

# 6th GRADE REQUIRED SUMMER READING



## THE REQUIREMENT:

In preparation for the new school year, the 6th Grade ELA teachers at TAG are requiring you to complete some reading over the summer. The book ***Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life***, by James Patterson, will be a part of the first unit of the school year, and so your participation in this summer assignment is mandatory. To make sure that you have read the book, a short quiz will be issued to all 6th grade students within the first two weeks back at school.

If you do not own the book already, or are unable to get it from your local library\*, TAG is making copies available to all incoming 6th grade students. These copies can be picked up at the TAG main office Tuesday-Thursday beginning the week of July 10th. Or students can get a copy during one of the 6th Grade Orientation events. In the meantime, to help you get started, we have attached a copy of the first 12 chapters.



### 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--and surprisingly poignant--story of a wildly imaginative kid that you won't soon forget."

Your 6th grade teachers are also asking that before you arrive this fall you make sure you have an up-to-date Springfield (or neighboring city) library card and that there is no money owed on it. TAG scholars are required to have a personal reading book on them at all times and having a library card allows teachers to take the whole class to make regular visits.

We look forward to meeting you all soon!

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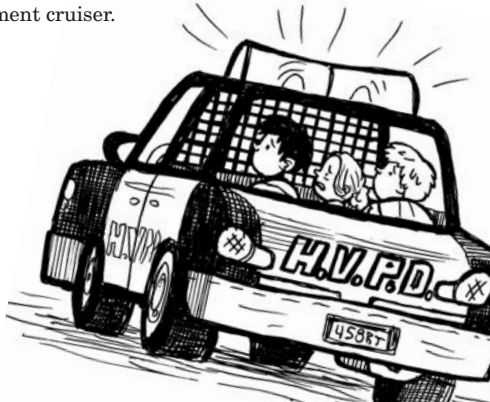
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## I'M RAFe KHATCHADORIAN, TRAGIC HERO

**I**t feels as honest as the day is *crummy* that I begin this tale of total desperation and woe with me, my pukey sister, Georgia, and Leonardo the Silent sitting like rotting sardines in the back of a Hills Village Police Department cruiser.



Now, there's a pathetic family portrait you don't want to be a part of, believe me. More on the unfortunate Village Police incident later. I need to work myself up to tell you that disaster story.

So anyway, *ta-da*, here it is, book fans, and all of you in need of AR points at school, the true autobio of my life so far. The dreaded middle school years. If you've ever been a middle schooler, you understand already. If you're not in middle school yet, you'll understand soon enough.

But let's face it: Understanding *me*—I mean, *really* understanding me and my nutty life— isn't so easy. That's why it's so hard for me to find people I can trust. The truth is, I don't know who I can trust. So mostly I don't trust anybody. Except my mom, Jules. (Most of the time, anyway.)

So . . . let's see if I can trust you. First, some background.

That's me, by the way, arriving at "prison"—also known as Hills Village Middle School—in Jules's SUV. The picture credit goes to Leonardo the Silent.

Getting back to the story, though, I *do* trust one other person. That would actually be Leonardo.

2

Leo is capital *C* Crazy, and capital *O* Off-the-Wall, but he keeps things real.

Here are some other people I don't trust as far as I can throw a truckload of pianos.

There's Ms. Ruthless Donatello, but you can just call her the Dragon Lady. She teaches English and also handles my favorite subject in sixth grade—after-school detention.



Also, Mrs. Ida Stricker, the vice principal. Ida's pretty much in charge of every breath anybody takes at HVMS.

That's Georgia, my super-nosy, super-obnoxious, super-brat sister, whose only



good quality is that she looks like Jules might have looked when she was in fourth grade.

There are more on my list, and we'll get to them eventually. Or maybe not. I'm not exactly sure how this is going to work out. As you can probably tell, this is my first full-length book.

But let's stay on the subject of *us* for a little bit. I kind of want to, but how do I know I can trust

you with all my embarrassing personal stuff—like the police car disaster story? What are you like? *Inside*, what are you like?

Are you basically a pretty good, pretty decent person? Says who? Says you? Says your 'rents? Says your sibs?

Okay, in the spirit of a possible friendship between us—and this is a huge big deal for me—here's another true confession.

This is what I *actually* looked like when I got to school that first morning of sixth grade.

We still friends, or are you out of here?

Hey—*don't go*—all right? I kind of like you.

Seriously. You know how to listen, at least. And believe me, I've got quite the story to tell you.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE MIDDLE SCHOOL/ MAX SECURITY PRISON

Okay, so imagine the day your great-great-grandmother was born. Got it? Now go back another hundred years or so. And then another hundred. That's about when they built Hills Village Middle School. Of course, I think it was a prison for Pilgrims back then, but not too much has changed. Now it's a prison for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders.



I've seen enough movies that I know when you first get to prison, you basically have two choices: (1) pound the living daylight out of someone so that everyone else will think you're insane and stay out of your way, or (2) keep your head down, try to blend in, and don't get on anyone's bad side.

You've already seen what I look like, so you can probably guess which one I chose. As soon as I got to homeroom, I went straight for the back row and sat as far from the teacher's desk as possible.

There was just one problem with that plan, and his name was Miller. Miller the Killer, to be exact. It's impossible to stay off this kid's bad side, because it's the only one he's got.

But I didn't know any of that yet.

"Sitting in the back, huh?" he said.

"Yeah," I told him.

"Are you one of those troublemakers or something?" he said.

I just shrugged. "I don't know. Not really."

"Cause this is where all the juvies sit," he said, and took a step closer. "In fact, you're in my seat."

"I don't see your name on it," I told him, and I was just starting to think maybe that was the

wrong thing to say when Miller put one of his XXXL paws around my neck and started lifting me like a hundred-pound dumbbell.



I usually like to keep my head attached to my body, so I went ahead and stood up like he wanted me to.

"Let's try that again," he said. "This is my seat. Understand?"

I understood, all right. I'd been in sixth grade for about four and a half minutes, and I already had a fluorescent orange target on my back. So much for blending in.

And don't get me wrong. I'm not a total wimp. Give me a few more chapters, and I'll show you what I'm capable of. In the meantime, though, I decided to move to some other part of the room. Like maybe somewhere a little less hazardous to my health.

But then, when I went to sit down again, Miller called over. "Uh-uh," he said. "That one's mine too."

Can you see where this is going?

By the time our homeroom teacher, Mr. Rourke, rolled in, I was just standing there wondering what it might be like to spend the next nine months without sitting down.

Rourke looked over the top of his glasses at me. "Excuse me, Mr. Khatch . . . Khatch-a . . . Khatch-a-dor—"

10

"Khatchadorian," I told him.

"Gesundheit!" someone shouted, and the entire class started laughing.

"Quiet!" Mr. Rourke snapped as he checked his attendance book for my name. "And how are you today, Rafe?" he said, smiling like there were cookies on the way.

"Fine, thanks," I answered.

"Do you find our seating uncomfortable?" he asked me.

"Not exactly," I said, because I couldn't really go into details.

"Then SIT. DOWN. NOW!"

Unlike Miller the Killer, Mr. Rourke definitely has two sides, and I'd already met both of them.



Since nobody else was stupid enough to sit right in front of Miller, that was the only seat left in the room.

And because I'm the world's biggest idiot sometimes, I didn't look back when I went to sit in my chair. Which is why I hit the dirt as I went down—all the way down—to the floor.

The good news? Given the way things had started off, I figured middle school could only get better from here.

The bad news? I was wrong about the good news.

12

## CHAPTER 3

### AT LEAST I'VE GOT LEO

**D**o you remember that nursery rhyme about Jack Sprat and his wife? How neither of them ate the same thing, but between the two of them they got the job done? Same deal with me and Leo, except the fat and the lean are words and pictures. Make sense? I do the talking, and Leo takes care of the drawing.

Leo speaks to me sometimes, but that's about it. Conversation just isn't his thing. If Leo wanted to tell you your house was on fire, he'd probably draw you a picture to let you know. The guy is about as talkative as a giraffe. (Oh, I've got a thousand of them, ladies and gentlemen.)

Say hi, Leo.



See what I mean?

Besides, if it's true that a picture's worth a thousand words, then my buddy Leo has more to say than anyone I've ever met. You just have to know how to listen.

Bottom line, Leonardo the Silent is my best friend, at Hills Village or anywhere else. And before his head gets too big to fit through the door, I should say there's not a whole lot of competition for that title. I'm not exactly what you might see in the dictionary when you look up *popular*.

Which brings me to the next thing that happened that day.

## CHAPTER 4

### RAH, RAH, RAH, YADA, YADA, YADA . . .

**A**fter homeroom they'd usually ship us off to first period, but today was "special." There was going to be a Big! School! Assembly! to kick off the year, and everyone was all excited about it.

Of course, by *everyone*, I mean everyone but me.

They herded us all into the gym and sat us down on the bleachers. There was a podium on the floor with a microphone, and a big sign on the wall: WELCOME TO HVMS!!!



The principal, Mr. Dwight, got up and spoke first. After a speech that went something like



... he brought out the cheerleaders, who brought out the football, soccer, and cross-country teams, who brought everyone to their feet, yelling



and screaming. (Of course, by *everyone*, I mean everyone but me.) The only things missing were the circus tent and a couple of dancing elephants.



After that part, Mrs. Stricker announced that anyone who wanted to run for student council representative should come down to the microphone and address the assembly.

Five or six kids from every grade stood up, like they'd been expecting this. I guess Mr. Rourke might have said something about it in homeroom, but I'd been too busy waiting for Miller to drive a pencil through the back of my neck. I hadn't paid attention to too much else.

They started with the sixth graders first. We heard from two bozos who I didn't know, then a guy named Matt Kruschik who ate his own boogers until fourth grade, and then—

"Hi, everyone. I'm Jeanne Galletta."

About half of the sixth grade and even some of the seventh and eighth graders started clapping right away. She must have gone to Millbrook Elementary, because I'd never seen her before. I went to Seagrave Elementary, where we chased rats in gym class, and most of the kids got free lunch, including me.

"I think I'd be a good class representative because I know how to listen," Jeanne said. "And

there's nothing more important than that."

I was listening, I was listening.

She was pretty, for sure. She had the kind of face that you just want to stare at for as long as possible. But she also seemed kind of cool, like she didn't think she was better than anyone else. Even if she was.

"I have a lot of good ideas for how to make the school a better place," she goes on. "But first, I want to do one thing."

She leaves the mike and comes over, right in front of where I'm sitting. Then she looks straight at me and says, "Are you Rafe?"

Suddenly, I'm feeling about as talkative as Leo, but I manage to spit out an answer. "That's me," I say.

"Do you want to maybe split a large fries in the cafeteria later?" she asks.

"Sure. I'm buying," I say, because there's a twenty-dollar bill in my pocket that I just found that morning.

"No," she says. "The fries are on me."

Meanwhile, everyone's watching. The band starts playing, the cheerleaders start cheering,

21



and Miller the Killer chokes to death on a peanut M&M. Then I win the lottery, world peace breaks out everywhere, and Mrs. Stricker tells me that based on my all-around awesomeness, I can just skip sixth grade and come back next year.



"... so I hope you'll vote for me," Jeanne was saying, and everyone started clapping like crazy.

I never even heard most of her speech. But she definitely had my vote.

23



## THOSE OH-SO-CRUEL RULES

The next girl to speak at assembly was Lexi Winchester. I knew Lexi from my old school, and she was a real nice kid. Still, Jeanne Galletta had my vote. Sorry, Lex.

Once the speeches were over, I thought the assembly was done too.

No such luck.

Mrs. Stricker came back to the microphone and held up a little green book so everyone could see it.

"Can anyone tell me what this is?" Stricker said.

"Yeah," Miller the Killer mumbled somewhere behind me. "A complete waste of time."

"This," Mrs. Stricker said, "is the *Hills Village Middle School Code of Conduct*. Everything you need to know about how to behave at school—and

how *not* to behave—is right here in this book.”

A bunch of teachers came around and started handing out a copy to each student in the gym.

“When you receive yours, open up to page one and follow along with me,” Stricker said. Then she started reading . . . really . . . slowly.

“Section One: Hills Village Middle School Dress Code . . .”

When I got my copy, I flipped all the way to the back of the book. There were sixteen sections and twenty-six pages total. In other words, we were going to be lucky to get out of this assembly by Christmas.

“ . . . All students are expected to dress appropriately for an academic environment. No student shall wear clothing of a size more than two beyond his or her normal size. . . .”

HELP! That’s what I was thinking about then. Middle school had just started, and they were already trying to bore us to death. *Please, somebody stop Mrs. Stricker before she kills again!*

Leo took out a pen and started drawing something on the inside of the back cover. Stricker turned to the next page and kept reading.

25

“Section Two: Prohibited Items. No student shall bring to school any electronic equipment not intended for class purposes. This includes cell phones, iPods, cameras, laptop computers. . . .”

The whole thing went on and on.

And on.

And on.

By the time we got to Section 6 (“Grounds for Expulsion”), my brain was turning into guacamole, and I’m pretty sure my ears were bleeding too.

People always talk about how great it is to get older. All I saw were more rules and more adults telling me what I could and couldn’t do, in the name of what’s “good for me.” Yeah, well, asparagus is good for me, but it still makes me want to throw up.

As far as I could tell, this little green book in my hands was just one long list of all the ways I could—and probably would—get into trouble between now and the end of the school year.

Meanwhile, Leo was drawing away like the maniac he is. Every time Stricker mentioned another rule, he scribbled something else on the page in front of him. Finally, he turned it around and showed me what he was working on.

**RULES ARE MADE**



**FOR BREAKING**

All I could think when I saw that picture was—I want to be that kid. He looked like he was having a WAY better day than I was.

And that’s when I got my idea.

My really stupendous, really, really Big Idea. It came on like a flash flood.

This was the best idea anyone had ever had in the whole history of middle school. In the whole history of ideas! Not only was it going to help me get through the year, I thought, it might also just save my life here at Hills Village.

That was, if I had the nerve to actually try it.

28



## EUREKA!

**D**id you ever hear the expression “breaking every rule in the book”?

That was it. That was my Big Idea. Break every rule in the book. Literally.

The way I saw it, the *HVMS Code of Conduct* could be my worst enemy here at school, or if I played it right, I could turn it into my best friend.

Sorry, Leo. I mean my second-best friend.

All it would take was a little bit of work . . . and a ton of guts. Maybe two tons.

Leo knew exactly what I was thinking. The idea had come from his picture, after all.

“Go for it,” he whispered. “Just pick something out of the book and get started.”

“Right now?” I whispered back.

my heart was pounding out “The Star-Spangled Banner,” I got up and walked over to where one of the prison guards (I mean, teachers) was standing by the gym door.

“I need a bathroom pass,” I told her.

“You can wait,” she said.

“‘Section Eight!’” Stricker boomed over the microphone. “We’re halfway there!”

“Please?” I said, trying to look as much like a pants-wetter as possible.

The teacher gave a big sigh, like she wished she’d been a lawyer instead. “Okay, five minutes,” she said.

Five minutes was more than enough. I went out to the hall and into the boys’ bathroom while she was still watching me. Then I counted to ten and stuck my head out again.

Nobody was around. As far as I knew, the whole school was inside that gym. It was now or never.

I sprinted up the hall, around the long way behind the office, and then cut down another hallway, through the cafeteria, and into an empty stairwell in the back. By the time I found what I was looking for, I’d been gone only a minute or two.

“Why not? What are you waiting for?” he said, and I guess the answer was—two tons of guts.

I just kind of sat there, frozen, so Leo flipped open the book for me and pointed to something on the page without even looking down. When I saw where his finger landed, I almost started having a heart attack.

“I can’t do that!” I told him. “What if someone gets hurt?”

“How does this hurt anyone?” Leo said. “Except maybe you.”

Somehow that didn’t make me feel any better.

“Listen,” Leo told me, “you’re never going to be one of those people”—he pointed at all the student council candidates and jocks and cheerleaders sitting on chairs that had been set up on the gym floor. “But this,” he said, thumping the rule book with his pen, “this is something you can do.”

“I don’t know,” I tried lamely.

“Or,” Leo said, “you can keep going the way you’re going, and every day can be just like this one.” He shrugged. “It might not be so bad. There are only a hundred and eighty school days in a year.”

That did it. “Okay, okay,” I said, and even though

30

I stood there, staring at the little red box on the wall.



I could just hear Leo now, like he was right there. *Don’t think about it. Just DO it!*

I flipped the latch, opened the wire cage around the alarm box, and put my finger on the little white handle inside. This was what you call the point of no return. My mission, should I choose to accept it . . . and all that.

Still—was I crazy? Was I completely nuts for thinking I could pull this off?

Yes, I told myself. You are.

Okay, I thought. Just checking.

And I pulled the alarm.

32

31

## CHAOS

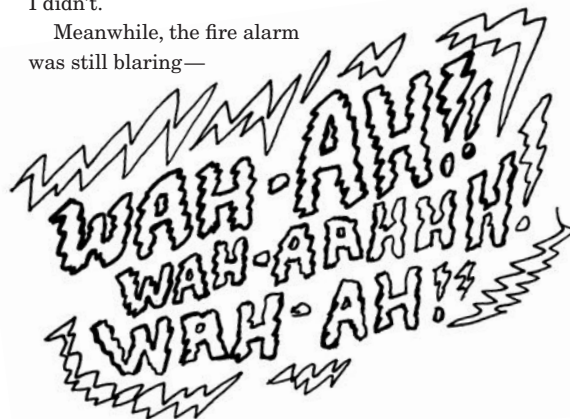
Turns out, I didn't need a plan. By the time I got anywhere near the gym, everyone was already running, walking, and for all I know skipping in every possible direction. I guess Mrs. Stricker hadn't gotten to the part about what to do if a fire alarm sounds (Section 11). In fact, I

it just sounded like—

**RULES!**  
**Rate RULES!**  
**Rate RULES!**  
**Rate RULES!**

Then I took Leo's pen and drew a line right through it. That felt pretty good too. One rule down and . . . well, all the rest to go.

Meanwhile, the fire alarm  
was still blaring—



## MY HOME PAGE

**O**n the bus ride home that afternoon, everyone was talking about my little fire drill. It was a rush, sitting there and knowing they were all talking about me.

Of course, everything good has to come to an end. Before long, I was getting off the bus and walking through the front door of my house.

Meet my future stepfather, also known as the low point of my day. His name is Carl, but we call him Bear. Two years ago, he was just this customer at the diner where my mom works. Now, somehow, Mom has a ring on her finger, and Bear lives here with us.

That's Ditka, Bear's lame excuse for a guard

dog. Ditka knows all about “attack” but not so much about “down” or “stop.” He usually tries to eat my face for an after-school snack.

"Ditka, down! *Down!*" Bear said, coming out of hibernation as I walked in the door.

Bear pulled Ditka off of me and then flopped back into his Bear-shaped place on the couch. "Hey, Squirt. How was the first day?" (He calls me Squirt. Do I even have to point that out?)

“School was unbelievable,” I said. “I kind of, well, sort of, met this amazing girl, and then I set off the fire alarm during an assembly—”

Okay, that's not what I really said, but it wouldn't have mattered if I did. Bear's not exactly a good listener.

“Uh-huh,” he said. He reached up and stretched—his workout for the day. “Did you sign up for football yet?”

"Nah," I said. I took a couple of pudding cups out of the fridge and kept moving toward my room.

“Why the heck not?” he yelled after me.  
“Football’s the one thing you’re actually good at!”

“Don’t worry, I didn’t forget I’m a loser, Loser,” I said as I zoomed down the hall.

“DID YOU JUST CALL ME A LOSER?” Bear roared back.

“No, I called myself a loser,” I said, and slammed my door. “Loser.”

Like I said—low point of my day.

Bear and Mom had just gotten engaged that summer, over Fourth of July. That's when Bear moved in. Mom asked Georgia and me what we thought about it before she said yes, but what were we going to tell her? "You're about to get engaged to the world's biggest slug"? I don't think she would have listened, anyway.

Now Mom was working double shifts at the diner all the time just to make enough money, and Bear was spending 99 percent of his time on our couch, except maybe to go to the bathroom or to collect his stupid unemployment check.

Bottom line? My mom was way too good for this guy, but unfortunately neither of them seemed to know it.

41



## CHAPTER 9

### CHECK THIS OUT

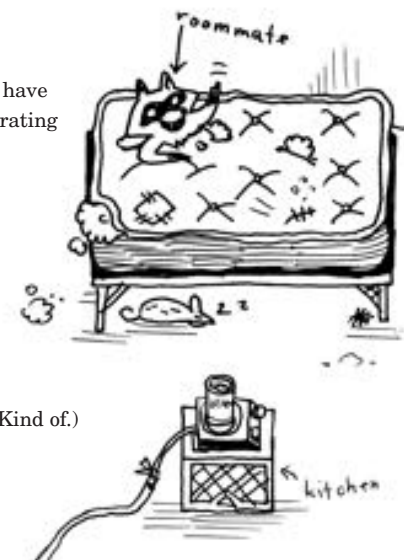
So, this is what my room looks like. It's the one place at home I can kick back, be by myself, and do whatever I want. Mom says I keep it too messy, but the truth is, I just have too much STUFF.



## CHAPTER 10

### CHECK THIS OUT, PART II

Okay, I might have been exaggerating a tiny bit there. Really, it's more like this.





"Here." I gave her one of my pudding cups. "He said have a pudding cup, okay? Now get out."

She gave me a look that was like, "I'm not stupid, but okay, I'll take the pudding cup," and she didn't ask any more questions.

Mostly, I can't stand Georgia, but I also didn't want her to get stuck in the middle of anything with me and Bear. She was still the kid in the family, after all.

"Rafe?"

"What?" I said.

"Thanks for the pudding cup."

"You're welcome. Now close the door—from the other side," I said, and turned my back on her like I expected nothing short of obedience. A few seconds later, I heard her leave.

Finally, some peace and quiet! Now I could get down to work and really figure out where this whole mission thing was going to take me next.

## CHAPTER 11

### GEORGIA ON MY NERVES

About twelve seconds after I slammed my door, Georgia came a-knocking. She knew better than to just barge in. At least I'd trained her that much.

"Enter!" I told her.

She came in and closed the door right behind her. "What's going on? Why was he yelling like that? Are you in trouble?" she said.

In case you're wondering, Georgia is nine and a half years old, in fourth grade, and 100 percent into everyone else's business.

"Go away," I told her. I had work to do. A mission to plan. Besides, since when do I need an excuse to NOT want my sister around?

"Just tell me what he said," she whined.

## CHAPTER 12

### SO THIS IS WHAT MOTIVATION FEELS LIKE!

First of all, it needed a name. I thought about it for a while and came up with Operation R.A.F.E., which stands for:

**R**ules  
**A**ren't  
**F**or  
**E**veryone

I'd be the first kid to ever play Operation R.A.F.E., but not the last. Someday there could be Operation R.A.F.E. video games, Rafe Khatchadorian action figures (okay, so it's not the best action hero name), a movie version (starring

me), and a whole amusement park called R.A.F.E. World, with sixteen different roller coasters and no height requirements to ride any of the rides. The whole thing (R.A.F.E. Enterprises) would make me the world's youngest million-billion-trillionaire, or maybe some kind of -aire that doesn't even exist yet. And I'd pay somebody to go to school for me.



Meanwhile I still had to finish inventing this thing.

I decided that every rule in the *Hills Village Middle School Code of Conduct* should be worth a certain number of points, depending on how hard it was to break. Of course, this meant I could get into some serious trouble, so I decided to make that worth a bunch of points too. And there would be bonuses, for things like getting big laughs, or if Jeanne Galletta saw what I did. Definitely that!

I wrote it all down in a big grid, in one of the spiral notebooks Mom got me for school. (What? This was for school.)

That's only part of it. There are a TON more rules in the *Code of Conduct* than that—112 of them, to be exact—but you get the idea.

After I was done writing it all down, I started thinking maybe this whole thing needed some kind of major ending. Like, if Operation R.A.F.E. was going to get me through sixth grade, then I should have something big—no, HUGE—as a kind of final challenge before I could go on to the next level (which was seventh grade).

I'd get Leo to help me, and it would be worth

50

## OPERATION: R.A.F.E.

### BEGINNER (no planning, low/no danger)

RULE	POINTS	Witnesses Required?
Talking in class	10,000	4
Running in the hall	10,000	4
Late for class	10,000	4
No Gum	5,000	4
No Electronics	7,500	4

### INTERMEDIATE (some planning AND/OR some danger)

RULE	P.P.P. POINTS	Witnesses required?
No fighting	25,000	4
Skip class	20,000	4
Break dress code a little	10,000	4
Break dress code A LOT	20,000	4
No bad language/cursing	20,000	4

### ADVANCED (major planning AND/OR HIGH danger factor)

RULE	POINTS	Witnesses required?
Destruction of school property	35,000	(only afterward)
Don't mess with fire alarms	50,000	4 DONE!!
Stealing school property	40,000	

### BONUS POINTS Available

FOR what?	POINTS	NOTES
Jeanne G. sees	5,000 - INFINITY	\$5000 the 1st time, 10,000 the 2nd, etc.
Get big laughs	2,000 - 10,000	depends on # of people
Sent to VP's office	20,000	BEWARE! STRICKER!
Sent to principal's office	30,000	DANGER - DMOHT!
DETENTION!	50,000	CAUTION - DANGER!
Talking my way out of getting sent to VP's office, principal's office, or detention	100,000	I am the MAN!

half a million points—way more than anything else. It had to be something everyone in school would see, and everyone would remember long after I was gone. But also very high risk. I'd have to *earn* those big points.

I still didn't have any idea how I was going to pull this whole thing off, but it almost didn't matter. I just couldn't wait to start figuring it out. In fact—and please don't tell anyone I said this—for the first time in my life, I was actually looking forward to going back to school.

52