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**The  
WORST-CASE SCENARIO  
Survival Handbook:  
Middle School**

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# The WORST-CASE SCENARIO Survival Handbook: Middle School



By David Borgenicht, Ben H. Winters, and Robin Epstein  
*Illustrated by Chuck Gonzales*

  
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**A WORD OF WARNING:** It's always important to keep safety in mind. If you're careless, even the tamest activities can result in injury. As such, all readers are urged to act with caution, ask for adult advice, obey all laws, and respect the rights of others when handling any Worst-Case Scenario.

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# Introduction



*Stuck in the middle...*



*The middle of nowhere...*



*Middle age...*

Sometimes being “in the middle” gets a bad rap. But if you’re in the middle—or about to *start* the middle—of your school career, there’s actually a lot to look forward to... *if* you’re prepared.

This handbook is your very own insider’s guide to the unique world that is middle school. It’s kind of like getting a sneak peek at the teacher’s edition of your math book. It doesn’t have all the answers to your next test, but it *does* have all the tips and secrets you need to make the most of that oh-so-special time in the middle.

So, what exactly *is* so special about middle school? One word: CHANGE.

Middle school is one of those times in life when a whole lotta change happens in a pretty short time. In those middle years, people get taller, they get new interests, their social lives change, and their minds start thinking in more and more sophisticated ways. It’s one big chapter of change.

And it’s not just about what happens *during* middle school—the chapter *begins* with a big whammy of a change, too. When you start middle school, you’re fresh out of elementary school. Back there, you were old and wise. You knew the ropes. You knew the rules. There were plenty of short people around to make you feel tall. But then, along comes middle school and suddenly, BANG! You’re in opposite land. You’re a newbie. A young’un! Lots of things are different—the way your classes are set up, what’s expected of you, the way your friends act, everything!

This book is here to help you navigate that sea of change. It’ll help prepare you for the choppy waters—and sharks!—so you’ll have plenty of time for smooth middle-school sailing. Here’s how this handbook can help:

- *Nervous about the school dance? We have the moves to get you through.*
- *Prepping for a big test? You’ll find plenty of tried and true studying hints in here.*
- *Have a sinking grade? We toss you a lifeline.*

- *Dealing with a bully or mean girl? We give you the upper hand.*

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- *Being crushed by a crush? We show you how to read the signs.*
- *Growing apart from your best friend? We help you deal— and make new friends.*

Whether you're a middle-school rookie or a seasoned pro, the tips, tricks, and secrets you'll find inside this handbook will help you have an amazing year (or two, or three). Now, it's time to dig in and get to the juicy *middle* of things!

—David Borgenicht, Ben H. Winters, and Robin Epste

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# CHAPTER 1

## The School Day



# How to Survive Day One

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If middle school were a game, the first day would be like the championship. Here's how to win it.

## 1 Conduct an investigation.

Does your school have a website? Check it out! Can you tour the school in advance? Do it! Know kids who already attend? Ask them for insider information! If you know what to expect, you'll keep the pre-game jitters at bay.

## 2 Look great, feel great.

Take your first-day clothes for a test drive a few weeks beforehand to make sure they look and feel right. You can even host your own fashion show by asking your best bud for an opinion. Knowing you look your best will help you have the confidence you need.

## 3 Buddy up.

Find out who's in your homeroom, who you can walk to gym with, and whose fries you can "borrow" in the cafeteria. Plan ahead to maximize "friend" time.

## 4 Map quest.

If you don't have a map of your school, make one. Add crucial information like a route from gym to math that takes you past a water fountain.

## 5 Imagine success.

See yourself being happy, making friends, and feeling great. Don't let yourself imagine an uncomfortable you. The better you visualize your day, the better you can make it.



## The Locker Lowdown

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Think of your locker as your home base, your fortress, your space to decorate or mess up as you see fit!



- Memorize your combo with a little poem like, “47, 13, 4, that’s the combo I adore.”



- Do a once-a-month super-clean. Toss what you don’t need and organize the rest.



- Make sure dirty clothes don’t hang around—they have a way of “ripening” in small, dark spaces.



- Keep a little mirror for between-class hair fixes and to check for paint smudges on your cheeks after art class.



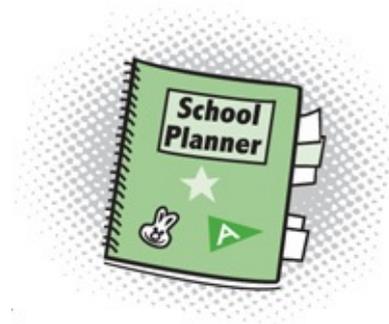
- Avoid storing food “for later,” which might turn into “for the roaches that have moved in and are now quite comfortable.”

# How to Keep Track of All Your Business

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Read this list, then close your eyes and repeat it: For first period, answer questions 12 through 27. For second period, read chapters 5 through 7. For third period, do worksheet 6. For fifth period, do problems 6 through 13, skipping 8 and 11.

If it was tough to remember that list *now*, it'll be even tougher at the end of a school day, when your brain feels like a wet noodle. Enter the homework planner, a.k.a. your brain saver!



## 1 Save the plan-it!

Assignments and quizzes and tests, oh my! Avoid getting lost in the woods by making (or buying) a planner where you can jot down crucial class info. Choose a notebook that's not too bulky—you'll be carrying this baby *everywhere*. Set up each page in your planner like the example on the next page.

## 2 Love your planner.

Record *everything* in there—not just homework and tests, but also upcoming field trips, long-term projects, and friends' birthdays. (Who doesn't like to be remembered on their birthday?!)

## 3 Get all the deets, all the time.

Make sure to record all the details as your teacher announces an assignment. If you're going to do the work, you want to make sure you're doing the right stuff.

## 4 Check, please!

As you pack your bag for the trip home, give your planner a final check so you can pack any books you'll need to get your homework done. Leave the others in your locker so they don't weigh you down.

## 5 Do one final prep.

The next morning, check that planner again. If you've got football practice, pack your helmet. If there's a field trip, bring a snack. If it's Saturday, don't go to school!

SUBJECT	MONDAY 3/22	TUESDAY 3/23	WEDNESDAY 3/24
MATH		P. 39 (#22-46, EVENS)	
ENGLISH			STUDY CH. 5-6 VOCAB
SCIENCE	TEST ON UNIT 4		
SOCIAL STUDIES			DEFINE CHAPTER 3 KEY TERMS
ART		BRING POSTERBOARD	
AFTER SCHOOL	SOCCER PRACTICE 4:00		GABE'S BIRTHDAY!

Write down all the details.

Record friends' birthdays.

SUBJECT	THURSDAY 3/25	FRIDAY 3/26	WEEKEND 3/27-28
MATH		FIELD TRIP (ALL DAY) TO SCIENCE MUSEUM!	
ENGLISH	VOCAB QUIZ		GET STARTED ON BOOK REPORT
SCIENCE			STUDY GROUP FOR TEST
SOCIAL STUDIES			
ART			
AFTER SCHOOL	SOCCER PRACTICE 4:00		WASH GYM CLOTHES!

Check your planner before you leave home to be sure you have everything.

# How to Fix a Problem with a Teacher

Maybe it feels like you're the *only* one who gets called out for being late. Maybe the *one time* you toss your friend a note, your teacher catches it. Or maybe you feel like he just has it in for you. If you sense that you and your teacher aren't clicking, try pushing these buttons instead.



Do

Don't

## 1 Find a time to talk...privately.

Politely ask your teacher if there's a time when you two can speak privately, so you won't feel rushed. Good times to talk: during lunch, after school. Bad times: as your teacher passes your desk while handing out homework, right before the bell rings.

## 2 Nod a lot.

Arrive to your meeting on time and start by saying something like, "I want to talk about what I can do to help us get along better." You made the brave move of taking that first step. Now you gotta see it through—look your teacher in the eyes while he's talking, and don't squirm, slouch, or look at the clock!

**BE AWARE** • Slow nodding says, "I'm listening," and signals that you're taking your teacher seriously. Too-fast nodding says, "Okay, I get it, enough already!"

## 3 Resist the urge to debate.

Every time you say, "I didn't do that," or, "He's lying!" you keep the conversation in the past—and the past is the place where you kept getting in trouble. Try forward-looking statements like, "What can I do to succeed?" or, "I'd love for us to have a fresh start. How can I make that happen?"



#### **4 Make conversational extra credit.**

Before you leave, make sure to thank your teacher for taking the time to talk to you. Expressing your gratitude lets you walk out with your best foot forward!

# How to Rescue a Sinking Grade

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Your geography grade is sinking like it's caught in quicksand in Morecambe Bay. (And if you weren't tanking in geography, you'd know where that is.) You need someone to throw you a lifeline, quick...and here it is.

## 1 Hold a strategy session.

The learning process is like a game of tug-of-war. The more folks you have on your side, the better your chance to win. Feel like you're getting pulled down? Recruit help! Let your teacher know you'd like to do better, and ask her to help you come up with a plan for success. Maybe she can recommend a tutor or fellow student who can help you out.



## 2 Twenty questions.

If a concept isn't sinking in, ask a question. Still don't get it? Ask another question. Then ask another person! Don't give up till you find someone who can explain the confusing stuff in a way that makes sense to you.

## 3 Build your own A-Team.

Your friend's a science whiz. You're a budding Shakespeare. So, do like Billy S. himself, and "swappeth skills." Have Mr. Wizard help you with your lab project, and you help him with his "book learnin'."

## 4 Ask for an extra-credit card.

You never know until you ask, so don't wait another minute: Ask your teacher if you can do something to score extra points. Maybe you can do another math worksheet? Write a short story using vocab words? Make a science poster explaining photosynthesis? It never hurts to make a suggestion!

# How to Play It Cool When You Don't Know the Answer

You are *the* French master! You can conjugate *être* upside down and backward! So naturally, the one time you're called on in French class is the one time you left your *livre* in your locker the night before. Anyone know the word for "help" *en français*?



## 1 Take a moment.

Getting called on by surprise can make you panic. Take control! You don't have to answer right away, even though all eyes are on you. Take a deep breath, think back to your homework or your textbook, and give it your best shot. If you really can't come up with anything, then...

## 2 Be honest.

Look right back at the teacher and say, "Sorry, I don't know that one." At worst, you'll get reprimanded for not paying attention. At best, you'll get points for being honest. Earn credit in a foreign-language class by saying "I don't know" in the language that's stumped you.

## 3 Tip it over to a smart pal.

If it's a fraction you're stuck on, and your pal is Miss Fractions, try a little alley-oop: "I don't know, but I betcha Emily does." Just be careful: If Emily's knowledge is more fractional than you think, she's going to be plenty peeved that you shifted the spotlight onto *her*.



#### **4 Raise your hand when you do know the answer.**

Just like people take vitamin C to help ward off a cold, you can prevent the dreaded “getting called on when you’re clueless.” Teachers just want to hear from you, so participate early and often when you *do* know the answer. That should reduce your chances of getting called on when you *don’t*.

# How to Challenge a Cheater

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They say that cheaters never win and winners never cheat, but how does that help *you* if someone's trying to harness your brainpower?

## SCENARIO 1

You sacrificed watching your favorite TV show to finish your math homework. But when you get on the bus, a greedy homework hog asks to copy your work.



### 1 Just say no.

Don't even listen to the cheater's pleas for help. Say "no can do" to that h-work hog, pop in your ear buds, and take a seat. Simple as that.

### 2 Try a quick comeback.

If the cheater won't buzz off, use one of these replies:

- *"I finished the assignment in school yesterday and already turned it in."*
- *"That's so funny—I was just about to ask to cheat off you!"*
- *"Actually, my dog barfed on it. You sure you want to touch it? I guess it doesn't smell too bad."*

## SCENARIO 2

You studied like crazy for the history test and now know more about Columbus than C. C.'s mother did. But the test pest to your left is trying to steal the words right off your answer sheet.

### 1 Go on the move.

Ask for a different seat on the opposite side of the room. No need to tattle: Say your chair is squeaking or the sun's in your eyes.

### 2 Play a little defense.

Block your paper with your forearm, or let your scratch paper just *happen* to cover up your answers.

**BE AWARE** • Sometimes blocking your paper isn't enough. If you still see those prying eyes, don't hesitate to tell the teacher after class.

## **WORST NIGHTMARE**

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Yes, your eyes were wandering—they *always* do that!—but you truly weren't cheating, honest! What if you're falsely charged?



- **Remain calm.** Crying or getting angry only makes you look guilty.
- **Offer to retake the test.** If you can ace it again on the spot, you'll prove your point.
- **Talk yourself up.** You turn in homework on time. You read independently. Basically, you're too smart to cheat!

# How to Survive Getting in Trouble

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Maybe you were passing notes in class, running in the hallway, or listening to your headphones under your hood. It seemed worth it at the time, but now that you've been busted, you're not so sure. You're queasy, your hands are sweating, and the room is spinning before your eyes. Do you need the school nurse? Nope—you need to check out these miracle cures.



## 1 Tell the truth.

Here's a simple formula you won't learn in math: Getting in trouble + Lying about it = Much worse trouble. If you were texting in class, admit it and move on.

## 2 Don't fight fire with fire.

You weren't the only one peeking at the teachers' edition, but you can keep that information to yourself. Tattling on the others won't lessen your punishment.

## 3 Keep your lips zipped.

Adults *love* it when you talk back, don't they? (*Yeah*, about as much as getting a bee sting on the bohunkus.) Don't be that bee! When you're getting a "talking to," maintain respectful silence so you won't cause more trouble than you already have.

## 4 Think about next week.

Seven days from now, this will just be a bad memory. Your body may be sitting on that hard bench outside the principal's office *today*, but in your mind you can already be playing video games or hanging out at the mall, with your punishment (way) behind you.

## Five Ways to Pass the Time in Detention

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With every minute stretching out in front of you like hot pizza cheese, detention can feel like it lasts a lifetime—unless you stop staring at the clock and try one of these sanity savers.

- **If you're a righty, try writing the alphabet with your left hand.** If you're a lefty, write righty.
- **Test your ESP.** Can you move an object with your mind? Can you influence someone

else's thoughts through yours? You will try it now...

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- **Think about what you did to get detention.** Then try to figure out how you could have done it *without* getting caught.
- **Make detention work for you.** If you're allowed to do your homework, get busy so you don't have to waste precious free time slaving over it later.



# How to Survive the Locker-Room Change

Pants (and shirt!) off—in front of your classmates? *Yikes!* If just the thought of doing the costume change for gym class gives you stage fright, try a few of these tricks to ease your performance anxiety.

## OPTION 1: Turn away and make it quick.

### 1 Face your locker instead of the crowd.

Stand as close to your gym locker as possible without actually climbing in.

### 2 Get all your gym clothes ready before the old ones come off.

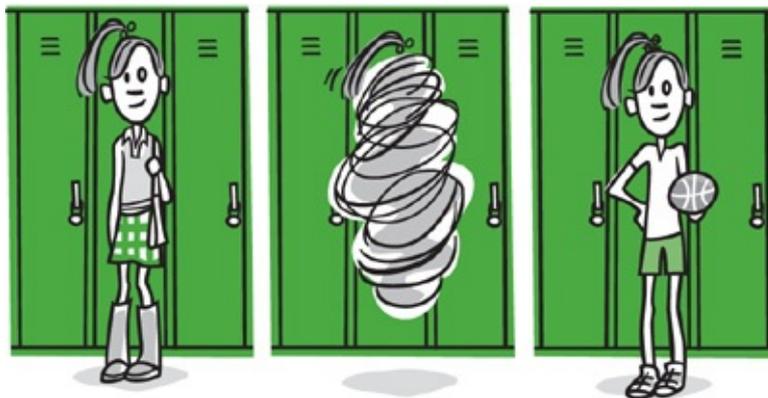
Make sure you've got everything you need (from shorts to shirt to socks), so you're not rooting around in your bag without pants on. As soon as everything is laid out in a clothing assembly line: presto-change-o! The process will fly by.

### 3 Dress in pieces.

Instead of getting fully undressed, approach it one article of clothing at a time. Take off your pants—then pull on your gym shorts. Next, replace your regular shirt with your gym shirt. Continue until you're all suited up.

### 4 Be a speed demon.

Glance at your watch before you start undressing, and see if you can set a personal record for a clothing change. If you're moving at the speed of light, no one can see a thing.



## OPTION 2: Squeeze in your social hour.

Conversation is a natural distraction, so yak it up with your friends as you change. Talk about the crazy tricks your pets can do, the awesome gadget you want for your birthday, the class that's driving you bonkers... whatever. Soon enough, you'll be all changed without having to spend a minute thinking about it.

## OPTION 3: Plain white Ts to the rescue.

You might feel less exposed if you wear a light under-shirt beneath your school clothes. That way, when you're changing into your gym uniform, you can stay wrapped in a protective

layer.

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**OPTION 4: Use the “stalling” technique.**

If all else fails, head for a bathroom stall and do your thing in your own private dressing room. If anybody asks what you were doing in there, look at them like they're crazy: “Uh, it's a bathroom—what do you *think* I was doing?”

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