners, but after he realizes that Greg was in fact responsible, he reinstates Rowley and gives him a medal.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



SOCIAL STATUS AND FRIENDSHIP

Greg Heffley is obsessed with fitting in and rising to the top of the social hierarchy of his middle school. However much his efforts to be “cool” tend to backfire, popularity is the goal that most shapes his behavior and decisions. While Greg thinks that popularity will earn him the respect and admiration of his peers (especially girls), Greg’s preoccupation with his social position undermines his relationships with his friends, parents, and wider peer group. This is particularly painful in its effects on his friendship with his best friend Rowley Jefferson, who constantly embarrasses Greg with his lack of concern about popularity, but who Greg comes to realize is essential to his life. Ultimately, Greg learns that measures of social status or popularity can’t substitute for true friendship.

As a result of his preoccupation with popularity and what others think of him, Greg is very easily embarrassed—by his family, his friends, and by himself. He has to constantly guard against doing anything that could be regarded as uncool because he is afraid that small transgressions could lead to a further dive in his already precarious social status. Greg is constantly embarrassed by Rowley’s behavior, comments, and even clothing, all of which suggest a lack of interest in popularity. For example, Rowley asks him to come over and “play,” although Greg informs him that the cool term is “hang out.” Rowley also wears a Superman costume to a high school haunted house, which Greg considers gauche. Greg’s younger brother Manny calls him “bubby,” and Greg is terrified that his classmates will find out about this embarrassing nickname. When Manny shouts “bubby” at the school play, he even goes so far as to quickly transfer the nickname to another boy, Archie Kelly, who is then bullied for it.

Greg spends most of the school year trying to raise his social status through various means: weightlifting, running for student government, drawing comics. He is enraged, then, when his supposedly uncool friend Rowley in fact becomes more popular than him. Rowley’s comic strip “Zoo-Wee-Ma,” which Greg thinks is dumb, instead becomes wildly popular with students and teachers—whereas Greg’s comic strip fails. When Rowley breaks his arm, girls sign his cast and offer to help him eat lunch; when Greg tries to garner sympathy by covering himself in bandages, girls don’t seem as enthused. Greg sets his heart on earning a superlative in the school

yearbook, which he thinks will solidify his social status. But to add insult to injury, it is Rowley, not Greg, who is elected “Class Clown.”

Greg constantly discusses and evaluates the social status of other students at school in relation to himself, even to the extent of coming up with an elaborate ranking system to measure the popularity of every one of his 150 classmates. In his evaluation, he’s “somewhere around 52nd or 53rd most popular this year,” but he hopes to move up a spot because another student is getting braces. Such precision in social ranking is of course absurd, but demonstrates just how seriously Greg takes the small gradations in status between himself and his classmates. He also remarks that Rowley is conspicuously uncool and would probably be ranked at the bottom of the class, at 150. But despite his callous and mercenary assessment here, Greg shows that he in fact clearly cares deeply for Rowley when he takes a social risk to spare Rowley from embarrassment: Rowley eats “the Cheese” (a moldy bit of cheese left out on the basketball court that dooms anyone who eats it to contagion from “**the Cheese Touch**,” meaning that they will be socially ostracized), but Greg steps forward and claims that *he* touched the Cheese instead. To save Rowley, he for once puts friendship before his own obsession with social status.

At the end of the school year, Greg still hasn’t achieved his goal of rising to the top of the middle school social hierarchy. However, his conflict with Rowley comes to an end when Rowley eats “the Cheese” and Greg chooses to protect him, even at a cost to his own popularity. This would have doomed Rowley to social isolation had Greg told others, but Greg’s decision to keep this a secret, protecting his friend, offers some hope that Greg might ultimately come to prioritize enduring friendship over popularity.



IDEALS OF MASCULINITY

As he enters middle school, Greg is formally leaving childhood and entering the world of adolescence—a world, as he learns, with a whole range of new and perplexing rules about masculinity and relationships with girls. As a so-called “wimpy kid” who hasn’t had a growth spurt yet, Greg struggles to find his place in a social order that values particular expressions of masculinity and punishes those who deviate from that ideal.

Greg likes girls and desires their attention, but also feels threatened by them and finds little success in his efforts to make them like him. He tries to sit next to “hot girls” in homeroom, but he admits that they pass notes about him and make fun of him. He assumes that all girls like the most popular boy in high school, Bryce Anderson, thus linking attention from girls to social status. Greg longs for the days in elementary school when the boy who “got all the girls” was simply the boy who ran the fastest—whereas now there are more complicating

factors, like clothes, looks, or wealth. When Greg and his classmates are tasked with building a robot in Independent Study, he is disdainful of the girls’ plan for a robot that dispenses lip gloss, and he refers to the group of boys as “the serious workers.” His sense of an “us versus them” dynamic between boys and girls suggests that he has internalized stereotypical ideas about femininity and masculinity.

Greg feels insecure about his body image and complains that the problem with middle school is that it mixes people like him—who haven’t yet gone through puberty—with boys who already need to shave, and thus are perceived as more masculine and physically dominant. He feels the sense of inadequacy even more keenly in physical education class, where the boys are taught how to wrestle while the girls learn gymnastics. The fact that the wrestling class is only for boys emphasizes the sport’s association with male identity and ideals of masculinity. Later, Greg asks his parents for a weight set for Christmas, hoping to improve his physique in order to move up a weight class and make the football team in the spring. He thinks that both developments would raise his social status, since many of the most popular boys in his grade are athletes.

Greg also faces pressure to conform to a certain ideal of masculinity from his father, who buys him gifts and encourages activities that are associated with stereotypically masculine spheres like sports. Greg’s dad is very keen for him to stop playing video games and go outside for physical exercise. Greg is passionate about video games and hates sports, but his dad is so set on the idea that Greg even runs through sprinklers to make it appear as if he has been sweating from exertion. Greg remembers that he once asked for a Barbie Dream House as a Christmas gift. His mom was supportive, thinking it was healthy for him to “experiment” playing with different kinds of toys, but his dad told him to start his wish list over and choose toys that were more “appropriate for boys.” Greg’s mom, by contrast, suggests that he should try a range of activities, such as singing in the school play, which Greg considers more suitable for girls. Greg admits that he likes some “girly” activities—for example, he enjoys sewing in Home Economics, although he stopped taking the class because he thought kids would make fun of him.

Greg faces many pressures to conform to a restrictive ideal of masculinity that emphasizes athletic prowess, physical strength, and confidence with girls. His dad often reinforces such ideals with his ideas regarding what kind of activities he thinks Greg should engage in. His mom, by contrast, encourages Greg to try more stereotypically “girly” activities, offering a more flexible model of how Greg might grow up and explore his masculinity. Greg’s interest in Barbie dolls and sewing suggests that Greg’s mom is right to try to encourage him to explore activities based on what he *wants* to do, rather than what he thinks boys should do. At the same time, however,

his reluctance to pursue those interests—as when he stops taking Home Economics because he is afraid of the social consequences—suggests that ideals of masculinity exert a significant hold on his life and decisions.



BULLYING

In Greg's middle school, deviation from social norms is often punished with bullying. One of Greg's central aims is to avoid any behavior that could make him a target for school bullies—like wearing the wrong clothes, being bad at sports, or having an embarrassing nickname. Ultimately, however, he chooses to protect his “uncool” best friend Rowley from school bullies when he takes responsibility for touching “the Cheese,” a moldy bit of cheese left out on the school basketball court, exposing himself to the risk of social censure to protect his friend.

Greg witnesses almost daily instances of bullying at his middle school and even perpetuates it himself. There is intense peer pressure to behave in certain ways to be perceived as cool, which even causes Greg to become the bully instead of the bullied. Greg runs a student government campaign for treasurer against Marty Porter, hoping that becoming treasurer will give him more power in the school. His campaign posters consist entirely of personal insults of Marty, such as reminding people of his lice problem in elementary school. The vice principal perceives this behavior as bullying and makes him take down the posters. Greg develops a vendetta against another student, Patty Farrell, after she stops him from cheating on a geography test. In the school production of *The Wizard of Oz*, Patty plays Dorothy, and Greg and his friends pelt her with apples. As a result, her glasses break and the director has to stop the play, ruining Patty's dream of performing on stage.

Greg is frequently bullied by older and physically intimidating teenagers who use their superior strength to exert power over others. Even Greg's older brother, Rodrick, sometimes engages in bullying behavior. For example, in the summer, he wakes Greg up at 3:00 A.M. and tricks him into thinking that it's the first day of school. This causes Greg to panic, get dressed, and make himself breakfast, getting him in trouble with their dad. Similarly, teenagers in a passing pickup truck spray Greg and Rowley with water while they are trick-or-treating. The teenagers then chase Greg and Rowley to Greg's grandmother's house. Although Greg and Rowley escape, the teenagers cover the house in toilet paper—in an act of intimidation that extends to Greg's family.

One bullying tactic adopted by the entire school centers on “the Cheese,” a moldy piece of cheese left on the school basketball court. Legend holds that any person who touches it gets the “**Cheese Touch**,” which they can then pass on to other students by touching them. The result is that students with the Cheese Touch are bullied and socially ostracized. One student,

Abe Hall, was thought to have the Cheese Touch, meaning that “no one would go near him.” This bullying had such a negative impact on Abe that he moved to California at the end of the school year.

The acts of bullying that Greg witnesses, experiences, and perpetrates are often framed as jokes, but their effect is often to intimidate. The fact that bullying is frequently carried out by older students models such behavior to their younger peers, perpetuating a cycle of bullying that continues over the years. Greg's protection of Rowley, however, provides one example of a moment when Greg chooses not to continue the cycle. Greg and Rowley are bullied by the same teenagers from Halloween night, who force Rowley to eat the Cheese. Greg knows that this would lead to permanent social outcast status for Rowley if people knew about it, but Greg chooses to keep the secret and take responsibility himself by claiming that *he* was the one who touched the Cheese. In this sense, he refuses to engage in the bullying behavior that is so common at his middle school and instead chooses other values: friendship over social status, kindness over intimidation, and self-sacrifice over self-protection.



INDEPENDENCE AND GROWING UP

Greg experiences the transition to middle school as a step away from childhood and into adulthood. However, he still finds that his parents and teachers have a great deal of control over his life and choices, which is a source of tension as he develops his own ideas about how he wants to spend his time.

Greg loves video games and wants to spend as much time as possible playing them. However, his parents disagree that this is a productive way for him to spend his time, which leads to frequent conflicts. Greg's dad often makes him stop playing video games and go outside to play sports instead. When this happens, Greg simply goes to his friend Rowley's house to play more video games. But Rowley's parents use a parental lock on their entertainment system that prohibits violent video games—another example of parental control over their children's entertainment. When Greg listens to one of Rodrick's CDs that has a “parental warning” for inappropriate content, his dad punishes him by banning him from playing video games for two weeks. Such a long period of time away from his beloved video games is difficult for Greg, and his parents' power to forbid him from playing video games or listening to particular music demonstrates that he is still subject to their authority.

Now that he's in middle school, Greg longs for independence from his parents. However, he also feels jealous of the attention given to his younger brother, Manny, who seemingly can do no wrong in their eyes. Greg feels that his parents are too indulgent with Manny and too easily forgive his misbehaviors, like drawing in permanent marker on the walls. At Christmas,

Manny is given nearly every toy he asked for, while Greg resents his more “grown-up” gifts like socks and a sweater. In this sense, Greg is still fairly childlike in his desire for toys. Greg admits that his own gifts to his parents are the same every year, usually a generic “#1 Dad” or “#1 Mom” coffee mug. In his drawing, his parents look somewhat dismayed, suggesting that Greg is less than thoughtful in his gift-giving. He seems to see Christmas as an occasion that should benefit him, rather than a more adult reciprocal transaction.

Although Greg professes to be very grown up, he still finds that he needs his parents sometimes—more often than he wants to admit. When Greg wants to run for student government, his dad supports him and tells him that he had done the same at his age. He digs out some of his old campaign posters and helps Greg pick up supplies to make his own posters. Greg’s mom takes Greg and Rowley to a haunted house at Crossland High School, which features various frightening scenes, including a teenager wielding a chainsaw. Despite their attempts to be cool, Greg and Rowley are terrified. Seeing this, Greg’s mom tells off the teenager and makes him show that the chainsaw is fake, which embarrasses Greg even as he admits that he was grateful for her intervention.

Greg sees middle school as the beginning of adolescence and claims that he is grown up now—that, for example, he now “hangs out” at his friend’s house rather than going over to “play.” However, his propensity for getting grounded or having his choices curtailed by his parents suggests that he is far from independent. Indeed, his jealousy of his younger brother suggests that he may, ultimately, be reluctant to leave childhood behind. Certainly his transition into adulthood has many bumps along the road, as he comes into conflict not only with the frustrating authority of his parents in his life but with his own continuing desire for their affection and approval.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE CHEESE TOUCH

“The Cheese” is a moldy bit of cheese left out on the school basketball court. Legend holds that anyone who touches the Cheese is infected with the “Cheese Touch,” which they can pass to others by touching them. Consequently, students who are thought to have the Cheese Touch are socially ostracized and treated as if they are literally infections. The Cheese Touch thus symbolizes the bullying and exclusion of certain students based on largely arbitrary factors. In Greg’s middle school, social status is all-important, and students struggle to fit in and be perceived as “cool”—an elusive designation that relies on measures such as clothes, wealth,

looks, and athletic ability. Students who happen to fall outside those prevailing norms, like Greg’s “weird” neighbor, Fregley, are socially excluded. The Cheese Touch illustrates what happens to those who don’t conform to certain standards of behavior, speaking, and even dressing. Greg’s preoccupation with popularity might sometimes seem excessive, but the idea of the Cheese Touch emphasizes the high social stakes of fitting in at middle school. For example, one student who had the Cheese Touch, Abe Hall, was bullied so relentlessly that he left school at the end of the year. The Cheese Touch symbolizes the ways that, for young teenagers like Greg, the loss of social status and exclusion from the wider peer community can be devastating.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Abrams edition of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* published in 2007.

September Quotes

☝ I try to explain all this popularity stuff to Rowley (who is probably hovering around the 150 mark, by the way), but I think it just goes in one ear and out the other with him.

Related Characters: Greg Heffley (speaker), Rowley Jefferson

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

Now that he’s in middle school, Greg displays a new preoccupation with popularity and how others perceive him. Indeed, he goes so far as to rank the relative popularity of all 150 of his classmates, because he is obsessed with trying to increase his own social status relative to that of others. By contrast, his friend Rowley seems oblivious to the changes in Greg’s understanding of his social life, and to what Greg calls “all this popularity stuff.” For this reason, Greg thinks Rowley is uncool and one of the least popular kids in the class. Rowley, however, doesn’t see it that way. He simply sees Greg as his best friend, rather than—like Greg—ranking his classmates and evaluating people based on their social influence and popularity.

☝ I have told Rowley at least a billion times that now we're in middle school, you're supposed to say "hang out," not "play." But no matter how many noogies I give him, he always forgets the next time. I've been trying to be a lot more careful about my image since I got to middle school. But having Rowley around is definitely not helping.

Related Characters: Greg Heffley (speaker), Rowley Jefferson

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

Greg is convinced that being grown up means letting go of holdovers from his childhood, like going over to a friend's house to "play." This is why he informs Rowley that middle schoolers don't go on playdates; they "hang out." Rowley's inability to remember this suggests that he is still set in his childish ways and doesn't care about seeming grown-up or cool, unlike Greg. He simply wants to be friends with Greg and continue to do the same activities they have always done together, like playing in the snow and sleeping over at his house. It doesn't occur to Rowley that anything about their friendship might change now that they're in middle school. But since Greg increasingly cares about his "image"—what other people think of him—he sees Rowley's obliviousness in this respect as a social liability.

October Quotes

☝ Mom made the chainsaw guy show us where the exit was, and that was the end of our haunted house experience right there. I guess it was a little embarrassing when Mom did that, but I'm willing to let it go this one time.

Related Characters: Greg Heffley (speaker), Greg's Mom

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

Greg thinks he is very grown-up and can handle the frightening features of a high school haunted house, like a teenager wielding a chainsaw. In reality, however, he is terrified. When Greg's mom sees this, she tells off the teenager who frightened him and makes them leave the haunted house. Greg is secretly grateful for this intervention, revealing that he is still a child and needs parental help and protection. Even though he finds the

presence of his mom "a little embarrassing," he also admits that he's "willing to let it go this one time," further deferring his full transition into adulthood. Despite his claims that he is independent now, Greg clearly isn't quite ready to deal with the adult world on his own just yet.

November Quotes

☝ I figure if I bulk up now, it could actually come in handy down the road. The football unit is coming in the spring, and they split the teams up into shirts and skins. And I ALWAYS get put on skins. I think they do that to make all the out-of-shape kids feel ashamed of themselves.

Related Characters: Greg Heffley (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

Before middle school, Greg never showed any interest in working out or changing his physical appearance. However, he changes his mind after he participates in a weightlifting unit in Physical Education class—a unit in which only the boys are allowed to participate. The fact that only boys are in the weightlifting class links masculinity to performances of physical strength. As a so-called "wimpy kid," Greg worries that he doesn't measure up and decides to start working out, both to perform better in the weightlifting class and to stand a better chance of being picked to play in the football unit. His statement that he thinks "out-of-shape kids" are always put on skins in order to make them "feel ashamed of themselves" suggests that he thinks athletic ability and physical strength will make him popular, whereas kids who lack those qualities will be socially rejected and bullied.

☝ I did my singing tryouts with a bunch of other boys whose moms made them come, too. I tried to sing as quietly as possible, but of course I got singled out, anyway. I have no idea what a "soprano" is, but from the way some of the girls were giggling, I knew it wasn't a good thing.

Related Characters: Greg Heffley (speaker), Greg's Mom

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 97-98

Explanation and Analysis

Greg is encouraged to try out for the school play by his mom, who wants him to experiment with different activities. However, he clearly doesn't feel that acting and singing are appropriate pursuits for boys, since he comments that his other male classmates had also been forced to come by their mothers. For this reason, he attempts to sing quietly so that no one will make fun of him. He is embarrassed at being singled out because the teacher says he has a "soprano" voice—a high voice associated with girls. The laughter of his classmates at this suggests that they see deviations from conventional gender roles as something to laugh about. This, of course, is why Greg was unwilling to try out for the play in the first place.

December Quotes

☝ Well, if one good thing came out of the play, it's that I don't have to worry about the "Bubby" nickname anymore. I saw Archie Kelly getting hassled in the hallway after fifth period today, so it looks like I can finally start to breathe a little easier.

Related Characters: Greg Heffley (speaker), Manny Heffley, Archie Kelly

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the entire school year, Greg is terrified that his classmates will find out about the embarrassing nickname his younger brother Manny has given him. When Manny shouts "Bubby" at the school play, Greg quickly deflects the nickname to his friend Archie, pretending that Archie was the one being addressed from the audience. As a result, Archie is bullied in school the next day for the nickname. Greg's willingness to metaphorically throw a friend under the bus in order to protect his reputation demonstrates his tendency to prioritize his own self-interest. However, the consequences faced by Archie also make clear the high social stakes of fitting in at middle school and avoiding any behavior that could give people ammunition for bullying.

☝ When Mom and Dad saw my wish list that year, they got in a big fight over it. Dad said there was no way he was getting me a doll's house, but Mom said it was healthy for me to "experiment" with whatever kind of toys I wanted to play with.

Related Characters: Greg Heffley (speaker), Greg's Dad, Greg's Mom

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

Greg remembers a time when he requested a Barbie Dream House for Christmas, thinking it would be a cool fort for his toy soldiers. Although Greg's mom isn't bothered about Greg's request, she gets in a fight with Greg's dad because he is concerned that a Barbie product isn't "appropriate" for boys to play with. In this moment, Greg's dad shows that he is invested in particular ideals of masculinity and would prefer that his son play with stereotypically masculine toys, rather than dolls, which are typically associated with girls. By contrast, Greg's mom doesn't think Greg's gender needs to define what sorts of toys he can and can't play with.

January Quotes

☝ I WANTED to sign up for Home Economics 2, because I was pretty good at Home Ec 1. But being good at sewing does not exactly buy you popularity points at school.

Related Characters: Greg Heffley (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

In his first semester of middle school, Greg takes Home Economics 1, a class focused on domestic skills like cooking and sewing. He admits that he actually performed quite well in this class. However, he decides not to take the class for a second semester because a skill like sewing is associated with girls. For a boy to be good at sewing, he explains, "does not exactly buy you popularity points at school," recounting how he was made fun of for sewing a purse. Greg's decision to stop taking a subject he enjoys because it involves stereotypically feminine pursuits like sewing demonstrates the rigidity of gender roles at this middle school, and it also perhaps reflects the influence of his father, who is deeply concerned with whether his son is masculine enough.

☝ In school today they had a general assembly and showed the movie “It’s Great to Be Me,” which they show us every year. The movie is all about how you should be happy with who you are and not change anything about yourself. To be honest with you, I think that’s a really dumb message to be telling kids, especially the ones at my school.

Related Characters: Greg Heffley (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

Middle school is supposedly a time for students like Greg to grow into adulthood and experiment with new interests and passions. However, Greg thinks the message of “It’s Great to Be Me” has little relevance to his day-to-day life in middle school. Rather than exploring what makes him unique, he spends most of his time trying to fit in with his peers. He thinks that being “happy with who you are” and not trying to “change anything about yourself” is a “dumb message” because the kids who are socially successful are the ones who make an effort to fit into the mainstream. Those who deviate from those norms, by contrast, are often punished with bullying. Greg thinks he will achieve higher social status and popularity by changing who he is, rather than by being himself.

February Quotes

☝ I sat at the end of the lunch table so there would be plenty of room for me to start signing autographs for my new fans. But nobody was coming over to tell me how great my comic was, and I started to get the feeling something was wrong.

Related Characters: Greg Heffley (speaker), Mr. Ira

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

Greg thinks that becoming a cartoonist for the school newspaper will help him achieve the social status and popularity that he longs for—as suggested by his hope that his “new fans” will ask him for his autograph. However, his scheme backfires spectacularly when the math teacher in charge of the school newspaper, Mr. Ira, entirely re-writes his comic so that it offers advice about fractions. The failure of Greg’s comic is particularly poignant because he genuinely enjoys drawing comics, and so this publication

would have been an opportunity for him to share his passion with his peers, perhaps gaining admiration for who he is rather than who he pretends to be. Instead, however, Greg is not able to share his work and he struggles to feel that he is appreciated and respected within the school.

March Quotes

☝ I can’t believe Rowley went and backstabbed me like that. While I was sitting there getting chewed out by Mr. Winsky, I was thinking, I need to remember to give my friend a lecture about loyalty.

Related Characters: Greg Heffley (speaker), Rowley Jefferson, Mr. Winsky

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

When Rowley is accused of teasing the kindergarteners while on Safety Patrol, Greg allows him to take the blame—even though it was in fact Greg who was responsible. Rowley then gets back at him by telling Mr. Winsky about Greg’s actions. Ironically, however, Greg accuses Rowley of betraying *him*. Although Greg was the one who allowed Rowley to be unjustly blamed for teasing the kindergarteners rather than taking responsibility for his behavior, Greg thinks that he needs to give his friend “a lecture about loyalty.” This counterintuitive idea of loyalty in friendship—expecting loyalty from Rowley while being disloyal to him in return—reveals Greg’s immaturity and lack of consideration for his best friend. Indeed, his tendency to prioritize his own self-interest above that of others leads to serious consequences for his friendship with Rowley.

April Quotes

☝ Ever since the worm incident, Rowley has been hanging out with Collin Lee every day after school. What really stinks is that Collin is supposed to be MY backup friend. These guys are acting totally ridiculous. Today, Rowley and Collin were wearing these matching T-shirts, and it made me just about want to vomit.

Related Characters: Greg Heffley (speaker), Collin Lee, Rowley Jefferson

Related Themes: **Page Number:** 190**Explanation and Analysis**

After Greg tries to blame Rowley for “the worm incident”—teasing the kindergarteners while on Safety Patrol—their friendship is seriously threatened. Rowley begins hanging out more with Collin, inviting him over for sleepovers and even wearing matching T-shirts. Greg’s description of Collin as “MY backup friend” suggests that he feels socially rejected and excluded even by someone who he thought was merely a “backup.” It also suggests that Rowley was indeed his best friend and the primary meaningful social relationship in his life, although he claimed that Rowley was unpopular and uncool. The loss of the friendship clearly affects Greg deeply. Although he writes that he finds the matching T-shirts “ridiculous,” the strength of his emotional response in wanting to vomit indicates that he feels very distressed at the idea of Rowley replacing him with a new best friend.

☝ So here’s what I’m thinking: this school year has been kind of a bust, but if I can get voted as a Class Favorite, I’ll go out on a high note...Last night I was lying in bed, and it hit me: I should go for Class Clown. It’s not like I’m known for being real funny at school or anything, but if I can pull off one big prank before voting, that could do it.

Related Themes: **Page Number:** 200**Explanation and Analysis**

As the end of the school year approaches, Greg is dismayed that he hasn’t achieved the popularity in middle school that he was hoping for. However, he thinks there might still be hope to end the year “on a high note.” He wants to be elected a “Class Favorite” because he thinks this will give him some notoriety and respect in the school, even though his attempts to be popular have met with little success thus far. Greg settles on “Class Clown,” although he admits that he is not known for being particularly funny. His belief that “one big prank” will get him the popularity and respect he craves suggests that Greg prioritizes social status rather than meaningful friendships built over time. His preoccupation with the Class Favorites, too, is reminiscent of his ranking of 150 classmates, which imagines popularity and social success as a contest to be won.

May Quotes

☝ If the truth ever came out about how the Cheese disappeared, Rowley would be finished. He’d have to move out of the state, and maybe even the country. That’s when I decided to speak up. I told everyone that I knew what happened to the Cheese. I said I was sick of it being on the court, and I just decided to get rid of it once and for all...if I threw away the Cheese, guess what that meant? It meant that I have the Cheese Touch.

Related Characters: Greg Heffley (speaker), Rowley Jefferson**Related Themes:**   **Related Symbols:** **Page Number:** 214-215**Explanation and Analysis**

Throughout his first year of middle school, Greg has made many selfish decisions that prioritized his own self-interest over others. His preoccupation with social status and popularity was at times so overwhelming that he even betrayed his best friend Rowley so that he could remain on the Safety Patrol. This is why Greg’s decision to claim that *he* was the one who touched the Cheese—thus protecting Rowley from social outcast status—is so surprising. His behavior earlier in the year might suggest that he would simply allow Rowley to take the blame and the bullying that comes from touching the notorious “Cheese.” But here Greg makes a different choice. For once, he puts friendship above popularity, choosing to allow people to believe he has the Cheese Touch—which he knows will mean social isolation—in order to protect Rowley. This decision demonstrates significant personal growth on Greg’s part, suggesting that he is growing out of his fixation on popularity and learning to value his closer and more meaningful friendships.

June Quotes

☝ Well, if Rowley appreciated what I did for him last week, he hasn’t said it. But we’ve started hanging out after school again, so I guess that means me and him are back to normal. I can honestly say that so far, having the Cheese Touch hasn’t been all that bad.

Related Characters: Greg Heffley (speaker), Rowley Jefferson

Related Themes:**Related Symbols:****Page Number:** 216**Explanation and Analysis**

When Greg takes the blame for touching the Cheese, he knows that he will have the “Cheese Touch,” meaning that his classmates will be afraid to go near him. Before, Greg might have considered this a disaster, since he wanted more

than anything to fit in and be considered “cool.” But although Greg loses his chance at popularity, he regains his friendship with Rowley. Greg’s statement that “having the Cheese Touch hasn’t been all that bad” suggests that he doesn’t mind this official social outcast status, as long as he has the support of his best friend Rowley. After a year of obsession with popularity, he learns the value of true friendship. Indeed, by realizing that having the Cheese Touch isn’t actually the end of the world, he shows that the measures of social status that had seemed so important to him before might not need to define his time in middle school



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

SEPTEMBER

Tuesday. Greg explains that the book he is writing at the moment is definitely *not* a “diary,” since he’s afraid his classmates would make fun of him for keeping a diary. He also specifies that keeping a diary was his mom’s idea, and that he doesn’t plan to write about his feelings. He only agreed to this exercise so that he can have a record of his life to give to journalists once he becomes rich and famous.

Greg writes that he goes to middle school with a bunch of “morons.” He complains that school is miserable because it mixes together people like him—who “haven’t hit their growth spurt yet”—with boys who already need to shave. It’s the first day of school, and the teacher is making a seating chart. Greg recommends selecting a seat carefully, away from unpopular kids and close to attractive girls—although he admits that those girls make fun of him. He misses the days in elementary school when the boy most popular with girls was always the one who ran the fastest. In middle school, being popular involves other factors, like “the kind of clothes you wear or how rich you are.”

Greg identifies his place in the middle school social hierarchy. Bryce Anderson is the most popular boy in school. Greg figures that he himself is “around 52nd or 53rd.” He’s tried to explain this to his friend Rowley (who Greg thinks is “probably around the 150 mark”), but Rowley shows little interest in popularity.

Wednesday. In physical education class, Greg takes a look at “The Cheese,” a moldy bit of cheese left on the basketball court. Greg explains that anyone who touches the cheese gets the “**Cheese Touch**,” which can then be passed on to other classmates. One student, Abe Hall, got the Cheese Touch, meaning that “no one would go near him.” Abe moved to California at the end of the school year.

Thursday. Greg is having a hard time readjusting to waking up early, now that school is in session again. He remembers a time during the summer when his brother Rodrick woke him up at 3:00 A.M. and convinced him that he had slept through the entire summer and needed to get ready for school. Greg’s dad yelled at him for making breakfast at 3:00 A.M., but when Greg tried to tell on his brother, Rodrick pretended to be asleep.

Greg is anxious about writing in a diary because people will think he is writing about his “feelings.” He worries that this would make him seem un-masculine (since emotional expressiveness is more associated with girls) or uncool, suggesting that Greg is deeply concerned about what his peers think of him.



Greg struggles with the new social landscape of middle school, where he feels physically inadequate compared to male classmates who have already gone through puberty. He also feels increasingly preoccupied with popularity. His careful consideration about where to sit on the first day of class, for instance, reveals just how seriously he takes even small decisions that could potentially impact his social status.



Greg’s belief that he can rank the relative popularity of every student in his class is clearly absurd, since measures of popularity cannot be that precise. However, his obsessive evaluation of others reveals his preoccupation with social status.



The story of Abe Hall reveals the high social stakes of fitting in during middle school. Because Abe was thought to have the “Cheese Touch,” he was excluded and bullied to the extent that he ended up moving away, presumably to start over in a new school.



Rodrick’s enjoyment of playing elaborate pranks on Greg mirrors the way that older and more physically powerful kids at his school bully their weaker counterparts. In Greg’s life at school, and even in his family, strength and age often determine who has the power in social relationships.



Friday. Greg is disappointed that he is placed in the “Gifted” reading group instead of the “Easy” group, since the former requires more work. He did his best to convince the teachers that he was a poor reader, but he suspects that his mom got in touch with the principal. Greg’s mom thinks that he is smart but “doesn’t apply himself.” Greg admits that this is true, since he thinks it’s better to keep people’s expectations of him low.

Saturday. Greg wakes up and goes to his friend Rowley’s house. Although Rowley is “technically” his best friend, Greg has been avoiding him since the first day of school, when Rowley came up to him and asked if he wanted to “come over and play.” Despite Greg informing him multiple times that he should say “hang out,” now that they’re in middle school, Rowley doesn’t seem to have gotten the message. Greg and Rowley have been friends since Rowley moved to the neighborhood a couple years ago. Rowley’s mom gave him a book called “How to Make Friends in New Places,” which Greg later used to play jokes on Rowley. Greg claims that he mainly became friends with Rowley because he felt sorry for him.

Monday. Greg resents the attention given to his younger brother, Manny, who can do no wrong in their parents’ eyes. For example, Manny drew a self-portrait on Greg’s door in permanent marker, and he continues to call Greg “bubby,” a nickname that he finds deeply embarrassing. Greg is responsible for helping Manny get ready in the morning, and he observes with dismay that his brother throws his uneaten cheerios in the toilet.

Tuesday. Greg loves playing video games, but his dad thinks he needs to be more physically active and sometimes tells him to go outside. Whenever this happens, Greg goes to Rowley’s house to play more video games—but he can’t play violent video games there, since Rowley’s dad uses a parental lock system. When he gets home, Greg runs through the sprinkler so his dad will think he’s been exercising, but this backfires when his mom tells him to take a shower.

Wednesday. Greg’s dad makes Greg go outside again, and on his way to Rowley’s he runs into Fregley, a “weird kid” who lives near his house. Fregley is in Greg’s P.E. class, and he uses a “secret language” like shouting “Juice!” when he wants to go to the bathroom.

Greg’s mediocre work ethic stops him from reaching his full potential in his academic work. As he admits, he is smart but tries to keep expectations low—perhaps at least in part because he is afraid to distinguish himself in a middle school in which he often feels insecure about his abilities and social status.



Greg increasingly comes to view Rowley as a social liability because, unlike Greg, Rowley seems oblivious to the social pressures of middle school. He is still fairly childish when he talks about going to “play” after school. Greg is obsessed with popularity and social status, whereas Rowley doesn’t seem to care about fitting in. Greg’s habit of making fun of Rowley suggests that he thinks less of his friend because he isn’t “cool.”



Greg is jealous of his younger brother because Manny seems to receive unlimited indulgence and attention from his parents. Manny is only a toddler, but Greg interprets his behavior—like throwing his cereal on the floor—as personal affronts to him, suggesting that Greg is still immature and sees his siblings as competition for parental attention.



Greg’s dad seems eager for him to participate in more traditionally masculine activities, such as sports and exercising outside. However, Greg is resistant to this and uses various techniques to avoid obeying his father. By contrast, the less independent Rowley seems content with the restrictions his parents place on his entertainment.



Although Greg isn’t popular, he thinks that Fregley is more of a social outcast than him. By referring to Fregley as “weird,” he suggests that failing to fit in can have high social consequences.



Greg doesn't mind going outside, since he would have wanted to be out of the house anyway while Rodrick was practicing with his heavy metal band. Their mom supports Rodrick's music, but when she tried to dance to one of Rodrick's CDs, Rodrick started using headphones.

Thursday and Friday. When Greg finds out that Rodrick has bought a CD with a "Parental Warning" sticker, Greg is determined to listen to it. He steals the CD from Rodrick's room and asks Rowley to bring his CD player to school—but it has no batteries, so they can't use it. Instead, they come up with a game to see who can shake off their headphones without using their hands, which they play until a teacher catches them. Greg finally listens to Rodrick's CD, but he forgets to plug in his headphones, and his dad catches him. Greg's dad bans him from playing video games for two weeks. Greg reflects that at least his dad tends to be straightforward in his punishments, whereas his mom tends to wait a while before deciding what his punishment be—and then just when he thinks she's forgotten, she lays it on him.

Monday. Greg is pleased to see that Rodrick is also in trouble with their mom. One of Rodrick's heavy metal magazines had a photo of a woman in a bikini, which Manny then brought into day care for show and tell. As punishment, Rodrick has to answer a list of questions their mom has written out for them, including, "Do you have anything you want to say to women for having owned this offensive magazine?" Rodrick responds, "I'm sorry, women."

Wednesday. Greg is frustrated that he's still banned from playing video games, since Manny now uses Greg's gaming system to play educational games. The one silver lining is that he can use Manny's "Discovering the Alphabet" case to disguise his games when he goes to play at Rowley's house.

Thursday. Student government elections are coming up, and Greg decides to run for treasurer because he thinks the position will give him social influence in the school. For example, he could give the cheerleaders more money for transportation to games, which might make girls like him.

Like Greg, Rodrick wants to feel independent and grown up. For instance, he tries to keep certain hobbies private and free from parental involvement, as when he is irritated by his mother dancing to his heavy metal music.



Greg seems so determined to listen to the CD with a "Parental Warning" sticker precisely because it is not approved for children. In his mind, music that is forbidden must be interesting and exciting. The CD thus represents teenage rebellion against the control of parents. At the same time, however, the ineptitude of Greg's attempt to listen to the CD and prove his independence—first forgetting the CD player batteries, then forgetting headphones—ironically provides proof of his immaturity and childishness.



Even though Rodrick seems very grown-up to Greg, he is still subject to parental authority, such as having to respond to his mother's set of questions about the picture of a woman in a bikini. Greg's mom's choice of punishment suggests that she is concerned about her sons internalizing harmful ideas about women and gender roles.



Parental restrictions don't seem to have much effect on Greg, since he continues to find creative ways to get around the limitations placed on his ability to play his beloved video games.



Almost all of Greg's decisions are motivated by a desire to become more popular. Running for student government—a position designed to allow students to help their peers—is for him an exercise in increasing his social status.



Friday and Monday. Greg finds out that he's running against Marty Porter, which is a problem since Marty is good at math. Greg's dad is excited that he's running for student government, since he had done the same when he was Greg's age. He digs out some of his old campaign posters. Greg likes the poster idea and asks his dad to help him pick up some supplies. But instead of campaign slogans, Greg's posters consist nearly entirely of personal insults against Marty, such as reminding people of his head lice problem in elementary school. The vice principal tells Greg to take the posters down as Marty goes around handing out lollipops to potential voters. Greg declares his political career officially over.

Greg's dad offers a positive example of how Greg might campaign for student government, by articulating a platform that appeals to other students. Greg, however, defaults to the bullying and rumor-mongering that has characterizes his social experience in middle school thus far, by reminding people of Marty's head lice problem. However, this backfires when the vice principal identifies these tactics as bullying and puts a halt to Greg's not very promising political career.



OCTOBER

Monday. It's the first day of October, and Greg is already looking forward to Halloween. He loves trick-or-treating, although his mom says he's too old for it. Greg's dad likes Halloween too, since he hides in the bushes and sprays passing teenagers with water. Greg's mom takes Greg and Rowley to the Crossland High School haunted house. When Rowley shows up, Greg is embarrassed to see that he's wearing his Halloween costume from last year. At the haunted house, Greg and Rowley are frightened by a teenager with a chainsaw. Greg's mom confronts him and gets him to show that the chainsaw is fake. Greg is grateful, although he also feels humiliated.

Greg likes to think of himself as very mature, but in reality he still displays childish behaviors and interests. For example, he still enjoys trick-or-treating for the free candy, although his mom thinks he's too old for it. Similarly, although he thinks he can handle the frightening content of a haunted house, he is terrified by the chainsaw-wielding teenager and is grateful for his mother's intervention, even though his humiliation suggests that he wishes he didn't need it.



Saturday. Greg decides to make a haunted house of his own in Rowley's basement (without parental permission). His ideas include a maze of 1,000 skulls, an acid lake, and a "Hall of Screams." He makes posters advertising the haunted house that claim there will be live sharks. That afternoon, there is a line of kids waiting to visit the haunted house. Greg charges them two dollars instead of fifty cents, sensing a business opportunity. Greg and Rowley admit a kid named Shane Snella into the "Hall of Screams," which is a bed with him and Rowley on either side of it. Shane is terrified and hides underneath the bed. Rowley's dad comes downstairs and shuts down the haunted house, but Greg is pleased that at least they made two dollars.

From the beginning, Greg and Rowley's haunted house is clearly a bit of a scam, charging local kids two dollars for their hastily thrown together displays. In this way, they are more concerned about their own self-interest than the value they are bringing to others. When Shane enters the haunted house, they are insensitive to his age and fears and they end up terrifying him—prompting Rowley's dad to shut down the haunted house, thinking they are bullying Shane. Greg's focus on their two dollar profit suggests that he hasn't quite learned his lesson.



Sunday and Tuesday. Rowley is grounded as a punishment for the haunted house, and Greg is annoyed that he can't play video games at Rowley's house anymore. To make it up to Rowley, he gives him a play-by-play of one of his favorite television shows over the phone. Greg admires Rowley's new knight costume, which comes with a sword and shield. Greg admits that his own costumes are usually more haphazard and last-minute, like a toilet paper mummy or a cowboy with two baseball caps. However, he says that he has to spend most of his time planning the best trick-or-treating route designed to gather the most candy.

Halloween. Greg is still stumped about his costume, but his mom brings him a pirate costume at the last minute. Rowley's mom, meanwhile, has made so many "safety improvements" to the knight costume that it doesn't look much like a knight anymore. Greg's mom tells him to take Manny with him on the trick-or-treating trip, which leads to Greg's dad coming as well, along with a neighbor friend. Greg is frustrated by their slow progress as a result of having the adults and the "little kids" along." After the rest of the group goes home, he and Rowley make up for lost time by trick-or-treating until 10:30 P.M. that night.

On their way home, Greg and Rowley have a run-in with a few teenagers who spray them with a fire extinguisher from a pick-up truck. After Greg shouts that he's going to call the cops, Greg and Rowley flee to Greg's grandmother's house, pursued by the teenagers. Greg's mom calls to say they have to be home, so they run home, this time narrowly escaping the pick-up truck. After this ordeal, Greg's dad drenches them with water, ruining all their Halloween candy.

NOVEMBER

Thursday. When the school bus passes by his grandmother's house the next day, Greg sees that the teenagers have covered it in toilet paper. He feels bad, although he assumes that his grandmother doesn't have much to do besides clean it up anyway, since she's retired.

Greg is not always the best or most loyal friend to Rowley. For instance, although it was Greg's behavior that got Rowley in trouble in the first place (he suggested that they open the haunted house), he doesn't do much for Rowley when he's grounded except telling him about television shows that Rowley is no longer allowed to watch. This is hardly going to make Rowley feel better, although Greg seems to think it will—suggesting his lack of sensitivity to his friend's needs.



Greg is frustrated that the group of younger kids is slowing down his trick-or-treating progress, since he and Rowley are supposedly old enough to go out on their own. Ironically, however, they aren't exactly entirely independent: Rowley is wearing a Halloween costume sewn by his mom, with "safety improvements." Furthermore, they are going in search of free candy, an activity usually associated with children.



Greg and Rowley are gratuitously bullied by local older teenagers, presumably just because the teenagers are bored and spend their time spraying younger kids with a fire extinguisher. In this sense, the community of Greg's middle and high school clearly perpetuates a cycle of bullying in which older kids pick on their younger peers.



Greg's lack of concern about his grandmother's house suggests his continuing immaturity and selfishness, since he's more focused on what's on his mind than the experiences of others.



Wednesday and Thursday. In anticipation of a wrestling unit in physical education, Greg begins practicing some moves at home with Rowley. He doesn't want to get too good, however, remembering the case of a star athlete whose name, P. Mudd, became the subject of weeks of mockery. The wrestling unit is less glamorous than Greg anticipated, since it involves sweaty mats and the wearing of humiliating "singlets," or swimsuit-like garments. The girls are separated from the boys and placed in a gymnastics class. Worse, the only person lightweight enough to wrestle Greg is Fregley, who has been paying attention in class and pins Greg easily.

Tuesday. Wrestling has taken over the school, even involving matches during lunch breaks. Greg is annoyed at having to wrestle Fregley every day, but he has no escape since they are the only two people in their weight class. Greg tries to bulk up by stuffing t-shirts under his clothes, but when that doesn't work, he decides to try to actually build muscle (thinking that such a change in his physique will also serve him well in football season in the spring). He asks his parents for a weight set, but Greg's mom stipulates that he has to prove he can stick to an exercise regimen by doing sit-ups and jumping jacks every day for two weeks.

Saturday. Greg makes an improvised bench press and barbells from old milk cartons and boxes. He invites Rowley over for a workout session. To test Rowley's dedication to weightlifting, Greg puts on a fake mustache and glasses. Sure enough, Rowley loses his concentration—causing Greg to conclude that he just isn't as serious about weightlifting.

Wednesday. Greg is excited for a quiz in geography on US state capitals, since he sits next to a map of the US. Unfortunately, a girl in the class, Patty Farrell, points this out to the teacher, who covers the map. Greg flunks the quiz and expresses the desire to "pay her back" for that one.

Thursday and Friday. Greg's mom makes Greg sign up for the school play, since she thinks trying different activities will make him more "well-rounded." Greg protests that this will interrupt his weightlifting schedule and looks to his dad for support, but he is overruled. Greg arrives to try out for "The Wizard of Oz," where he auditions with a group of boys "whose moms made them come." The teacher, Mrs. Norton, remarks on his "soprano" voice, which makes the girls giggle and embarrasses him. Greg sees Patty trying out for the role of Dorothy and hopes he'll be cast as the bad witch so he can do mean things to her.

Greg's anxiety about wrestling is linked to a fear of bullying. Kids can be bullied for not being physically strong enough, like him—or they can even be bullied for being too good at sports, like P. Mudd. The wrestling unit is a particular cause of anxiety for Greg too because it requires him to test his physical strength against other boys. The fact that no girls are in this class suggests its associations with strength and performances of masculinity.



Greg is dismayed to find that the wrestling unit has influenced the social world of the middle school outside of Physical Education class. He is embarrassed at having to wrestle the "weird" and unpopular kid Fregley because they are the only two people in the same weight class, suggesting that he links athletic performance and strength to social status. These social pressures give Greg a newfound enthusiasm for working out to try to change his physique.



Greg's laughable attempt at weightlifting suggests that his desire to work out is not related to enthusiasm for the activity. Rather, he hopes to improve his athletic performance and raise his social status by becoming more physically intimidating.



Greg's anger at Patty for stopping him from cheating reveals his immaturity. Rather than applying himself to academic tasks in school, he would rather find ways to get around doing the work.



Greg seems worried that singing and acting aren't activities traditionally associated with boys, and that being in the play will make him vulnerable to bullying. This fear is realized by Mrs. Norton saying he has a high "soprano" voice, which makes the girls laugh. At the same time, however, his plan to bully Patty suggests that he participates in the same behaviors that others use to make fun of him.



Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Greg is disappointed when Mrs. Norton says that everyone who auditioned will receive a part. He decides that he would like to be a tree—since he won't have to sing or dance, and he can throw apples at Patty as Dorothy. He finds that many of the other boys have also signed up to be trees. Ultimately, however, he is disappointed, since the tree costume has no arms and he can't throw apples at all. Although Greg has to go to a two-hour practice every day, he only has a single line—"ouch." He tries to think of a way to get Mrs. Norton to kick him out of the play, but thinks it's hard to mess up a single line.

Greg is too embarrassed to perform because he is afraid that people will make fun of him—so he is pleased that Mrs. Norton casts him in the play as a non-speaking tree. This fear is seemingly shared by other boys, who also ask to be cast as trees. And yet he still seems to harbor some desire to participate in the play, since he is annoyed at only having one line. This suggests that he might be repressing his natural desires to perform because of a fear of social consequences.



DECEMBER

Thursday. The play rehearsals are not going well. For one, no one has bothered to learn their lines, since Mrs. Norton keeps prompting them from the sidelines. Also, Mrs. Norton keeps adding new characters and songs—including a song for the trees, to Greg's dismay—because she thinks everyone "deserves" a chance to sing in the play. Greg is thankful that Rodrick won't be there to see Greg humiliate himself. The one upside to all this is that the tree costumes now have armholes, so he can throw apples at Patty.

Mrs. Norton is enthusiastic about theater and wants everyone to have a chance to perform, oblivious to the social terror experienced by the students. Greg is particularly worried about singing in public because he is afraid of the reaction of his brother Rodrick, who tends to make fun of him and play pranks on him. Ironically, though, Greg also plans to bully Patty by throwing apples at her.



Tuesday. On the night of the play, several things go wrong at once: one student has stage fright, and the student who plays Toto brings a book onstage. Greg is embarrassed that Rodrick has come to see him sing. Perhaps even worse, Manny shouts "bubby," potentially making the whole school aware of his embarrassing nickname. Thinking quickly, Greg attributes the nickname to his friend Archie Kelly.

Greg is so terrified that his classmates will find out about the "bubby" nickname that he pretends the name is in reference to his friend Archie. This opportunistic move demonstrates just how important popularity and social perception are to Greg.



Tuesday and Wednesday. Seeing that Rodrick is videotaping the song and will mock him, Greg simply refuses to sing, and the other trees follow suit. Mrs. Norton tries to remind them of the lines, but instead, Greg and the other trees begin throwing apples at Patty. The apples knock off Patty's glasses, and the play has to end, since she can't see without them. That night, Greg's mom throws the bouquet of flowers she had bought for him in the trash. The next day, Greg is pleased to see that Archie is being made fun of for the embarrassing nickname instead of him.

Although Greg is frequently a victim of bullying, here he mirrors the same behaviors that have victimized him. He throws apples at Patty, knocking off her glasses and ruining her star performance. He also pins the "bubby" nickname on his friend, which Archie is then mocked for, showing his disregard for others. Greg's mom throws his flowers in the trash, suggesting she is disappointed with his bullying behavior.



Sunday. After all this excitement, Greg remembers that Christmas is coming up, and it's time to make his wish list. Manny circles every toy in the catalogue, which Greg thinks is a bad strategy, since then his parents might just get him terrible gifts like clothes. Greg remembers a time when he was seven and he really wanted a Barbie Dream House as a fort for his toy soldiers. Greg's mom was supportive, but Greg's dad was uncomfortable and asked Greg to choose toys that were "more appropriate for boys." Greg asked his Uncle Charlie for the Barbie Dream House instead, but to his dad's dismay, Uncle Charlie simply bought Greg a Barbie—which Greg admits that he played with "once or twice."

Thursday and Christmas. Greg's mom takes Greg to the Giving Tree, a gift donation program for the homeless. She donates a red woolen sweater, which Greg thinks is a terrible gift, since he hates getting clothes for Christmas. On Christmas morning, Greg is disappointed with his gifts—which are mostly books and socks—while noting that Manny "made out like a bandit" and got almost everything he asked for. Greg gives books to Rodrick and Manny and a generic "#1 Dad" coffee cup to his parents, and Rodrick gives Greg the "Lil Cutie" comic—which he knows Greg hates. Greg hopes that his Uncle Charlie will give him better gifts, but Uncle Charlie simply gives him a large framed picture of Uncle Charlie himself. Greg's dad gives him the biggest gift—a brand-new weight set—but Greg doesn't have the heart to tell him that he has already lost interest in weightlifting.

Greg thinks one final wrapped present will contain the Twisted Wizard video game, but instead he finds that it contains a red woolen sweater intended for the homeless man, since Greg's mom accidentally swapped their gifts and gave the video game to the homeless man instead. Greg re-gifts the "Lil Cutie" book to Rowley but is disappointed with the gift Rowley gives him, a "Big Wheel" toy scooter. He is also jealous that Rowley has received the Twisted Wizard game.

New Year's Eve. Greg resentfully explains that he is grounded on New Year's Eve because he told Manny that a small black ball of thread was a spider. Manny ate the "spider" and told Greg's mom, who was furious even though Greg tried to explain that the thread wasn't a real spider.

Greg's request for a Barbie Dream House for Christmas is threatening to his father, who would rather that Greg would play with toys that are more "appropriate" for boys. His use of the word "appropriate" suggests that he thinks Barbie products are for girls, and boys should play with more masculine toys. Greg admits, however, that he liked playing with the Barbie that Uncle Charlie bought him—even though his father clearly felt that his son should adhere to a more traditional ideal of masculinity.



Greg's unhappiness with his gifts demonstrates his childishness and lack of maturity. He still sees Christmas as a holiday primarily oriented around gift receiving rather than giving gifts, as demonstrated by his lack of interest in donating gifts at the homeless shelter. He also seems to put little effort into the gifts he gives his family, since he gives his parents a set of generic coffee mugs. His jealousy of his younger brother reveals that he is still preoccupied with who in the family receives the most gifts, which similarly prioritizes giving over receiving.



Greg continues to be immature and less than generous around Christmastime, as when he is annoyed that a homeless man has received the video game intended for him. He doesn't put much thought into the gift he gives Rowley either—he simply re-gifts the unwanted "Lil Cutie" book he had received from Rodrick.



Greg often feels that Manny is the beneficiary of unfair favoritism. This suggests that he still desires parental attention and sees his siblings as competition, rather than trying to care for his younger brother.



JANUARY

Thursday. Greg's mom tells Greg that he has to write thank-you notes before he can go over to Rowley's house. Greg has a hard time with this, since he hated all his gifts. He types up a form letter on his computer, but this causes problems when it generates phrases like "all my friends will be so jealous that I have my very own pants."

Friday and Monday. Greg knocks Rowley off the Big Wheel, accidentally breaking his hand. Rowley has to wear a cast, which generates a great deal of sympathy at school. For instance, girls invite Rowley to sit at their table so they can feed him. Greg tries to "cash in on some of Rowley's newfound popularity" by telling everyone that he was the one who broke Rowley's hand, but he is just called a "meanie."

Tuesday. Jealous of Rowley's popularity at school, Greg tries to fake an injury to garner similar sympathy. However, telling people he has a "raging infection" doesn't seem to work, since people just find it disgusting. He thinks the problem is that he doesn't have a cast to sign, so asks people to sign his "sympathy sheet," which is similarly unsuccessful: the only person who is interested is Fregley.

Monday and Tuesday. Greg signs up for a class called Independent Study. He'd rather take Home Economics 2, since he is good at sewing, but he found that this didn't make him any more popular. On the first day of class, the teacher tells the students they will be building a robot. Greg brainstorms some ideas for a robot that will do chores for him, while the girls want to design a robot that dispenses lip gloss. The guys think this is "the stupidest idea we ever heard," so they split into a separate group from the girls. Now that all the "serious workers" are together, they come up with a list of the swear words the robot shouldn't be able to say. When the teacher comes back, he is less than pleased with this list and cancels the class for the rest of the year.

Thursday. At school, the students watch a film called "It's Great to Be Me," which Greg thinks is pretty bad advice, given how many kids are bullied for being who they are. It occurs to him that if he joins the Safety Patrol—a group of students who escort people across the street—he won't be bullied because he'll be in a "position of authority." He and Rowley sign up to walk kindergarteners home from school, which will also conveniently allow them to miss part of Pre-Algebra class.

Greg has a difficult time feeling and expressing gratitude, which demonstrates that he lacks the maturity to see outside his own interests and experiences. Rather than thinking about other people's feelings, he tends to prioritize his own.



Although Greg desperately wants to be popular, he displays a comical lack of understanding of social relationships and how to make friends. Telling everyone that he broke Rowley's hand unsurprisingly fails to make people like him more.



Greg tends to value social relationships and friendships for what they can bring him—in the form of high status and popularity—rather than making meaningful connections with people. This explains why his attempts to generate sympathy don't meet much success, since he is faking an injury to try to become more popular.



Greg actually enjoyed and was successful in his Home Economics class, which taught domestic skills like cooking and sewing. However, since those skills are more typically associated with girls, kids made fun of Greg for being good at sewing and he chose not to continue. The rigidity of gender roles in Greg's middle school is also demonstrated by the separation between boys and girls in the robot-building class. Greg and the boys think the girls' ideas are stupid, although it is actually the boys who get the class cancelled by generating a list of robot swear words.



Greg thinks that the message of "It's Great to Be Me" has little relevance in his middle school, where his classmates strive to fit in rather than show what makes them unique. This is because deviation from social norms can lead to bullying and isolation. There is no point in "being yourself," Greg points out, if people don't accept that authentic version.



Tuesday. Greg and Rowley take advantage of the free hot chocolate available to Safety Patrols in the morning, even though their shift isn't until the afternoon. As they walk the kindergarteners home, one of the children tells Greg that he's had an accident, but Greg ignores him, claiming that he didn't sign up for "diaper duty."

Greg clearly only cares about being on the Safety Patrol because he wants to have a position of power in the school that might raise his social status, not because he cares about kindergarteners—as demonstrated when he ignores one child who tells him he's had an "accident."



FEBRUARY

Wednesday and Thursday. It's a snow day, and Greg is excited about building the "world's biggest snowman" with Rowley. Their snowball is so big that it tears up the turf on Greg's lawn, angering Greg's dad. Greg's dad is annoyed even further when Greg throws snow at Manny, so he takes out his shovel and destroys Greg and Rowley's snowball. Rowley is mad at Greg for getting them in trouble, so they get into a shoving match—until they are both hit by snowballs from a group of kids passing by.

Greg's dad takes issue with Greg throwing snow at Manny because a toddler is too young to fight back. Ironically, he metes out similar behavior—destroying Greg and Rowley's snowball with a shovel. Greg and Rowley are then hit with snowballs by other kids, demonstrating the way that kids in Greg's life both perpetrate and are victimized by bullying behavior.



Wednesday and Thursday. The school announces an opening for a cartoonist for the school newspaper. Greg is eager to take the slot, since he thinks it will make him a "celebrity" at school. He once won honorable mention in a competition to draw a cartoon for an anti-smoking campaign, so he thinks he has a good shot. Greg and Rowley decide to write a cartoon together but have trouble coming up with actual jokes. Greg comes up with the idea to write a cartoon in which the punch line is always "Zoo-Wee-Mama," which Rowley loves, even though Greg eventually gets tired of it.

As usual, Greg is motivated to do something because he thinks it will make him more popular and raise his status in the social hierarchy of the middle school. But although Greg tries out for school cartoonist because he wants to become a "celebrity," he in fact shows significant enjoyment of comics and drawing. In this sense, his pursuit of popularity might be less effective than developing his own authentic interests.



Friday. Greg comes up with an idea for another comic called "Creighton the Cretin," which makes fun of the "idiots" at his school. He turns in the comic to the teacher who runs the school newspaper, Mr. Ira, making sure to hide the comics he thinks might be better than his under a pile of paperwork on the teacher's desk.

Greg is so desperate to become school cartoonist—and reap the ensuing social benefits—that he deceives Mr. Ira and hides the comics of other students, demonstrating once again his obsession with social status.



Thursday. Greg's scheme backfires spectacularly when Mr. Ira chooses to publish his comic—but with some "minor edits." These edits involve entirely changing the comic strip beyond recognition. In the original, Creighton the Cretin ate a math test, whereas in Mr. Ira's version, Creighton explains fractions.

Despite his efforts, Greg's edited comic does not give him the popularity he craves. This points to the pitfalls of engaging in activities for their supposed social benefits, since Greg's schemes to become more popular rarely yield the desired effects.



MARCH

Wednesday. Rowley gets in trouble with Mr. Winsky for reportedly “terrorizing” the kindergarteners during Safety Patrol. What Mr. Winsky doesn’t know is that it was actually Greg who terrified the children with a worm—he was misrecognized by a neighbor because he was wearing Rowley’s hat. Greg thinks that maybe he should come clean, but he doesn’t want to lose his hot chocolate privileges. That night, Greg’s mom can tell that something is bothering him. She comes up to his room and tells him that he should make the right choice, since it’s choices that make us who we are.

Thursday. Greg decides to “let Rowley take one for the team” this time, so Rowley has to apologize to the kindergarteners. He tells Rowley after school that he was the one who chased the kids with the worms, and that there are valuable lessons to be learned from this: Rowley should be more careful about who he lends his hat to. Greg senses that Rowley might be mad at him, because Rowley declines to hang out after school. When Greg gets home, he says that he did “the right thing,” and his mom takes him out for ice cream as a reward.

Tuesday. Mr. Winsky calls Greg to his office and tells him that an “anonymous source” has revealed that he was “the real culprit in the worm-chasing incident.” He fires Greg from Safety Patrol and reinstates Rowley. Greg quickly figures out that the anonymous source was probably Rowley, and is incredulous that his best friend would “backstab” him like that. He thinks of teaching Rowley a lesson about loyalty, but instead he decides to play nice in a bid to get Rowley to take him to Six Flags later in the year.

Wednesday. Greg has now lost his hot chocolate privileges, and worse, Rowley doesn’t make any effort to give him some hot chocolate in the mornings. He notices that Rowley has been giving him the cold shoulder and doesn’t want to play in the snow anymore.

Greg’s mom tries to teach him to do the right thing, prioritizing obligations to others—like his friend Rowley—rather than his self-interest. However, Greg still seems unable to see beyond his own desires, to the extent that he would rather preserve his hot chocolate privileges than help his friend. This demonstrates his immaturity and self-centeredness.



For Greg, doing the “right thing” means choosing to protect himself and his own interests. His immaturity blinds him to his friend Rowley’s feelings, so he is unable to figure out why Rowley is angry with him and doesn’t want to hang out after school. Clearly Greg has trouble forming and maintaining adult social relationships, a limitation which has consequences for his friendship with Rowley.



Greg comically and immaturely misunderstands the nature of loyalty between friends. Instead of thinking that he should be loyal to Rowley and own up to his mistakes, he expects Rowley to cover for him. This demonstrates that he sees his friendship with Rowley as an arrangement that is always primarily on his terms, rather than acting for their mutual benefit.



Greg finally begins to understand that his friendship with Rowley has been compromised. This shows some personal growth and self-awareness on his part, although he still doesn’t seem to feel remorse for his actions.



APRIL

Friday. Since the Safety Patrol incident, Rowley has been hanging out with Collin Lee every day after school instead of Greg. This particularly annoys Greg because “Collin is supposed to be MY backup friend.” Rowley and Collin have even taken to wearing matching “Best Friends” t-shirts and having sleepovers. Greg decides to try to find a new best friend to prove that two can play at the game, but the only person who comes to mind is Fregley. Greg tries to have a sleepover with Fregley, but this backfires when Greg finds that Fregley is even stranger at home. Fregley stabs a kite with a stick, steals Greg’s jelly beans, and chases him around with a booger on his finger. Greg eventually escapes Fregley’s house at 2:00 A.M., when he is sure that Rowley and Collin won’t see him leave.

Monday. Greg claims that he is better off without having to carry around Rowley’s “dead weight,” socially. Looking through Rodrick’s old middle school yearbook, Greg sees superlatives like “Most Popular” and “Most Talented.” He decides that although this school year hasn’t exactly been all he hoped, he’ll “go out on a high note” if he can be voted a Class Favorite. He’ll also have eternal fame. After all, Greg adds, the winner of “Most Likely to Succeed” is still treated like “something special,” even though he dropped out of high school.

Wednesday. Greg admits that “Most Popular” is definitely out of his reach, so decides to go for “Class Clown.” He’s not exactly known for being funny at school, but thinks that one good prank should be able to put him over the top.

MAY

Thursday and Friday. Greg is thrilled by the news that the students will have a substitute teacher in history class, since he thinks subs are easy to play pranks on and thus are “comic gold.” However, he is horrified to find out the next day that the substitute teacher is actually his mom, who likes to get involved at the school.

Wednesday. Greg had resigned as school cartoonist after Mr. Ira’s intervention, and he is shocked to see that his replacement is none other than Rowley. The “Zoo-Wee-Mama” strip is incredibly popular with students, who laugh over it during lunch. Greg is jealous that Rowley is getting “all the fame that was supposed to be mine.”

Greg describes Collin as a “back-up friend,” so it is humiliating for him when Rowley begins to prefer the company of someone who Greg had considered socially beneath him. Indeed, Greg had rarely shown much respect for either Rowley or Collin, but now that they seem to be enjoying their own friendship without him, he begins to feel jealous. His efforts to show that he has other friend options are a dismal failure, suggesting that his friendship with Rowley was very significant in his life, although he tended to discount how much Rowley meant to him.



Greg claims that Rowley was dragging him down in the school’s social hierarchy. However, his distress at Rowley’s abandonment suggests that he did really care for him. He copes with his sadness and feelings of abandonment by embarking on a new project in pursuit of popularity—winning a superlative in the class yearbook—although past precedent indicates that this won’t be much of a success.



Greg’s belief that a single prank will win him a superlative in the yearbook suggests that he thinks popularity is a prize to be won, rather than a result of meaningful relationships with others.



Greg is dismayed to find that he can’t play pranks on the substitute teacher—because the substitute is his mom. His embarrassment at his mom’s presence suggests that he has the usual adolescent desire to have a space free from parental interference, even as he still needs his mother’s support in some situations.



In an ironic twist, the “Zoo-Wee-Mama” strip is very successful, proving that Greg might have real talent at cartooning. His anger at Rowley’s newfound popularity, however, shows that Greg is still fixated on social status as a metric of his self-worth.



Monday. Greg confronts Rowley and accuses him of stealing the “Zoo-Wee-Mama” idea, but Rowley refuses to put his name on the comic as co-creator. As they argue, a group of kids gathers around them and starts urging them to fight. Both are clearly unwilling, and before anyone throws a punch, a group of teenagers pulls up in the parking lot. Greg realizes with horror that these are the same teenagers that chased him and Rowley on Halloween.

The Cheese is only a few feet away from where they’re standing on the basketball court. One of the teenagers drags Rowley over to the Cheese and makes him eat it. They try to make Greg eat it too, but Greg thinks quickly and claims he is lactose-intolerant. After making Rowley finish the Cheese, the teenagers drive away, and Rowley and Greg walk back without saying anything.

Tuesday. At school the next day, the students quickly begin speculating about how and why the Cheese vanished. Greg suspects that some of the students will eventually figure out that he and Rowley had something to do with it. Rowley starts to panic, knowing that the social consequences for eating the Cheese will be severe. But Greg steps up and takes the blame, telling everyone that he was the one who threw away the Cheese—even though this means he now has the **Cheese Touch**.

JUNE

Friday. Since getting the **Cheese Touch**, life hasn’t been too bad for Greg. He and Rowley are friends again, and he didn’t have to square dance in P.E. because no one would partner up with him. The school yearbook finally comes out, and the “Class Clown” is not Greg but Rowley. Greg throws the yearbook in the trash. He is jealous but somewhat good-natured, and writes that he would only ever tell people about the Cheese incident if Rowley got “too big for his britches.”

Greg and Rowley are pressured by their classmates to fight, although neither of them seem inclined to do so—showing that peer pressure has a great deal of power in the school. But this bullying behavior pales in comparison to the teenagers who pick on younger kids for their own amusement.



The teenagers bully Greg and Rowley by coming up with a punishment that combines physical intimidation with social humiliation. By eating the Cheese, Rowley is not only doing something disgusting but also condemning himself to social outcast status, since touching or eating the Cheese gives him “the Cheese Touch.”



For once, Greg puts another person above his own self-interest. By telling everyone that he was the one who touched the Cheese, he protects Rowley at the cost of exposing himself to bullying and exclusion. This demonstrates significant personal growth, since until now Greg has never made a decision that considered anyone’s interest but his own.



It turns out that having the Cheese Touch is not in fact the disaster that Greg feared. He loses his chance at popularity but re-gains the friendship of Rowley, which ultimately means more to him than social status. This suggests that Greg is maturing and growing into a more loyal friend, since he increasingly values the important people in his life, like Rowley, rather than looking for the approval of his wider peer group.





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