

# NIGHTMARES!

JASON SEGEL AND KIRSTEN MILLER

## Family Reading Kit

Activities the Whole Family Can Enjoy Together

### Includes:

- Read-Aloud Tips
- Discussion Questions
- Tips for Fighting Nightmares
- Activities
  - Scene Illustration
  - Make Your Own Dream Catchers
  - *Nightmares!* Family Radio Theater
  - Recipes



GOOD NIGHT, CHARLIE.  
SLEEP TIGHT, JACK.  
TURN OUT THE LIGHTS  
AND  
WATCH YOUR BACK.

## IF YOU SNOOZE, YOU LOSE.

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# SNUGGLE UP WITH NIGHTMARES!

## READ-ALoud TIPS FOR FAMILY STORYTIME

In good storytelling fashion, use the 5 Ws and 1 H\*—Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How—to create a fun and successful family storytime. (\*There’s definitely more than one “HOW” in storytelling. See below for lots of fun ideas to bring this tale off the page and make it come to life.)



**WHO is involved in family storytime?** Everyone in the family! Each family member will have fun—and will benefit from—reading together. For those who can read, participating as one of the storytellers will increase literacy skills. For those who can’t read yet, listening to stories will expand the imagination. And there’s no doubt that family reading time strengthens the bond between family members.

**WHAT book(s) will you read?** For family reading with middle-graders, choosing your storytime book should be a family affair. Once you’ve read *Nightmares!*, peruse your local bookstore or library and have each family member select a book of interest. Each person then takes turns reading the back cover or flap copy of his or her chosen book aloud to the group. Now it’s time to choose which book you will read next! To choose democratically, you can vote by ballot or show of hands. Or you can leave it to luck and have a drawing.

**WHEN is the best time for storytime?** Answer: *Anytime!* A chapter at breakfast could begin the day with a kick-start to the imagination. Depending on the time of year, a lunchtime storytime could be fun (consider heading outside for a “Yarn in the Yard” picnic in the summer, or a fireside “Snack ‘n’ Story” in colder weather). And of course, the age-old tradition of reading at bedtime never goes out of style. Most important, read every day. Kids will respond with excitement when you announce that it’s “STORYTIME!” before each reading session. By being consistent—and making it fun—you ensure that kids start to look forward to this quality time that you’ll spend together.

**WHERE should your family storytime take place?** Read-aloud time is best done in a quiet location that is free of distractions. In your home, set up a reading area that has room for sitting and lying down. Put some big throw pillows or beanbag chairs in a circle on the floor so everyone can gather in relaxed comfort. The reader can sit in the center so they are in a position to share illustrations or to pose a discussion question. Snuggling up together in a bed is also one of the best venues for storytime before bedtime.

**WHY is family reading time important?** Children are more likely to become readers when they are read to. It really is as simple as that. And here’s the good news: It’s easy to do and it’s great fun. With a little practice, you will be making memories that last a lifetime, memories both you and your child will cherish.



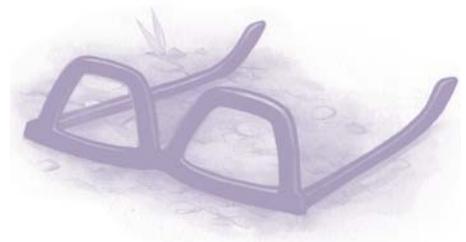


# SNUGGLE UP WITH *NIGHTMARES!* (CONTINUED)

## HOW can you create a family storytime that is fun and successful?

### HERE ARE SOME TIPS AND IDEAS:

- First, shake out the wiggles and extra energy with a pre-read *Nightmares!* exercise called The Bouncy Spider. Stretch your spidey arms and legs up and out and then in circles, nice and slow, using loooong spidey movements. Next, put your arms in the air, exhale, and release a length of imaginary spiderweb thread to the ceiling—then, using that thread, bend your legs and bounce up and down like a spider might. Do this ten times. Finally, reach high and detach your spider thread from the ceiling, ball it up, and calmly throw it away. Now it's time to sit down and relax with a story.
- *Nightmares!* Flip Book Alert: Dear Readers, did you notice that the spider on each page of the book bounces up and down when you flip quickly through the pages? Gather your family and try it! Let a family member start each storytime by being in charge of showing the book's "Bouncy Spider."
- Assign a Storytime Captain: Each family member takes turns being in charge of storytime. Responsibilities include setting up the reading space, deciding the storytime attire (regular pajamas or—to "Nightmare-proof" the storytime—should everyone wear something with the same color? Or should each person wear a hat, like Mr. Meduso?) Storytime Captains set the book in place and then get to announce "STORYTIME!" to the whole family. Perhaps the Storytime Captain can start each story time by showing the book's "Bouncy Spider." (See above.)
- During the storytime, encourage your middle-graders to interact with the book—tell them to feel free to react to the story and to ask questions.
- Read aloud with animation. *Nightmares!* offers lots of opportunities for using different voices and adding sound effects. Be loose, have fun, and laugh a lot.
- Take turns reading. Whether you switch off paragraph by paragraph, page by page, or chapter by chapter, switching reading privileges makes it fun for everyone.
- Ask your middle-graders questions while you're reading together. They'll love chatting about favorite parts, funny characters, and what might happen next. (See the next page for some discussion questions to jump-start the conversation.)
- Look at the illustrations in the book and talk about the details in each. Talk about how the illustrations enhance the story.



Storytime is a fun and interactive experience for your family. When imaginations are nudged, your family travels together to new and amazing places, and forever memories are created.





# FACE YOUR FEAR OF NIGHTMARES!

## READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Nightmares!* puts Charlie in some situations that cause fear. Do you think fear is healthy or unhealthy? Why?
2. Has there been a time in your life when you have been afraid but you were able to overcome your fear? When was it and what did you do?
3. Vivid dreams (even nightmares) indicate an active imagination. Can you relate a dream or nightmare that was particularly memorable? Describe it — share as many details as you can remember.
4. Jason Segal (the creator of *Nightmares!*) has said, “Our biggest fears can give us our greatest strengths as long as we are brave enough to face them.” Think about one of your biggest fears and describe it. Then describe how you might face it and defeat it. What strength will come from facing and defeating that fear?
5. When Charlie met Charlotte for the first time, he had a gut instinct to hightail it away from her. He called that gut instinct a “bad case of the heebie-jeebies.” Describe a time when you had a similar gut instinct or the “heebie-jeebies.” What was the situation? How did you feel? What did you do?
6. In the book, Medusa says that nightmares are people’s fears in disguise. It’s not **what** you’re afraid of; it’s **why**. Do you think if you can identify or name your fear, it loses power over you? Why?
7. If *Nightmares!* were going to be a movie, who would you cast as the main characters?
8. If you could only give this book a one-word review, what would your word be?
9. Why didn’t Charlie just sit down and throw his hands up in the air when things got too scary?
10. Take a good, long look at the cover of the book. What does this illustration convey to you?
11. Although each of the kids in Charlie’s group of friends has their own trouble, they band together to help each other. What are some character traits these kids have (e.g., compassion, empathy, generosity)? What are good things about helping other people? What traits do you think you have that would benefit other people?
12. Charlie is challenged quite a few times in this story. But somehow he digs deep and finds his way through. What do you think it is in Charlie that helps him overcome his challenges?
13. What is something that you fear? Name two personal traits you possess that would make you capable of facing and overcoming that fear.





# TURN *NIGHTMARES!* INTO DAYDREAMS



## FIVE TIPS FOR FIGHTING NIGHTMARES! A Guide for Parents

**DISCUSS** the nightmare during the day. Try to determine if there might be a theme to the nightmares—especially if they are occurring frequently. If there is, this could mean there is something bothering your child. Talk about the day’s activities and see if stressful triggers can be identified. Talk them through their anxiety in an effort to reduce the stress.

**WORK OUT** the nightmare through creativity. Reading stories about getting over nighttime fears can help. The book *Nightmares!* may even give a child some tools and inspiration. Drawing pictures of nightmares is also a way to release some of the anxiety that may be causing bad dreams.

**PROVIDE** reassurance and comfort to your child. When a child has had a nightmare, a little extra TLC is highly encouraged. Physical reassurance is important. Hugs from you and snuggles with a favorite stuffed animal will help bring calm. Tell your child you’ll stay with them and reassure them that they are safe at home. Leaving a low light on or leaving the bedroom door open may also bring needed comfort.

**EMPLOY** calming bedtime rituals. Calming rituals such as playing soft music can help kids feel secure at bedtime. Some children might also respond positively to “protections” that they can use to take control of being scared. For example, let your child rub a little skin lotion or face cream—you can call it “Pleasant Dream Cream”—on his/her tummy or forehead before turning in.

**EMPOWER** your child. Let him/her tell you what happens and empathize, “No wonder you were scared!” Then ask, “I wonder if you could have done something to stop it? Did you know that sometimes you can change what happens in a dream by telling the scary thing to go away? Or that you can call for help, and help will always come? For instance, I will always come if you call me in a dream. And you can also wake yourself up if the dream is scary.”





# NIGHTMARES! FAMILY STORYTIME ACTIVITIES

## ART ACTIVITY: Scene Illustration

Is there a scene from the book that stood out to you? Something memorable, scary, or funny? As your family is reading the book, draw your favorite scenes from the book. You can do this multiple times as you read—or to cap off your family storytime adventure. Before you begin to draw, talk about each person's most memorable scene from the story. Then pull out the paper, markers, pencils, and crayons and have everyone in the family draw their scene. You can also cut out pictures and words from magazines and glue them to your paper to show your scene in a different and creative way. Display the finished drawings on the fridge or create a gallery in the family room.



## CRAFT ACTIVITY: Make Your Own Dream Catchers

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- paper plates
- scissors
- yarn (about 7 feet per dream catcher)
- feathers (3 per dream catcher)
- beads (10 per dream catcher)
- hole punch
- stickers or markers (optional)



The image to the left is what a typical dream catcher looks like. Now you can make your own!

1. Begin by cutting out the center of the paper plate. Leave a rim of 2 inches all around the paper plate.
2. Punch holes in the rim of the paper plate, about 1/2 inch apart each.
3. Measure out 5 to 6 feet of yarn. Tie one end to one of the holes.
4. Weave the yarn up, over, and all around the paper rim from one hole to the next one. You can make your pattern any way you like. Make sure to loop through each of the holes.
5. You can add the craft beads to the middle of the dream catcher as you go through the holes. Simply slip them onto the yarn and continue with the next hole. They will end up in the middle of the dream catcher.
6. Once all the holes are threaded, tie a knot at the last hole.
7. Now punch 3 more holes at what will be the bottom of the dream catcher.
8. Cut 3 more pieces of yarn, each about 5 inches long.
9. Tie them to the 3 holes at the bottom of the dream catcher.
10. Thread some beads onto the yarn pieces and tie a feather to the end of each one.
11. Use your markers and stickers and decorate the paper rim, if you like.
12. Lastly, make a piece of yarn the length you need to hang it on the wall. Punch one more hole into the top of your paper plate dream catcher and tie the yarn to it. When you're finished, hang the dream catcher on your bedpost or on a wall in your room. If you have a bad dream, simply blow it into the dream catcher.



Sweet dreams!

by JASON SEGEL AND KIRSTEN MILLER

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# NIGHTMARES! FAMILY STORYTIME ACTIVITIES

(CONTINUED. . .)

## DRAMA ACTIVITY: NIGHTMARES! Family Radio Theater

Garrison Keillor and his theater troupe weave riveting tales on his live radio show *A Prairie Home Companion*. Audiobooks represent our favorite stories brought to life via the spoken word. (*Nightmares!* is also available as an audiobook!) And of course, Orson Welles created perhaps the most famous (and frightening) radio theater of all time with “The War of the Worlds.”

Now it’s time for a new generation of radio theater, starring your family and featuring *Nightmares!* There are a multitude of lively characters in *Nightmares!*—and they are already quite theatrical in many ways. Use this guide for mounting a Family Radio Theater production featuring different scenes from the book. You can pick one scene for a smaller spoken-word production, or you can stage a larger-scale production with multiple scenes, adding music and sound effects. So clear your throats and exercise those vocal cords—it’s time to bring *Nightmares!* to life.

### INSTRUCTIONS:

To get started, use the script on the following pages, which was created from pages 148–151 of *Nightmares!* when Charlie Laird meets Mr. Meduso, for your first Family Radio Theater. Once you get the hang of it, choose other scenes from the book, turn them into scripts, and create more radio show episodes.

### HOW TO PREPARE:

- Cast the narrator and characters (fill in the performer names below).
- Make copies of the script for each actor. The same person can play multiple characters if needed.
- Do a couple of practice readings to get familiar with the script.
- Once everyone is prepared, it’s time for the performance.
- Add an extra level of theatrical fun and record your show using a smartphone or computer.

### INTRODUCING THE CAST OF NIGHTMARES!

#### RADIO THEATER PERFORMERS:

The Narrator will be played by: \_\_\_\_\_

Mr. Meduso will be played by: \_\_\_\_\_

Charlie Laird will be played by: \_\_\_\_\_

Fernando will be played by: \_\_\_\_\_

Larry will be played by: \_\_\_\_\_



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# NIGHTMARES! FAMILY STORYTIME ACTIVITIES

(CONTINUED)

## THE SCRIPT: Meeting Mr. Meduso

In this scene, a voice from behind a sewer grate tells Charlie to come down to the sewer so the bloodthirsty bunnies won't attack him. The scene takes place once Charlie is safely down in the sewer.

**Charlie:** Who are you and why are you here?

**Meduso** (offering his hand): The name's Meduso. And I'm here because of you. I usually do my best to avoid such odiferous conditions.

**Narrator:** He's rude, Charlie thought. But Charlie was in no position to turn away someone who'd been sent to help him.

**Charlie:** So, where are your friends?

**Meduso:** What friends?

**Narrator:** Charlie kicked himself for letting down his guard.

**Charlie:** I heard three voices coming from the sewer. Only one of them was yours.

**Meduso** (fidgeting in discomfort): Oh, those voices. I'm afraid that was just me.

**Charlie** (indignant): Really?

**Narrator:** Charlie stood his ground. Why did everyone in this world think he was stupid?

**Charlie:** Where are the other guys, Meduso? Are you planning an ambush?

**Meduso** (snapping back): That's ridiculous! I just saved your behind—what happened to “thank you”? I swear, children these days! I'm a well-dressed man standing in the sewer. What's not to trust? (Deep breath.) Fine. You want to meet the “other guys”? I'll introduce you. Just remember—we don't have time for idle chitchat. We need to get out of this pipe before the next super nightmare begins.

**Narrator:** Meduso lifted his hat with one hand and three serpents uncoiled from beneath it. Charlie hopped back in horror but managed not to scream. He'd already faced gargoyles, zombies, and bloodthirsty bunnies. He should've known better than to think the Netherworld sewers were safe. The first snake was dark red. Its muscular body swayed from side to side like a hypnotist's pocket watch. The one next to it was a dusty, washed-out brown. It flicked at the air with the pink forked tongue. The third snake, an emerald-green beauty with beady red eyes, immediately bared its fangs.

**Meduso:** Meet Larry, Barry, and Fernando.

**Narrator:** That was when Charlie realized that all three snakes were growing directly out of the man's head.

**Meduso:** The green one is Barry. He hasn't spoken since the whole “forbidden apple” misunderstanding. The other two never shut up.

**Fernando** (hissing in a Spanish accent): It'ssss a pleasure. My name iss Fernando.



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# NIGHTMARES! FAMILY STORYTIME ACTIVITIES

(CONTINUED)

Larry: The boy's barefoot is in a sewer. That's just not sanitary.

Charlie: You can talk!

Larry: So can you. Don't sound so surprised.

Fernando: Settle down. Snakes can talk where he comes from. Don't you remember? She said the same thing.

Charlie: She?

Narrator: Medusa clapped his hat back on his head and the three snakes disappeared beneath it.

Meduso: I wouldn't get too close. Barry's a biter.

Charlie: And what are you?

Meduso (flabbergasted): I'm a gorgon.

Charlie: What's a gorgon?

Meduso (snorting at Charlie's ignorance): Surely you've heard of Medusa—the monster from the myths? The lady with snakes for hair and eyes that can turn men to stone?

Charlie: Yeah? So?

Medusa (outraged): So? So she's one of the most famous nightmares that ever lived—and she's a gorgon like me. Over 2,000 years old and as fearsome as ever.

Charlie (astonished): Medusa is still alive? I thought some guy cut off her head a long time ago.

Meduso (sniffing): That was just a story. You shouldn't believe everything you read. Besides, you're talking about a legend. Show some respect or I'll turn you into one of those cute little cherub statues that pee into fountains. All I need to do is take off my sunglasses and give you a peek at my baby blues.

Charlie: You can't turn me into stone if someone sent you to help me. Who was it?

Meduso: I have to help you, not humor you. If you want to leave this world, I suggest you follow me. It's a long trip to the portal, and I haven't got—

Charlie (interrupting): Portal?

Meduso (walking ahead and explaining): The only door between the Netherworld and the Waking World. It's inside that mansion you live in. We need to get you back there before—

Charlie: No.

Narrator: Charlie's voice echoed through the tunnel. For once he almost sounded grown-up.

Charlie: I can't leave the Netherworld until I find my little brother.



# NIGHTMARES! FAMILY STORYTIME RECIPES

## GREEN PLATTER

Charlotte DeChant (aka “Stepmonster”) serves green pancakes and split pea soup (also green!). Continue her verdant tradition by creating a “*Nightmares!* Smorgasbord” of foods that are green. And ONLY green. Ask each family member to suggest their favorite green food and create an exquisitely monochromatic and mouthwatering storytime snack tray.

### SOME GREEN FOOD IDEAS INCLUDE:

Celery (add green food coloring to cream cheese to fill the celery)

Zucchini (raw or oven-baked)

Spinach dip

Edamame

Crispy baked Parmesan green-bean fries

Cucumber slices

Grapes

Honeydew melon slices

Kiwi slices



## “CAN’T SLEEP” COFFEE CAKE

Charlie may drink coffee to stay awake, but coffee cake makes a much better storytime snack. Get the whole family involved in preparing today’s *Nightmares!* nosh. (Note: Best served at a daytime storytime.)

### INGREDIENTS:

#### Cake:

- 2 cups flour
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup softened butter
- 1 egg
- 3/4 cup milk
- 1-1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

#### Streusel:

- 1/4 cup flour
- 2/3 cup white sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 cup butter

### DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350° F (175° C). Grease and flour a 9x13-inch pan.
2. Make the streusel topping: In a medium bowl, combine 1/4 cup flour, 2/3 cup sugar, and 1 teaspoon cinnamon. Add butter in small pieces until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Set aside.
3. In a large bowl, combine 2 cups flour, 3/4 cup sugar, baking powder, and salt. Add butter until the mixture looks like coarse crumbs. Crack the egg into a measuring cup; add milk to fill to 1 cup. Stir in vanilla. Pour into crumb mixture and mix until moistened. Spread into pan. Sprinkle top with the streusel mix.
4. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean. Cool before cutting. Enjoy pieces of coffee cake during storytime.

