EDUCATOR’S GUIDE

MIDDLE SCHOOL:
THE WORST YEARS OF MY LIFE

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CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS
• GRAPHIC NOVELS
• BULLYING
• SOCIAL ISSUES
AGES 8-12
CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

English/Language Arts
Rafe uses well-known similes and gives them a twist to add humor to his story. For example; “It feels as honest as the day is crummy” (page 1) and “…other people I don’t trust as far as I can throw a truckload of pianos” (page 4). Ask students to find other examples in Rafe’s story, and then to write some original twisted similes to share with the class. Have students write a short personal experience incorporating the twisted similes and share with the class.

Math
Rafe counts 112 rules in the Student Code of Conduct. Have students use information from the book to write math problems using a variety of math skills. For example, students can count the number of rules Rafe breaks to determine the percentage of rules he breaks compared to the number of rules students can also calculate the average number of points Rafe earns in a certain period of time or the average number of points per rule he breaks. Ask each pair of students to write three word problems based on the factual information given to them in the book. The pairs can then exchange and work on their problems.

Social Studies
At Hills Village Middle School, the students tend to congregate into one of several groups. Students like Jeanne Galletta excel in academics; Miller and his band are troublemakers; and another group of students play sports. These groups could be defined as cliques. Ask students to define the word clique and then make a list of cliques in their school, church, or other settings. Have students explore different facets of cliques and conduct a panel discussion: Are cliques a detrimental aspect of schools and other settings? How can cliques be beneficial? What actions need to be taken to insure that cliques do not infringe upon the rights of others?
THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Family Relationships
Rafe’s relationship with his mother and Carl are key factors in his behavior. How does Rafe feel about his mother’s relationship with Carl? What role does Carl and Rafe’s mother play in keeping Leo alive-and-well in Rafe’s mind? How does Rafe interact with his sister, Georgia? What role does she play in Rafe’s life?

Making Choices
Every day a multitude of choices present themselves to us, and we choose based on our experiences and desires. Every character in Rafe’s story makes choices, some not so wise. With a partner, ask students to select a character and discuss the outcome of his or her choices. How could a given situation have been different if another choice had been made?

Motivation
Rafe dreads going to middle school, but because of Operation R.A.F.E., he stays motivated to attend school even though his grades are way below average, and he is being bullied by Miller. What motivates the other characters’ actions? What finally motivates Rafe to improve his grades? What would motivate you to work hard in school?

Adversity
Rafe has endured some pretty tough breaks in his short life which may explain why he remains so isolated from his peers. Who could have helped Rafe deal with the adversity in his life? Why don’t those people recognize Rafe’s difficulty in coping? How could Rafe have handled his problems in a positive manner without hurting the people around him?

Bullying
Rafe is bullied by Miller the Killer all year long. Chapter 55 poses interesting questions to answer: Is it bullying if you’re bullying the bully? How does Rafe attempt to bully Miller? Who else is a bully in Rafe’s life? How does that person bully Rafe?
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. One of Rafe’s biggest challenges is his confrontations with Miller the Killer. What could Rafe do to get on the good side of a kid who only has bad sides? What are some of the strategies Rafe employs? Why don’t they work to help keep Miller off Rafe’s back?

2. What do Leo’s illustrations show the reader that Rafe’s words do not? How do the illustrations bring life to Rafe’s story?

3. Rafe sees the Student Code of Conduct as a long list of all the ways he will probably get in trouble before the end of the school year (page 21). What other ways could he view the handbook? Instead of the principal reading each page to the students, what other ways could the Student Code of Conduct be presented to students at Rafe’s school?

4. Why does Rafe allow Leo to set the rules to the game as they play Operation R.A.F.E.? Why is Leo always upping the difficulty? How does Leo determine when Rafe should lose one of his three lives?

5. Leo says on page 54, “Not telling the whole truth isn’t the same thing as lying.” Is this an ethical interpretation of truth and lying? Why or why not?

6. Why does Rafe risk telling Jeanne Galletta about Operation R.A.F.E.? What does he hope to gain by confiding in her?

7. How does Rafe break his no-hurt rule by his antics on Halloween Day? Who does he hurt? What decision does he make as a result of the pain he inflicts?

8. Why is Rafe so shocked when Jeanne tells him that his grades may cause him to repeat sixth grade? What factors contribute to Rafe’s failing grades? How does Jeanne help or hurt Rafe and his grades?

9. Rafe is furious when he loses his third life because Jeanne Galletta goes into the boy’s bathroom to talk to him. Is Leo justified in taking away Rafe’s final life? Why or why not?

10. What is Rafe’s opinion of Mrs. Donatello? Why is Rafe mistaken about Dragon Lady Donatello? How does he discover the error in his judgment?
Rafe Khatchadorian has enough problems at home without throwing his first year of middle school into the mix. Luckily, he’s got an ace plan for the best year ever, if only he can pull it off: With his best friend Leonardo the Silent awarding him points, Rafe tries to break every rule in his school’s oppressive Code of Conduct. Chewing gum in class: 5,000 points! Running in the hallway: 10,000 points! Pulling the fire alarm: 50,000 points! But when Rafe’s game starts to catch up with him, he’ll have to decide if winning is all that matters, or if he’s finally ready to face the rules, bullies, and truths he’s been avoiding.

Blockbuster author James Patterson delivers a genuinely hilarious story of a wildly imaginative, one-of-kind kid that you won’t soon forget.

about the book

also by James Patterson

about the author

JAMES PATTERSON was selected by kids across America as Children’s Choice Book Awards Author of the Year in 2010. He is the internationally bestselling author of the highly praised Maximum Ride novels, the Witch & Wizard series, the Daniel X series, Med Head, and the detective series featuring Alex Cross. His books have sold more than 205 million copies worldwide, making him one of the bestselling authors of all time. He lives in Florida.

CHRIS TEBBETTS is the author of The Viking, a fantasy adventure series for young readers, and co-author of the young adult novel, M or F?, with Lisa Papademetriou. He lives in Vermont.

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thematic connections
- Family Relationships
- Making Choices
- Bullying
- Friendship
- Peer Pressure

Ages: 8 - 12

by James Patterson and Chris Tebbetts
BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK (PRE-READING ACTIVITY)

Right now, you’re probably saying to yourself, “Get me out of here! I don’t want to read another book.” Well, don’t sweat it. The story you are going to read is all about my life in 7th grade—and it’s no ordinary book. It’s actually pretty funny. But, before you start reading, first tell somebody in your class the worst thing that has ever happened to you in school. And, oh yeah, make it funny! No matter how horrible it was, I bet the stuff you’ll find in my book is WAY worse… —RAFE

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

English/Language Arts

Using poster board, ask students to work with a partner to generate a list of Rafe’s Top Ten (or so) Biggest Accomplishments from 7th grade. Then have them illustrate each item, using the same kind of irony and humor Rafe uses in Chapter 4. Display the Top Ten lists in the classroom.

Math

The Cathedral School of the Arts is a fine arts academy, and students who attend can also study music and theater. According to Rafe’s rule number three on page 108, Rafe believes that “most of the kids at Cathedral were born with a math book in one hand and an extra brain in the other.” Ask students to create a polyhedron with paper, adding colors and design to each side. The templates can be found at: www.korthalsaltes.com. When students have completed their polyhedron, hang them from the ceiling in the classroom.

Science

Our planet is becoming polluted and our natural resources are being depleted. Although it is not Ms. Ling’s purpose in asking students to create an art project from something they could recycle, the project provided a good exercise in making students aware of what they use and throw away. Working in small groups, ask students to investigate “going green” and what that means for an individual or family. Ask students to keep a list for a week of every item they use that becomes garbage. Students may even choose to save their trash for a week, so they can see the volume and weight. By exploring the amount of waste students and their families produce each day, students can better understand the enormous impact of trash on the environment. After their lists are generated, and students become aware of how much trash they accumulate, ask students to brainstorm ways they can reduce, reuse, and recycle. Students can also investigate local recycling options and initiate a school recycling campaign.
Social Studies

With all the recent stories in the news about cyber bullying, could the fake web page that Zeke and Kenny posted using Rafe’s name get them in serious trouble? Ask students to define the term cyber bullying, to investigate cyber bullying laws in their state, to research the consequences of cyber bullying, to ascertain if there are school policies that protect students, and to find statistics and stories about actual cases. Then, armed with information, ask the students to initiate an awareness program in their school and community.

Bullying

The green paint poured in Rafe’s locker is mean, but it doesn’t hurt anyone, and, at that point, Rafe realizes he needs to stop the battle. But when Zeke and Kenny take bullying to the next level by posting the fake website, Rafe renews the war. How could Rafe have handled that situation without making the choice to “get even?” What, if any consequences, do Zeke and Kenny suffer for their bullying tactics? Matty also begins to bully Rafe after the incident at the museum. What is Rafe’s reaction to Matty’s bullying tactics? How can bullying be stopped?

Thematic Connections

Family Relationships

Rafe causes his mother considerable grief, but she remains supportive. How does she influence Rafe’s choices? How do Rafe and his mother show each other mutual respect? What does Rafe learn about his father’s family from his grandmother? How does Rafe go about discovering the whereabouts of his father?

Making Choices

Rafe is a likeable character with a good heart, but he continually makes bad choices. Why is Rafe so easily influenced by Matty? What choices does Rafe make based on his emotions? How do those choices turn out for him? What is the result of the choices Rafe makes based on his intellect?

Friendship

Rafe is thrilled when Matty befriends him on the first day of school. What does Matty teach Rafe about friendship? How does Matty betray Rafe? What does this say about Matty as a friend? How does Rafe respond to Matty’s betrayal? Rafe turns to Jeanne when he is hurting, even though he does not consider her a friend. How does Jeanne prove to Rafe that she is his friend? What are characteristics of true friendship?

Peer Pressure

Everyone responds to peer pressure—at least occasionally—but some kids are more likely to submit to negative peer pressure while others are better able to resist and stand their ground. Rafe obviously responds to negative peer pressure and finds himself in trouble for the actions initiated by others. Why is Rafe so easily swayed? Ask students to discuss what factors influence students who conform to the pressure, students who apply the pressure, and students who stand their ground.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Being a new kid is always a difficult situation. How does Rafe adjust to his new school? What are Rafe's biggest fears about moving to the city? What are his biggest disappointments about leaving Hills Village?

2. Rafe's grandmother welcomes them into her home. What is Rafe's first impression of his grandmother and her house? Why does Rafe never feel at home in his grandmother's house?

3. How does Rafe explain his need for Leonardo the Silent? What does the idea of Leo as a companion give Rafe? How does Leo help Rafe?

4. Why does Leo feel the need to step up “Operation: Get a Life”? Are his reasons justified? What is Rafe's reaction to Leo's new rules? How is Rafe going to keep his “no-hurt rule” and follow Leo's new guidelines?

5. What do Matty the Freak and Leo have in common? How does Matty help Rafe work toward achieving his mission?

6. Matty, Zeke, and Kenny are all involved when Rafe gets busted for “art-napping,” but they do not come to his aid, and Rafe does not tell on them. Why is Rafe willing to take the blame and suffer the consequences on his own?

7. After the failed attempt at art-napping, Rafe realizes he has lost his mother's trust. What does Rafe do to begin to earn her trust back?

8. When Rafe tells the truth about whose backpack held the stolen pen, Matty turns on him, and, even worse, Matty uses private information Rafe shared in order to humiliate Rafe. What is Rafe's immediate response?

9. Going to Hills Village on a bus by himself demonstrates that Rafe has courage even though he is running away from his problems. Does Rafe do other ironic things like this in the story?

10. How does Rafe react to the news about his father's life and death? How will this news help Rafe to know the truth about his dad? What role did his father's uncle play in Rafe discovering the truth about his dad?

11. How is moving back to Hills Village a positive move for everyone in Rafe's family? What do they learn from their time spent in the big city?
about the book

James Patterson’s winning follow-up to the #1 New York Times bestseller Middle School, The Worst Years of My Life—which the LA Times called “a perfectly pitched novel”—is another riotous and heart-warming story about living large.

After sixth grade, the very worst year of his life, Rafe Khatchadorian thinks he has it made in seventh grade. He’s been accepted to art school in the big city and imagines a math-and-history-free fun zone. Wrong! It’s more competitive than Rafe ever expected, and to score big in class, he needs to find a way to turn his boring life into the inspiration for a work of art. His method? Operation: Get a Life! Anything he’s never done before, he’s going to do it, from learning to play poker to going to a modern art museum. But when his newest mission uncovers secrets about the family Rafe’s never known, he has to decide if he’s ready to have his world turned upside down.

also by James Patterson

MIDDLE SCHOOL: The Worst Years of My Life
978-0-316-10187-5 HC
978-0-316-13348-7 PB

THE DANGEROUS DAYS OF DANIEL X
978-0-316-11970-2 PB

DANIEL X: WATCH THE SKIES
978-0-316-11969-6 PB

DANIEL X: DEMONS AND DRUIDS
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about the authors

James Patterson
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Chris Tebbetts
is the co-author of Middle School, The Worst Years of My Life, the author of The Viking, a fantasy adventure series for young readers, and the co-author of the young adult novel M or F? with Lisa Papademetriou. He lives in Vermont.

www.lbschoolandlibrary.com

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