

## Dear Digital Diary: 'Wimpy Kid' e-books coming

October 15 2012, by Hillel Italie

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This image released by Abrams Books for Young Readers shows the animated character Greg Heffley from the "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" book series. Creator Jeff Kinney, a major e-holdout among children's authors, has agreed to make his illustrated, top-selling series about middle schooler Greg Heffley available electronically. The first six volumes of "The Diary of a Wimpy Kid" are coming out Oct. 30 as e-books. The new novel, "Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Third Wheel," comes out simultaneously as a hardcover and an e-book on Nov. 13. (AP Photo/Abrams Books for Young Readers)

(AP)—The "Wimpy Kid" is returning to his digital roots.

"Diary of a Wimpy Kid" creator Jeff Kinney, a major e-holdout among children's authors, has agreed to make his illustrated, top-selling series about the trials of middle schooler Greg Heffley available electronically.

"The decision came after a lot of thought and deliberation," Kinney said during a recent telephone interview. "I am very excited about this. It feels like the time is right."

The first six volumes of "The Diary of a Wimpy Kid" are coming out Oct. 30 as [e-books](#). The new novel, "Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Third Wheel," comes out simultaneously as a hardcover and an e-book on Nov. 13.

In the post-Harry Potter era, few series have been as popular with young people as the "Wimpy Kid" books. According to Amulet Books, an imprint of Abrams, more than 75 million copies are in print worldwide. Even with an e-edition coming out, Abrams CEO and president Michael Jacobs says the first printing of the new book will be the same as for the previous one—6 million hardcovers, likely the highest for any release of 2012 and far more than the 3.5 million copies Disney announced for Rick Riordan's latest, "The Mark of Athena."

"We see this as a multiple purchase. Kids will want the e-books in addition to the hardcovers," Jacobs says. "If they're in a car for instance, they'll read the books on their e-book device, or on their parents' e-book device."

Kinney noted that his books actually were born online. He initially published his stories for free on the educational Web site [www.funbrain.com](http://www.funbrain.com), back in 2004, when the e-book market was almost non-existent. Millions of kids read his work and the first hardcover, simply titled "Diary of a Wimpy Kid," was released commercially in 2007.

The digital market for children's books remains smaller than for adult books, but sales and technology have improved enough to convince everyone from Rowling to the authors and publishers of such enduring

series as "Clifford the Big Red Dog" and "The Berenstain Bears" to permit electronic editions.

Kinney's reasons for waiting mirror the objections many authors have had. He had philosophical concerns, believing that kids should have the "tactile" experience of holding books in their hands. And he didn't think the devices were adequate for the drawings that accompany and help define his narratives.

But, like Jacobs, he believes that e-books will complement hardcovers, rather than replace them. And he appreciated the proliferation and improvements of iPads, Nooks, Kindle Fires and other tablets.

"I've been working very closely with Amazon and Apple and Barnes & Noble to make sure the books look right for the format. It's almost exactly like the hardcovers, if not exactly," he says, adding that for now there would be no interactive or other added digital features. "We don't want to distract from the humor of the books, which are very reliant on timing. If we ever do something supplemental, it will have to be something special."

The author himself doesn't bother much with e-books. He likes audio, for practical reasons. He works constantly, sometimes 17 hours a day, on his "Wimpy Kid" stories and doesn't have the chance to sit down and read.

"Illustrating my [books](#) is incredibly intense and audiobooks help me survive that process," he says.

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Citation: Dear Digital Diary: 'Wimpy Kid' e-books coming (2012, October 15) retrieved 26 April

2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-10-dear-digital-diary-wimpy-kid.html>

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