

WELCOME TO YOUR WRECK THIS JOURNAL CLASSROOM PACKET!

INSIDE YOU'LL FIND:

- A LETTER TO STUDENTS FROM AUTHOR KERI SMITH
- SAMPLE PROMPTS FROM WRECK THIS JOURNAL TO SHARE WITH STUDENTS
- CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
- SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES
- AN INTERVIEW WITH KERI SMITH

AND MORE!

HELLO...

So, here you are...on the precipice of complete ruination, and you have no idea what a beautiful thing that is. I can only imagine how different my adolescent years would have been if someone had given me permission to wreck.

When I was a kid, I shut down all of my artistic inclinations, for fear that they would not be as good as I wanted. I gave up when things didn't turn out the way I hoped because I had very high expectations, ones that I often could not live up to. I believed at the time in the standards that the world had given me, that I needed my work to be "GOOD."

But "GOOD" is not always the point, you see. My years of creating messes have proven that. In truth, it is often when we are experimenting and goofing around, when we least expect it, that the interesting stuff comes out. "GOOFING OFF" can be the source of great ideas.

Some may say the activities in the following pages, drawn from my book *WRECK THIS JOURNAL*, are too obvious. It is true that some of the things I ask you to do may seem ridiculously simple—AT FIRST. Drawing lines while you're moving or riding the bus, for example. Take a moment to play with the laws of gravity. Throw yourself off balance on purpose. How does that feel? I wish for you to experience the moment of giddiness when you try something that feels completely ridiculous and silly. But these experiments can become completely addictive.

And here lies one of the great problems with wrecking things—you become addicted. Well, maybe not addicted, but definitely attached. Wrecking means you can unleash your destructive, slightly unbalanced self, something that no one has ever asked you to be before. If you do it with abandon, you may end up with only a few pieces of dirty paper pulp. And that would be a beautiful thing. Because with wrecking, it is the journey that is most important, not the final results. And what a crazy ride it is!

ARE YOU READY?

GOOD.

SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE.

.....

Your partner in destruction,

KERI SMITH

THIS PAGE IS FOR HANDPRINTS
OR FINGERPRINTS.

GET THEM DIRTY THEN PRESS DOWN.

TRACE THE THINGS
IN YOUR BAG (OR POCKETS).
LET THE LINES OVERLAP.

draw lines while in motion,
on the bus, on a train, while walking.

FILL THIS PAGE WITH CIRCLES.

this page is a sign.

what do you want it to say?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

GENERAL QUESTIONS...

What does it mean to create something?
What things have you created in the past?

What does it mean to wreck something?
What are some definitions for the word wreck?
What are some synonyms for the word wreck?
What things have you wrecked in the past?

Is it easier for you to create or to wreck? Why?

Do you think creating and wrecking can be the same thing? How?



THE CREATIVE PROCESS...

What are the properties of a blank page or blank canvas?

What do you think when you see a blank page or canvas? Are you excited?
Scared or intimidated? Bored? Neutral? Why?

How do you get your creative juices going?

What is creative/writer's block? How do you get over it?
Can the idea of wrecking something help you with creative/writer's block? How?

What is revision? How do you tackle it?
Can the idea of wrecking something help you with revision? How?

What is a journal?

Do you keep a journal? How is this book like or unlike your journal?



IF YOU HAVE THE BOOK...

In *Wreck This Journal*, there's a list of things that you need, including "happenstance" and "gumption." What are "happenstance" and "gumption"?
Why do you think you need them to wreck a book?

There's a statement in *Wreck This Journal* that says, "To create is to destroy."
What do you think that means?

Wreck This Journal is "Dedicated to perfectionists all over the world."
What is a perfectionist? Are you a perfectionist?
Why might a perfectionist like or dislike some of the activities in the book?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- Start a class copy of *Wreck This Journal*. Keep it in a space where students can pick it up and add to it, wrecking the book together. Lend the book out to other classes to see what they come up with. Ask guests to take a hand at wrecking a page or two. Schedule dates for each student to take the journal home overnight. Bring the journal on class fieldtrips.
- Pass around a giant sheet of paper and encourage each student to wreck it in some way. The challenge? There still has to be something to pass on when they're done.
- Encourage kids to start a picture or a piece of writing. Then, encourage them to completely destroy it or wreck it. Talk about how it feels... Is it liberating, frustrating, something else? Why?
- Brainstorm a list of more ways to wreck things, and apply some to the book or a blank journal.
- Encourage your students to research journaling and diary keeping, from some of the earliest diary keepers (*The Book of Margery Kempe* and Samuel Pepys) and famous diary keepers (Anne Frank) to today's versions (Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr). How has the form evolved over time?
- Encourage students to share their creative results. Send pictures of your wrecked journals to PerigeeBooks@us.penguingroup.com.



AN INTERVIEW WITH KERI SMITH



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WHAT GAVE YOU THE IDEA FOR WRECK THIS JOURNAL?

I actually created the journal for myself. I was contemplating why, when I started out as an artist, I was unable to do any consistent journal work, and several years later, I was filling journal after journal, unable to stop. What had changed? The answer, I believe, was that at first I approached the journal as a perfectionist, worried about making it look good. Later on, after questioning my methods, I challenged myself to treat the journal as a place where anything goes. An experiment in the truest sense of the word.

Our culture teaches us that perfection is most desirable and that imperfect things are less desirable. Over time we create a set of standards to reach this perfection, standards that none of us can possibly live up to. And when we don't live up to them, we have a tendency to beat ourselves up or become critical (which can lead to depression). The goal for me became to question those standards: Were they real?

I used to become frustrated when I would make a mistake or when a drawing didn't turn out the way I had intended. Now, I know this is a natural part of creating. With *Wreck This Journal*, I wanted to consider what would happen if I approached creation from the perspective that imperfections aren't just beautiful but actually necessary to make my work unique.

This is where the need to treat everything as an experiment came in. When kids create things, they treat everything as part of the exploration process (not a means to an end). Children see creation as more of a journey—"What if I add blue to the page?"—whereas adults place value on the final product.

Through my research into my journaling process and standards, I was introduced to the ideas of John Cage, who incorporated in his work the concept of indeterminacy, a process by which the artist gives control over to some other means (decisions are determined by chance operations, such as dice, I Ching, or randomness). I became interested in this concept as a way for [me] to let go and not control my own work.

I put it into practice. At first I played around with not controlling the medium as much, letting ink wander and roll around the page, adding water, dropping things. Then it evolved into letting work become altered by outside influences, weather, etc. More recently, I've been incorporating happenstance, finding objects out in the world. All of these exercises were used in *Wreck This Journal*, and I continue to work with them on a daily basis.



AN INTERVIEW WITH KERI SMITH

DID YOU ALWAYS WANT TO BE A WRITER?

In many ways I don't really consider myself a writer. I started as an illustrator, but now I see myself more as a purveyor of ideas. I like to distill things and present them in new formats. I don't like to limit myself to one medium, and I remain open to working with all kinds of different mediums.

WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR IDEAS FOR BOOKS?

As Anaïs Nin said, "in the midst of living." They happen when I am not necessarily trying to come up with ideas, often presenting themselves to me when I am least expecting it.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE PEOPLE WILL GAIN FROM *WRECK THIS JOURNAL*?

I think the beauty of *Wreck This Journal* is that people bring themselves to it and end up creating something that reflects their own journey. I hope that they will experience a feeling of letting go during the process of creative destruction, which can often lead to a bit of giddiness. I truly believe that when you begin to challenge yourself to try new things on a small level, it eventually translates into bigger things in your daily life. *Wreck* can help you go a bit deeper in your own self-awareness, if you let it.

Often the pages we are most afraid of doing can tell us a bit about where our personal fears lie. For example, many people are really good at the addition pages ("Collect fruit stickers here"), but tend to avoid the subtraction pages ("Poke holes in this page" or "Lose this page"). One is not better than the other, but it can be interesting to note which pages you dislike or avoid completely. That is probably the place you most need to go in order to experience the greatest "letting go."

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PROMPT IN THE BOOK?

My favorite prompt is one of the new ones in the expanded edition ("Hide this page in your neighbor's yard"), because it turns the destruction experience into a covert operation. I also really enjoy "Drop the journal," because it has the most chance of total ruin.



AN INTERVIEW WITH KERI SMITH

WHAT HAS SURPRISED YOU MOST ABOUT CREATING
WRECK THIS JOURNAL?

The public response to it, and the sharing of the pages. *Wreck* was meant to be a personal project, something you could work on by yourself for yourself. I was surprised when lots of people started sharing their pages on social networking sites (Flickr, Facebook, Tumblr, etc.). Then groups adopted it as a tool for overcoming perfectionism. *Wreck This Journal* began to take on a life of its own, completely outside of its “role” as a book. Now it is a conversation, a part of a journey, an experiment, a personal challenge, a shared challenge, a dare, a secret, a way of altering daily life.

WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF WRITING OR CREATIVITY ADVICE
YOU’VE EVER BEEN GIVEN?

Do something else. The subconscious mind is always working on things for you and will often present things to you when you are doing something else.

Walking is particularly good for this. My grade twelve history teacher (who I still am in contact with) told me to go for a long walk for more than an hour to let the ideas flow and to stop thinking. I wrote down a quote recently by the author Annie Proulx, “Walking induces a trancelike state that allows the mind freedom and ease and encourages exploration of odd possibilities and improbable connections.”

I also find procrastination highly effective. When I am supposed to be working on a project I get my best ideas for new projects.

WHAT EDUCATORS ARE SAYING ABOUT KERI SMITH AND WRECK THIS JOURNAL

"I am a middle school librarian and want to use a couple of your ideas with my kids...You are now at the top of my creative guru list! My personal opinion is that if we taught children how to think creatively it would solve our education woes!"

"I happened upon your book *Wreck This Journal*, fell in love with it, and used many ideas for my students."

"My students are traditionally ESL students, recent immigrants, or disadvantaged American born minorities. *Wreck This Journal* jumped out as holding so many learning possibilities to involve our group with hands-on, fun, and non-traditional activities."

"I stumbled upon *Wreck This Journal* last week while diligently searching for books for my sixth grade [special ed.] students. I am always looking for creative teaching tools to use within the classroom...I want to use your book!"

WHAT STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS ARE SAYING ABOUT KERI SMITH AND WRECK THIS JOURNAL

"You have helped me in the process of opening my eyes in the world that we live in and making me realize things I never realized before. You have helped me discover my creative side, and think and discover and learn."

"I am a twenty year-old university student...If I had to take a possession to a desert island, *Wreck This Journal* would be the item."

"*Wreck This Journal* is so amazing! Whenever I got mad I would take my anger out on the book instead of my little brother."

"I'm a fine art major, and the art department sometimes feels so suffocating that I fear for my and my friends' creativity...Your definition of creativity makes me want to try the scariest things possible."

"My twelve-year-old son picked up the book the other night and read through it cover to cover. This was amazing because my son is dyslexic, reading is difficult for him, and he usually gets bored by anything he doesn't find tremendously engaging. He asked for his own copy right away."

"My ten-year-old son asked if I would buy him *Wreck This Journal*. I kept saying, 'Hold on, which book? Does it have batteries?' (Because usually his books include calculators, stickers, pop ups.) I bought him the book and when we got home, he spent hours on the pages—spitting, ripping, scribbling, poking holes..."

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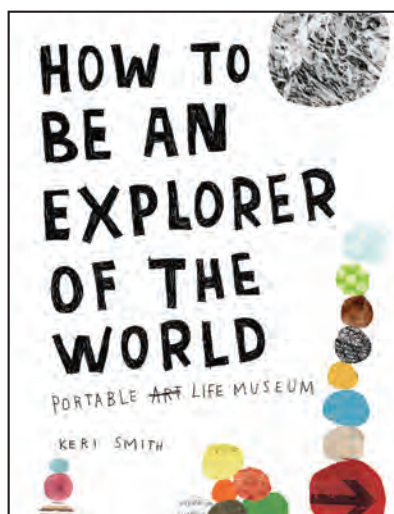
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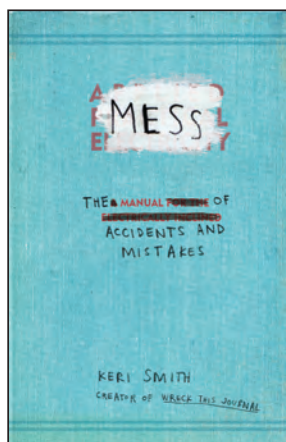
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