

## Wimpy Kid author Jeff Kinney: 'I've sold 300m books. What's next?'

### Level 1: Elementary

#### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- What books did you enjoy reading as a child? Why?
- Have you ever read any of the Wimpy Kid books? Did you enjoy them?

#### 2 Key words

a. Match the words in bold in the article to the following definitions.

1. short, funny stories that are told to make people laugh \_\_\_\_\_
2. an event where a famous person writes their name in books for fans \_\_\_\_\_
3. available for people to buy or see for the first time (for books, films, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
4. the stress or worry you feel when you have too much to do \_\_\_\_\_
5. published as a book, magazine or newspaper \_\_\_\_\_
6. without many jobs or opportunities (of a place or area) \_\_\_\_\_
7. the written text of films, including the words and instructions \_\_\_\_\_
8. to learn how to do something after practising \_\_\_\_\_

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.

1. The author is doing a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ event at the bookshop on Saturday, so fans can meet her.
2. After a few lessons, I started to \_\_\_\_\_ the guitar and could play some simple songs.
3. The new film was \_\_\_\_\_ in cinemas last Friday.
4. Dan grew up in a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ part of the city where many shops were closed.
5. The \_\_\_\_\_ to finish the project on time was making everyone unhappy.

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6. Greta Gerwig wrote the \_\_\_\_\_ for the movies Barbie and Little Women.
7. My grandfather's \_\_\_\_\_ always make me laugh.
8. This novel has been \_\_\_\_\_ for over 50 years.

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#### Stuart Heritage

01 February, 2026

- 1 Jeff Kinney is at a **book signing** event for Partypooer, the 20<sup>th</sup> book in his Diary of a Wimpy Kid series. Every copy has the phrase "Over 300 million books sold" on it.
- 2 Before he first created Wimpy Kid – about the adventures of a student called Greg Heffley – Kinney was a software engineer. When they **released** it, it became a huge success.
- 3 Now 54 years old, Kinney is both very tall and very polite. And, for someone who has to be extremely rich, quite normal. He could quite easily be a friendly teacher, or someone who runs a small business.
- 4 Every new Wimpy Kid book is an event. For some authors, this may cause stress, but Kinney doesn't seem to mind. "I wouldn't call it **pressure**. It's a nice place to be."
- 5 As well as the books, he also writes the **screenplays** for all of Disney's Wimpy Kid movies. He says this is what keeps the books feeling fresh. "My first few books are just like a collection of **jokes**," he smiles. "I didn't care that much about telling a good story. It wasn't until book 12 that I started to **get the hang of it**."
- 6 If that wasn't enough, Kinney also works as a town planner. When his books started to take off, he used some of the money to open a bookshop in his hometown. And when the store became a success, he decided to branch out to the whole region.
- 7 "The downtown is very **depressed**," he says. "So what we're doing is we're building. We just finished a beer garden, and now we're gonna put in a pizza restaurant, and then we're going to create a town green and some other things too."
- 8 I ask him if he has a number of books he'd like to write before he moves on. "There were two goals; one was book 20, and the other was 300 million books **in print**. I didn't ever think beyond that. And now I've gotta say, what's next?"
- 9 "When you look at what I've created, it's a cartoon character," he goes on. "Cartoon characters go on for a long time. "I'm very lucky that I don't have to introduce myself to the public when I have a new book, and I like that better."

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Read the article and decide if the statements are True or False.

Jeff Kinney ...

- |  |              |
|--|--------------|
| 1. worked in the tech industry before he became a writer.        | True / False |
| 2. feels stressed about writing a new book every year.           | True / False |
| 3. opened a bookshop in a different city from where he lives.    | True / False |
| 4. thinks his early books were better than his recent ones.      | True / False |
| 5. believes that being famous makes it easier to sell new books. | True / False |

#### 4 Key language

a. Read the article again and decide which definition is correct in the context of the article.

- move on
  - to change the subject in a conversation
  - to stop doing one thing and start doing something different
- take off
  - to become very successful suddenly
  - to leave the ground (of an aircraft)
- branch out
  - to become interested in something new
  - to remove a part of a tree
- go on
  - to talk without stopping
  - to continue for a long time

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5. put in
  - a. to build something in a place
  - b. to remove something from a place

#### b. Complete the sentences with phrasal verbs from task a.

1. Some businesses \_\_\_\_\_ quickly, while others need more time.
2. The company wants to \_\_\_\_\_ into new markets such as Asia and the Middle East.
3. Vernon's been in the same job for ten years, but now he is ready to \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Our weekly meetings always \_\_\_\_\_ for too long and everyone gets tired.
5. Our neighbours want to \_\_\_\_\_ a new kitchen.

### 5 Discussion

#### a. Discuss these questions.

1. Do you prefer reading books or watching films? Why?
2. Do you think children read more or less than they did in the past? Why?

### 6 In your own words

#### a. Research and present a book series for children or young adults that has been popular and that you think is good for kids to read.

##### Step 1: Identify the book

- Find the basic information about the series, such as the author, title and number of books in the series.
- Briefly describe the story and characters.

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#### Step 2: Brainstorm ideas on why it is valuable

- Think of the reasons this series is fun and interesting to read for young people.
- Think about the reasons why this book is good for kids to read.

#### Step 3: Prepare a presentation

- Put your information into a short presentation.
- Practice giving your presentation.

b. Present to your classmates or group. Which book series sounds interesting to you?