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 to 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 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 a clique. 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 do Carl and Rafe’s mother play in keeping Leo alive-and-well in Rafe’s mind? What role does Georgia 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 an interesting question 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 the 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 probably will 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 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

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.

Now a Major Motion Picture!

About the Movie

Rafe has an epic imagination... and a slight problem with authority. Both collide when he transfers to an oppressive, rule-crazy middle school. Drowning in do’s and don’ts, Rafe and his scheming best friend Leo hatch a plan to break every rule in the school’s Code of Conduct. It’s Ferris Bueller meets Home Alone as their battle with Principal Dwight explodes into chaos both real and imagined. But Dwight displays his own fiendish creativity, striking back at the rulebreakers. Meanwhile, Rafe struggles to hide his misbehavior from Jeanne, the straight-A, overachieving girl of his dreams, and at home, his mother’s boyfriend – a moody, jack-of-no-trades named Bear – threatens to become his stepfather.
The Middle School Series

Middle School: Get Me Out of Here!  
9780316322010

Middle School: My Brother Is a Big, Fat Liar  
9780316322034

Middle School: How I Survived Bullies, Broccoli, and Snake Hill  
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Middle School: Ultimate Showdown  
9780316322119

Middle School: Save Rafe!  
9780316322126

Middle School: Just My Rotten Luck  
9780316264776

Middle School: Dog’s Best Friend  
9780316349543

About the Author

JAMES PATTERSON received the Literarian Award for Outstanding Service to the American Literary Community at the 2015 National Book Awards. His other awards include two Emmys, the Edgar Award, and the Children’s Choice Award for Author of the Year. He is a tireless champion of the power of books and reading, exemplified by his children’s book imprint, JIMMY Patterson, whose mission is simple: “We want every kid who finishes a JIMMY Book to say, ‘PLEASE GIVE ME ANOTHER BOOK.’” He has donated more than one million books to students and soldiers and has over four hundred Teacher Education Scholarships at 24 colleges and universities. He has also donated millions to independent bookstores and school libraries. Patterson invests his proceeds from the sales of JIMMY Patterson Books in pro-reading initiatives.

Other JIMMY Patterson Titles for Middle School Fans

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