

# THE SMARTEST KID IN THE UNIVERSE

"Chris Grabenstein just might be the smartest writer for kids in the universe."  
—JAMES PATTERSON

**CHRIS GRABENSTEIN**

A NEW SERIES FROM THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING  
AUTHOR OF *ESCAPE FROM MR. LEMONCELLO'S LIBRARY*

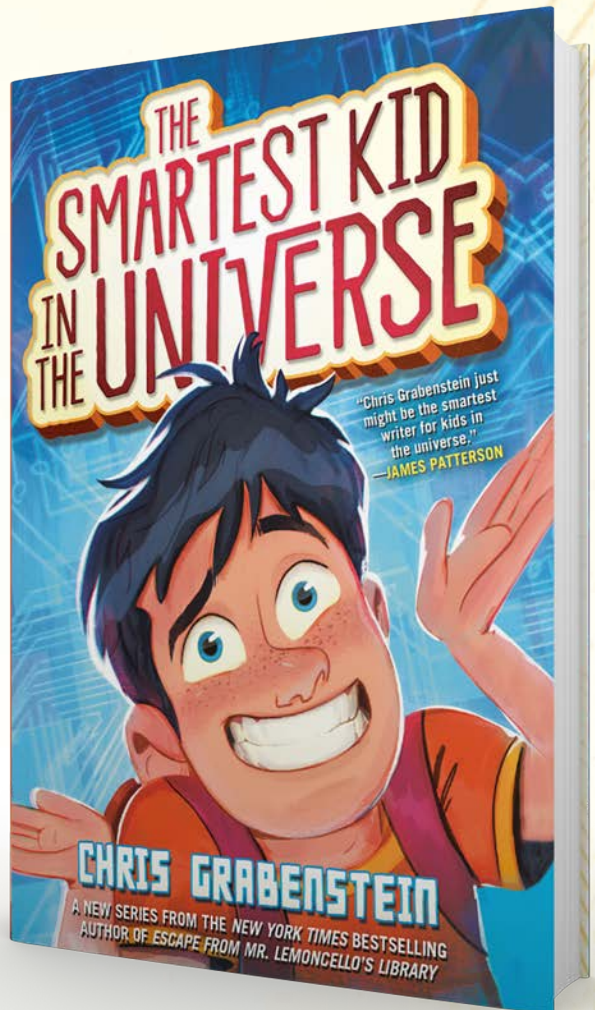
EDUCATORS' GUIDE

## ABOUT THE BOOK

*“For centuries, humans have consumed information through our eyes and our ears. . . . Here is my prediction: In the not-too-distant future, we are going to ingest information. . . . You won’t need to read a book or attend lectures. . . . The chemicals in these pills will do your learning for you.”*

Twelve-year-old Jake’s middle school is about to be shut down. Jake and his friends know their school is worth saving—if they could only figure out how! When Jake spies a bowl of jelly beans at the hotel where his mom works, he eats them. But uh-oh—those weren’t just jelly beans; one of the scientists at a conference is in the process of developing the first ingestible information pills. And THAT’S what Jake ate.

Before long, Jake is the smartest kid in the universe. But the pills haven’t been tested yet. And when word gets out about his new genius, people want him. The government. The mega corporations. Not all of them are good people! Can Jake navigate all the ins and outs of his newfound genius (not to mention the ins and outs of middle school!) AND use his smarts to figure out how to save his school? (Hint—it will take someone smart enough to decipher an almost forgotten pirate legend!) It turns out, sometimes even the smartest kid has a lot to learn!



Grades 3–7 • HC: 978-0-525-64778-2 • GLB: 978-0-525-64779-9 • EL: 978-0-525-64780-5



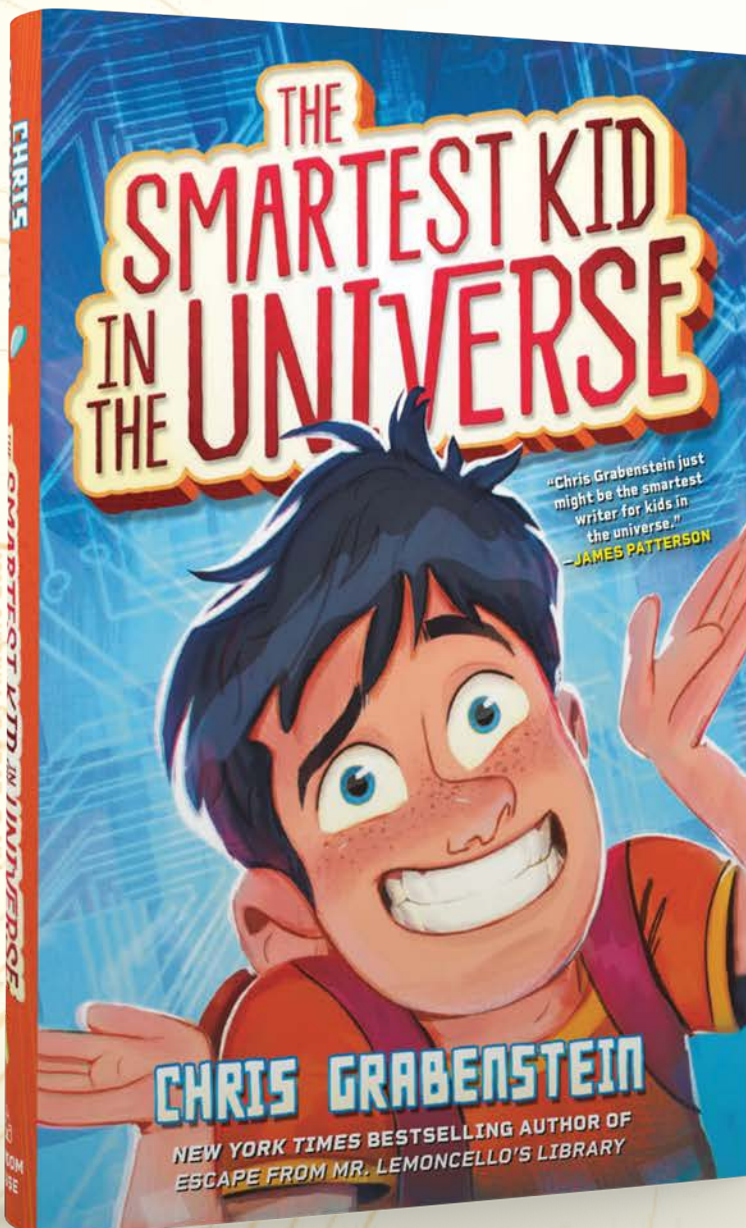
Elena Seibert

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Chris Grabenstein** is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Mr. Lemoncello and the Welcome to Wonderland series, as well as the coauthor of many page-turners with James Patterson, including the Max Einstein series. He also wrote *Shine!* with his wife, J. J. Grabenstein. Chris lives in New York City. Visit Chris at [ChrisGrabenstein.com](http://ChrisGrabenstein.com) and on Twitter at [@CGrabenstein](https://twitter.com/CGrabenstein).

“CHRIS GRABENSTEIN JUST MIGHT BE  
THE SMARTEST WRITER FOR KIDS  
IN THE UNIVERSE.”

—JAMES PATTERSON



★ “A MULTISTRANDED  
CROWD-PLEASER.”

—*Booklist*, starred

★ “Grabenstein delivers once again...  
with a book that will appeal to even  
the most reluctant readers.”

—*School Library Journal*, starred

“CLEVER, CONCISE,  
AND COMPELLING.”

—*Kirkus*

“A humorous love letter to public  
education and dedicated teachers.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

# INTRODUCTION

*The Smartest Kid in the Universe* is a hilarious tale of middle schoolers, jelly beans, greedy adults, and a pirate’s treasure. All these elements create an action-packed adventure that readers won’t be able to put down. Jake is a regular kid . . . until he accidentally eats the world’s first ingestible information jelly beans. Find out what happens when a typical middle school boy suddenly knows everything about history, math, science, and more. This just might be the smartest adventure in the universe!

Chris Grabenstein is an award-winning, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author with a lengthy list of

accomplishments. His fast, fun escapades will take you to wacky places and engage your imagination. What’s his secret? He’s still a kid at heart and has been writing for most of his life. No jelly beans necessary!

The smartest teachers in the universe can use *The Smartest Kid in the Universe* in distance learning, too! Ideally, these activities would be done in person, but we know smart teachers like to be prepared for anything! This guide includes additional resources and options for an entirely online adventure.

## BEFORE YOU READ

### Meet Chris Grabenstein

What makes Chris Grabenstein unique? Every author has a style—something that sets them apart. Before reading *The Smartest Kid in the Universe*, discover what makes this author special. Where does he draw inspiration from? How does he build a story, and what makes his stories so engaging? Listen to this podcast to gain insight into the creative process of Chris Grabenstein. Be sure to listen to the bonus episode, too! [storyseedspodcast.com/podcast-episodes/viewfromtop](http://storyseedspodcast.com/podcast-episodes/viewfromtop)

Create a list of quotations from the podcast, and post them around your classroom. Once you begin reading *The Smartest Kid in the Universe*, mark each quotation with the page numbers where the writing technique or book theme or idea he mentions can be found.

Here are some quotes that align well with *The Smartest Kid in the Universe*.

- “I start all of my stories by stroking my chin and saying, ‘What if . . . ?’”
- “Nobody wants to read stories about nice people having a nice day.”
- “Stories are all about characters. . . . Get your character up a tree. Once he’s up that tree, throw rocks and stones and sticks at him, and give him one problem after another.”
- “The facts that he digs up help [Chris Grabenstein] figure out the rules of the imaginary world.”
- “We want to like our main characters, and sometimes, to like the main character, you need to make the things around him not so likable.”

**DISTANCE LEARNING TIP:** If posting the quotations around the room is not possible, share an editable chart (see below) that includes each of the quotations. Readers can add the evidence as they read the story.

Chris Grabenstein Quotes	Evidence/Examples from <i>The Smartest Kid in the Universe</i>
“I start all of my stories by stroking my chin and saying, ‘What if . . . ?’”	Chris Grabenstein may have asked himself, “What if a kid accidentally ate jelly beans that were made by a scientist who made Ingestible Knowledge?”
“Nobody wants to read stories about nice people having a nice day.”	

## IQ INQUIRY

Jake McQuade is the smartest kid in the universe! Explore the process of measuring a person's intelligence. What makes a person smart? Is there more than one kind of intelligence? Take a deep dive into the world of intelligence quotients. Do you think IQ scores are a good way to measure intelligence?

Article about IQ and its importance:  
[sciencenewsforstudents.org/article/what-iq-and-how-much-does-it-matter](https://sciencenewsforstudents.org/article/what-iq-and-how-much-does-it-matter)

Video about IQ: [youtu.be/7p2a9B35Xn0](https://youtu.be/7p2a9B35Xn0)

IQ Assessment example: [literacy.net.org/mi/assessment/findyourstrengths.html](https://literacy.net.org/mi/assessment/findyourstrengths.html)

Invite readers to discuss the following questions:

- What does *smart* mean? Who decides?
- How do we determine if someone is smart?
- Is there only one kind of smart? Why do you believe this?
- How is intelligence measured?

After reading the book, discuss the different ways Jake demonstrated his intelligence.

- How do his friends show their intelligence?
- How can intelligence be measured?
- Are some forms of intelligence intangible?

**DISTANCE LEARNING TIP:** Have students look up online IQ tests (they can take them, or not!). Ask students to submit a paragraph explaining what they think makes a person intelligent, and whether there should be tests to help measure it. Why are IQ tests so popular?

## WHAT IF . . . ?

Before you embark on this exciting journey with *The Smartest Kid in the Universe*, take a moment to ask a very important question: What if you suddenly knew everything? How would your life change? What would stay the same? Think about the positive and negative aspects of your newfound knowledge. Let your imagination run wild, and create a brainstorm web to record your thoughts. Don't forget to include *how* you became the smartest kid in the universe. Did you eat your favorite candy, or did something else happen?

Once you have completed your brainstorm web, write your own short story about what happened when *YOU* became the smartest kid in the universe. Share your story with fellow students before you dive into *The Smartest Kid in the Universe*. These stories will be fun to revisit after you've read the book!

**DISTANCE LEARNING TIP:** Host a virtual Author's Chair. Give students a chance to read their stories aloud. Separate into small groups to maximize sharing opportunities. Teachers can visit these digital breakout groups to hear students' stories and offer feedback.

## WHILE YOU READ

### Author Analysis: Explore the techniques and elements of Chris Grabenstein's writing.

- List Jake's character traits. How would you describe Jake at the beginning of the story? How does his character change as the story develops? Which traits are consistent throughout? Why do you think Grabenstein chose to keep some traits consistent while changing others?
- Discuss the relationships between Jake and Kojo and Jake and Grace. How are they alike? How are they different? How do their character traits add to the story?
- Which character is most like you? Would you have handled the situations in the story in the same way? What would you do differently?
- Who are the villains in this story? Why?
- What are the pros and cons of Jake's super intelligence? How does Grabenstein illustrate its positive and negative effects?
- How does Grabenstein use specific details to foreshadow events in the story? How does he set the stage with the story of the pirate ship? How does he connect the past to the present day?

- How does the author blend fact and fiction throughout the story? Locate specific examples in the book. Why is this important? Why is it necessary for both elements to be included in this book?
- Chris Grabenstein creates outrageous conflicts to challenge his characters. The conflicts in this story aren't things that would realistically happen to most kids, but they can be connected to real struggles. Connect the challenges of these characters to real problems a middle schooler might face.
- Why do you think Jake knows how to speak multiple languages but cannot speak Spanish? As the story develops, how did this affect Jake? Why did Grabenstein choose to add this detail?

**DISTANCE LEARNING TIP:** Create an online form using your digital platform of choice. Add each discussion question and have readers type in their responses. This can be used as a preview before an online group discussion or as a way to check for understanding.

## AFTER YOU READ

### What If . . . ? Revisited

Now that you have reached the conclusion of the adventure, revisit the brainstorm readers created in the earlier What If . . . ? activity. Invite readers to add new ideas, ask and answer questions, and reflect on how they might handle being the smartest kid in the universe now that they've finished reading the book. This time, ask readers to think beyond themselves and their world. What would they change about the world we are living in? Allow students to create a vision board illustrating these big ideas.

Supply poster board, magazines, and art supplies. The possibilities are endless. Perhaps one of the visions will become reality!

**DISTANCE LEARNING TIP:** Share a virtual graffiti wall. Start with a blank slideshow and invite readers to share their ideas for the group to see. Allow all participants to edit so they can add simple bullet points with their ideas as well as photos and clip art. The collaboration is sure to be moving!

# FACT VS. FICTION

Jake is the smartest kid, but this book might be the smartest book in the universe! It's a fantasy tale with a ton of true facts. The contrast between fact and fiction is one of the things that makes this story so engaging. Chris Grabenstein cleverly blends reality and fantasy to keep readers engaged and on the edge of their seats. Encourage readers to find examples of

these contrasting elements. How does Grabenstein connect the rules of the real world to the fictional components in the story? Why does he do this? Why is it important to be able to identify fact and fiction while reading? Make a chart to organize the facts and fantasies in the story. Discuss the connections.

The Real World (Fact)	The Creative Spin (Fiction)	The Connection (How do fact and fiction blend together?)
"Ndiyo, nadhani nafanya." (p. 35)  Translation: "Yes, I think I do." Jake is able to speak Swahili.	Jake is able to speak Swahili on the bus after he eats Haazim Farooqi's jelly beans. He has never understood Swahili until now. (p. 35)	An accurate response in Swahili spoken by a boy who doesn't speak that language is a blend of reality and fantasy.

**DISTANCE LEARNING TIP:** Create a sharable chart for the examples of fact and fiction. Ask readers to do a quick-write to explain the connection between one of the facts and the corresponding fictional portion of the story.

# CHARACTER CAPERS

Chris Grabenstein is a master at creating multilayered characters. By the end of the story, the reader feels as if they know the characters. Assign each reader a character. Readers will gather as much information about their character as possible. Encourage readers to find obvious information, like physical characteristics, as well as inferences that reveal something about the character to readers. Grabenstein uses both methods to help readers paint a picture of each character.

Instruct each reader to write a riddle that describes their character. The riddle should be detailed without giving away too much information. Here is a resource to help readers get started.

[poetry4kids.com/news/writing-riddles/](https://poetry4kids.com/news/writing-riddles/)

Once the riddles are complete, there are a lot of options!

- Pair students to read the riddles to each other and guess the character.

- Play SCOOT! Post the cards around the room. Give students two minutes to read each riddle and write the character's name on a recording sheet.
- Readers can draw portraits of each character and match their pictures to the riddles.
- Create a slideshow with the clues and portraits.
- Cite evidence in the book to show where the information came from. Be sure to note whether the information was a described character trait or if it was implied in the text.

**DISTANCE LEARNING TIP:** Ask students to write their character riddles and submit them digitally. Once the entire group has submitted their work, create a slideshow. Readers can guess each character or complete a custom-made online quiz to test their knowledge of the characters. Students love a good competition!

# CULMINATING IDEAS

Wrap up the smartest reading adventure by offering these culminating activities to readers.

## TREASURE MAP MURAL

X marks the spot! The excitement in this story comes from the treasure hunt! Jake and his friends are trying to save their middle school and help the Garcia family claim the treasure that is rightfully theirs. Invite readers to re-create the map that led the kids to the treasure. Use evidence from the text to draw a map that includes all the places in the book (the town, Riverview Middle School, Imperial Marquis, Haazim Farooqi's laboratory). Although the map in the book does not include these places, and rather just landmarks within the underground cave, have the students think creatively about where these places would be. Explore the importance of setting in a story. Why is it especially important in *The Smartest Kid in the Universe*? How do the maps help the reader "see" the setting? Analyze the similarities and the differences in the maps. Readers can discuss why the maps vary.

### Mapmaking Resources for Kids

Map Crafts  
[artistshelpingchildren.org/makemapstreasuremapscraftsideasdecorationskids.html](http://artistshelpingchildren.org/makemapstreasuremapscraftsideasdecorationskids.html)

Treasure Map Art  
[youtube.com/watch?v=F6IvNNKBpkA](https://youtube.com/watch?v=F6IvNNKBpkA)

Map Drawing Tutorial  
[youtu.be/UwLNo0XrsSo](https://youtu.be/UwLNo0XrsSo)

Map Vocabulary  
[youtu.be/Z8lYc9Ehw24](https://youtu.be/Z8lYc9Ehw24)

**DISTANCE LEARNING TIP:** Once maps are complete, ask students to submit their work by sending a picture of their map. This will make a great slideshow to share with the class. Hold a digital class discussion about the maps. How are they similar? How are they different? What techniques did students use to create their maps? What choices did they make? Why? What do they like about each other's maps?

## THE NEXT ADVENTURE

What happens next? Chris Grabenstein leaves us with a cool cliff-hanger. Until Jake's next adventure as the smartest kid in the universe, readers will have to imagine what he is up to. In the meantime, challenge students to create his next adventure. Foreshadowing is found throughout the book. Dig through the pages to find details that give clues about how Jake may be asked to use his super smarts in the future. Readers can also create a completely new adventure for Jake. Share these ideas with artwork, a quick-write, or even short skits. Imagining the next adventure is the best way to keep the characters alive!

Ask readers to vote on the new adventures! Include categories such as "Most Likely to Happen" and "Most Mind-Blowing Adventure." Once the votes

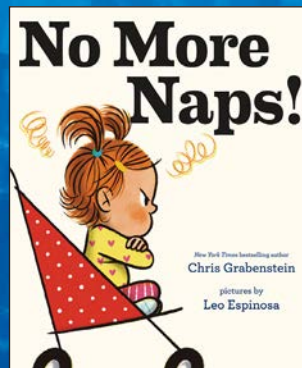
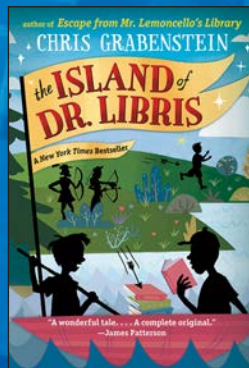
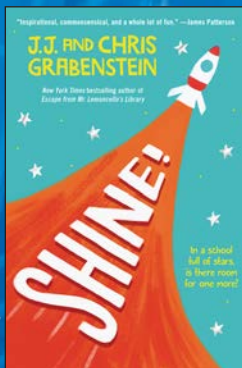
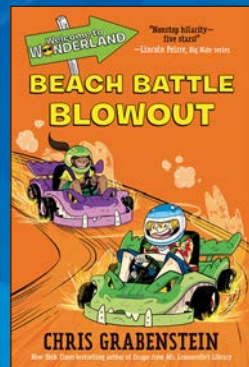
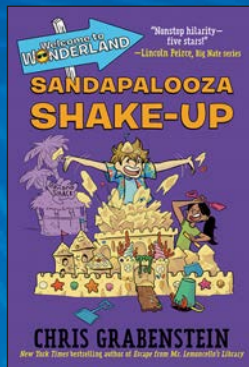
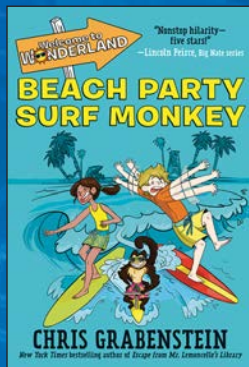
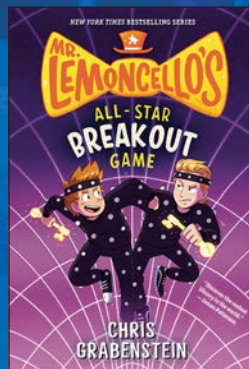
are in, tally them and reveal the winning ideas! Seal the results in a time capsule until the sequel is published. What a fun way to celebrate the next adventure of *The Smartest Kid in the Universe Book 2: Genius Camp!*

**DISTANCE LEARNING TIP:** Once you have finished the book, challenge readers to write and perform a skit. The skit should include at least one example of foreshadowing from the book. The video should begin with a statement of which foreshadowing the skit is based on. These videos can be shared with the group so they can discover what other readers think will happen next. Or have students guess which foreshadowing example is being shown in the video! Go digital and create a time capsule that can be saved and opened when the next book is released.

This guide was written by Room 228 Educational Consulting, with public school teacher Shannon Rheault as lead teacher. We love jelly beans, too . . . even if they don't make us smarter. Visit [rm228.com](http://rm228.com) to learn more.



# EVEN MORE CHRIS GRABENSTEIN STORIES TO READ AND LOVE!



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