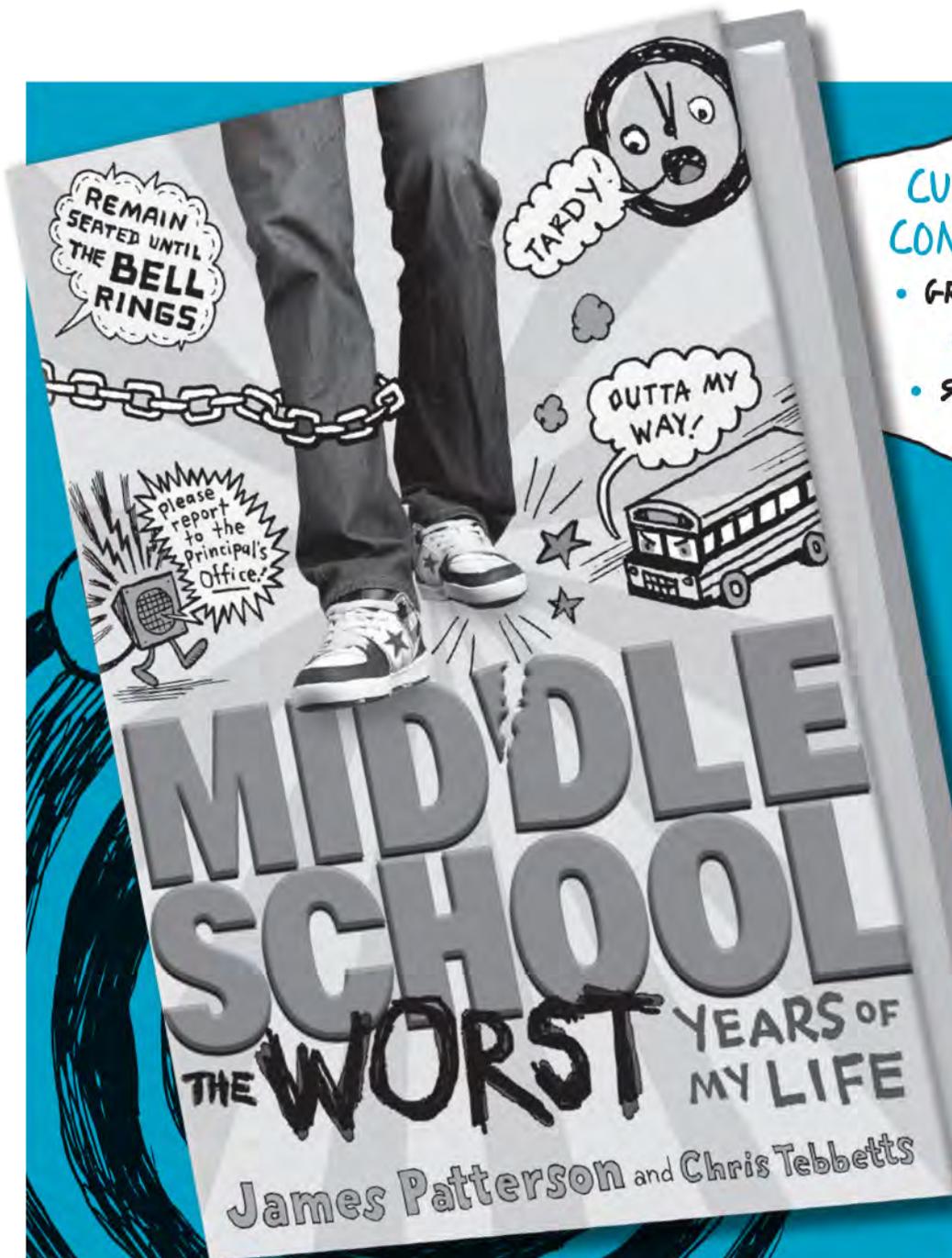


# MIDDLE SCHOOL: THE WORST YEARS OF MY LIFE

BY JAMES PATTERSON AND CHRIS TEBBETTS

ILLUSTRATED BY LAURA PARK



## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- GRAPHIC NOVELS
- BULLYING
- SOCIAL ISSUES

AGES 8-12





## BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK (PRE-READING ACTIVITY)

Okay, I know nobody wants to do any work before they read my story, but, really, if you will just skim through your student handbook and count and review all the rules, my story will be more fun for you to read.

## 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.

### Art

Ask students to select a section of their Student Code of Conduct handbooks to illustrate using pen and pencil line drawings in cartoon strip format. Each student should select a different section so that the entire handbook will be illustrated. Have students incorporate humor and exaggeration as they portray the rules and possible consequences. Then ask students to compile the illustrations with the appropriate sections of the handbook and show an illustrated copy of the Student Code of Conduct to the principal.



### 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?



### 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?



### 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?

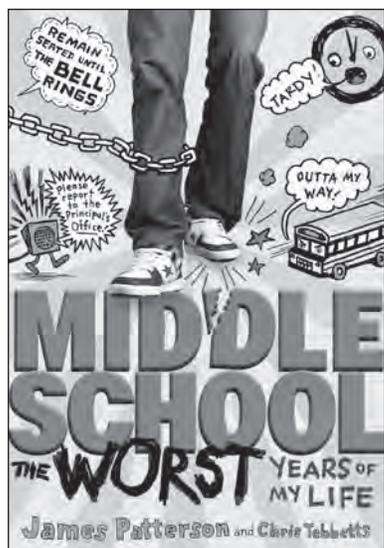


## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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?



## about the book

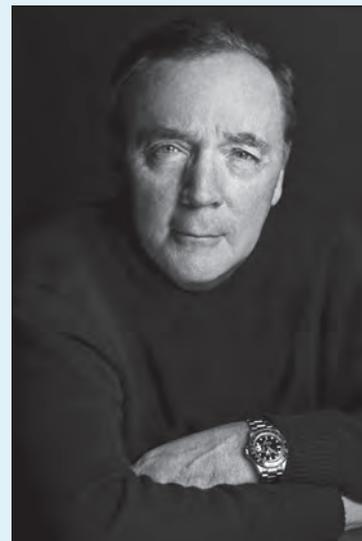


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Rafe Khatchadorian has enough problems at home without throwing his first year of middle school into the mix. Luckily, he's got an ace plan for the best year ever, if only he can pull it off: With his best friend Leonardo the Silent awarding him points, 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 author

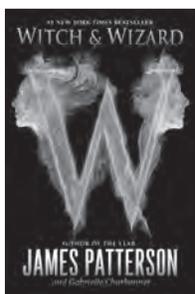


JAMES PATTERSON was selected by kids across America as Children's Choice Book Awards Author of the Year in 2010. He is the internationally bestselling author of the highly praised Maximum Ride novels, the Witch & Wizard series, the Daniel X series, *Med Head*, and the detective series featuring Alex 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.

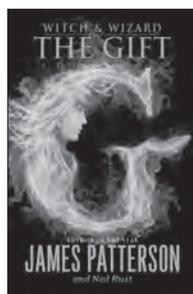
CHRIS TEBBETTS is the author of *The Viking*, a fantasy adventure series for young readers, and co-author of the young adult novel, *M or F?*, with Lisa Papademetriou. He lives in Vermont.

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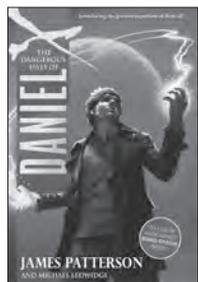
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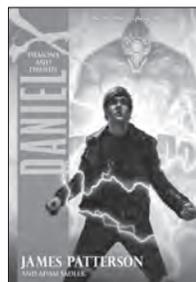
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Educator's Guide prepared by Susan Geye.