Middle School

Chatterbooks activity pack
**Middle School by James Patterson**

**About this pack**

Here’s a pack about the great series of *Middle School* books – all about the ups and (quite a few) downs in the life of Rafe Khatchadorian. Rafe is a student who has attended Hills Village Middle School, Cathedral School for the Arts, and Airbrook Arts. He is an artist, and school to him often seems like a prison for sixth, seventh and eighth graders. He’s come up with several missions for himself in an attempt to make life more interesting, though executing the operations seems to only land him in hot water!

His mother is Jules, a single parent, and his (adopted) sister is Georgia. He has a deceased twin named Leo, whom we meet as Rafe’s imaginary friend. Rafe’s father, Luca, was a war hero who died before the events of the series.

Read all about Rafe’s rollercoaster life as he tackles the challenges of school rules, bullying, summer camp, and much more... and enjoy these *Middle School* discussion ideas and activities with your Chatterbooks group!

*Middle School* is written by best-selling author James Patterson and this pack is brought to you by The Reading Agency and their Children’s Reading Partner, *Cornerstone Publishing*.

**Chatterbooks** [www.readinggroups.org/chatterbooks] is a reading group programme for children aged 4 to 14 years. It is coordinated by The Reading Agency and its patron is author Dame Jacqueline Wilson. Chatterbooks groups run in libraries and schools, supporting and inspiring children’s literacy development by encouraging them to have a really good time reading and talking about books.

**The Reading Agency** is an independent charity working to inspire more people to read more through programmes for adults, young people and Children – including the Summer Reading Challenge, and Chatterbooks. See www.readingagency.org.uk

**Children’s Reading Partners** is a national partnership of children’s publishers and libraries working together to bring reading promotions and author events to as many children and young people as possible.

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**Top Tips for a Successful Session**
Middle School – author James Patterson

James is passionate about encouraging children to read. He was inspired by his own son, who was a reluctant reader, to write books specifically for young readers. His commitment to child literacy and engagement in books saw him voted ‘Children’s Choice Author of the Year’ 2010 by American schoolchildren themselves. James sets out to write a broad range of books so that there is a Patterson book for every kind of reader – especially kids. He starts with the premise that to get people engaged and loving books, you have to deliver a read that’s exciting, entertaining and gets kids hooked.

James Patterson has been the most borrowed author in UK libraries for the past eight years in a row and his books have sold more than 300 million copies worldwide, making him one of the biggest-selling authors of all time. He sponsored the inaugural World Book Day Award in 2015, giving schools the chance to win a share of £25,000 to buy books for their library. The award will run again in 2016 with a further £25,000 prize pot. He has also so far donated £500,000 to UK independent book shops in partnership with the Booksellers Association, funding everything from new carpets and shelves to innovative schemes to get children reading. He lives in Florida with his wife and son.

Have a look at the James Patterson’s website.

Here’s what readers have said about Middle School

I found this book very interesting and well written. It has a good story line and AMAZING drawings. As well as this, there is also a very good twist at the end which I will not tell you about (spoilers)! I highly recommend this book to anyone who likes funny and adventurous books. Just to let you know, it does not use much amazing vocabulary like Harry Potter or the Hunger Games, but it is still very engaging. If you get the book, you will enjoy it very much.

I really enjoy this Middle School series and can see why it’s been such a hit with its target age. Rafe is a fun character with very realistic qualities and a hatred of school, and his family are just as likeable as him. Rafe tells it like it is, and even though he has trouble at school he tries his best and writes books to help others through the trauma. He’s also funny and quick-witted, especially when faced with new situations like a survival week!
Introducing Rafe and the Middle School books
First of all let everyone read at least one of the books. You could start by introducing it in a session and reading one or two chapters together – and also read tasters from more of the books.

Talking about the book: some book-talk questions
Get everyone to share their first responses to this book. This could be with the whole class – or children could discuss in small groups, and then share feelings and questions with everyone.
Ask lots of open questions to get people talking and encourage discussion about feelings and responses to the story, the characters, and the way the story is told with lots of illustrations linking in with the text.
There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions – we will all have our own feelings and opinions about the book, and the things we like, or don’t like!
Here are some questions to get you going:
  o What did you like about the book?
  o Was there anything that you disliked?
  o Was there anything that puzzled you?
  o Were there any patterns – any connections – that you noticed?
  o What did you think of the way the story was told in the pictures as well as in the words?

Middle School:
The books – published by Young Arrow

See also page 9 of this pack for more ideas for discussion and activities.

James Patterson and Chris Tebbetts
Middle School 1: The Worst Years of My Life
978-0099596783
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.

A taste: So anyway, ta da, here it is, book fans, and all of you in need of merit 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.
Some discussion and activity ideas:

- The best and worst years of your life! In pairs in your group share with a partner: tell them about your best year so far, and your worst year. Then ask everyone to tell the whole group one thing from what their partner has said.
- See how the text on page 24 describing the fire alarm blaring, actually looks like the sound! Here are some more words to play with – write them down so that they look like the sounds they are telling us about. – e.g. !!B A N G!!  Try this with: whisper; scream; crash; slurp; moo...
- On page 42 is a picture of Rafe’s bedroom. In the same way, draw your bedroom as it really is – or as you’d like it to be – or both!
- Have a look at Rafe’s Operation Planning Chart on page 51. Think of some positive challenges for yourself – e.g. ‘get up early one day a week’ – and put together your own Operation Planning Chart.

James Patterson and Chris Tebbetts
Middle School 2: Get Me Out of Here!  978-1784750114
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!

A taste: It turns out when you’ve got a new home, new city, and new school, it’s not exactly hard to find new experiences. I was scooping them up without even trying – which was all great for my mission. In the meantime here are some of the highlights, lowlights, and everything-in-between lights of Operation Get a Life.

Activity ideas

- On page 67 Rafe does a self-portrait. Have a go at drawing yourself in cartoon style. Then annotate it, giving details about how you look and what you’re like. E.g. draw an arrow to your hair and say what colour it is, and something about it – e.g. ‘grows really quickly!’
- Rafe decides he’s going to do one new thing a day and keeps a visual diary recording the things he’s done (see page 89). Have a go yourself at doing one new thing a day. Get a notebook and make a ‘daily diary’ – each day draw or write about your new thing from the day before.
James Patterson and Lisa Papademetriou  
*Middle School 3: My Brother is a Big Fat Liar*  
978-1784750121

Georgia Khatchadorian plans to excel at Hills Village Middle School in all the places her troublemaking brother failed. She’s even bet him that she’ll quickly become one of the most popular girls in school. But Rafe left a big mark at Hills Valley Middle School, and no one will give Georgia a chance!

**A taste:** “If I didn’t act crazy, Mom wouldn’t even remember I was around,” Rafe said. “It’s been that way since the day we brought you home.”

The day we brought you home. There was something about those words which made me start to cry. I tried to do it as quietly as possible. Tears leaked out of the sides of my eyes and trickled into my hair. “You’re my sister, Georgia,” Rafe said. “You always have been.”

**Discussion and activity ideas:**

- **The narrator in this book is Rafe’s sister Georgia, so now we get her view on things and how she sees Rafe. This way we learn more about him – and much more about Georgia too. We also get a different take on events – which narrator do you like best, Rafe or Georgia? You could have a go at writing a simple event from two points of view – e.g. a family day out from your POV, and how it seemed to your parents!**

- **Georgia describes what it’s like being judged in the light of her brother’s reputation. Talk about the pros and cons of having brothers and sisters! If you’re an only child, you could describe the pros and cons of having none.**

James Patterson and Chris Tebbetts  
*Middle School 4: How I Survived Bullies, Broccoli and Snake Hill*  
978-1784750138

Rafe Khatchadorian is ready for a fun summer at camp—until he finds out it’s a summer school camp! Luckily, Rafe easily makes friends with his troublemaking cabin mates and bunkmate, a boy nicknamed Booger-Eater, who puts up with endless teasing from the other kids.

**A taste:** It turned out that Major Sherwood was all gung ho about reading, just like Norman. So every morning from eleven o’clock to eleven forty-five, everyone at camp, including the teachers, had to sit and do nothing but stare at a book. They called it D.E.A.R., which stands for *Drop Everything And Read*. Maybe you even have it at your school, but I’d never heard of it.
Discussion and activity ideas

- Here are some of the books which Rafe’s friend Norman reads: Holes (Louis Sachar), The Chocolate War (Robert Cormier), Lord of the Rings (Tolkien), Hunger Games ((Suzanne Collins). Do you know any of these? ‘Holes’ would make an especially good Chatterbooks read.

- On page 63 Rafe describes ‘Drop Everything And Read’ (see Taster above) where dropping everything and making time for reading is highly encouraged! There’s a special website for it. Lots of schools in the U.S. have D.E.A.R.- What do you think of the idea? Is it something you do, or could do, at your school?

James Patterson and Julia Bergen
Middle School 5: Ultimate Showdown  978-0099596363
This is where readers get a chance to participate in the Middle School series in this interactive book featuring more than 80 hilarious anecdotes from duelling siblings Rafe and Georgia Khatchadorian—plus dozens of fun-filled activities!

A taste: Welcome to the book version of a Doomsday Cage Match. My sister and I are going to go at it mano a mano, which, I’m told, means “hand to hand,” not “man to man.”...Georgia and I agreed (can you believe it?) that we want YOU to be in the story too. So you get to talk, draw, play a couple of games, do whatever you want. This is YOUR book. Plus, your whole class, your whole school, can join in if they’re in the mood. Even teachers!

Lots of great activities in this book – here’s a selection:

- Page 31 – make a bookmark which says ‘why I love my librarian’. Talk about librarians, what they do, what they’re like (does a librarian have to have spectacles and a bun, and say SSSHH! All the time?!)

- Page 65 – have a debate about school uniform and school dress codes. Do you think school uniform is a good thing or not?

- Page 102 – a Fun Food Wordsearch
James Patterson and Chris Tebbetts
Middle School 6: Save Rafe! 978-0099596431

After a rough summer, Rafe is heading back to the dreaded Hills Village Middle School, the site of the very worst years of his life. And as if that's not bad enough, he's learned that he's going to be held back a year unless he can prove himself on an outdoor survival excursion—complete with dangerous white-water rafting, dizzying rock climbing, and fanatical counsellors.

A taste: “All right, cockroaches, listen up!” Fish said. “Welcome to Rocky Mountain High Base Camp. This is where your journey starts, and if you've got what it takes to make it through the week, this is where it will end. Now grab your gear and follow me.”

Activity ideas:

- If someone wrote a biography of you, telling your life story, what would the book cover look like? On page 80 Rafe gives some ideas for the cover of his.

- On page 226 Rafe is thinking about what his life might be like in a year's time. What would you want yours to look like one year from today? Take some time to think about it and make some notes – then share some of your hopes and plans with the rest of your Chatterbooks group.

James Patterson and Chris Tebbetts
Middle School 7: Just My Rotten Luck 978-0099596448

In this seventh Middle School episode, Rafe heads back to the place his misadventures began: the dreaded Hills Village Middle School, where he's now being forced to take "special" classes.

A taste: Ms Donatello says when you change one little corner of the world, you change the world. I don’t know if that’s true, but if it is, then I say mission accomplished. My BNICE project ended up changing things too, in an even bigger way. I know that one news story on Channel 11 and a couple of conversations round school aren’t going to drive bullies extinct everywhere, but they made a difference at HVMS.

Discussion and activity ideas

- What way-out things have you especially liked doing that you could recommend to your friends? Here’s one of Rafe’s most favourite things! ‘If you’ve never eaten cold leftover burgers in the middle of the night while watching the scariest movie you’ve ever seen with your new best friend and your dog, then you’re missing out.’ (p143)

- On page 108 is Rafe’s To Do List – write your own To Do List for the day!

- Page 217 has a board game of the Chutes and Ladders in Rafe’s life. You could play this game using dice and counters – or make up one of your own to play.
Middle School:
More discussion and activity ideas for your Chatterbooks sessions

Things to talk about

Bullying
Rafe sometimes gets bullied – especially by Miller in Book 1 *The Worst Years of My Life*.
Talk about how this is described and how Rafe tries to deal with it.
In Book 5 *Ultimate Showdown* there is a whole section on bullying where Rafe gives some tips learned from his experiences. He and his sister Georgia describe the different kinds of bullies and there are activity sheets, cartoons and questionnaires to get you thinking about how you might tackle bullying.

Rules are made for breaking?!
What do people in your group think?!
In *The Worst Years of My Life* Rafe sets out on his special Operation RAFE – Rules Aren’t For Everyone – and aims to break every rule in the book – the school’s book of rules. Eventually things start catching up with him...
Talk about the rules in your school and why you think they are there.
Are there rules which don’t work, or could be improved upon?

Difficult Times
In Book 7 *Just My Rotten Luck* Rafe says:
*Sometimes you have to hold your ground. Sometimes you have to face your fears. And other times? You just feel like running.* (p39)
Talk about this – do people agree? Are there times when they’ve faced up to things, or felt like running away? How did they turn out in the end?

Imaginary Friends
Rafe has a friend called Leo – and gradually we realise that Leo is an imaginary friend. Later we learn that he is actually Rafe’s brother, who died when they were very young – but he is still very real to Rafe.

Rafe talks to Leo and imagines Leo talking to him – and encouraging and daring him to do things, like Operation RAFE!
In Book 1 *The Worst Years of My Life* Rafe says: *We all talk to people who aren’t there, all the time, with texting and computers and even answering machines. Artists talk to their muses for inspiration. Some people even talk to themselves.* (p124)
Have people in your group had imaginary friends? Or do they talk to themselves sometimes? Do they find it helps – maybe to sort things out or to get yourself moving on something?

Do you know any other stories with imaginary friends? Have a look at A.F.Harrold’s *The Imaginary* – and there’s Sean Murphy in Chris O’Dowd’s *Moone Boy*.

**Warm up**

**Scrambled!**

Can you unscramble these words? They are the names of people in *Middle School* Book 1 – most of them appear in all the *Middle School* books!

The answers are at the end of this pack.

REBA          JESUL          OLE          GERAGIO          TAKID

MERLIL        FERA          RMS          ALTONDLOE        JANENE

and one place! SHILL GLEVIAL

**Middle School – the main characters**

On a flipchart make a list together of the names of all the characters you can think of from the *Middle School* books you have read.

Next to each character write just a few words describing them – then vote for your favourite characters!

You could also have a go at drawing them and writing about them.
Longer activities

What do you know about Rafe?
From all the *Middle School* books you have read, collect and write down as many things as possible that you know about what Rafe is like. Here are a few quotes to get you going:

- Book 1 – *And don’t get me wrong. I’m not a total wimp* (p10)
- Book 1 – *I’m not exactly what you might see in the dictionary when you look up popular* (p15)
- Book 2 – *I went to Seagrave Elementary where we chased rats in gym class, and most of the kids got free lunch, including me* (p20)
- Book 2 – *I like to think of it as putting my own spin on the things that happen to me – active imagination’, ‘tendency to lie’* (p10)
- Book 2 – *...imaginative- a loner for sure. But not cuckoo* (p31)
- Book 5 – *Rafe cares a lot about his mum: It was one more reason why she’s basically the most awesome mom in the world...I wasn’t going to let her down ever again, if I could help it.* (p73)
- Book 5 – *Mom said I had an ‘adventurous spirit’ before I could even walk* (p3)
- Book 5 – *it’s like I’m some kind of trouble magnet, and I can’t do anything to stop it* (143)

Talk about other storybook characters you know who are a bit like Rafe – eg. Wimpy Kid and Barry Loser.
Make a list of all the ones you can think of (including Rafe!) and next to each one jot down particular things about them – eg. Wimpy Kid wants to be cool. Which character do you like best? What do you specially like about them.
*(See the Further Reading suggestions on p14 of this pack)*

Pictures and illustrations 1
Book 1 – *None of Mom’s paintings have names. She says you’re supposed to look at them and decide for yourself how they make you feel* (p120)
Find 6 (or more) paintings on the Internet – choose ones by different painters and in different styles.
Print them out and make sure the title of each painting can’t be seen.
Ask your group to spend time looking at them and talking about them, and then let each person decide what names they would give to the pictures.
They could put post-its up against each picture. Then compare all the names – do they show lots of different feelings from different people? Are some of the names very similar?
Pictures and illustrations 2
In Book 1 (p131) Rafe’s teacher gives the class a list of abstract nouns – e.g. *contentment, prosperity, fortitude.*
She explains what an abstract noun is and then asks them to find pictures in magazines and newspapers, representing what the words mean to them. Get your group to have a go at this, making collages to display different abstract nouns.

Pictures and illustrations 3
*Just when things seem to be going ok.... (bk1, p133)*
Storyboard a day in the life of Rafe.
Get together lots of old magazines and newspapers.
Choose one day from any of the *Middle School* books, plot it out in a storyboard, and put together the story using cut-out text and pictures from the magazines/papers.

Pictures and illustrations 4
In Book 7, *Just My Rotten Luck*, Rafe’s teacher introduces them to lots of well-known artists and paintings. (See illustration on p59 which includes several of those below)
See how many of these you can find out about – in art books and on the Internet.
Here’s a list of most of them:
Artists:
- Grant Wood
- Michaelangelo
- Andy Warhol
- Magritte
- Vincent Van Gogh
- Mondrian
- Jackson Pollock (p116)
Art works
- The Mona Lisa
- Venus de Milo
- The gold mask of Tutankhamun
- ‘Starry Night’ (p129)
- ‘The Scream’ (p148)
- ‘St George Killing the Dragon’ (p144)
- ‘The Thinker’ (p153)
Pictures and illustrations 5 - Loozer comics
Rafe draws comic strips about his life and feelings – e.g. in Book 5 (p40)
Use this template for people to draw their own comic strips of things that have happened to them. What would they call their comics? Here’s a useful website.
More Reading

More books by James Patterson - With Chris Grabenstein

I Funny 1  978-0316206921
Jamie Grimm is a middle schooler on a mission: he wants to become the world's greatest stand-up comedian - even if he always seems to 'choke' in the spotlight. When Jamie finds out about a contest called the Funniest Kid on the Planet, he knows it's time to face his fears and enter. But are the judges rewarding him out of pity because he happens to be in a wheelchair, like his bullying cousin Stevie suggests? And will Jamie ever share the secret of his troubled past - and reason for his disability - instead of hiding behind his comedy act?

I Funny 2 - I Even Funnier  978-0099567462
Middle schooler Jamie Grimm has big dreams of being the best stand-up comic in the world – and he won't let the fact that he's in a wheelchair get in his way. After winning the New York state finals in the Planet's Funniest Kid Comic Contest, Jamie's off to Boston to compete in the national semi-finals. But when one of his best buddies runs into trouble at school and a sudden family health scare rears its head, Jamie has to put his comedic ambitions on hold and stand by the people he cares about. Can Jamie pass up the big competition for the sake of his friends and family?

I Funny 3 - I Totally Funniest  978-0099596288
Jamie Grimm is back and better than ever in the third episode of James Patterson's bestselling I Funny series. Finding himself one step closer to his dream of being the best kid comic in the world, Jamie faces his biggest challenge yet.
After scoring big on national TV in the semifinals contest, everyone back home is jumping on the Jamie Grimm bandwagon, and all the attention might be going to his head. Not only are his friendships starting to suffer, but the pressure of coming up with his best material ever for the ultimate stand up act to snag the final win in Hollywood is pushing Jamie to the brink. Suddenly, life isn't looking very funny anymore. Can Jamie take the grand prize without pushing away his fans, friends and family?

Treasure Hunters 1 – Treasure Hunters  978-0099567622
The Kidd siblings have grown up diving down to shipwrecks and travelling the world, helping their famous parents recover everything from swords to gold doubloons from the bottom of the ocean. But after their parents disappear on the job, the kids are suddenly thrust into the biggest treasure hunt of their lives.
They'll have to work together to defeat dangerous pirates and dodge the hot pursuit of an evil treasure-hunting rival, all while following cryptic clues to unravel the mystery of what really happened to their parents – and find out if they're still alive.

Treasure Hunters 2 – Danger Down the Nile  978-0099567653
Four kids on a quest to find the legendary Mines of King Solomon... and their parents. Bick, Beck, Storm and Tommy are navigating their way down the Nile, from hot and dusty Cairo to deep dark jungles, past some seriously bad guys along the way. They'll need all their survival instincts just to make it out alive...
Treasure Hunters 3 – Secret of the Forbidden City  978-0099596493

The Kidds – treasure hunting family extraordinare – are heading to China, on a journey that will lead them beyond the Great Wall and into the underbelly of Berlin.
Bick and Beck Kidd are desperately trying to secure the ancient Chinese artefact that will buy their mother’s freedom from renegade pirates. But when the kidnappers force them to locate an even greater treasure – priceless paintings stolen by Nazis, the Kidds must rely on their own cunning and experience to outwit the criminals, all while their mom’s life is on the line.

House of Robots 978-0099568285

An extraordinary robot signs up for an ordinary fifth grade class... and elementary school will never be the same!
It was never easy for Sammy Hayes-Rodriguez to fit in, so he's dreading the day when his genius mom insists he bring her newest invention to school: a walking, talking robot he calls E – for "Error". Sammy's no stranger to robots – his house is full of a colourful cast of them. But this one not only thinks it's Sammy's brother... it's actually even nerdier than Sammy.
Will E be Sammy's one-way ticket to Loserville? Or will he prove to the world that it's cool to be square? It's a roller-coaster ride for Sammy to discover the amazing secret E holds that could change his family forever... if all goes well on the trial run!

And more stories to enjoy!

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Answer to ‘Scrambled’:

BEAR     JULES    LEO     GEORGIA     DITKA    
MILLER    RAFE     MRS DONATELLO    JEANNE    

And one place!  HILLS VILLAGE