

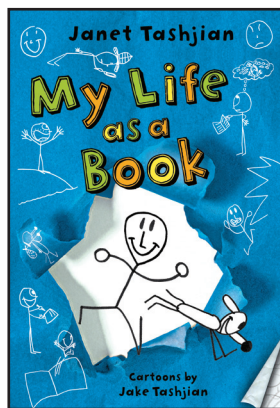
# My Life as a . . . Series



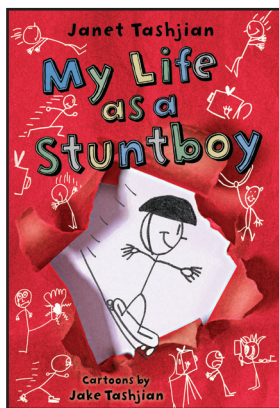
Common  
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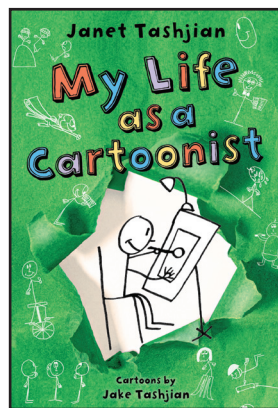
Prepared by Maureen Connolly & Janet Tashjian



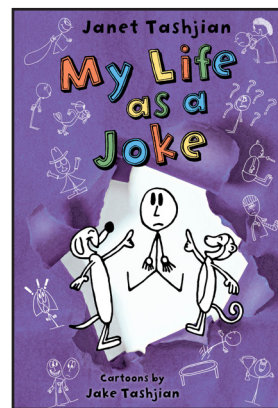
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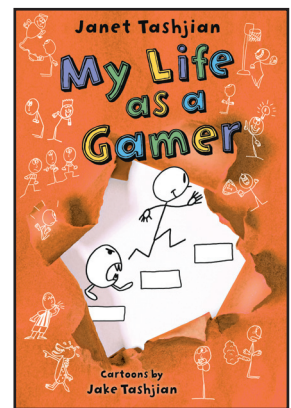
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This Teacher's Guide to the My Life as a . . . series provides resources and ideas to strengthen students' understanding and critical thinking regarding the books' central ideas and themes. The recommended assignments are designed in accordance to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS OF THIS GUIDE

**Maureen Connolly, Ed.D.**, is a professor of education at The College of New Jersey. She is the coauthor of *Getting to the Core of English Language Arts, Grades 6-12: How to Meet the Common Core State Standards with Lessons from the Classroom* and *Getting to the Core of Literacy for History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, Grades 6-12*. She lectures and consults with schools around the country to guide teachers about using creative means to help students reach the Common Core State Standards. As a consultant with CBK Associates, Maureen develops book guides like this one, integrating Common Core State Standards. For more information, visit [www.cbkassociates.com](http://www.cbkassociates.com).

**Janet Tashjian** has written chapter books as well as middle-grade and young-adult novels. She often speaks at NCTE and ALA on the subject of reluctant readers. Her My Life as a . . . series which is illustrated by her teenage son, has a main character who is dealing with reading disabilities. In writing the series, Janet utilized many strategies for struggling readers, including the acclaimed Lindamood-Bell's *Visualizing and Verbalizing* and Dr. Maryanne Wolf's *Rave-O Intervention Program*. Her chapter book, *Einstein the Class Hamster*, is a fun way to introduce and integrate nonfiction topics into the classroom. She has spoken to hundreds of thousands of students during her two decades of doing school visits.

Christy Ottaviano Books



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[mackids.com](http://mackids.com)

# INTRODUCTION

The My Life as a . . . series is about the adventures of a twelve-year-old with a reading disability who draws his vocabulary words in order to learn them. In this curriculum guide, you will find handouts that link directly to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts and Literacy in the Content Area. The Guide Notes for Handouts explicitly state which CCSS are being met through each activity; by choosing these books and engaging in these activities, you are doing more than helping your students meet state standards. You are helping them examine the connection between visual and textual information, as well as dozens of other subjects, including friendship, special needs, physical disabilities, and community. The handouts are applicable to all the books in the My Life as a . . . series. Use them again and again as you and your students continue to share Derek's adventures. This guide also invites students to take action to help in their school and community through service learning, all based on these stories. For more information about service learning, visit [www.cbkassociates.com/resources/](http://www.cbkassociates.com/resources/) and download The Five Stages of Service Learning: A Dynamic Process.

## GUIDE NOTES FOR HANDOUTS

### READING ACTIVITIES

#### Create Your Own Comic Strip (Page 4)

This handout helps students differentiate main ideas and details and use quotes to draw inferences about the text. Students list three main ideas in the chapter and quote text that helps make these ideas clear. You may want to take this opportunity to teach proper citation of page numbers for the quotes and the use of additional single quotation marks when quoting dialogue. Once students have noted the main ideas of the chapter and supporting quotes, they can sketch their own comic strips. Take time to consider how best to lay out the story and set expectations clearly. It may not make sense to include all their quotes in the strip. Discuss how best to make these decisions.

CCSS R.1

#### Sensational Similes (Page 6)

Use this handout to support students' thinking about the effects of Tashjian's use of figurative language. Students locate similes throughout the text and evaluate the effect of these similes on their understanding and emotions. Then they reverse the process by creating a simile to represent a portion of the text that they choose.

CCSS R. 4

#### Vocabulary Visuals (Page 8)

The drawings throughout the books help to make vocabulary more accessible for readers. This handout provides students with an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of some of the vocabulary words in the book by writing their own sentences and by creating their own illustrations. You may want to encourage students to post their vocabulary illustrations around the classroom or to keep them in a journal.

CCSS R.7

**Service Learning Idea** Students can also think about who would benefit from their making vocabulary flash cards. For example, a set of cards could be helpful to English language learners, younger students, or for people with special needs.

## WRITING ACTIVITIES

The CCSS call for three types of writing—opinion, narrative, and informative/explanatory. To help you and your students engage in the writing process, prewriting handouts for each type of writing are included in this curriculum guide. After students complete the prewriting handouts, they may develop a full essay. Use the revision handout to support revision/editing. Publishing options range from displaying written work in the classroom to creating media presentations that include illustrations and recorded voice.

CCSS W5, S&L5

### Kids and the Internet (Opinion) (Page 13)

This writing activity provides students with an opportunity to write their opinion as to whether or not the internet is good for kids. It is important for students to make a direct statement of belief followed by reasons to support their opinions. They can strengthen their writing by including research that connects with their reasons. Note that students are going beyond the use of the internet for their research. They are interviewing a person of their choice. You may want to help students develop criteria to help them decide who to interview. Once students have gathered their ideas and completed the organizer, encourage them to use linking words and phrases in their writing.

CCSS W1

**Service Learning Idea!** Students can submit their research on kids and the internet to school officials to help them make recommendations. Students can also create posters to become advocates for how best to use the internet, and when it's time to turn off all electronic devices.

### Service Learning Plan (Inform/Explain) (Page 12)

Students use the questions listed to help them organize a letter or a proposal for service. The questions help students think through all five stages of service learning. Suggestions for service learning connections are listed below.

- Draw vocabulary cartoon cards for younger students.
- Create a book or brochure or posters about how to replace bullying with friendship.
- Develop a collection or fundraising campaign

### The Next My Life as a...! (Narrative) (Page 10)

Students write a narrative about what they think should happen in the next My Life as a . . . book. As opposed to the opinion piece above, here students develop a creative narrative. The prewriting checklist parallels the CCSS standards for narrative writing. For example, the initial words provided on the handout (first, then, after that, finally) support clear sequencing; the similes appeal to sensory details, and students are encouraged to include dialogue. The similes and vocabulary on the checklist also reinforce some of the skills developed in the reading handouts.

CCSS W3

### Technology Connections

- [Janettashjian.com](http://Janettashjian.com) and [janettashjian.com/links-and-resources/](http://janettashjian.com/links-and-resources/)
- [www.cbkassociates.com](http://www.cbkassociates.com) and [www.cbkassociates.com/abcd-books/](http://www.cbkassociates.com/abcd-books/)
- [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)



# CREATE YOUR OWN COMIC STRIP

Choose a chapter from your reading. Use the main ideas and details to create your own comic strip.

STEP 1: Determine two or three main ideas in the chapter. Quote some descriptive language or some dialogue that supports these main ideas.

Example from *My Life as a Book*:

1. Main Idea: *Derek doesn't want to read, so he escapes to the attic.*

Support: *"I DON'T WANT TO READ THIS BOOK!"* (Tashjian, 1)

2. Main Idea: *He finds a newspaper article about a girl who drowned, and his mom won't tell him why she saved it.*

Support: *"LOCAL GIRL FOUND DEAD ON BEACH"* (Tashjian, 3)

3. Main Idea: *He thinks that if his life were a book, he'd have cool adventures.*

Support: *"If I were the main character in an exciting story rather than some kid who has to sit around and READ all day, I'd spend the summer trying to find out how that girl in the newspaper ended up dead."* (Tashjian, 5)

1. Main Idea: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Support: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Main Idea: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Support: \_\_\_\_\_

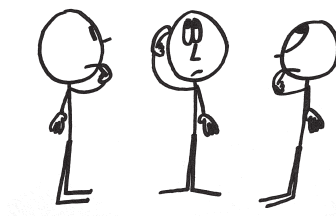
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Main Idea: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Support: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



**STEP 2: Plan out your frames.**

Decide how best to represent the story in six to eight frames based on the main ideas you listed already. You may need more than one frame to represent some of the main ideas. Be sure to include dialogue in some of your frames by using the details that you listed above.


# SENSATIONAL SIMILES

Derek uses a lot of similes to describe how he feels. These similes appeal to our senses and help us understand Derek better. Be on the lookout for similes as you read. Tell how they affect your understanding and/or your emotions. Be sure to cite by including the author's last name and page number in the parentheses provided.

Example from *My Life as a Stuntboy*:

Simile: "The first day of school is always the worst day of the year. It's like some crazy surgeon throws you on an operating table and removes a major organ from your chest called summer."

(Tashjian, 1)

Effect on my understanding and/or my emotions: *This helps me understand how much Derek hates school.*

1. Simile: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

( \_\_\_\_\_ )

Effect on my understanding and/or my emotions: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Simile: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

( \_\_\_\_\_ )

Effect on my understanding and/or my emotions: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Simile: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

( \_\_\_\_\_ )

Effect on my understanding and/or my emotions: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Simile: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

( \_\_\_\_\_ )

Effect on my understanding and/or my emotions: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Your turn!

Create your own simile based on your reading. Tell what is happening in the book. Then write a simile that helps describe Derek's thoughts or feelings.

Tell what part of the book you are describing with your simile:

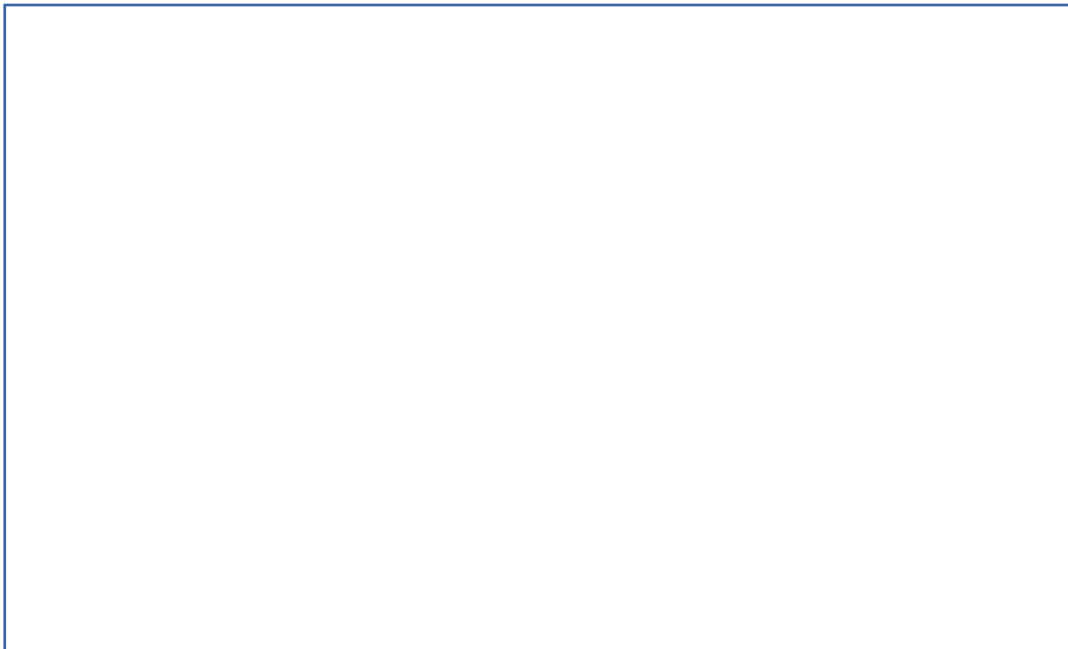
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Simile: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**BONUS!** Add a drawing to go along with your simile.



# VOCABULARY VISUALS

Do Derek's drawings help make words clearer to you? Choose five words from the text and use them in a sentence of your own. Illustrate the words in a new way.

Word: \_\_\_\_\_

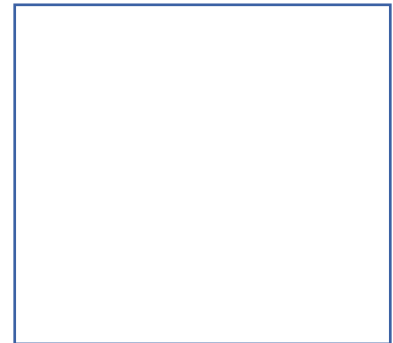
Page: \_\_\_\_\_

My new sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



My Illustration

Word: \_\_\_\_\_

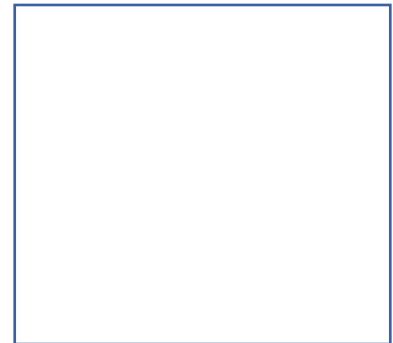
Page: \_\_\_\_\_

My new sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



My Illustration

Word: \_\_\_\_\_

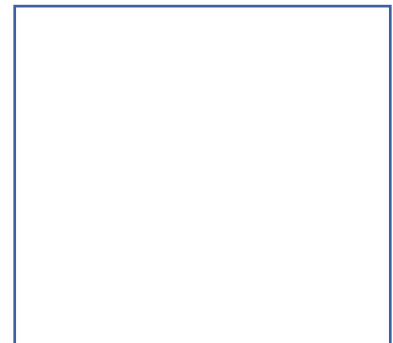
Page : \_\_\_\_\_

My new sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



My Illustration



Word: \_\_\_\_\_

Page: \_\_\_\_\_

My new sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



My Illustration

Word: \_\_\_\_\_

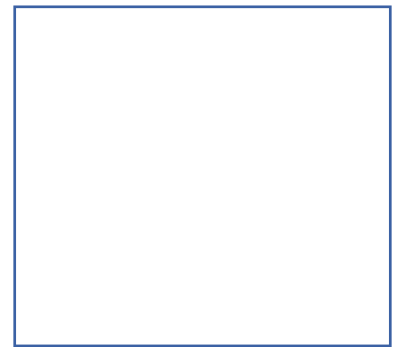
Page: \_\_\_\_\_

My new sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

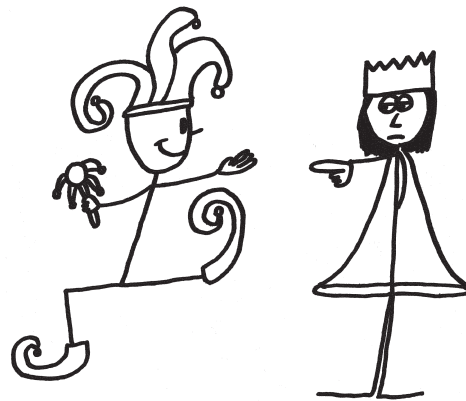
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



My Illustration



# THE NEXT MY LIFE AS A . . . !

If you were Janet Tashjian, what would be your next *My Life as a . . .* book? What do you think Derek should do next? Fill in the blank in the title below, and start writing! Use the checklist below to plan Derek's next adventure.

*My Life as a* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ List your main characters:

---

---

---

---

\_\_\_\_\_ Tell the conflict in this story:

Example: In *My Life as a Cartoonist* the conflict is that Umberto bullies Derek.

---

---

---

\_\_\_\_\_ List the major events in the plot below:

First

---

---

---

Then

---

---

---

After that

---

---

---

Finally

---

---

---

\_\_\_\_\_ Include two similes that appeal to your senses:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

---

2. \_\_\_\_\_

---

\_\_\_\_\_ Include three vocabulary words:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Where is there room for dialogue in your story? Use the space in the left margin to draw dialogue bubbles next to the plot events above, and add dialogue.



# SERVICE LEARNING PLAN

In the *My Life as a . . .* series, there are many ways that Derek tries to help others. Now, it is your turn to help out. Use the questions below to think about your ideas. Then develop a plan of action as a class. Use the Service Learning Proposal at [cbkassociates.org](http://cbkassociates.org) to write up the plan to share with a person who can help you move your idea forward (a teacher, a coach, the librarian, the principal).

## **Investigation—Find out what is needed.**

Who do you want to help? Hint: Derek helped by replacing bullying with friendship. That's one idea of what may be needed.

What did you learn about this topic by reading a *My Life as a . . .* book?

What can you read to learn more about this topic?

Who can you interview to learn more about this topic?

What do you know from your own life about this topic?

## **Preparation—Get everyone ready with the skills that are needed.**

What skills do kids in your class already have that they can use?

What kind of skills will kids need to learn?

Do you need to advertise your idea to others?

What important facts will you include in your advertising?

## **Action—Create your plan to something good for people, the planet, or animals.**

Use the Service Learning Proposal to describe your plan.

Tell the different jobs that people will have.

Provide a timeline.

Monitor your progress! How are things changing because of your action?

## **Reflection—Along the way, pause to think and feel about your ideas and actions.**

What new ideas do you have from what is happening?

How do you feel about all this?

What needs to be changed as you make your plan come to life?

What are you learning along the way?

## **Demonstration—Capture the story and tell others.**

After you complete the steps above, how will you think about and discuss how things went?

Gather photos and comments along the way and use these to tell your story of helping others!

# KIDS AND THE INTERNET

## BACKGROUND

There are several scenes in the *My Life As a . . .* series that deal with kids using the internet. In *My Life as a Book*, Derek uses the internet to find information about the babysitter who died. He also posts on a page in her memory. In *My Life as a Stuntboy*, Matt uses the internet to bully Derek by posting an embarrassing video. He also posts cool videos of Derek. In *My Life as a Cartoonist*, Derek's parents use the internet to find some information on bullying. In *My Life as a Joke*, Derek uses the internet to sell the doll he collected for the shelter.

## WRITING PROMPT

Develop an essay in which you explain whether or not the internet is good for kids.

## GETTING STARTED

The answer to this question is not simple. Sometimes the internet is good, and sometimes it can have a negative effect on kids. Use information from what you've read in the *My Life as a . . .* series and from your own experience to support your opinion. Also, conduct research. You can use online sources, but go further. Interview someone about this topic too. People you might consider interviewing include but are not limited to a teacher, a librarian, or a parent. You can also conduct a survey to find out what other people think.

Use the questions to guide your search for information and for your interview or a survey:

1. What are some good ways to make sure the information that you find online is reliable?
2. What questions should you ask yourself before posting something online?
3. What should you do if you are being bullied online?

Add your own questions below:

4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Use these pages to organize your ideas for your essay. Be sure to cite your sources.

### Introduction

Clearly state your opinion:

---

---

---

## Body Paragraph

Reason 1:

---

---

A fact from your research that supports this reason:

---

---

( \_\_\_\_\_ )

Reason 2:

---

---

A fact from your research that supports this reason:

---

---

( \_\_\_\_\_ )

Reason 3:

---

---

A fact from your research that supports this reason:

---

---

( \_\_\_\_\_ )

## Conclusion

Restate your opinion and connect it with the reasons listed above. Maybe you will want to include a quote from one of the My Life as a . . . books in your conclusion.

---

---

When you write your essay, remember to use linking words and phrases to connect your opinion and your reasons. Here are some good linking words and phrases:

consequently	specifically	because
for example	therefore	since

List your research sources below

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## REVISION

Double-check your writing! Place a checkmark next to each of the following if you think your writing includes:

- \_\_\_\_\_ A topic sentence
- \_\_\_\_\_ Strong reasons and details
- \_\_\_\_\_ Clear and powerful language
- \_\_\_\_\_ A concluding sentence
- \_\_\_\_\_ Word variety
- \_\_\_\_\_ Accurate punctuation

What else could be on our checklist? Add something else you think is important to look for.

Even professional writers have to revise their work! View Janet Tashjian's video about revision at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fWPx-C6gsE>