

# What they didn't tell you about



## MIDDLE SCHOOL

Ishan Khire

# **What They Didn't Tell You About Middle School**

**Ishan Khire**



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## **Author's Note**

Middle school was quite possibly the craziest, most transformative time of my life. From moving to a middle school ten times larger than my previous one, to shifting to India to experiencing the pandemic and online school, it has been a wild few years. I wrote my first book when I was 10 and worked on this book during 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Although this book and all the characters in it are fictional, they were all heavily inspired from my experiences and observations of the world. I hope this book can make you laugh, but even more, I hope it can make you relate to (or prepare for!) your own middle school journey.



## Acknowledgement

There are many people without whom this book would never have been possible. Of course, and above all, my mom, dad and sister. They have been a constant source of support, guidance and encouragement no matter what crazy project I decide to come up with, and the ones who inspired me to put out my thoughts and ideas out into the world in the first place. Thank you to my mom, who gave thoughtful and honest feedback, tirelessly reading, re-reading, and re-re-reading my drafts, and brought out ideas that transformed the book, to my dad, who was always willing to sit down and brainstorm a hundred hilarious ideas in 5 minutes, and who helped hugely improve the book from it's first form, bringing out a hugely needed spark in each chapter, and of course to my sister, Sanika, who helped refine the cover page, write the last chapter, and be the annoying sibling I don't know what I'd do without.

Thank you to my most enthusiastic readers, my cousins Ayush, Ankita, Aadya and Aarya for giving me constant encouragement, and for all the love and support from my grandparents.

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Finally, I want to thank everyone in my life who inspired the characters in this book, from my closest friends, to most caring teachers, to strangers I've never talked to.



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## **8<sup>th</sup> Grade**

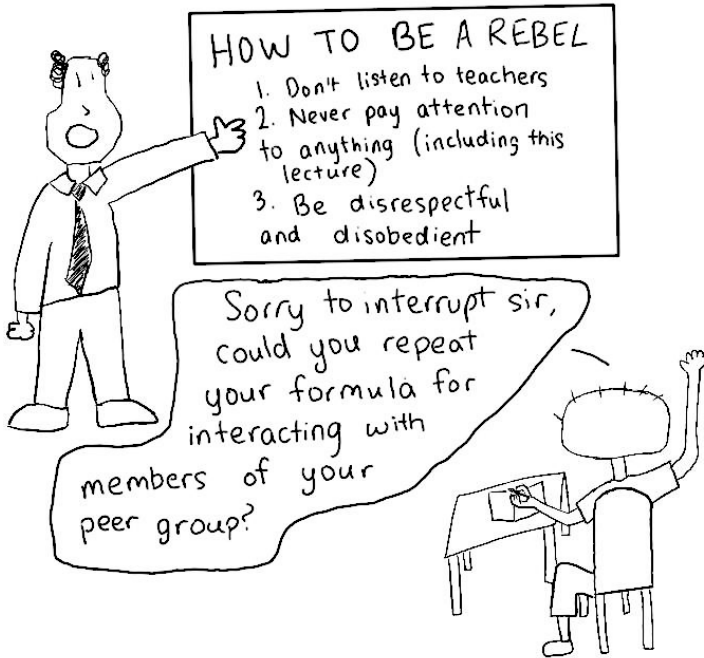
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# **6<sup>th</sup> Grade**

## A New Hope (Less Year)

I think Elementary schools should conduct workshops to introduce 5th graders to what middle school life is like.



I mean, you can't expect innocent 5th graders to fly in blind to the three most important years of their entire childhood! Sure, there's a middle school orientation that schools usually have a couple weeks before school, but they don't answer the questions middle schoolers really want to know about, like 'how do you become cool?' or 'what should you wear?'

But I'm getting ahead of myself. My name is Ishan. I live in Sunnyvale, California (in the US) and tomorrow is the first day of middle school! In the US, after elementary school (1st-5th grade), you go to a completely new school for 6th-8th grade. I've heard middle school is COMPLETELY different from elementary school, from the way teachers treat you to how kids behave. I'm really scared, so I've been preparing all week, binge watching middle school TV shows and reading the entire Diary of a Wimpy Kid series, while taking extensive notes. And after all that research, I've learned some key secrets to success.

For example:

How to be Popular:

If there's anything I've learned from watching middle school TV series, it's that popularity is everything. It gets you a lot of friends, boosts you up the middle school social hierarchy and gets you more followers on Instagram. Unfortunately, it's also one of the hardest things to become. In elementary school, popularity basically meant having the coolest backpack. However, the requirements list for being popular in middle school is pretty long:

1. Wear cool clothes (since there's no uniform)
2. Get into detention a lot (detention is boring)
3. Be really athletic (too hard)
4. Act cool (also too hard)

But this year, I've decided to try to be popular. Anyways, after you actually become popular, you don't need to do too much to stay that way. So if I invest my efforts this year, the next two years will be a breeze. Of course, I hope this won't be too big of a problem, since most people will already know me from my first book: "Life through the Eyes of a Ten Year Old" which talked about my life in elementary school.

There are also way more people in middle school than in elementary school. There are 400 people in my grade and 1200 in the school! Now, if you're trying to be popular, there's a lot of competition for it.

Another thing that boosts your popularity is what kind of phone you have. Last week, I had done some research on which phone was trendy and after some time, I decided to get an iPhone 10, the latest one.

"Here's the phone I decided to get." I said, showing my parents the Amazon page. They looked absolutely shocked. "I know right? It looks really cool."

"There's absolutely no way you're getting that!" my mom said. "Yeah," my dad agreed, "Just get a slightly older model, they're much cheaper."

My mom glared at him, "It's not about the price, you're too immature. Until I know you can handle the responsibility of having a phone, there's no way you're getting one."

"But phones are meant for immature people!" I thought, "What's the use of getting a phone when I've become mature? I won't have anything to do with it then."

I tried arguing that my entire social life for the next three years hung in the balance, and after a long discussion between my parents (which I wasn't invited to) they finally agreed. Yes!

Two days later, a huge amazon package came in. I jumped out of bed and rushed outside. Had Christmas come early? I unwrapped it and... ew, I got a flip phone. What was I supposed to do with this? This belonged in a museum. There weren't even any letters on it! But my parents said that until I proved I'm more mature, I was stuck with it. So much for being popular... At least I have a phone though, because a middle schooler without a phone is like Trump without Twitter (neither

can live without the other).

I think the reason my parents were being this cautious was because of a middle school parent orientation they had had in the summer. It was an introduction to middle school and what you should expect kids to do in middle school. My parents had looked traumatized when they had come back from it. Ever since, they've been really protective of me.

Anyways, it's 12:00 a.m. and I should probably be going to sleep now...

Today is the first day of middle school and I'm freaking out! I actually tried spending some time to pick out my clothes, but they pretty much looked indiscernible from each other to me, so I just grabbed some random ones and headed out. My parents had made me comb my hair, but as soon as I reached the bus stop, I messed it up. I couldn't afford to look like a nerd on my first day. At the bus stop, pretty much everyone was on their phones and were wearing earphones while they waited for the bus, so I busted out my Nokia 6235 and tried acting like I was texting on MySpace or something. In the school bus, all the 6th graders looked really shy and didn't talk much, but the 7th and 8th graders were really noisy. I kind of zoned out until we almost reached school.

Finally, the bus pulled up in the school parking lot. Through the window, I could see hundreds of students streaming into the school. So this was it! From the moment I stepped foot on this breath-taking land, I would officially be able to call myself a middle schooler. I got off the bus and took my first steps onto this strange land.

“One small step for kid!” I thought “One giant leap for -”  
“@#\$\$%&!” My thought was interrupted by an eighth grader swearing.

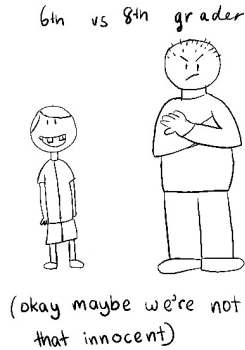


My eyes widened. This was major league stuff! I was completely unprepared for this, especially after watching Disney middle school TV shows. I waited for a teacher to drag him to the principal's office or something, but surprisingly, nothing happened. There weren't even gasps from anyone around him, like in elementary school when someone said a bad word.

So this was the real middle school!

As I looked around, I also realized just how different 6th, 7th and 8th graders were from each other. Everyone around me looked so big! This was a big change for me, going from being the oldest kids in elementary school to youngest in middle school. I was used to being the top dog, respected by all the kids in lower grades, but now I was part of the smallest grade. There is a HUGE difference between 6th, 7th and 8th graders. Categorising all of them as the same 'middle schoolers' is like calling tadpoles and frogs the same animal. Sure, they belong to the same species, but one is an innocent, defenceless kid while the other is a large, warty, unhygienic monster (I'm describing middle schoolers not frogs).





I also noticed another thing about middle schoolers. They're bright and colourful. I'm not talking about their personality or clothes. I mean their hair. I learned that dyeing your hair is a big thing in middle school. It makes you look really cool. And in a school of 1300 people, you can identify every single colour. There are even a few rainbow ones. Hair styles also provide an easy way to identify a middle schooler's personality.

Here are some examples:

### **Nerd Hairstyle**



This is the hairstyle your parents force you to have on the first day of school to make a good impression on your teachers. Note the well combed and well-kept hair. You will most likely not be touching a comb for the rest of the year.

## **Super long hair**



People with hair like this have the magical ability to see through their hair. I'm seriously considering having long hair. It has so many advantages. For example, when you're lying about something, it's easy to avoid eye contact. This is also particularly useful for sleeping in class when something boring is happening. No one will ever know.

## **Mohawk**



Mohawks are one of the scariest hairstyles in middle school. They grant a massive intimidation advantage that can be used to bully people or as defence from other bullies. This can grant

a free pass to the best seats in the cafeteria and classroom. Mohawks are mostly used by bullies, but can actually be used as a tactic to prevent bullying as well by scaring the heck out of them.

## **Canvas Hair**



For those with an artistic flair, canvas hair is a great way to express their creativity. Canvas hair is exactly what it sounds like: painted in many different colors. A little streak of blue here, some polka dots perhaps, the possibilities are endless!

Choosing the right hairstyle is really important because it immediately lets your teachers and classmates know what kind of person you are, which can be useful to know when you want to be friends with someone or talk to them.

Middle schools are also quite different from Elementary Schools in the way classes are conducted. In Elementary Schools, there's only 1 teacher who teaches you the entire time and a class of 30 kids you spend your entire year with. But in Middle School, there are multiple periods, so you go to different classes for different subjects. Oh, and it looks like I have math now!

## **Bullies in the Back, Nerds in the Front**

It took me some time to find my class. Here's an important tip: You should always survey the class before just taking a seat somewhere. The person you sit next to will likely be your first friend.

You can learn a lot about a middle schooler if you know where they sit in the class. Because of the ideal locations of the backseats (farthest from the teacher) competition is fierce for them. In the end, only the biggest, angriest bullies get access. The bottom of a desk at the back seat is also sometimes known as 'The Bubblegum Storage Facility'. Here, you'll find flavours of all kinds, ranging from peppermint to mouldy cheese, some of them dating to years back! The top of the desk is 'The Graffiti Zone' where backbenchers express their creativity. Some of them have even been sitting in these seats for over a year! They are called VIPs (Very Idiotic People). As you move up the seating, people get smaller and more normal until you get to the first row. The first row is full of the teacher's pets who are also spit wad target practice for the people in the back row. I sat right in the middle, far enough from the kids (if you can call them that) in the back row, and far enough from the teachers too.



Behind me sat a big, scary giant with a hairstyle that told me to back off. He was probably a bully. On his desk there was a sentence written in messy handwriting: “Dom was hear.”

He gave me an angry look and I took a deep breath as I turned away. Another valuable life lesson I had learned while watching TV: never look a bully right in the eye. They can smell fear.

A few minutes later, a kid with blue hair entered the class and sat right next to me... and right in front of Dom.

“Hey move it, that’s my seat!” Dom said when the blue haired kid tried to sit in front of him.

“Uh, I think you came to the wrong class, The 8th grade classes are down the hall,” the blue haired kid said.

Just when Dom was about to punch him, I intervened, “The teacher’s coming!” I just meant it as a distraction, but it turned out that the teacher actually came at that moment! Dom glared at me but let go of the blue haired kid as the teacher walked in.

“Thanks for saving my life. By the way, I’m Cameron” he said.

“No problem, I’m Ishan.” I said. I had just made my first friend!

Our homeroom teacher (class teacher) taught us math. She didn’t exactly look pleased to be in the class and looking around at some of my classmates, I could understand why.

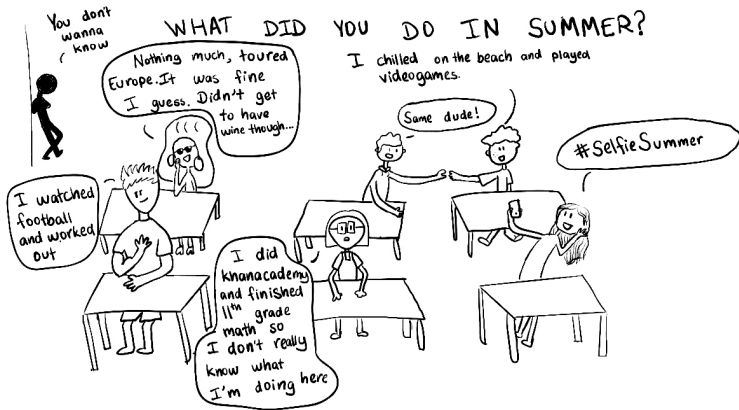
After the teacher took around five minutes to get people to put down their phones, we started off with introductions. I thought we were going to play some math games, like we did at the start of elementary school, but we mostly spent the period discussing rules. Surprisingly our math teacher let us decide the rules we had to follow. Cool! I was all ready to start writing a bunch of classroom rules, but ‘write our own rules’ basically meant the teacher decides the rules, acts like we suggested them and we get to write them, so if anyone breaks the rules, they can just say, “Well you decided the rules.” If we actually got to decide

the rules, every period would be a free period.

The next period was a lot more fun. Our English teacher basically let us watch Youtube videos the whole time after introductions.

After that, during social studies, we did the standard, “What did you do during summer vacation?” speech.

The answers were pretty varied.



After that, we had an orientation. We all gathered in the cafeteria and waited for the principal to speak. I was so surprised at the number of people that were sitting there. There must have been at least a thousand people! Kids of all shapes and sizes, from all over the world, with all kinds of interests, under the same roof... Middle school must be one of the most diverse places in the world.

I sat next to Cameron and I introduced myself to another kid in my class who was sitting next to me.

“Hi, I’m Ishan.” I said.

“Hey I’m Ed.” he said. “You look familiar. Do I know you?”

“Yeah... I sit next to you in math and science.”

“Oh right!”

After that, they showed us our lockers. At first, I was really excited about the prospect of having a place where I could store anything I wanted to do and lock it up so nobody could access it but me, but then I realised I didn't have anything to put in it.

I think lockers are a pretty clever way for teachers to spy on you. The school can pretend the lockers are completely private and only you have a way to open them, but considering they're the ones that set the combinations, I think you know what they use it for.

## **McDonalds: It's in school now too!**

Before lunch, the school principal gave a speech:

“Welcome everyone! For many of our students, this is going to be the first lunch in Sunnyvale Middle School. I hope all of you are accustomed to your classes by now. Before you start eating, I thought you should know that. We believe health is an essential part of life. That's why we are dedicated to providing you a balanced diet and nutritional food to satisfy all your needs. Enjoy!”

My mom had already given me lunch, since she thought school food was too unhealthy, but I guess she was wrong.

Ed looked relieved, “I'm so glad we're getting healthy food. I'm trying to build my muscles. I'm on keto.”

Ed and Cameron went to the lunch line to get food while I started eating my lunch. 5 minutes later, they came back. I was shocked! There was pizza and pudding and soda and plenty of other stuff kids dreamed of, on their plates. How was this healthy?

“Isn't the food supposed to be, you know, healthy?” I asked Ed.

“What do you mean? It is healthy. Didn't you see the 5 apple slices I took? And I'm drinking diet Coke, not the unhealthy kind. Besides, pizza is healthy. It's basically just bread, which is made of wheat, cheese, which is just milk, and sauce, which is made of tomatoes. In a few months, I'll look like Dwayne Johnson!” Ed justified.

“This health stuff is a hoax. Look at me. I've been eating this crap for years and I'm still not fat!” Cameron exclaimed.



Suddenly, Dom came and sat right in front of us. “Give me your pizza or I’ll beat you up!” he said to Cameron.

“Okay sure. It’s not good for you anyways. Thanks for doing me a favour.”

“Are you trying to make me unhealthy? Take your pizza and get out before I break your nose!”

Phew, that was close. After lunch, we had two periods and then school was finally over. I was relieved I had gotten through one of the scariest days of my life.

Overall, the day went pretty well. I made two friends (and one bully), but I also learned many valuable lessons about middle school.

## **The School Class System - Das Popularitat**

It had been a month since school had started and we got our first project in social studies about inequality and discrimination. The teacher told us to try to draw inspiration from our daily experiences, so when I came to school the next day, I started taking notes of everything I saw.

As I reached the bus, I saw a small kid being picked on by bullies. When I reached school, I saw someone being made fun of for not wearing 'good clothes' (may have been me). At lunch, I observed how the popular boys and girls all sat at the same table. From everything I saw, I decided to make my report on one of the most unequal societies in the world: middle school (only behind high school and America).

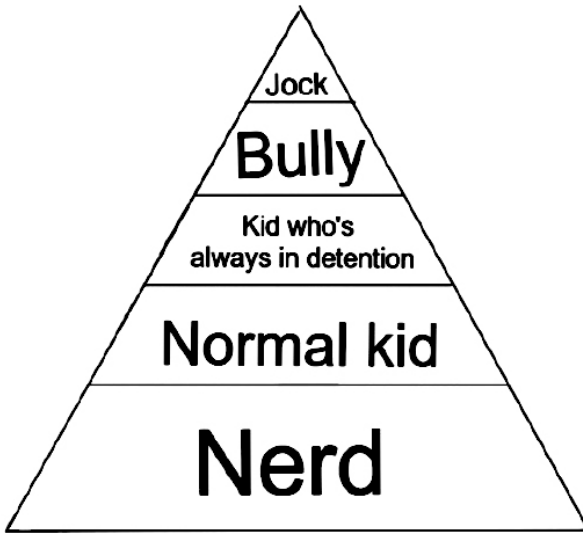
Let's talk about the middle school hierarchy.

Firstly, there's the obvious grade discrimination. Every grade thinks it's infinitely cooler than the previous one. When I was in 4th grade, I thought 3<sup>rd</sup> graders were idiots. In 5<sup>th</sup>, I realised that 4th graders are idiots. And now that I'm in 6<sup>th</sup> I discovered 5<sup>th</sup> graders are idiots (not 6th graders though, they're very smart).

Because of this, 7th graders would never be caught communicating with puny 6th graders and an 8th grader would never think to speak to a lowly 7th grader.

Knowing someone popular in the grade above you was the ultimate sign of coolness and got you a bunch of popularity points. That's why when I become the coolest kid in middle school, my sister is going to have a *way* easier time in middle school.

But don't forget about the hierarchy within a grade too, the standard:



I had hoped I would automatically sit at the top of the pyramid because of my book, especially because I had bragged so much about it, but then I learned another harsh reality about middle school: nobody cares what you've done (but only in real life of course, Instagram followers and Fortnite kills still count).

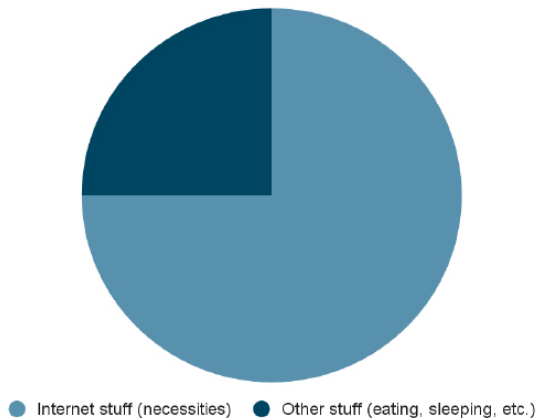
So my plans of being the coolest kid in middle school may would have to wait.

## How do middle schoolers spend their time?

Even though I'm a middle schooler, I don't really feel like one yet. Sure, I've gotten accustomed to their ways of life and made some friends, but I don't really think I've changed at all. I still feel like a 5th grader on the inside. My mom is extremely happy about this. Especially after the parent orientation where the school told parents what to expect of middle schoolers. I don't know what they said we'd become, my mom is relieved I haven't changed. But I want to learn more about what being a middle schooler is *really* like, so I've started observing middle schoolers closely lately and paying attention to how they spend their time.

Based on the data I acquired, here's a graph showing the average day of a middle schooler.

How Teenagers Spend their Time

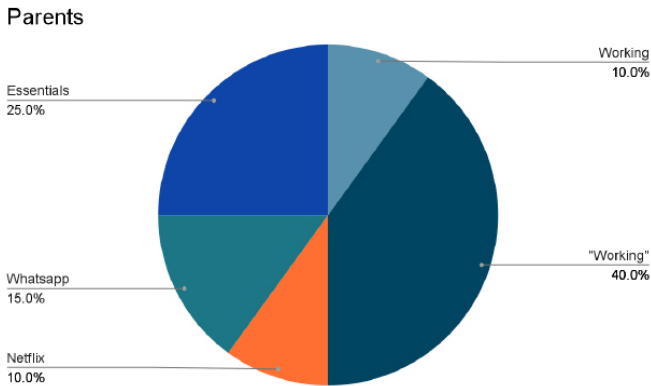


This is not to say that every middle schooler spends their life in the same way. Cameron spends most of his life taking selfies and posting them on Instagram.

Dom spends his life... I don't know, cyberbullying?

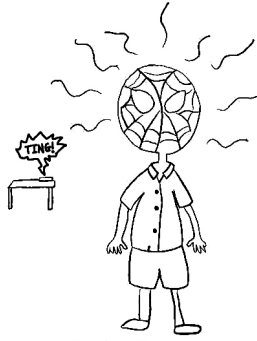
There are some differences, but they're broadly the same.

You may be completely shocked if you're an adult and think that our country is doomed, but before you draw conclusions too fast, I learned in biology that it's important to have a control group in any experiment to compare your results. In this case: they were my parents:



See any similarities? So when parents ban their kids from using the internet because they are accessing it too much, they forget how much they themselves use the internet. A lot of adults spend so much time on the phone checking messages.

Sometimes it's crazy how fast adults respond to messages. They can do it in seconds! It's almost like they have a superpower or something.



My texting sense is tingling!

So spending a lot of time on the internet won't make me more of a middle schooler, it will only make me more human. I guess I'll have to find something else.

## **CIA: Classroom Intelligence Agency**

April Fool's Day is coming up next week and Cameron decided to pull off a huge prank on our teacher. I had always wanted to be like those people on middle school TV shows, getting into trouble and winding up in detention and I hadn't gotten into trouble even once until now, so I was really looking forward to it.

For most teachers in our school, April Fool's Day pranks were a matter of pride where teachers would brag how terrible the prank played on them was. Unfortunately, our teacher wasn't like that so we had to do it in secrecy.

So, during lunch in hushed voices over stale cafeteria pizza, we decided to craft a plan (well, we mostly just ate pizza). "Plan for what?" a voice behind me said.



Uh oh. Busted.

Over time, I've started realizing a pattern to these busts... Are you wondering how the teacher *always* knows when you're not paying attention in class, haven't submitted homework or are talking to your friends when you're supposed to be completing a class assignment? Look no further than the CIA: Classroom Intelligence Agency.

The CIA is an army of spies that supplied the teacher with all the information regarding students: their gossip, not-so-nice nicknames for teachers and more. There is a good chance you haven't heard of this yet. The CIA is very secretive. However, I can guarantee you they are in your school. The CIA can take on various sizes. There can be as few as 5 or as many as 30 CIA agents in your grade, but they are there.

I've collected this knowledge because I recently had a run in with one. In a grammar lesson, I got extremely bored and started drawing some comics when all of a sudden, without the teacher even looking at me, he suddenly told me to walk to the principal's office and tell her what I did.

Earlier, I hadn't ever really thought about it, especially because of the myth teachers circulated - that they have eyes on the back of their heads (which makes sense, they have plenty of other superpowers). But after that, I started paying more attention in class - no, not to what the teacher was saying, but when somebody got in trouble. And I noticed that there was always one kid involved - Tim.

Now, at first sight, this may seem like your average friendly neighborhood nerd, but don't be fooled by the disguise. Tim is a cold-blooded, black-hearted snitcher. Whenever a kid got in trouble, Tim always made some sound to alert the teacher. After recording many snitches, I've compiled a list of some of the indications CIA agents use to alert teachers:



| <b>Indicator:</b> | <b>Meaning:</b>      |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| Clearing throat   | Talking              |
| Yawn              | Not paying attention |
| Cracking knuckles | Cheating on a test   |
| Sneeze            | Not doing their work |
| Head scratch      | Chewing gum          |

After I identified the indicators, I was able to uncover other CIA agents too. You may be wondering, why would anyone do this? Is it some sort of obedience to the teacher? Is it a desire to get revenge on those above them in the hierarchy who have oppressed them for years? Maybe a little. But mostly, it's for the huge perks that come with being a CIA agent: window seats, homework get out of jail free cards, and most importantly, shining letters of recommendation.

A CIA agent's biggest enemy is a member of the KGB, the Killer Guild of Bullies. It's hard to snitch on someone when they can beat the crap out of you.

So remember, stay away from the CIA and KGB. They cause nothing but trouble, and intervene when no one asks them to.

## **Green Week**

Now that I had learned how to survive in middle school, I was feeling pretty good about myself. I was even happier when I found out that our school had announced that there was going to be a special week in a few days. I was really excited. We used to have stuff like this all the time in Elementary school. There was crazy hair week and pyjama week and with middle school, I was hoping we could have some other cool weeks like gaming week and don't come to school week. This time, we had green week. I was pretty excited for it.

Our science teacher, Ms. Brown, taught us about global warming and climate change. She gave a speech in the morning about how we should reduce plastic consumption and save the environment.

“Does anyone have ideas on how we can improve the environment this week? You can discuss in groups and let me know.” she said.

So for the rest of the period, we were all discussing what we could do together.

“I have an idea!” exclaimed Ed, “What if instead of a heater, we turn the AC backwards to stop global warming. Heat the inside, cool the outside!”

Everyone ignored him.

“I don't get why we have to do anything anyways.” complained Cameron, “I mean it was their generation who caused all this global warming stuff and messed up the planet, not us!”

“I don't think there even is such a thing as global warming. It's

all a hoax! Isn't the teacher the one who told us energy is never created nor destroyed? Heating up the earth seems like creating energy." Dom said. "Besides, this winter was so cold. Where's global warming when you need it?"

"How could you even say that!" Stephanie said. "Don't you know how big of a problem climate change is? Polar bears are dying! Islands are drowning! Droughts are happening! As a famous social media influencer, it's my job to sway people's opinions."

Dom shrugged, "What can I say? I'm a sceptic."

"We need to take action now!"

"What if we install vacuum pumps instead of flushes to save water?" Ed suggested. "Or plug two computers into each other to charge them both up."

"What if instead of light bulbs we use those glow sticks at PartiesRUs? Or we can go for a strike against buses!" Ed said.

"Wait, what did you say?" I asked.

"Use glow sticks instead of light bulbs?"

"No, the other thing."

"Call a strike against buses?"

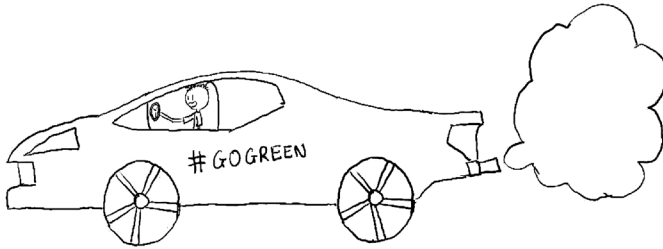
"Yeah! It's not a bad idea!"

"Rebel against the system. I like it!" said Cameron

And so, it was decided. We spread the message in the bus that the next day we were going to boycott buses and cycle to school instead.

The school really liked the idea too, especially since the principal was looking for a way to save some costs and cut the budget, so they announced that for the next few days, there would be no buses. I felt glad about my contribution to the environment.

As it turned out, the bus ban didn't make much of a difference anyways. Most people just had their parents drive them there.



We were all kind of bummed out that nothing was happening. I mean, the school did pass an initiative to ban plastic straws but...yeah, I don't think that really did much.

There was a local protest happening on Saturday for building a new solar energy station, so we all decided to go there. Stephanie posted a story on Instagram, so a few of her followers also tagged along. It was a really long day and super hot (probably because of global warming), but finally, the mayor agreed! My first big week of middle school was a success.

## **Say no to bullying!**

Another week we had was anti-bullying week. Our school district had a program where they would teach us about bullying. I don't see what's so hard about that though, I mean you punch someone, tease someone, what's more is there to teach about bullying? Ohhh, they're going to teach us how to *stop* bullying.

The guy taking the class, Mr. Craig, looked really big and strong, so I thought he was going to teach us some cool self-defence tricks. I doubted he ever had to deal with bullying.

He started it off by telling us why people become bullies. "Bullying often happens when bullies have low self-esteem and feel the need to pull down others. So, the first thing you do when you see a bully is to just go give them a hug."

Woah. I glanced at Dom and wondered if he would stop bullying me if I gave him a hug. He glared back. Nope, definitely not a good idea.

"Before I give you some more tips on how to stop bullying, does anyone want to share some of their experiences with bullies? Please don't use any names though." Mr. Craig said.

"Oooh, ooh, can I?" asked Ed.

"Sure."

"So, there's this guy in my class and every time we have lunch, he always takes half my dessert. He's really big and scary and looks super tough so I'm always scared of him. Luckily, he sits exactly two rows behind me, in the middle seat, so he can't bully me during class." Ed said.

“Have you tried staying calm and not reacting when they bully you? Bullies often leave you alone if you just ignore them.”

“Dom - uh, I mean the hypothetical bully - just tries harder.”  
Ed responded.

“Huh, that’s not what’s supposed to happen... What if you tell them to stop?”

“He’ll just say no.”

“Tell a teacher?”

“Haven’t you heard? Snitches get stitches.”

“This isn’t supposed to happen... Aha! Have you tried hugging your bully? The power of friendship is strong enough to overcome any problems!”

“Well, no but - “

“Then that’s what you have to do today!” exclaimed Mr. Craig.  
“The number one solution to bullying is healing through the power of friendship!”



Yeah, as if that’s going to work.

“Well, okay,” Ed said, walking over to Dom. What was he doing!

Ed hugged Dom and for a moment, the whole class went silent - then someone started sobbing. I couldn't believe my eyes - it was Dom!

“All my life, I've always been seen as the tough guy, but I've been living a lie! I write poetry! I dance to Shake it Off! I don't want to be seen as just a bully anymore! Oh, thank you so much Ed, for helping me reveal my true self- I'm still not going to stop bullying you though.”

“Oh Dom, it wouldn't be the same without you,” Ed said with a grin.

Mr. Craig had tears in his eyes and I felt myself getting emotional too. Before we all burst out singing “We're all in this together”, class ended and we all walked home to school, changed children (hey, maybe school does actually teach you stuff!).

## **Class Pets: Lizard Therapy**

Lately kids have started getting more stressed in school. I overheard some people talking about how stressed they were.

“I’m still just at 842 followers!” Stephanie said, “I’m starting to think I’ll never be able to cross the magical 1000 follower limit and truly be called an influencer! Is it my clothes? I need to buy more expensive clothes for my selfies, right?”

“You know that new guy Ros? He’s been stealing all the best nerds. I mean what if he kicks me out and I’m no longer the class bully. I don’t know what else to do!” said Dom.

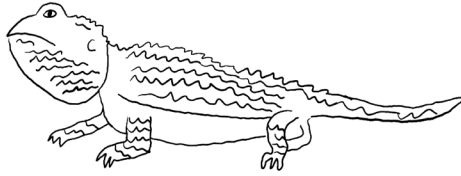
“Don’t worry buddy, I won’t ever get a new bully.” Tim said, “I’m getting pretty stressed too. What if Harvard doesn’t accept my application? My chances of being the youngest Harvard graduate will significantly reduce.”

“The Fortnite World Championships are coming! What if I don’t even make it past regionals?” said Ed.

But the parents thought we were stressed out because of school, so after a few angry emails by PTA (Parent Teacher Administration) moms, the school conducted a survey to find out how the students felt about it and after the results came out, they became really concerned over our mental health and decided to implement the CPP, the class pet program.

Jimmy had volunteered to get his pet. The next day, he brought this huge lizard called a bearded dragon whose name was Scruffy. From the moment Jimmy got Scruffy in the class, Scruffy instantly became a celebrity.





Every day after lunch everyone would flock to Scruffy to see him. There was always a huge waiting line to see which lucky student would get to clean his poop.

Plus, whenever somebody wanted to get out of doing classwork, they could also use Scruffy as an excuse and ‘check up on him.’

Scruffy became a big topic of discussion during lunch. We always used to talk about his health and how he was feeling. And I’ve got to say, he really did relieve our stress! Everyone seemed so upbeat when Scruffy was in the class.

Of course, except for the teacher. The teacher was the only person who didn’t like Scruffy, but she had to go with it since it was a school policy, so she kept her all the way at the back. And whenever the teacher had to go to the back to get something, she would look really scared and nervous. From the students getting stressed, it was now the teacher who got stressed. This made Scruffy even more popular!

And since Jimmy was Scruffy’s pet - I mean owner, he became popular too by association. So, if you have a pet, find some excuse to bring them to school. It pays off.

But slowly, we started noticing something was wrong.

“Have you noticed? Scruffy hasn’t moved all morning!” I said.

“Well, he is a lizard. They don’t do much.” Ed - said.

“Yeah, but this seems different. He hasn’t even eaten the lettuce that my mom gave me for lunch. He loves lettuce!” Cameron said.

“Maybe he’s dead.” Dom said. We all glared at him. “Hey, I’m

just saying it's a possibility!"

"I read online that loss of appetite and inactivity for lizards are signs of \*gulp\* Lizardivitus! He may not have long to live!"

We were all really scared, so Jimmy took Scruffy to the vet. When we came back, everyone swarmed around him like a bunch of reporters asking him questions.

"Don't worry guys. Scruffy is fine." he said and we breathed a sigh of relief. "But the vet said that Scruffy was probably stressed, being in a brand new environment with all the attention, so it's probably for the best that she doesn't come back."

Wow I guess middle school really *is* stressful. You can never get rid of it, just pass it on to someone else.

## **Report Cards: D- in discipline**

The second trimester was almost over and we were going to get our grades for it. Uh oh... My grades for the first trimester weren't exactly amazing. It should be fine though. Teachers usually bump up your grades in the 2nd trimester to make it seem like they had a positive impact on the kids.

Plus, one thing I love about the American grading system is how hard they make it for your parents to get mad. The grades that we get are from A to F. And here's the definition for each grade:

- A - Excellent understanding
- B - Very good understanding of concepts
- C - Acceptable understanding of concepts
- D - Mostly shows acceptable understanding of concepts
- E - Slight Improvement Requirement
- F - Needs Improvement

This means that even if you get Cs in everything, you can still say your understanding is 'acceptable.' And teachers almost never go below a C since when class grade averages are calculated, it looks bad for them. Bad grades also attract annoying parents asking how their child can improve and why they don't pay enough attention to him.

Here is how the actual chart should look like:

- A. Amazing job, you're not terrible!
- B. Better luck next time
- C. Could you at least try?
- D. Did you even read the questions?
- E. ...sigh
- F. Failed

Good grade averages are also really good for the school, which is why they kick out students who get bad grades on charges of ‘bullying’ and ‘inappropriate behaviour.’ I mean come on, this is middle school, half the people here fall into one of these categories.

One thing that’s kind of fun about reading report cards is report card comments, especially from teachers that don’t know me, like Mr. Santiago, our Spanish teacher. Since he teaches a hundred kids, unless you’re really bad or really good, he doesn’t know your name. So he always plays it safe with some generic comments like, “The student exhibits a positive outlook and attitude in the classroom.”

## **Inclusivity**

Recently our school started an inclusivity program to ensure that nobody felt out. It was to decrease discrimination and promote feelings of unity. California is a pretty diverse place and there were people from all over the world in my class, but there were a lot of bad stereotypes too.

In our class, we had a discussion about diversity with our school counsellor, Ms. Dorothy.

“Good morning everyone! As a part of World Diversity Day, we’re going to celebrate all of our unique cultures by sharing them with each other. Very often, we have preconceived notions about someone’s culture and it’s important to make sure we’re very careful about what we say or we could hurt someone’s feelings. Now, let’s talk about a country. Ishan, you’re from India right?” she turned to me and asked.

“Yeah,” I said.

“That’s amazing, I love India! Do you speak Indian?” she asked.

“Huh? Indian isn’t a language.” I said.

“It isn’t? Oh, I’m so sorry! How about we have someone volunteer to share their culture instead?”

“I can do it. I’m Cameron and I’m from America.”

“Oh, uhh... okay. So does anybody know what American culture is like?”

I had watched the Simpsons, so I knew all about American culture. “Oooh, I know! Americans eat burgers and on

weekends they have barbecues. Oh and they love watching TV all day.” I said.

“And they call football soccer,” Jose said.

“And they listen to country music,” added Vanessa.

“Nah, I was born in California, not Texas.” Cameron replied.

“And now does everyone see why cultural stereotypes are wrong? Everyone should celebrate theirs and each other’s cultures, but never forget that everyone is a unique individual, with their own unique culture and customs and traditions,” Ms. Dorothy explained.

Now that I thought about it, the teacher was right. I have my own unique culture. The only problem was, I wasn’t really sure what it was. During lunch, we had a discussion about culture.

“So, which culture do you think you belong to?” I asked.

“I took this DNA test last month to check my ancestry and genetic traits and it turns out I’m 6% Japanese which makes sense since I love watching Pokemon,” Ed said.

“Well, at least you’re only 6% Japanese.” Cameron said, “I took my test and it turns out I’m 23% French, 47% Greek, 4% Austrian and 26% Norwegian. And I thought I was American.”

This stuff seems really cool, but also very weird. How can someone know which country your ancestors were from just by checking your DNA?

I was really curious what my ancestry is. I always thought I was Indian, but then after thinking about it, I realized chocolate and pizza are my two favorite foods so I changed that prediction to 90% Indian, 5% Belgian and 5% Italian.

## **School Fundraiser**

It's almost the end of 6th grade now and this week our school is holding a fundraiser to raise money to improve the facilities and infrastructure (like repairing the broken coffee machine in the teacher's lounge). We would get prizes based on how much money we collected. We had this kind of thing last year too, but I always collected too little money for any of the good prizes and I usually got stuck with the 'certificates' and Chuck E Cheese toys, but this time I'm really determined to get something good. The way we would collect the money was by going door to door asking for money and then bringing the money to school to redeem our prizes in exchange. It's kind of like an arcade. You know the money you spent was way more than the value of the toys, but turn in your tokens anyway because it's better than nothing.

I thought this idea was okay, but the school could make much more money selling a product - like chocolate - instead of just asking for donations. Think about it, the only reason people don't spend all their money on chocolate is because it is not good for you. But now they're being told it's for a good cause? Our school could make millions!

This was the list of what stuff we could get based on how much money we collected.

| <b>\$5</b> | <b>Recognition in school announcements</b> |
|------------|--|
| \$10       | Bouncy Ball                                |
| \$20       | Rubix Cube                                 |
| \$50       | Model Plane                                |
| \$75       | Headphones                                 |
| \$150      | Nerf Gun                                   |
| \$225      | Geology Rock Kit                           |

I really wanted the Nerf Gun so I set \$150 as my target. If I wanted to win it, I would have to come up with a strategy.

First I planned a route to take. Since I only had a week to raise money, I would have to manage my time wisely. Luckily I had collected a lot of data over the last few years from trick or treating excursions, so I knew the best neighbourhoods to visit (I was equating money with candy but it's a pretty fair approximation).

Well, that's enough planning. Time to go get some money! I'm expecting at least \$50 today. That'll get my Nerf gun in around 3 days.

4 hours later:

I did not get \$50. Exactly \$10.34 (yes people were that specific about how much money they gave). The biggest problem: competition. The problem with raising money is that it's not just you. There are three hundred other middle schoolers going door-to-door asking for money and people are only willing to give a few cents per person. This seems selfish, but if you give just 50 cents per kid and hundred kids come that's \$50!

Because of this, a lot of people treat this as a trick or treat but with money. Except adults think money is more valuable than candy so they're likely to give much less. Fundraising week is a lot like the anti-Christmas. Instead of people hanging up



lights and brightening up the neighborhood, people close the curtains and hope kids think that they are not at home.

But I feel the biggest challenge of raising money is people not giving much money.

During your fundraising experience you'll probably hear phrases like:

“My tax money is already funding your school. Now I have to donate too?!”

“Back in my day, 30 cents was enough money to buy a nice pair of shoes. How much more money do you need?”

“Uhhhh... I only have a hundred dollar bills. Do you have any change for that? Like \$99.50? No? Ok, sorry. I don't have change.”

“Here's a penny for your troubles!”

Also, a ton of time is wasted when people are caught off guard by fundraising and they don't have change lying around. But rather than giving away precious dollar bills, many of them engage in a treasure hunt for change, digging through their wallets, pockets and couches.

People should have bags of change like Halloween candy to avoid all the hassles of sofa diving.



Day 2: Since I only collected \$10.24, I probably have to change my strategies a bit. Today I'll try negotiating...

I tried negotiating and it worked really well! I got \$40. A little bargaining and emotional blackmail can work wonders. Some phrases you can say if you ever fundraise are:

“Do it for the children!”

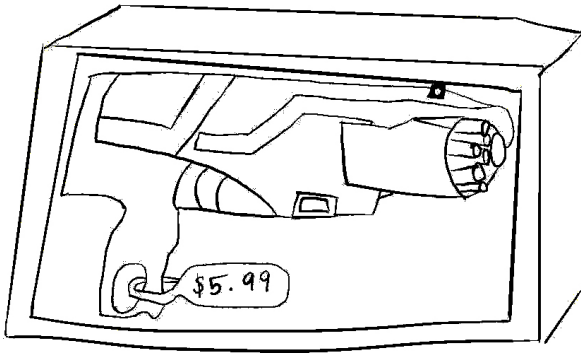
“One more dollar for the future of America!”

Day 5: As time progresses, people give less and less money. I collected \$110 which was a lot, but unfortunately not enough to get the Nerf Gun. That day, instead of going to normal neighborhoods, I had walked a little further to the street with all the big houses and cool cars, hoping to raise more money and get a nerf gun, but rich people gave me even less money.



I only had \$130 by the end of the day. I was really desperate at this point to get a nerf gun and I was so close so I decided to put \$20 out of my savings so I would finally meet that \$150 mark. I was really proud of my achievement and went to school with a smile on my face to collect the nerf gun.

All that time and effort had paid off after all! I bragged to my friends, showing it off.



Oh wait a second...

## **Camping: A week in the wild (without parental supervision)**

School was almost over, so at the end of 6th grade, we had a camping trip. Everyone was excited for it, but also nervous. How would life be without electronics for a whole week? How would we survive in the wild? On the other hand, a week staying with your friends with no parents? Who wouldn't be excited? While going home, we had to carry a 5-page permission slip that looked like an insurance policy, that our parents had to sign.

### ***Permission Slip***

***Please note that a chemical compound found in the air produced by fungal spores at Camp Timber has been known by the state of California to cause cancer. Send your children at your own discretion.***

***We are not liable for any injury caused by any allergies not priorly noted. If you have any allergies, please note them down here:***

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***The camp is also not liable for any injury caused by wildlife including, but not limited to bears, coyotes, venomous snakes, poisonous flora and fungi.***

***I have agreed to the terms and conditions (signature)***

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***Have fun at camp!***

My mom was really scared to sign the document and to be

honest, I was too. But my dad said they were overreacting in case they got sued, so I submitted the permission slip.

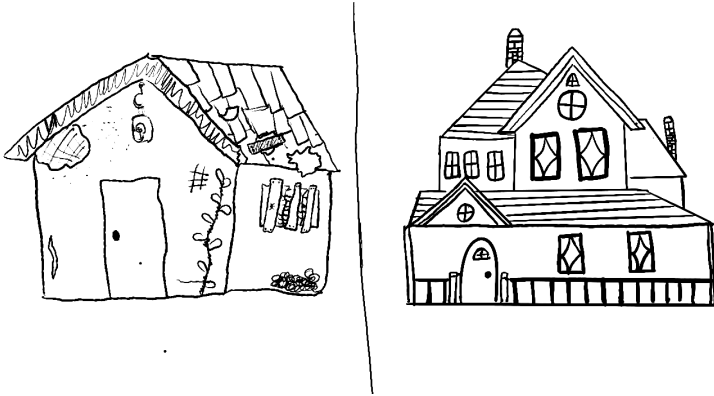
We were going to a place called Camp Timber where we would spend a week. Luckily, I was in Cameron's group along with two other twins in my class, but unfortunately, Dom was also in the group. I stuffed some clothes, a toothbrush and water bottle in my bag and we went to camp. When I went to the bus, I was shocked at how much stuff people had packed. Most people were like me - carrying one backpack, but some looked like they were moving to camp! They had suitcases filled with stuffed animals and make-up cases and sports equipment I didn't even know existed.



After the bus ride, we reached camp. We went to the cafeteria where the camp leader gave a speech.

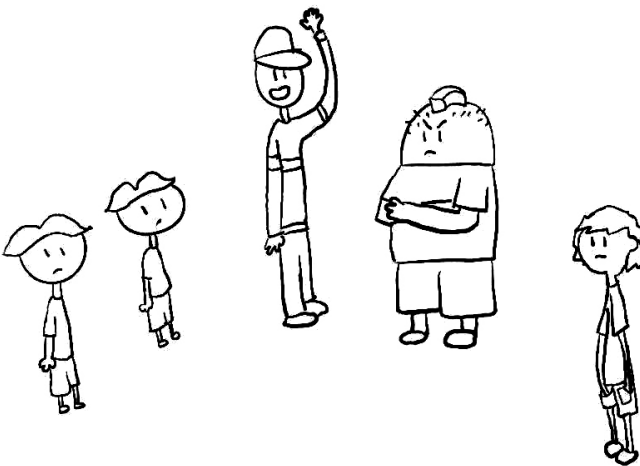
“Good morning campers! How’s everyone doing?” - no one answered - “Well, I’m doing well too. Camping is all about building valuable life skills. Here, you’ll learn how to take care of yourself and be independent. We’ll also teach you about minimalist living and being one with nature, with no dependency on electricity or technology,” he said as he turned on the AC in the cafeteria, “And lastly, you’ll experience camaraderie with your cabin mates through trust building exercises and our day long cabin hike.”

Our cabins were pretty small and I could see no electronic appliances near them. Moss had grown on the wood and some of it was rotting so it seemed old. This place really did look like the woods. And then I saw the teacher's cabin. My jaw dropped.



It looked like a 5-star hotel! It had a coffee machine, ACs and recliner chairs. So much for ‘minimalistic living.’

I was in the ‘kangaroo rat’ cabin and I went inside to greet my cabin mates. In the cabin, there was a 20-year old nerd who had packed 4 suitcases filled with stuff.



“What’s up? I’m Kevin,” he said, “I’m a boy scout. I’ll be your camp counsellor for the next few days. I’m pretty much an expert at hiking and stuff, so just ask me if you need anything. It’s really great to have you here and I’m looking forward to all the cool stuff we’re going to do together! Does anyone have any questions?”

“Are you bald?” Cameron asked.

“Excuse me?”

“Are you bald, you know, do you have any hair?”

“Uhhhh, well... ummm, no. No, I am not bald.”

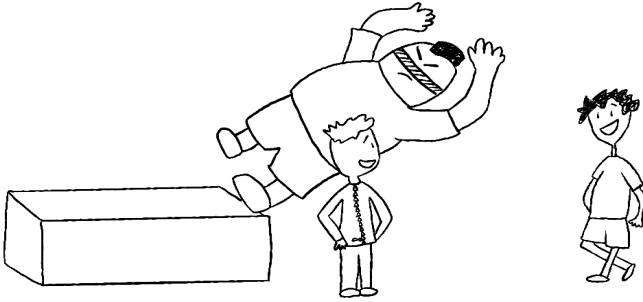
“Then why don’t you take off your cap and show us.”

“Umm...because I like my cap. Oh look at the time!” Kevin said quickly. “It’s time for breakfast.”

Even breakfast seemed like it came straight out of the woods. We ate a smelly berry with our stale bread, while the teachers and our camp counsellor got to eat pancakes and stuff that actually had taste.

After a hearty, fulfilling breakfast, we started doing “trust building” exercises. They were supposed to build team spirit but if they wanted to do that they could have just let us have a movie night or something like that.

First we had the classic trust fall, where people would fall from heights that could break their bones and trust a bunch of strangers to catch them. I realized this was the perfect opportunity to get revenge at Dom for all the bullying he had done. So I shared my idea with Cameron, Nick and Rick and they all agreed. The first few trust falls went smoothly. Then it was Dom’s turn. Honestly, I don’t think we could’ve stopped him even if we tried. He came crashing down and we all cheered.



By taking revenge on a common enemy, I felt that bond of trust strengthen.

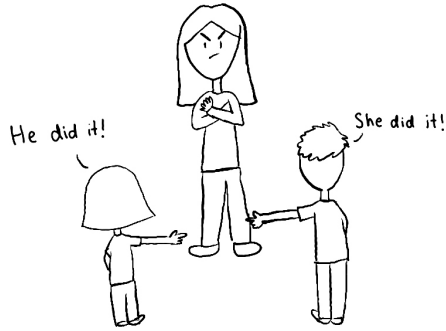
After this we had a team building exercise called the Cafeteria Cleaner's Dilemma. Here's how it worked: In the exercise our cabin was split into two parts. We went to two separate places. The groups were Cameron, Rick and I in Group 1 and Dom and Nick in Group 2.

Both of our groups were asked this question: Do you want to clean up the cafeteria or do you want the other team to do it? Here were the rules:

1. If both teams tell the other team to clean, each team has to clean for 3 meals.
2. If both teams agree to clean, each team has to clean for 1 meal
3. But if one team agrees to clean and the other tells the other team to clean, the team that agreed has to clean for 5 meals while the other team doesn't have to clean at all.

Although I didn't know it by the official name of "Cafeteria Cleaner's Dilemma" I had encountered this problem before. Infact if you have a sibling you have encountered this too.





In the beginning we constantly told on each other because it seemed like the logical thing to do since 0 or 3 days was better than 1 or 5 days. But overtime we started to realize that staying silent was best for both of us. So I knew the solution to this problem! I told Rick and Cameron.

We all agreed to clean. When we came back to our cabin, we thought Team 2 would have agreed too. But they dumped the whole thing on us!

“Hey! Why’d you snitch on us?” I complained.

“You didn’t support me in the trust fall. This doesn’t even begin to make up for what I’m going to do to you when we get back to school!” Dom said.

“Shut up, don’t insult my teammate. It’s not like your teammates supported you either!” Rick said. I was deeply moved.

“You’re just too ugly for anyone to like you,” countered Nick.

“I look the same as you, idiot.” Rick replied.

“You’re an idiot.”

So in the end, the ‘trust building exercises’ just made us trust each other less. But I don’t even think team building exercises are meant to do that. Do you really think games of betraying your teammates and threatening their lives by falling on them makes you trust them more? I think they’re just ways to make

us do more work.

By the time we were done with our trust breaking exercises and cleaning, it was time to sleep. The atmosphere was pretty tense and the two teams slept on different sides of the cabin. I had only packed a thin blanket which turned out to be a mistake since it was so cold, but I was pretty tired and slept instantly.

BEEEEEEEEEP!

I jolted straight out of bed. Had my eardrums exploded? Was there a fire? As my heart rate slowly got below 1000, I realized it was an alarm clock! As I slowly got out of bed, Kevin announced that we were going for a hike today. We were all really slow in getting up. We had to take a cold shower to save electricity (but I guess Kevin didn't have to, since we saw all the steam in the bathroom after he got out). We got delayed by about 15 minutes because of Cameron fixing his hair with his disgustingly smelly hair spray and after that, we had breakfast. We still weren't on speaking terms with each other and we ate breakfast silently except for Kevin telling everyone dumb camping jokes.

Finally, we set off on our hike. I hadn't packed anything to take on the hike, but Kevin looked ready to spend his life in the woods.



“Next time you’re hiking, always be prepared for any situation. It’s the boy scout motto,” - he saluted for dramatic effect - “ ‘Be prepared!’ ” Kevin told us. He took a huge bag filled with stuff and we started hiking.

After some time, Kevin busted out some binoculars and started looking around, “Look at that bird! It’s the elusive yellow footed flat beaked black booby! There are only 300 in the wild! I thought they were only found in Bolivia!”

“Uhh, that’s a crow.” I said.

“Oh... right.” he frowned, “Well anyways, this seems like a good place to stop.” Kevin said.

It had just been 10 minutes.

“Yeah, I agree,” Dom replied, sitting down on a log. “What are you waiting for idiots? Sit down!”

“Are you sure you needed all those things?” I asked. Kevin was already exhausted from carrying the heavy bag. “Like why do we need a flare gun?”

“Of course we need them. Remember the boy scout motto? ‘Be prepared’ .”

While we were resting, I saw a cool, shiny rock and inspected it.

Kevin took it from me, “Wow! This is magnetite, one of the only known magnetic rocks! Unfortunately, I can’t let you keep it since this is Camp Timber property.” he stuffed it in his pocket. I frowned. He had just stolen my first naturally forming fridge magnet souvenir!

The trail was now thinning and Kevin said we would have to rely on the map and compass.

“In Boy Scouts I learned the number one rule for navigation” Kevin announced, “Always trust your compass. Maps can be

interpreted incorrectly, but compasses never lie.”

I thought the number one rule for navigation was always follow google maps, but I guess this works too.

The trail had almost disappeared now and walking in the woods was a really serene experience. The birds were chirping, the sun was out and we could hear some frogs croaking in a nearby stream. It was just us and nature...

2 hours later:

We were getting really tired of nature.

“The heat is ruining my hair!” Cameron complained, “When can we go back?”

“Yeah, and mosquitoes keep biting me!” I said.

“And- I’m - so - ex - hausted.” Dom said, gasping for breath.

Kevin was dragging his bag now.

“And I’m bored.” Nick said.

“I’m even more bored.” Rick countered.

“I’m way more bored than you!” Nick replied.

Before things could get too intense, Kevin intervened. “Hmmm, we should be back by now. All I can see is trees all around. I’m not sure what went wrong.” he gulped, “Umm, guys... I think we’re lost. BUT BEFORE YOU PANIC -” he said, right before we started panicking - “I have a walkie talkie to call for help. I came prepared!” he removed the walkie talkie and tried to turn it on. “Huh, why isn’t it working? Uh oh, I think I forgot to change the batteries. WAIT DON’T PANIC YET!” he said, right before we started panicking - “My good old flare gun can help us here. Oh crap, I don’t have any flares left! Umm, wait, wait, don’t panic, don’t panic, just take a deep breath... WE’RE ALL GONNA DIE!”

We started panicking. Dom started breathing heavily and clutching his stomach (I don't know if this was because he was tired and hungry or if he was scared). Cameron frantically combed his hair as if a primal response to fear.

"There's something I never told you before.." Nick said to Rick, "I love you. I was always jealous of how you looked. I admit it, you are the more handsome brother!"

"We look the same, idiot. And... I love you too. Even more than you love me," Rick replied and they started crying.

"I WANT MY MOMMY," squealed Dom.

I decided I wasn't going to sit around and whine. This was the time for a leader to show himself. I had to take charge so we could survive this.

"Listen up everybody! We're probably going to die. Most likely. Almost certainly. But if we have any hope, and I mean any hope at all of surviving this, we need to work together! Now is the time to put aside our personal differences and unite!" I announced.

Everyone cheered.

"So... what do we do now?" I asked Kevin.

"I.. I don't know!" he replied.

"Oh come on! You must have learned something in Boy Scouts! What do we need to survive?"

"I didn't get that badge yet!"

I groaned, "Well, in order to survive, we need food and water. How much food do we have?"

"5 Ritz cracker packets, 4 bags of trail mix and 7 energy bars. If we want to survive, that leaves about 5.4 Ritz crackers. 7.1 nuts and 0.2 energy bars per meal per person if we want to survive a week." Kevin said.

"Right, carry out the appropriate rationing. What about

water?”

“In *Man vs Wild*, I learned that you can get water by sucking the dew off grass.” Cameron said.

“Okay, well that solves our water problem. But where will we sleep?”

“Don’t worry, I brought a tent! See, it pays to be prepared,” Kevin announced.

We all glared at him.

But suddenly, when it was starting to look like we may just get out the woods in one piece, Nick brought up another problem.

“Umm, what about bears?” Nick said.

“What?”

“Bears. I’ve heard that bears prey on campers during the night. And one time, I saw in a movie that a bear killed everyone in an entire campsite in just one night! What do we do about them?” Nick continued.

We all got really worried, but then Kevin intervened, “Don’t worry guys, I have just the right solution! Campers carry this all the time when they go hiking: bear spray! It’s a spray that stings their eyes and smells horrible to bears.” He pulled out a can and shook it, “Huh, why is this so light? Uh oh did I forget to fill up my can of bear spray? Oops.”

But luckily, we had an alternative: Cameron’s hair spray. We figured if it was as repulsive to bears as it was to humans, there soon wouldn’t be a bear within a mile.

I was supposed to take the first night shift but I didn’t have my phone to keep me awake and I was super tired from all that... surviving, so I slept instantly.

It was all going well until the growling started. At first it was kind of quiet but soon it got louder and everyone started

freaking out. We couldn't actually see the bear but it was probably hiding in the shadows or something. In a fit of awe-inspiring courageousness (I was pushed out of the tent in all the commotion) I ventured out, daring the monster to show himself. A huge dark beast emitted another bloodcurdling growl, stretching itself to its maximum height on its hind legs.



“You got anything to eat? I’m hungry.”

The monster was Dom’s stomach! Unfortunately by then Nick had bolted into the forest. The moonlight was bright enough that he could see where he was going but I doubted he could find his way back.

Everyone started calling out for him (which I was strictly against by the way. That bear might’ve still been lurking around somewhere!).

Dom sniggered and grinned, but I could see in his eyes that he felt guilty. Had Nick gotten lost because of his stomach? 10 minutes later, we had almost given up. Then suddenly Nick came out of nowhere! We were all relieved and that turned to excitement when we found out who he had brought with him! The camp leaders! We were saved!

The camp leaders led us to camp and to my surprise, after just a 5 minute walk we were right there! Just a few football

fields from our camp site (or about a third of a kilometre if you measure in metric).

So as it turns out, the magnetic rock in Kevin's pocket changed the direction of the compass or something and we were just led in a circle! If only we had walked a little bit further...After I came to camp, I felt like a teenager who finally got to check his phone after a 1 week ban by his parents. I couldn't believe what I had just done! I'd survived a whole day in the wild, but more importantly I had survived a whole day without electricity! And you know what? I think my stone-age ancestors would have been proud of me. I was extremely happy to be back, but the counsellors looked even happier.

"Thank goodness you're back!" the camp leader said, "We were so worried that we were going to get sued – uh, I mean we were so worried you were in danger!"

The next day my cabin mates and I were treated like heroes.

During breakfast, instead of the usual stale bread that was served every day, we got IHOP pancakes with strawberries and whipped cream. They also let us stay in one of the teacher's cabins! I thought the camp leaders were doing all this because we had just gone through a traumatizing event, but after the camp leaders came to our table, I found out the real reason.

"Heeeey guys! How are you all feeling today? If your parents ask about what happened on the hike, it was more of an 'adventurous excursion' than you .. you know, getting lost." he said. Ohh... I realized what was going on. Camp Timber had forgotten to include 'Camp Timber is not liable for any bear attacks or getting lost because of a clueless counsellor' on the permission slip.

"I don't know," I countered, "Can we get this food every day and keep the teacher's cabins for the rest of the trip?"

"Sure! Yeah, whatever you want!" he replied so quickly that



he probably hadn't heard what we had asked for. After that, the whole camp became pretty envious of us and we became the coolest cabin around. The kangaroo rat cabin was on the top of the food chain!

The next few days were hard on us. The camp had decided not to risk it with more camping trips, so a lot of time was spent inside the cabins 'building relationships with your cabin mates.' I wished they had given us a PS4 or something for all this relationship building because it was getting really boring without electronics. I may have been able to survive for a day in the woods, but a challenge like 'no electronics for a week' was at a whole new level.

There was a black market in camp with kids that rented out Nintendo DSs they had smuggled, but I considered such an act beneath me (plus, they had run out of stock). Everyone in camp also met in front of a campfire every day where the counsellors would play guitar songs, but you can only hear so many songs about friendship and kindness and sharing until you start going insane.



We also had a few camp sports we played like capture the flag and football. And because of our epic team chemistry (and Dom scaring everyone away) we won 1st place in both competitions!

By the time we had won camp games, it was time to head back home. It was nice to be back, but I sure was going to miss camp.

## Moving to India

So, for some context, I was born in India, but I moved to the US when I was just 6. Although I've visited India before, during summer vacations, I don't remember what it feels like to live there. So while I was born in India and first went to school there, I've spent half my life here and all my achievements (like graduating elementary school) have been in the US too. So you could kind of say I'm half-Indian, half-American. I'm telling you this because today, my parents told me that they were considering moving back to India. They asked my sister and me if we were fine with it. I agreed, but I was pretty nervous about it. We would be going to a whole new country!

For the next few weeks, I just kind of forgot about it and carried on with my normal summer vacation routine of doing absolutely nothing, but then, the time came that there was just a month left until we would be moving. I was freaking out! There would be so many things to adapt to. We would have to make new friends, learn new languages, fit into the new culture... all my middle school preparation might be useless when I go to India! I was going to miss all my friends, even Dom. My sister was pretty freaked out too. She was constantly messaging her friends how much she was going to miss them.

It's just two weeks until we go to India. We're packing all our bags. I have to say, I'm amazed at the amount of junk we found while cleaning out the house. If it was just my dad and I packing, we would be done in an hour. We were just going to pack our clothes and some essentials like a phone and computer, but my mom and sister insisted on taking *everything*. My sister has

this huge pile of stuffed animals which she hasn't looked at in years and she wants to take all of them. We made a 'junk box' for my sister which was a big cardboard box where she could put all her garbage and ship it. Meanwhile, my mom is exactly the same.



My dad and I both knew that it was pointless to argue. At first it looked like there was no way we were going to get under the maximum weight for luggage, but after forcing my mom and sister to let go of some heavy stuff (like my sister's 2nd grade cooking set that she hadn't touched for years), we finally got it down.

It was now just one day until we moved. For the last day, we just took a drive through the city. I saw my school and smiled as I remembered all the good (and bad) times I had had there with all my friends.

I had one last phone call with them.

"Wow, I can't believe I'll never see you again. Have fun in India!" said Ed, as he burst into tears.

"Send pictures when you reach there! I've always wondered what India looks like." Nick said.

"Haven't you ever seen a map, idiot? What do you mean what does it look like?" Rick said, "but yeah, definitely send pictures."

"Remember to message me!" said Cameron.

"You better not forget me or I'll kill you!" said Dom.

During the flight, I saw Sunnyvale grow smaller and smaller until it was just a piece of land with a bunch of lights brightening it up. Over the next day, we finally left America and began approaching India. As the border neared, I took a deep breath.

"We have now reached India." the pilot said on the intercom. Was I 100% Indian now? A few hours later, the plane finally touched down at midnight and we started our new life in India.

# **7<sup>th</sup> Grade**

## **India/US transition: Reconnecting to my Roots**

Now that I'm in India, I'm going to have to adapt to the lifestyle and culture here. Earlier, I was really nervous about moving, but now I've taken it as a challenge to adapt to India as fast as possible. After taking a few days to get out of jet lag, I started my transition. India is in some ways way different from the US. I decided the best way to learn was to get some exposure, so I ventured out onto the roads with my dad to help me. But before that, the first thing I had to do was cross the road.

How hard could that be?

As soon as I stepped out of the apartment I was hit by a deafening wave of noise. It seemed as if every car was honking every few seconds! In India, instead of keeping two hands on the wheel, drivers probably learned to keep one hand on the wheel and one on the horn.

The traffic was also so intense! There wasn't a single empty space between cars that a two wheeler or impatient car driver did not take up.

"Good thing we came at a relatively calm time, right?" my dad said, "It would have been hard if the traffic had picked up."

My jaw dropped. This was supposed to be low traffic? Well, no big deal right? I can just wait until the traffic light turns red and then cross. Then I looked at the signal. The light *was* red! Later, I learned that in India, traffic lights are mainly just for aesthetics and for foreigners/tourists, nobody actually pays attention to them.

Fortunately, I was kind of a pro in crossroad and really skinny

so I hoped that might help me.

Nervously, I took my first step on the road and immediately jumped back as a motorcycle went right past where my foot was a second ago! As I was scanning the traffic for any small gaps in traffic I could madly sprint across, I stared in disbelief as a guy my age expertly walked through and navigated the maze and made it across without breaking a sweat.

I decided to try to observe some people before trying it out again. My training starts tomorrow. Wish me luck.

Three days later:

After some practice I have had several key realisations.

1. Crossing the road is not always a full blown sprint
2. Road crossing is an art with several techniques to master
3. Road crossing forces you to master not only the body but also the mind.

Here are some techniques I learned:

#### 1. The stare down

As I mentioned earlier, road crossing is largely psychological. You can avoid the traffic or stop the traffic. The stare down is a great way to stop it. Just look in the driver's eyes, making your gaze angrier by the second until they stop. This does need some practice though. I recommend angrily staring at your math textbooks and broken pencil tips after you've sharpened them for 20 minutes to get better at this. Just make sure nobody sees you...

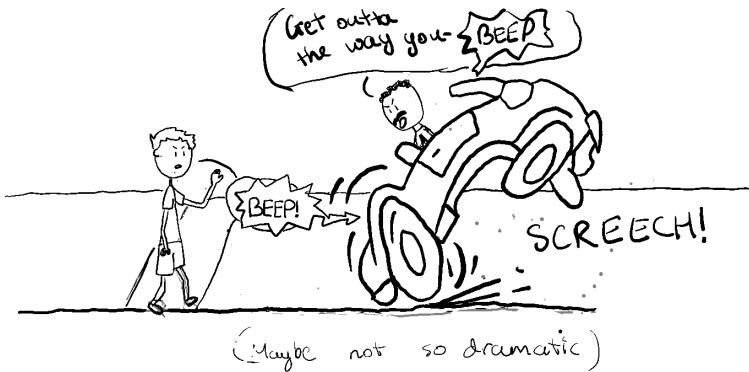
#### 2. The stop sign

This one is pretty easy. It adds a nice theatrical touch to your performance while telling the driver to stop or else. Just thrust your hand forward.

### 3. Music

No performance is complete without music! But seriously, bad words are a great way to intimidate drivers and tell them to back off. The only problem: noise. The roads in India are really noisy because of all the honking. In the US, you honk to tell someone to get out of the way. In India you honk to tell the other drivers you're alive (if someone doesn't honk for over 15 minutes, make sure they're okay). You have to be loud enough to be heard over all these sounds. Again, for practice I recommend playing level 137 on skull quests and releasing your emotions every time the second stage boss that never seems to die, kills you.

Here's how it all looks together:



Oh also, another useful thing to remember: do NOT trust the green light.

So, imagine you're trying to walk across the street and you see that there's 20 seconds left on the timer until the green light turns red. So you can just cross the road, right? WRONG! About 15 seconds before the light turns green, it's like the beginning of a Nascar race. You can hear the engines revving. So unless you're Usain Bolt, don't plan on running when the timer is under 20 seconds.



Hopefully, this guide helps you conquer one of the most challenging aspects of living in India: crossing the road. Of course, if you were born and raised in India, these instructions are encoded in your genetics, so it's natural for you.

Another thing I've always wanted to do since we got here is ride an Indian taxi. Indian taxis, also called auto rickshaws, are so cool. They're like the cooler version of a convertible.

I've always wanted to ride one of them. They're such an underrated vehicle. I asked my parents if we could get one and they looked at me like I was crazy. I guess they're too expensive. Today, I finally got the chance to ride a rickshaw and it was amazing! Rickshaw drivers are like Nascar racers. They go super fast and are amazing at overtaking. If you're too tired of going on slow, boring, 70mph roller coasters, I highly recommend rickshaws.



## Selecting Schools

Now that we've had some time to settle in, it's time to look for a school. We were going to visit many schools and decide which one was best.

The first one was Lakeview Global School. In the waiting room sat another family. There was a boy my age, dressed in a formal suit and tie so I felt a little out of place with a Steph Curry t-shirt and shorts. To break the awkward silence, I decided to talk to him.

“Hi, my name is Ishan.”

“Good day, I am Edward Uday,” he replied in a British accent. He sounded like somebody from Harry Potter.

“Are you from Britain?” I asked

“Why yes, yes I am! How did you know, old chap?”

“Wait a second, your initials are EU?”

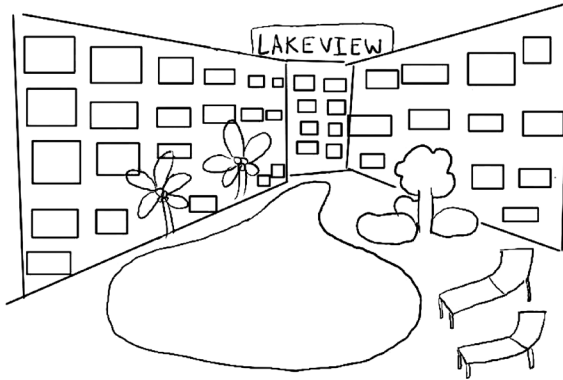
“Quite right.”

“I thought Britain was supposed to leave the EU, not the other way around.” I joked



He looked pretty confused so I changed the topic.

Next, we went on a tour of the school. It looked less like a school and more like Buckingham Palace!



Awesome! EU and I hopped on a golf cart and they drove us around. The principal was giving the tour and stopped along the way to point out all kinds of cool stuff. There was a swimming pool and a mini-golf arena and a food court and stadiums for sports I didn't even know the names of. In the end, they served us some fancy French food which I can't pronounce and Danish pastries. My sister was impressed!

I was just about to ask for seconds when unfortunately, the tour ended. After the tour we went to see the principal. The principal was a scary-looking lady whose smile looked like the face you make when your parents force you to pose for a picture. I saw a huge trophy, as tall as me, that looked like the scale model of the Empire State Building! And then I read the label: It was for participation. In a knitting competition. In Japan. I looked around to see any for math, science or social studies but there were none. All of them were for participation! Knitting, origami, kite flying, baking... I wondered if they had participated in any gaming competitions. I had never seen anyone boasting about their participation trophies before. Weren't they supposed to be cheap plastic cups and stupid paper certificates you give to kindergartners to stop them from whining?

"As you can see," the principal said, pointing to the trophies,

“Our school is very enthusiastic about extracurricular activities. Now, do you have any questions?”

“Uhhh... what about teaching and education?” my mom asked.

“Oh yes! I completely forgot to tell you. Well-”

At this point I zoned out. Every school gives lectures to parents about their ‘school philosophy’. It’s basically a statement that is filled with generic words that tells you absolutely nothing about the school and is completely meaningless. Unless you’re a parent. Then it matters a lot.

All school philosophies have some things in common:

1. Be as ambiguous as possible. Don't say, “We help them achieve academic excellence.” Say, “We embrace their uniqueness and help them reach their full potential in their passions and interests.” Don't say, “We answer any doubts or questions they have.” Say, “We encourage inquisitiveness and risk taking.”
2. Use key buzzwords that no one knows the meaning of. For example: holistic development, developing inner self, becoming a global citizen, liberal arts...
3. Turn your weakness into advantages:  
For example “We have limited facilities and a small campus.” turns into: We believe that simplicity is sophistication and our cosy spaces give our students a feeling of security and friendship to one another.

The principal followed all of these points to perfection. She said: “This is our school philosophy (I zoned out here). Blah blah blah blah, holistic development blah blah blah, inner soul blah blah blah, make global citizen blah blah, spiritual enlightenment blah, liberal arts blah blah, we don't believe in homework-”

Wait, what was that? Did I just hear there would be no

homework! The sentence echoed in my head, louder and louder - this school was my destiny. I had always liked the school, imagining swinging my 7-iron on the mini-golf putting green with EU as my caddy every day, but now I loved it! Meanwhile, my mom didn't look so pleased. Not good news. Meanwhile, my dad looked really bored sitting there and I thought I still had a chance.

"Here is the information regarding fees." the principal said after her speech, giving my parents a pamphlet.

"Oh, this isn't that bad!" my dad said.

"That's for the application process. Here is the fee for attending the school," the principal said with a smile.

My dad's jaw dropped and he kept rubbing his eyes and counting the number of zeros. "Uhhh, we'll let you know later," he said nervously and we walked out.

When we got home, my family and I had a discussion on whether we liked the school or not.



My sister and I loved it, but unfortunately, my mom and dad said there was no way they were going to send us to Lakeview.

I guess we're going to see another school tomorrow.

The next school we saw was Hyderabad Champion School (HCS).

The second we walked into HCS I saw dozens of trophies, but unlike Lakeview, these weren't for participation. There were trophies for literally everything, 1st place state math competition, 1st place Horlicks Quiz Contest, 1st place national abacus tournament! On the wall, cheesy 'hard work' posters were hung:

"Work harder than you did yesterday."

"Sleep for 8 hours. That leaves 16 hours for hard work."

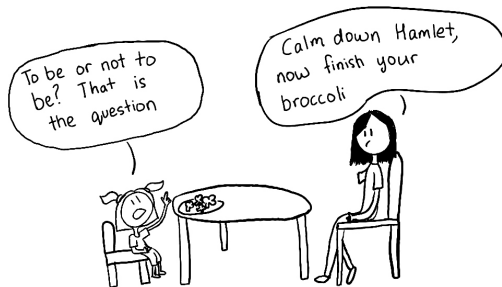
"No matter how hard you work, somebody else is working harder."

Just reading them made me feel exhausted. Just like in Lakeview, a person came to give us a tour of the school.

He first took us to some classrooms where I saw small kids studying.

"This is our nursery program. It is for children from 6 weeks to 4 years. In the nursery program, children learn to count to 100, add and subtract, to do yoga, meditation, drama, arts and crafts and our brightest can even recite poetry!"

"Can they really do all that?" I asked.



“Well, this period during the ages 6 weeks to 4 years is the time when children absorb the most amount of information. This is why we expose them to as many activities as possible so they can find which ones they’re talented in and pursue them,” he explained.

“Cool.” I said. I was pretty impressed by HCS. I mean, think of how much better I could have gotten at gaming if I started when I was in my diapers! I could have been a pro by now.

He further went on to explain how I would learn advanced math and science and five languages as a 7th grader. Suddenly, he yanked a passing 5th grader and showed him to us. “This is one of our brightest students. He can recite the scientific name of any animal and say the spelling of any word. Try it!”

I seriously doubted that. “What’s the spelling of floccinaucinihilipilification?” I asked. It was the longest word in the dictionary.

“Can I have the language of origin?” he asked

“Oh, sure it’s English. Don’t worry it’s not a French or German word or something.” I replied, holding back a laugh.

He looked at me strangely, but I’m not sure why. Then suddenly, he started reciting the spelling: “F-L-O-C-C-I-N-A-U-C-I-N-I-H-I-L-I-P-I-L-I-F-I-C-A-T-I-O-N”

“Woah!” I said. I was really impressed. I’m not an expert or anything, but I’m pretty sure floccinaucinihilipilification is the hardest word to spell. It took me half an hour to memorise it. This guy must have been a pro.

After that, our tour guide went to talk with the principal.

“So, what do you think about this school?” my dad asked, “The languages are kind of too much right?”

“No, actually I think they’re really cool.” I replied. At first,

when I had heard about all those languages, my first thought was - too much work. But now that I'd really considered it, I realised there are many advantages with learning a ton of languages.

1. You can text on your phone or talk to your friends when your parents are watching and they won't know what you're saying.
2. Knowing a ton of languages means that you can also learn a bunch of new roasts and insults. You can make fun of someone without them even knowing.
3. You can finally know the meaning of Despacito and Gangnam Style.

The fact that they taught advanced math and science was actually a gift in disguise. At this rate, by my sophomore year (10th grade), I would be done with college. Then I could pursue my true interests like twitch streaming and becoming a Youtuber.

"I love this school," I said.

My dad looked shocked, "You like it?" he asked me. "You do know that there will be a lot of homework right?"

"Dad! I'm responsible now. I'm not in 6<sup>th</sup> grade anymore. I promise that I will dedicate 30 minutes every single day to homework."

"30 minutes! Have you seen this school! You're going to have to do at least 3-"

Suddenly, the intern came and interrupted us. "I'll show you the uniforms now," he said.

He went into a room and pulled some clothes out. I was traumatised! What I saw would strike fear in the hearts of the bravest boy and I was no exception. What looked to be a promising school *had* to have a uniform that looked like *that*.



It was a shame. Such a waste of potential! But no matter how much I liked any school, I was not going to wear *that* every day.

The tour guide continued: “Also, I spoke with the principal. Although there is no guarantee, if you apply now, you have an excellent chance of getting your son admitted in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and your daughter in the 7<sup>th</sup>.”

“But I’m in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.” I said.

The tour guide laughed. “People fill the application forms as soon as their children are born and still don’t get in until they are 5 or 6. Consider yourself lucky!”

I did. This meant I wasn’t going to HCS after all. But which school would I go to now?

We checked out some other schools too. In the end, we all decided to go to the Lotus School, which was a pretty normal school. We all liked it and I would start in a week.

## **Adapting to my new school**

After I got admission into the school, I found out there were just three days until my first day in school. I'm freaking out!!! In India, school starts early in the year, so although I only have to attend half a year until summer break, everyone will know each other by then so I'll be the new kid. My parents have told me horror stories about the punishments they used to get in school. My dad said his teacher used to hit kids on their knuckles with a ruler and my mom said her teacher used to throw chalk at people! In school, I had learned in the US that if anyone tried to do something like that, you could just dial 911. Didn't they have children's rights in India? Luckily, I was a yellow belt in taekwondo, so I had learned how to endure pain.

Next, I had to find some common ground to be able to communicate with my peers. So naturally, I had to memorize the bad words they used here. After searching some up, I decided I was ready to converse with people and make friends.

Finally the day came when I took on the challenge of my first day to school in India. On my bus, I was overjoyed to find someone speaking to me with an American accent!

"Hi!" I introduced myself.

"Hey, dude what's up?" he replied.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"I'm Sid. You?"

"I'm Ishan. Are you from America?"

"Yeah bro, I'm from The States."

"Me too! I just came here a few weeks ago. What about you?"

“I came here when I was 6 months old.”

I wondered how he had an American accent then. But having made my first friend, I was much more confident. After that, I went to my first period.

The teachers were actually really nice and I was relieved that they didn't give any of the punishments my parents told me about. Then, during lunch, I heard the welcoming noise of someone swearing “@#&%!”

I thought I would have to learn new bad words, but they used the same bad words here! But sometimes, people were acting weird. Like at random times, the teacher asks someone, “Are you ready?”

Ready for what? I wondered. Someone even asked me the question once so I asked Sid what it meant. He told me that ready (spelled Reddy) is actually a name! That would be a pretty handy name to have...

Yoda: Ready you are, to learn the ways of the Jedi?

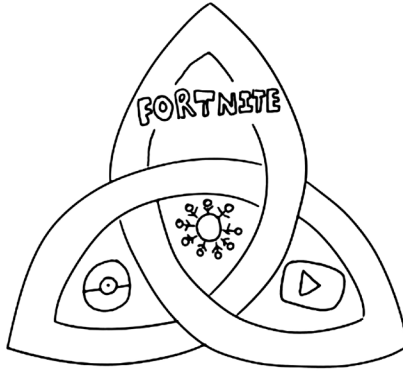
Apprentice: Reddy is my middle name.

In India, instead of having multiple classes that the students went to with different classmates in each class, the kids just sat in one class while the teachers were the ones who went to each class, so all my classmates were the same in all classes.

I made another friend during school too. His name was Krish. Through him, I learned some more things about school in India.

As I started talking to new people and making new friends, I learned a lot, not just about India, but about kids in general. When I was in the US, I used to think kids would be way different in India. But now, I think that all kids are really just the same. No matter where you are in the world, every kid is united by the same ideals of Fortnite, anime and Instagram. So if you're going to move to India or any other country, just stick

to talking about the Holy Trinity. You'll fit in just fine.



I made two friends today, Sid, the guy on the bus, and Krish. So overall, today was a pretty good day.

## **Exams**

The word 'exams' has a very different meaning depending on where you live. So the next day, when my parents told me I had a big test in the next two weeks, my reaction was: "Oh, okay... Why are you telling me this?" Because this is how 'exams' (if you can even call them that) are in middle schools in the US. My school had two exams. One in the middle of the year and one in the end.

Absolutely no one used to prepare for those tests. Except for the teachers. This was because the tests weren't supposed to measure how good *we* were. They measured how good *the school* was. Each school was given a rating based on its average performance. The rating changed how much funding the school got. It was basically telling us "Oh you got bad grades and didn't study? Don't worry, it's not your fault. It's your school's."

Exams in the US are great until high school and then from zero study time, you suddenly have to go to a few hours. In India it's different. There are exams from just 5th grade in my school. And there are many reasons to do well in exams besides the obvious one - if you wind up on Jeopardy knowing this stuff will be really useful. The convenient placement of exams before Diwali/Christmas makes the gifts you receive proportional to your grades. And teachers brag all the time about which students got the highest grades in their classes, in the teacher's lounge or at lunch, so scoring well puts you in the nice list of many teachers. I'm pretty new to this "studying" concept so let's see how it goes.

Wow, a week had passed already! I really needed to get my study schedule down. This is what I started doing:

- Study for 15 minutes
- Take a break because it relaxes your brain
- Keep a bag of chips near at all times. Because I need energy for studying
- Repeat until I memorize everything

Pretty soon this got a bit repetitive, so I decided to have a group study.

“Hey, Krish, can we come to your house to study?” I asked.

Krish said “Uhh, I’m not so sure my parents will be hap-”

“Oh come on. It’ll be fun!” Sid said.

As soon as we arrived, Krish brought out his books and started reading. I was hoping we could have played a little before, but I guess this *was* a study session. Around 15 minutes later, the silence was starting to get pretty awkward.

“Whew, I’m exhausted. Can we play some video games?” Sid asked Krish.

“Yeah, I think we should take a break to rest our brains so we don’t burn ourselves out.” I agreed.

“You’ve literally been studying for 15 minutes.” Krish said, “Ugh, fine, you can play some Nintendo.”

So Sid and I took a break and played some Super Mario... for 3 hours. Krish was studying for almost the entire time! I’m not really sure how he plans to get good marks without resting his brain.

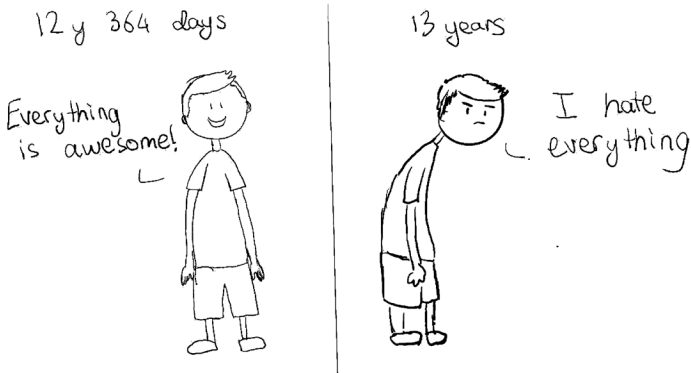
In the middle of our break, Krish’s mom kept scowling at us and whispering to Krish. Something about, “Dumb American kids” and “bad influence.” I started feeling kind of guilty, so I studied more than usual.

As for Sid, I’m pretty sure he came just for playing Super Mario.

A few weeks later, I took the exam and a week after that, our results came out. I got a pretty good score! So I guess my strategy of regular breaks, snacks and video games worked after all.

## Turning 13!

My 13th birthday is getting pretty close... I've heard a lot about teenagers and none of it is good. I've heard that they are mean, negative, and obsessed with their phones. I'm not a teenager yet, I'm just 12, but I am pretty close to being in my teens. I don't think I'm mean, negative or obsessed with my phone (I mean, it *is* a Nokia, but that snake game is pretty addicting). Us preteens are nothing like teenagers. So I wonder what happens on that fateful day when you turn 13.



My dad keeps telling me that now that I'm almost a teenager, I need to start learning to be independent and take care of myself. Meanwhile, my mom is freaking out about my birthday. She says she can't believe how fast I've grown and that it's too early for me to be a teenager. To be honest, I can't believe I'm almost a teenager either. My mom has officially banned me from getting any taller and today, she got some new Peppa Pig curtains for my room. I tried protesting, but it was pointless, so now whenever I invite a friend to my house, I'll just never go in my room.



For my birthday party, my mom wanted to have a kiddy theme, but I argued that it would totally ruin my image, so we finally settled on Spiderman. As my birthday present, I asked my parents if I could finally get Instagram (all my friends had it), and after a long, long discussion, they said I could finally have it. Yes!

I had the party the day before my birthday since that was a Sunday. My parents wanted to have my party in a place called the KidZone, where my sister had had her birthday party, but it was clearly written on their website that it was for ages 5-12. To be honest, it was a pretty cool place, but I had a reputation to uphold! I decided to play it safe and stick with an arcade. Everybody likes video games. My parents drove me there.

“Thanks for driving me here! You can go now,” I said.

My dad laughed, “We’re coming with you! You’re not that old yet that we can just leave you alone with your friends. And knowing kids your age, there’s going to be at least one person who gets sick from eating too much cake.”

“But one of my friends had a completely unsupervised birthday party once!” I tried to argue.

“Okay, first of all, I’m not sending you to his birthday party again. Second of all, we have to be there for this special day! I mean, from tomorrow onwards, what if you start locking yourself up in your room and start thinking we’re lame?” my mom said.

“Okay fine,” I conceded, “but no taking pictures!”

My mom smiled, “Just a few.”

I was really excited when the first person, Krish, came. His parents had come to drop him off, so I was relieved I wasn’t the only person who had brought parents to my birthday. Unfortunately, they decided to stick around. They started

talking to my parents which I was kind of worried about. Just like Krish's mom thought I was a bad influence on him, I thought his mom was a bad influence on my mom. I mean, what if my parents started expecting me to go to JEE classes and start studying all day? Meanwhile, a few of my other friends had come.

I had also invited the most popular kid in my grade, Neel, who wasn't really my friend, but it was kind of a rule to invite him. He was already a teenager so I was hoping to get some tips from him.

He came to my party, staring at his phone.

"Hi!" I said.

"Hey. Happy Birthday. Here's this stick of gum as a present." Neel said, sitting down and going back to his phone.

Oh well, gum is better than nothing.

After that, Sid came. His parents unfortunately also joined the parent discussion. Whenever parents talk about their kids, it never ends well.

After that, we played in the arcade and on the trampolines for some time which was really fun. Then it was cake cutting time! We got some pizza and started talking while eating it.

Overall, the party was awesome. Finally, everyone left, and we went back home. It was still just 7, so I decided to watch a movie. My mom said I could only choose an animated one, so I saw Ice Age and it was actually really good! I stayed awake until 12 for my real birthday. And finally, when the clock struck 12 and I turned 13... I expected some sort of change that would transform me into a teenager, maybe my back slouching or some other teenage symptoms but... nothing happened. Maybe it's a more gradual change.

## **Livin' the, Teenage Dream**

Today, my good friend Sam got sent to the principal's office for drawing on the bathroom walls.



Sam is the coolest kid in our grade and he's been a teenager for 2 months now so I've started looking up to him and became his BFF. Today, he got sent to the principal's office for drawing on the bathroom walls. I was incredibly impressed by him, but I also knew he was probably getting into huge trouble. So during lunch, when he was summoned to the principal's lair, I snuck around the water fountain and pretended to get a drink while listening in to their conversation. I needed to know the consequences of these things since I was a teenager too.

Our homeroom teacher was there too and I listened closely to what huge punishment he was about to receive.

"Eh, he's a teenager, what can you do?" the principal said and that was it.

I was shocked. If I had done something like that, I would have

received a double knockout punch, one from the teacher and one from my parents. But Sam got out unscathed!

Nervously, during lunch, I went up to him and the cool kids group. “H-hey Sam! So how did you not get any punishment at all from the principal? Did you bribe her or something?” I asked.

“Who are you?”

“You know, Ishan, your best friend? I sit next to you in class?”

“Huh? Well, kid, it’s all about expectations. In time, through hard work and dedication, you’ll learn to set your expectations exactly where you want them to be. As a teenager, people expect you to be independent, rebellious to the system that’s trying to lock us up, facing authoritative structures of power like parents and teachers without fear. You can use this to get whatever you want. It’s all about expectations, kid. Now leave me alone.”

Yes! Expectations! That’s what would transform me into a true teenager. I was excited to learn. For the next few days, I observed Sam to learn how to shape my expectations. Here’s what I learned.

Step 1: Wear headphones at all times. This will give other people the impression that you aren’t listening to them.

Step 2: Be as sloppy as possible

Step 3: Complain that no one understands you and idolize gamers and celebrities

Step 4: Be on your phone as much as possible

Step 5: Always talk back to people and don’t let others tell you what to do.

Armed with this knowledge, I decided to try it.

One day, I came home wearing headphones, looked at my phone, threw my bag on the floor and started walking to my room.

“Ishan! Pick up your bag! And stop being on your phone all the time,” my mom said.

I pretended not to listen. She repeated a few times and finally yanked out my headphones.

“UGH. Mom. I’ll do it later.”

“Pick up your bag right now!”

“No.”

“Fine, I’m taking away your phone for 2 days.”

“No one understands me!”

“Yeah, but I don’t need to understand you to take away your phone.”

“It’s my property! You can’t take it away.”

“What’s gotten into you? Why are you acting so much like an American teenager? This is exactly why we moved to India! That’s it, no video games for a week.”

I was completely unprepared for this. “Wait what? No please, I’m sorry!” I quickly picked up my bag, changed my clothes and started helping my mom with gardening. Thankfully, I got off the hook with just a two-day phone ban. Being a teenager is too hard, I think I’ll stick to just being me.

## **Careers**

Today my parents said they wanted to have a ‘talk’ with me.

“We think we need to talk to you about something.” my parents said.

“I’m in trouble right?” I said. “Sorry for breaking your favorite coffee mug while practising taekwondo.”

“You did what?! We’ll talk about that later! Anyways, you’re a teenager now. It’s time you started thinking seriously about your career choices. You still have a long time to decide, but just keep it in mind. And... be honest okay? When we were kids, we only got to study engineering or become a doctor. We don’t want you to have the pressure of entering a career that you don’t like. Follow your dreams!”

“Oh that’s fine, I already decided my career. Just give me 5 minutes to think about it and I’ll let you know.”

“Umm, ok.”

I had shortlisted two main career paths:

1. Gamer
2. Sports Player

If you’re like most boys in my grade, you want to be a sports player. You’re probably convinced that since you’re the best football player in your grade, you have what it takes to make it to the Premier League.

I am not one of those people. I realised at one point in my life that it’s too hard to become a pro sports player. And even if you do put in all that hard work you are probably going to be shown up by someone more talented or taller than you. Fortunately

there's a much easier way to get fame and fortune- become a pro gamer. Unlike an athlete, you don't need talent or hard work to become a pro gamer! All you need is dedication, time and the ability to survive for long periods of time without going to the bathroom (I still need to work on the last one). Anyways, with AI coming along and taking all our jobs, most people will just sit at home and watch TV. So gaming will get a lot of viewership. Gaming is on the rise. For the average middle school kid, it's much more interesting to watch the Fortnite world championship than to watch people kicking a ball across a field.

Sounds like a simple recipe for success.

1. Get good at gaming (preferably a new game, not Fortnite), which you can get a head start in.
2. Make millions from gaming tournaments.
3. Enjoy your fame and fortune.

Having made my decision, I told my parents: "I want to be a pro gamer or twitch streamer."

"Haha, no seriously."

"I'm serious."

"You can't be a pro gamer! That's not a real job."

"But you told me to follow my dreams! And gaming is my dream!"

"Yes but... just pick a different dream."

The next day, I came back with my second dream, disappointed that I couldn't be a gamer, but I had some other good options left. "I've decided if I can't be a gamer, I'm going to be a Nascar driver," I said.

My mom almost spit out the tea she was drinking. "No way, it's way too dangerous!"

"Mom I'm 13, I can take care of myself! What about professional

NBA player?”

“Uhh, pretty sure you need to be *good* at sports to do that.” my dad chipped in unhelpfully.

“Can I at least be a rockstar?”

“No.”

“Youtuber?”

“Don’t even think about it.”

“Food critic (free food for the rest of your life.)?”

“Nope.”

“Then what do you mean by ‘follow your dreams’? I’ve run out of dreams by now!”

“Well, you know... you can be a data scientist! That’s a nice, in-demand job!” my dad said enthusiastically.

I frowned.

“Or, or how about biotech? That’s an emerging field! You like spending time at your computer? Well, how about being a software developer? Really there are endless possibilities! Physics professor, economist, entrepreneur... Just follow your heart!”

After some arguing, we finally agreed on being a game developer. I think it’s a pretty good job, almost as good as being a gamer. Now I understood why there was such a big demand to learn programming! You could just make a really popular game like Fortnite, get rich and spend the rest of your life playing that game for ‘testing’ purposes.

Although I am still very undecided...



## **A Picasso in the making?**

Wow, I can't believe it's already February! I still don't really feel that sense of school spirit. So, I looked at the school philosophy to get some inspiration. Hmm let's see... "We encourage every child to take risks and learn through the process of experimentation and become well-rounded."

It was time to develop the other parts of my character in my quest to become a well-rounded, global citizen. First, I tried developing my creative soul in art class.

Our art teacher was a professional art critic. She had judged over 100 pieces of artwork and she looked like a piece of art herself.

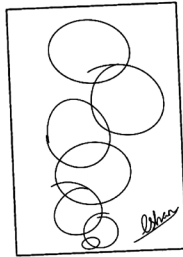


In my first class, we were assigned to draw whatever we felt like, to "commence the circulation of creativity across our body and soul". I decided to try my luck at abstract art. To be honest, I didn't really understand abstract art, but people pay millions of dollars for this kind of stuff, so there must've been something I was missing. I decided to draw a bunch of circles and colour them. All masterpieces have one thing in common,

a meaningful name, so I chose to call my work of art “The Human Soul”.

Nope. It still looked horrible. I should’ve just drawn a cartoon or something.

Art Club Drawing



We all submitted our artwork to the teacher. The teacher was really harsh, even to good drawings so I was pretty scared of what she would have to say.

Finally, she picked mine up. I was really nervous of what kind of creative insult the teacher would give to mine, but the teacher was silent for a few awkward seconds. Then she took off her glasses to peer closer.

“Brilliant!” she exclaimed.

“Wait, what?” I said momentarily before I regained my composure. “I mean, yes, of course!”

“I have never seen such a flamboyant work of art done at such a young age! It is quiet but not timid, colorful but not ostentatious. It speaks to me! The yellow represents your outward nature, what a casual observer sees. It is happy and bright, like the color of the sun. However, the layer is quite transparent. Someone who knows you well can see through this layer and see your imperfections. I can notice how you used blue which goes horribly with this ‘warm’ colour scheme to

display the imperfection and you also colored it horribly, to again highlight imperfection. Then, if a person peers deeper, they can see your dreams and passions shown in bright red. In the 2nd deepest layer is orange which symbolizes the hot lava of your juvenile beliefs and values which slowly harden over time. However, only someone who knows you very well can see into your core and appreciate your uniqueness. Absolutely brilliant!”

“Huh? I mean, yes of course. That’s exactly what I was going for.” I said. The teacher had taught me so much about my own art. I never had really thought about myself as an abstract artist, but art teachers don’t lie.

Wow! I was an amazing artist. I had no idea how much talent I had! Now that the teacher had made all those points, I could truly appreciate the inner beauty in my art. I felt enlightened.

“Look what I did today in art class!” I bragged when I came home.

“What is it?” my mom asked

“Abstract art.”

“Okay.”

“Don’t you like it though?” I asked, frowning.

“It’s a bunch of circles that you colored in. And you didn’t even color that well.”

I was deeply offended. “But the messiness, it represents imperfection! And, and the warm color scheme, with the blue color. Don’t you understand the meaning behind it?”

“Ok...”

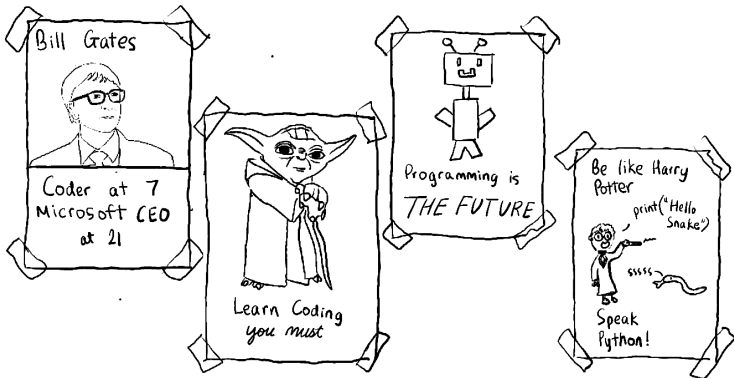
“So where can I hang it?”

“The trash can is under the kitchen sink.”

Some people just don’t understand true art.

## The Coding Menace

This year, an organisation called Coding4Kidz organized a 1 month course in our school. In the course, we would learn about stuff like programming and robotics. The organization did a ton of advertising for it. A week before the course, the hallways were filled with posters of famous people talking about the benefits of coding.



I was really excited for it. Since my parents hadn't allowed me to be a pro gamer, this was a pretty good alternative. I could build a robot to act as my bodyguard and chase any bullies that came too close, be able to hack into my friends' emails to see who their contacts are and make an AI to finish all my homework... The opportunities were limitless! I signed up for it.

"What do you think of that new programming course? Pretty cool, right? I signed up for it." I told my friends. "That stupid thing?" my friend Sid said, "No way I'm joining that. It's such a scam, you won't learn anything."

"Yeah, but more importantly, it has *homework*. Why in the

world would you voluntarily take extra homework?” my friend Anil said.

“There’s no way I’m joining that,” another classmate chipped in. About 10 more people agreed.

Uh oh. Was signing up for that course a mistake?

The next day, I stayed after school for the course. I thought no one would show up, but surprisingly, literally all the kids who said they were definitely not coming were there!

“Did you change your mind?” I asked.

“No, my dad made me.”

“Same, my parents forced me to.”

“Yeah, my mom said I had to attend it. It’s so unfair.”

“I know right.”

Meanwhile, I was relieved.

As it turned out, the course was a huge waste of time. I thought at the very least we would learn to use bots to increase the number of followers you got on Instagram or hack into each other’s emails, but we didn’t even do that. The whole class was spent on learning ‘for loops’ and lists and ‘if’ statements etc. And as for robotics, well, we superglued some motors and wheels on a car and drove it around. Do you really think Steve Jobs invented the iPhone by learning how to print ‘hello world’?

## **Basketball tournament**

One thing I was excited about was sports. In the US, with 400 people in my grade and insanely athletic kids, I pretty much stood no chance of getting into any sports team. But now, I was actually decently tall and athletic in India. I had a chance at making a sports team! I thought I would have to learn Indian sports like cricket (which is basically baseball minus the boredom) and kabaddi (which is basically American football minus the ball), but surprisingly, they had a basketball team too. I had never thought of myself as a basketball player, I was more of a thumb sports kind of guy, but after thinking about it, it did seem pretty appealing. So I decided to try out for the team. In America, selections would be a complicated process where they would look at your fitness, grades, basketball skills and teamwork. It was much simpler in my school.

Selections for the basketball team were based on two main criteria (ranked by importance)

1. How much the PE teacher likes you
2. Whether your team won or not in selections

Luckily, I was in the team with all the good people, so my team won and I was new, so the PE teacher didn't dislike me as much as he disliked some other people. Plus, since I came from the US, the PE teacher probably thought I was Steph Curry or something. So I got in!

There's going to be a tournament next week. It's going to be held at Lakeview, so who knows, I might even meet EU! The basketball tournament was a really serious event for all the

schools. It determined bragging rights not just for the students, but also for the teachers. We practised a lot for the whole week for the tournament and I even got to miss some school (the teachers even encouraged it!).

I learned that we had always been beaten by our rival school HCS, but we always got so close to winning the tournament. What better way to build school spirit and go to this tournament? Who knows, we might just win this time! There was huge pressure on our shoulders and I hoped we could live up to our expectations. There was more at stake than just first place. This was about the reputation of the school and even more importantly, it was about bragging rights.

Finally, the day of the tournament came. Sid had come along for 'emotional support' (basically getting free food). When we got to Lakeview, I was shocked at how many teams there were. This was going to be hard.

The opening ceremony was the most boring part of the event. It was basically the part of the event where Lakeview bragged about all their accomplishments. Lakeview had invited a 'chief guest' to the ceremony. He was some famous old guy who kept going on and on about sports 'back in the old days' and how winning wasn't important, sports was all about having fun. After an hour of listening to the speech, we finally got started with our first game.

It was against Lakeview! Surprisingly, EU was also in their team, but I guess they had so few people in their school, that they practically had to beg people to join. Before the game, I heard their coach tell them in their pre-game pep talk to not worry about winning and just have fun, which I thought was pretty stupid. The whole point of sports is to beat the other person. Why else would a person run aimlessly throwing a ball at a hoop for an hour? The only time a person would give their

team a pep talk like that is if they really sucked. And they did. We beat them 43-7!

After that, we played a few more games. Some of them were really close and tough, but we won them all. We were going to the finals!

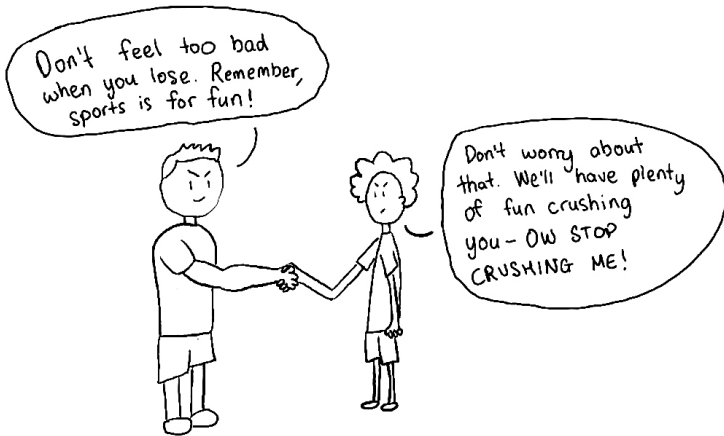
After that was lunch break. This was undoubtedly the best part of the event. Sid's eyes lit up. It was like a 5-star restaurant! We had bruschetta as an appetizer, pizza for lunch and pudding as dessert. We completely stuffed ourselves. I had no idea how we were going to manage playing basketball.

For the finals, we were facing HCS. Uh oh. Their coach, a big muscular guy with a handlebar moustache and a tattoo on his arm, walked in and looked our coach right in the eye. He gave the completely opposite pep talk as Lakeview. "If you lose, you're not coming back to HCS by bus. You'll walk there. Do you understand? We don't accept losers in this school." I wasn't sure if the pep talk was to motivate them or scare us. Meanwhile, our coach was giving us a similar pep talk. "This stupid coach has beaten me for years. I'm done with losing. You better win or else I'll never let you play a basketball game for the rest of the year!"

The team stepped forward to shake hands with HCS. Their coach came and shook hands with our coach. "Ready to lose again?" he said.

"Heh heh, I'll let you have the privilege this time."





Then, the game started. They started with the ball and ran like their lives were on the line (which judging by their coach, they probably were). I don't know if HCS was just really motivated by fear or I had eaten too much food, but we got off to a really

bad start. By the 2nd half, we were down by 15 points! Oh well, there was always next year. Just when we were all about to give up, a kid on their team came up to us, “Thanks for another easy victory. See you next year in the same situation!” Suddenly, I got really mad. I decided I wasn’t just going to let them win easily, we weren’t going down without a fight. I cleared my throat and stood in front of my demoralized team.

“Some people say sports is all about having fun, that winning isn’t that important. Those people are losers! It’s time to put our personal differences aside, to stop having fun, and beat the crap out of those HCS nerds!”

Everyone cheered. We were back in this game! The 2nd half started well and thanks to a few lucky baskets, we were closing the gap. But we needed a miracle to be able to win this game. They were just too good. But then suddenly, we came up with a crucial block! A deafening, shrill sound of a whistle. Everyone froze.

On the other side of the court, their coach, his eyes bulging wide open had just called a timeout. The other team lay unmoving, paralysed with fear. “HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU TO NOT GET OVERCONFIDENT? JUST REMEMBER THAT IF YOU LOSE THIS GAME, YOU WILL LET DOWN THE NAME OF THE SCHOOL. IS THAT WHAT YOU WANT, TO DISGRACE THE SCHOOL IN FRONT OF EVERYONE?”

A minute later, the game started and they were too stunned to do anything as we scored the first basket. That only made their coach more mad. Every few seconds, they kept glancing at their coach, so we quickly closed the gap and finally won!

Honestly though, I felt a bit bad for them considering how mad their coach looked..



I kind of expected the medals to be made of real gold, considering Lakeview, but they were just pieces of metal spray painted. When I looked at the standing I laughed. Lakeview had come in dead last! I had a feeling they just hosted this event to flex their facilities to the other schools. I mean, why else would you have such a huge basketball stadium and come dead last?

I think this event was definitely a success. I also feel like I made many friends from this. There's nothing that can build bonds better than beating up a bunch of overconfident nerds.

## **We're in Lockdown**

There's just a week left until summer starts. It's almost the end of 7th grade and I'm really looking forward to summer vacation. My friends and I planned a party for the weekend after 7th grade ends. Just seven days left to go.

I was really hoping they wouldn't teach us anything and we would just get to relax for at least one last week, but the teachers still managed to find stuff to do after the syllabus was complete. For example, today, we learned about some disease called the coronavirus in school and how there are 200 cases in China. One of my friends said that his parents were scared, so he wasn't coming the next day, which I thought was stupid. I mean, it's not that big of a deal! The next day, 5 people were absent from the class. They're probably just using it as an excuse to skip school. The day after that, only ten people were there.

And by the next day, when the first case in our state emerged, only 4 people went to school! Everybody is panicking and acting like it's a zombie apocalypse. I think people are taking COVID way too seriously. I mean, it's just twenty cases in India, nothing's going to happen... right?

We also decided to switch our class party online.

"So this coronavirus thing is such a bummer right?" I asked at the class party.

"No, not at all!" Sid exclaimed, "I managed to convince my mom to hoard 20 packets of oreos!"

"Lucky," said Krish, "All my mom got were sanitisers."

“Ooh, good idea!” I exclaimed, “I should try that.”

“Isn’t anyone getting afraid of coronavirus?” Krish asked, “I’m glad we don’t have school or anything. I’m not planning to get out of the house for another month at least.”

“Really?” asked Sid, “I don’t think I need to do that. I only take a bath once a month, so I’ve built up a ton of immunity. You should try it sometimes, Krish.”

All the moms were still panicking, so after a heated discussion on Whatsapp, they sent an email to the school and it closed down. Although there are just two days until school ends, the school was forced to shut down. We went directly into summer vacation and I was starting to get a bit worried. If this thing kept going on, we might be stuck in COVID for weeks!

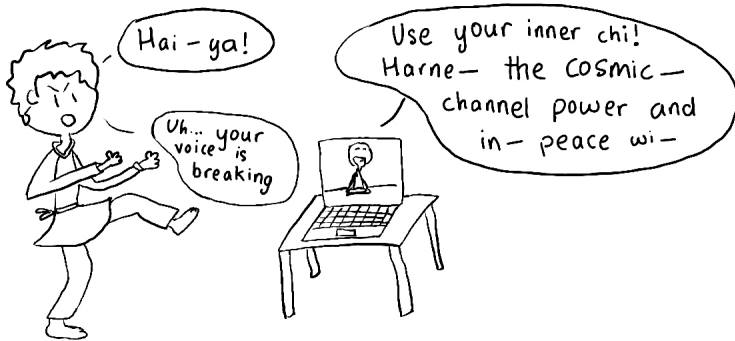


**8<sup>th</sup> Grade**

## Getting online: Tae-kwon-don't break the lamp!

It's now been two whole weeks since summer vacation started. Things aren't looking so good from a covid perspective. It looks like coronavirus isn't going away any time soon. India just announced a lockdown and now, there are a lot of restrictions on going outside. We're not allowed to play outside, visit other people, and meet our friends. Life is getting really boring.

A lot of people are using this time to learn some useful skills. One of my friends learned how to draw, another learned how to code and one learned how to play the piano. But in general, there is a huge demand to learn new things, so online classes have popped up for pretty much anything. One of my friends is learning taekwondo online!



Everyone in my family has also joined an online class. My sister is learning guitar, my dad is learning singing, and my mom is learning yoga. Despite the abundance of classes, I feel there is a lot of untapped potential in this market. Imagine if



someone launched a course that showed middle schoolers how to become popular instantly. They'd be millionaires!

Although online classes are at least something, I really wanted to meet some friends, so since it was Sid's birthday, we decided to have a call and play some video games or do something else on the screen. Just like a normal birthday party.

"Happy Birthday Sid!" I said, "So, what video games are you playing these days?"

"Thanks! Oh wait, one second the doorbell just rang." He came back with a huge bowl of chocolate ice cream. "I ordered some dessert on Zomato. It's made meal time so much more enjoyable. My cake is arriving at 2 p.m. on Swiggy."

"Lucky!" said Krish, "My mom signed me up for IIT, piano, abacus, Sanskrit and spelling bee class so that's all I've been doing so far. What about you, Ishan?"

"Uhh, I'm not doing too much. I've started being on screen a lot more though." I said.

"Really?" said Sid, "I've actually decreased my screen time a lot. Earlier, I could just tell my parents I was going down to play and take my phone with me for the whole time, but now, they keep spying on me."

After that, we all played video games for some time and then Sid cut the cake right in front of our faces while we pretended to be really happy for him. Overall though, it was really nice to talk to my friends again.

For my sister, though, she has these kinds of calls all the time. The advantage of being a younger sibling is whenever the older sibling gets something, you get it to. So even though I've just gotten Discord and Instagram, she's getting them two years before I did. My sister has calls all the time with her friends, (even online sleepovers every Friday.) where they do stuff they would normally have done in real life, like shopping (on

Amazon), talking and... and, well not much else.

With not much else to do, it's been fun to barge into her room (especially when she's put up a 'Do not disturb' sign) and interrupt her during her calls with friends. And being an (almost) teenage girl, she always gets really embarrassed and talks about how annoying I am. In fact, I've started becoming kind of a celebrity among her friend group.

## **Online School**

Summer seems like it passed by so quickly with the lockdown and now school is starting again... For a while, I was really excited about the possibility of there being no school at all, but of course, the school Whatsapp group had to ruin everything.

I'm so concerned about how the children are going to learn. They'll fall so behind if they don't attend school until the lockdown gets over.

Yes definitely. Lakeview and Hyderabad Champion School have opened online classes. Why can't our school do that too?

I completely agree. I've sent an email to the principal of the school. Really hope our children's future isn't impacted because of these few months.

**WHY? COULDN'T YOU LET YOUR CHILDREN ENJOY EXTENDED SUMMER VACATION FOR ONCE.**

Since it looks like we are not going to go to school for a while, our school has decided to conduct classes on Google Meet. After thinking for some time, I realized that this may not be so bad after all. Let me just say that from the school's point of view, things aren't going to turn out well. The only reason kids pay attention to school in the first place is because there are no distractions. And now they want to have it on the Internet where you have Hangouts, Instagram and chess.com? It's a recipe for disaster.

First day of online class

Today was the first day of online school. We were going to have it conducted on google meet. I was really excited for online

school and wondered how it would be, so I woke up bright and early, ready for the day. Then, realizing I didn't have to catch the school bus, I snoozed for another hour. When I woke up, I realized school started in just two minutes, so I quickly grabbed my computer and joined the google meet. Even though many of them were in my previous class, I didn't recognize a single person. Everyone had changed their profile picture and name!

I♥HarryStyles =>

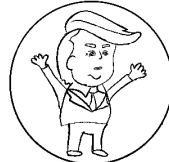
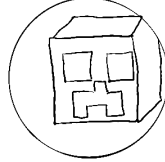


Virat\_Konli64



7th grade

Random\_Creeper



6th grade

I checked my sister's class. Everyone had also changed their profile pictures, even my sister. I felt so outdated.

But unlike my class, everyone in their class had turned on the mic and were making annoying fart noises. I can't believe I was as stupid as them at one point. The 8th graders were much more civilized. Then, the teacher came, so I rushed back to my class. Everything was silent for a few minutes. I think, given all the profile pictures, the teacher was confused if this was actually the school meet. Then, the teacher sent us a message in the chat, "How do I unmute?"

About five people messaged Alt F4 at the same time (the shortcut to shut off a windows computer). After the teacher left the meet a few times, she finally figured it out and turned on the mic and camera.

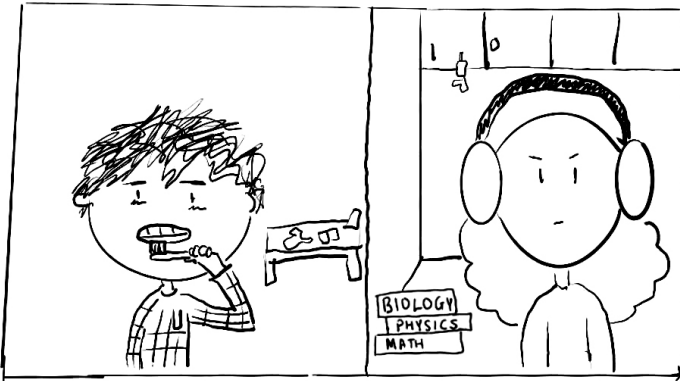
"Good morning students!" she announced.

gud mrning said Virat\_Kohli42 in the chat.

“How are you guys doing?”

idk fine ig messaged JohnCena99.

The teacher looked really confused so she asked us to unmute and turn on our cameras. I was nervous I would be the only person not dressed neatly, but as it turned out, most of the class was in pyjamas. I wasn't the only one who had just woken up either, everyone looked like zombies. Then there was the other half of the class. There were basically two types of people; people who were completely unprepared and people who were over-prepared. The rest of the class looked like twitch streamers! They were wearing fancy headphones and had such a professional set up with a bottle next to them, a swivel chair and even a notebook in front of them. They actually looked like they were going to study in online school.



Overall, the day was pretty eventful. About halfway through math class, Sid fell asleep and we could hear his snoring through his mic. So the whole math class went like this:

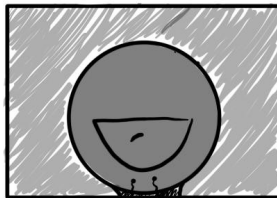
“The area of a co- *snore* - ne is  $\frac{1}{3}$  the vol - *snore* - ume of a - *snore*.”

And Virat\_Kohli64 got caught watching cricket highlights.

As for me, I took English class to finally brush my teeth and spent the rest of the day texting Sid on how fun online school was. I was really excited for the future of education. This was why people were so eager to have learning become digital. It's awesome.

I also made some new friends. Normally, if you put 20 random teenagers in a classroom, it'll take at least a day for any of them to talk and a week for them to make friends and split up into their respective hierarchical groups. However, now that it was online, we all felt more at home in our reassuring and comfortable natural environment, so I already made friends with ViratKohli\_64 and this kid called 'THE ATOM SMASHER' just based on his nickname which sounded really cool. I later found out that it was Krish, so I was really proud of him for having a good name, until he told me he was talking about the Large Hadron Collider, which kind of killed it. As for Sid, his name was still just 'Sid' (he said his name was the coolest thing he could put). Plus I even scouted out a potential cyberbully, 'Dark Carnage' who had a profile picture of a large shadow of a person in a dark room. He never answered the teacher, also kept the lighting super low when turning his camera on and wore a hoodie which covered his face.

Dark Carnage



But overall, it was an awesome day.

Unfortunately, the next day, school wasn't as fun. The teachers were a lot stricter and they didn't even allow me to brush my teeth when I got up too late. And with our mics and cameras on, the teachers could know everything we were doing. We tried to complain that our internet didn't have enough bandwidth to turn on cameras and every time there was a boring period like French, half the class would have a 'power cut'. But the teachers started catching on surprisingly fast and sent emails to our parents, asking if there was any internet problem. I was deeply worried about the future of online classes. Would we actually have to pay attention? But luckily, because of all the background noise (people blowing on the mic and pretending it was static and parents yelling at their kids to stop playing video games during online school) and people complaining that turning on the camera makes WiFi slow, the school sent an email that we wouldn't have to turn on our mics and cameras.

Another problem the teachers faced was abbreviations. Just like animals have an instinct to find food and run away from predators, teenagers have an instinct to communicate online in as few characters as possible.

This instinct is very hard to ignore, even when the teenager is in online school. So for the whole time kids were msging like this.

I hv ntwk issues rn

Gtg 2 bthrm

Wut was ystrday's hw ?

Our teachers couldn't make heads or tails out of what we were typing so it was a bit of an inconvenience at first trying to explain what we were saying and typing out all those vowels. But after a while, some kids started taking advantage of it and we made out some new acronyms to communicate with each other:

CISB - Class is so boring  
GTH - Go to Hangouts  
VCAS - Video call after school  
WPA - Wasn't Paying Attention  
WDTS - What did the teacher say?  
CAPF - Can anyone play Fortnite?

So for example, if I didn't hear what the teacher was saying for the last 10 minutes because I may or may not have been playing brawl stars and have no idea what the teacher was talking about, I can just say:

Cisb wpa wdts 4 last 10min?

And then someone will say:

Gramr

And then I'll say:

Thx

And go back to playing brawl stars. And if I want to play video games with somebody, I can just say:

CAPF

The whole system worked fine for a while but pretty soon, acronyms were banned by the teachers.

There's still a lot of stuff to do during online school. During online school there's one half of the class who always pays attention to school and one half which is constantly doing something else. I try to pay attention during online school, but then there's a little voice in my head that says something like: "It's been 30 whole seconds! Your friends must have typed something in the chat by now."

I try to hold myself back as long as possible, but my willpower takes a blow and I eventually click that 'new tab' button under the pretext "just for 2 minutes". But 2 minutes turns into 4, 4



turns to 10, 10 turns to 20 and before you know it, the teacher says something like, “Ishan, can you answer the question?”

Since I had no idea what we were even talking about, much less answer the question, I had panicked the first few times and left the meet. And so far, I’m still not too sure what to do.

I guess you can just be like ‘DarkCarnage’ who even in his profile pic hasn’t ever shown his face in class and just intimidated (or annoyed) the teachers enough so he doesn’t get called anymore.

But I don’t think kids not answering even comes close to some of the other things that annoy teachers the most.

### **Parents during online class**

The only person more irritating to a teacher than a rival teacher is a parent (kids come 3rd). Earlier, their influence was limited to PTMs and annoying emails, but now, their presence is everywhere. For example, nosy parents. I have some friends with nosy parents and they try to get involved with everything in the school. Krish’s family is filled with scientists and academics. His mom always tries to get involved with everything in science. Like in physics when we were learning about conservation of mass, there were constant messages like:

Actually, my mom said that’s wrong. She’s a scientist. She said fusion and fission violate this, so what you’re talking about is actually the conservation of energy. My mom said you shouldn’t be teaching kids misleading information.

And when we were learning about how gravity works and Newton’s laws of motion:

My mom said Newtonian gravity is proven wrong. She said you should be teaching us about general relativity and that gravity is actually caused by the curvature of spacetime. She said you need to revise your syllabus.

And in history class, Krish's grandfather was telling the teacher that the computer was not invented by Charles Babbage, but by Indian scientists in the 5th century.

But parents aren't just limited to that. On the class Whatsapp group, the parents keep discussing for hours about online school, now that they have all this information about it. For example someone will say:

“What do you think about online school? Just wanted to know your opinions on it.”

“I think it's too stressful for the kids. Lakeview Global School is conducting it so nicely with a perfect work-life balance. They have 30 minute breaks between every class. And they don't give any homework.”

“Yeah I totally agree. They shouldn't have exams this year too. I'll send the school an email asking them to reduce homework.”

Lakeview was practically still on vacation! Then the next day, someone will say:

“What do you guys think about the homework? My kids are playing too many video games this lockdown. The school should increase it.”

“Definitely! Look what Hyderabad Champion School is doing! They've used the Lockdown as an opportunity to go even more ahead of the syllabus. How will our children cope up with them?”

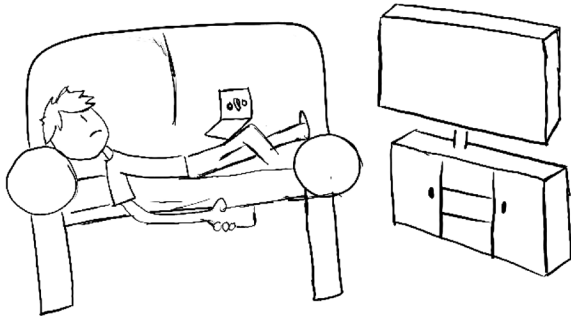
“I've sent the school an email asking them to increase the duration of online classes. Hopefully they'll do something about it.”

The school must be really confused with all the feedback they're getting...

Parents aren't just annoying to the teachers though, they're annoying to us too. For example my mom always tells me to

participate in class and answer questions. And somehow, my mom always picks the exact time I'm taking a test to come into my room and ask me how school is going. Also, my dad started a singing class during Lockdown so every Friday 4th period, I can't hear a single thing. Other parents are distracting too. Whenever Sid turns on his mic to answer a question, I always hear background noise of his mom telling him to stop playing video games.

Of course, for my sister, this isn't really a problem. She has a complete set up and for all practical purposes, she's in school. She always wears noise cancelling headphones and actually pays attention to online school. Every time I come in her room, she always gives me a scary glare and I back off. She's probably the only person in the world who takes online classes at a desk. As for me, I alternate between lazing around on the sofa and lying down on my bed.



But as it turns out, 6th graders are a lot more sincere about online classes (I have no clue as to why) than 8th graders. Whenever the teacher asks a question in my grade, everybody is silent until the teacher finally has to call on someone, but in her grade, people literally compete to answer questions.

Chat:

Person 1: can i answer the question?

Person 2: i raised my hand first! -\_-

Person 1: shut up, u already answered so many times!!!!

In general, during online school, I feel like teachers are adapting pretty fast which is bad for us. Most notably, online school excuses. When the teachers first used to call on you, there were many excuses you could use like internet problems, going to the bathroom etc... but the teachers started getting suspicious after everyone started “going to the bathroom” several times during a period. The internet problems excuse not only shows a complete lack of creativity, but the teachers started asking parents to talk to them in case of internet issues. So I made up some new excuses.

My favourite trick is when you pretend you have a bad internet and your voice is breaking.



You can also blame everything on your sibling (even if you don't have one.).

## Yoga and Yoda

It's been three months into online school and people are getting burned out. Lately, everything seems to be happening on the screen, school, homework and breaks. A bunch of parents

were complaining on the Whatsapp group that school was too stressful, so the school started a program called Educational Enlightenment (the parents finally did something good). We have it on Friday in the last period. Today was our first day of Educational Enlightenment. I was pretty excited for it.

“Hey everyone!” the teacher said, “Today in our first period, we’re going to do some meditation. Now does anyone know what meditation is? Meditation is the act of being in complete thoughtlessness. Has anyone ever done meditation before?”

“Yeah!” I said, “I do it all the time in school.” A few people agreed in the chat.

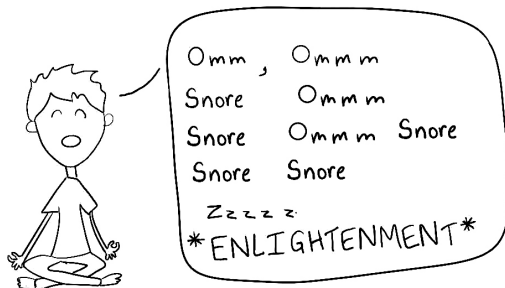
“Uhhh, let’s try it out.” The teacher gave us some instructions on how to do it, so I sat down, folded my legs and went into a state of thoughtlessness. Two hours later, my mom snapped me out of my trance.

“How long have you been sleeping?” my mom asked.

My eyes drifted open slowly as I took in my surroundings and brought myself back into the material realm. “I wasn’t sleeping. I was meditating. I think I just experienced enlightenment.”

My mom rolled her eyes and laughed. “Sure.”

I think I’m the first person to ever experience enlightenment on my first try! It was a liberating experience. Well, I can check that off my bucket list. After enlightenment, I played Fortnite for some time.



I was really looking forward to the next Educational Enlightenment period. I wondered if I could attain enlightenment twice in a row. There had to be some kind of record for that right? But instead, the teacher thought that most of the people had fallen asleep so the teacher wanted to do something more 'energizing'. We played this game where we had to do ten exercises and the person who did them first won. We were supposed to turn on our cameras. No one did. We were all kind of waiting until at least half the class turned on their cameras to get confirmation to turn it on, but no one did.

Meanwhile, the 6th graders (including my sister) were way more sincere about this. It had been ten minutes and no one had gotten anything, but in her class, people were jumping around as if there was a point to this game. At times like this, I question whether I was ever a 6th grader at all.

Exams were also coming up soon so our topic for that day was on how to use our time wisely. The teacher said that we should be completely honest and that she wasn't going to judge us on what we said. I learned a lot from that session.

"To save time, I just finish my homework during online classes," DarkCarnage said.

"Oh that's a good idea. I do my homework at 1 am in the night and catch up on sleep during online classes," Sid agreed.

The teacher was shocked, "No, no, you guys are supposed to pay attention during online classes. What if you miss something important?"

"Yeah, I always pay attention in online classes," ViratKohli\_64 said, "Except for Educational Enlightenment, since we don't learn anything anyways."

At least we were honest. Although from then, the teacher was a lot more suspicious of people when they didn't answer a

question.

So overall, this is really fun. Whenever we do meditation, I feel like one of those lucky toddlers who have nap time during school. Hopefully, we can have it when real school starts.

### **Fortnite Championship**

Wow. I can't believe it's already been 5 months of online school! Around this time, our school has sports week, but since we can't do that now, I thought about doing something like that, but online. I called it "Gaming Week". I suggested the idea to my friends and we all agreed. I asked the school if we could do something like that and surprisingly my homeroom teacher agreed. He even let us pick which game to play! We held a vote on it and submitted a small description of the game.

Fortnite - A strategic team game that utilizes decision-making, teamwork and concentration. It requires not only a sharp memory and fast calculations but also encourages working with groups, a necessary skill in modern day life. It is played at the highest level, only the most shrewd and clever individuals making it through to the regional, national and world championships.

He approved it! We got split up by our houses and before the championship, I helped take intensive training sessions to try to teach my clueless classmates on in-depth strategies and techniques.

Finally the day of the competition came. We were all really excited and had worked very hard for this. I sent the link for the game in the chat.

The teacher's jaw dropped, "This is Fortnite? That stupid game my grandchildren waste hours on? I thought you said it was a strategic game that required thinking!"

I was confused, "It does," I said, "Haven't you seen any youtube videos on it?"

For a moment, it seemed like gaming week wasn't going to become a reality, but after telling him how many hours we had dedicated to it after school (sometimes even sacrificing homework), he sighed and let us play.

The tournament was awesome. I'd never played video games in school before, but it was really fun! I hope gaming week continues even after school reopens. After the tournament, there were a ton of messages on the class Instagram group thanking me, so it bumped me up a few points on the popularity chart too. Unfortunately, the parents' group didn't see it that way...

I can't believe the school is not only letting kids play video games during school, but encouraging it! Don't they know how much it impacts their learning? What if my kid doesn't go to my, uh I mean his, dream college because of all the time in school that's being wasted on playing video games. If we wanted the children to just waste their time, we wouldn't have had the kids go to school at all! Or we would've sent them to Lakeview!

"Hahaha! How was school today? I heard from the parents' whatsapp group that some idiot in your class started a gaming week!" my dad said.

"Hehe, yeah... Some idiot..."

### **8F's got talent!**

The 1st term is coming to an end with the exams just getting over. Normally around this time, our school has some Diwali performances and events where they get to make a good impression on our parents, so as you can image, a lot of work goes in to it and during the final week, the clubs and teachers get super busy with filling up the classroom with corny math posters and the theatre kids rehearsing plays. This pretty much gives us an extra week of holidays since we don't do anything.



Unfortunately, none of this is happening, but the school said they're having a talent show this week. I thought about it for a while and decided to do standup comedy. I spent the week writing my speech and practising it. After preparing my speech, I was finally ready.

While waiting for my turn in the talent show, I watched the other acts.

For the first act, Sid showed his talent of making triple edits in Fortnite. I had always wondered how to do that, so it was entertaining as well as educational.

But after that there were sooo many singing acts. The talent show was filled with people who thought they had what it takes to get on American Idol. At regular times, I had to mute my audio to prevent permanent hearing damage. And if kids were performers on American Idol, the chat box was Simon Cowell.



Chat box:

This is the first time I've heard someone sing every single note out of tune. And I have a brother who tries to sing.

I think there was some construction noise going on during your performance. Or was that your singing?

My headphones broke while you were singing. That probably saved my life!

In my grade, people actually spoke about how they thought the acts were, but in my sister's class, it was completely different.

They were all messaging supportive comments about each other's performances, no matter how horrible they were.

This is how their chat box looked:

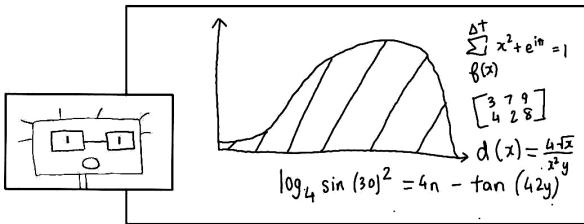
Nice!

Good effort!

Wow!

This is the difference between teenagers and pre-teens. But at least we were honest.

The next act was Neil (whose talent was 'math') showing off his trigonometry skills.



He went through practice problems for 5 minutes until the teacher finally told him to shut up and let the next person go (in nice words, of course. Meanwhile, we told him the same thing in the chat with less nice words).

Many performances were just ways to market people's social media. Like one person showed off her 'photography' skills (selfies) and told everyone to follow her on Instagram and another girl did arts and crafts to promote her Youtube channel. During lockdown, many people had expanded the completely useless part of their skillset, so there was some juggling and solving rubix cubes too. There were also a few magic shows but it became pretty hard to tell the magician which card to pick.

Meanwhile, in my sister's class, there was a talentless show going on. There was a guy burping the alphabet song and some poor kids whose parents must have made them recite 400-year old poetry.



Chat:

wow! what a creative display of ur talents!

amazing how did u do that?

oo do u think u culd teach me



Chat:

im so moved

ur such a good actor!

There was also a guy who was showing off some karate movies which were pretty cool until he tried to do a 360 degree kick and hit his foot on the table (hi-yaaaowwww crap.).

Finally it was my turn. I decided to do standup comedy. I had a few jokes about my classmates and some one-liners about Donald Trump since that's what's in trend these days.

At the end of the performance, I was really nervous of what my classmates were going to say, but 5 seconds later, there was a message in the chat:

not bad

lol

that wasn't that boring

Yes! I couldn't believe the compliments I was getting from my classmates. This was definitely a success.

### **School re-opening: Exiting the Matrix**

It looks like Covid cases have finally started decreasing. There's a lot of heated discussion on the parent whatsapp group about whether the school should open or not.

"I don't even know how people can even consider having schools reopen! I'm not sending my kid until there are no Covid cases in the world. How can we, as responsible moms, threaten the lives of our children? Which other moms are concerned for the safety of their child?"

"I actually think it should have opened at least a month earlier. This Covid pandemic will probably continue for another 2-3

years. Does this mean we should completely abandon our lives? But the kids are falling behind so much in their syllabus. They're only studying for an hour every day! Hopefully the school starts increasing homework when it starts."

"I, for one, prefer to put the health and safety of my children over whether they get an A or B in exams."

"I'm actually looking forward to get the kids out of the house and be able to watch TV and relax again 😊"

Eventually though, it looked like the moms in the Whatsapp group who wanted school had won the war. The school sent out a survey and even though there was absolutely no way they would get a majority supporting school reopening, it did. I think the school was tired of doing everything online and just had the survey thing as an excuse...

The school sent an email that they're going to open the school in 2 weeks. I'm not really sure what to think. On one hand, it'll be nice to see all my school friends again, on the other hand, this online school set-up was working so well. They're also going to make us wear masks and do social distancing. I wonder what that will look like...

2 weeks later:

Well, tomorrow was school. I packed my bags with books I hadn't seen for months and slept at my regular time: 11:30. Tomorrow was going to be an eventful day.

"ISHAN! WAKE UP IT'S ALREADY 7:20," my sister screamed in my ear, interrupting my dream of summer vacation just starting.

"Huh, what? Leave me alone. Let me sleep. School isn't for another hour. And stop shouting." I complained, still drowsy.

“THE BUS IS COMING IN 5 MINUTES.” my sister continued to scream.

Oh no! I had completely forgotten about the bus. But that was fine. I had made it to the bus in less time than five minutes before. I jumped out of bed, brushed my teeth in just 15 seconds and slapped on my bag.

“Ready!” I said, gasping for breath.

“Forgetting something?” my mom asked.

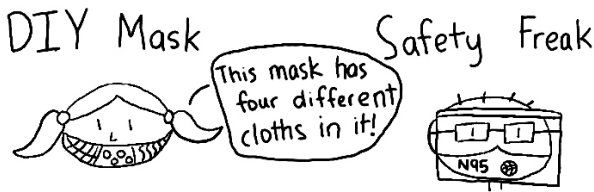
“Uhhh.” My bag was there, I had brushed my teeth, I had worn a mask... “Oh yeah! I have to give my friend his comic book back.”

“Maybe your pants?” my mom suggested.

I was still in pyjamas! I quickly put on my uniform and ran to the bus. I took a seat, but I realized a lot of people from my bus were late too. Everyone had probably overslept, since over the next 10 minutes, I saw more people running to the bus. We had to follow social distancing in the bus so only one person could sit per seat. It was nice seeing my friends on the bus, but we played every day in the apartment anyway, so it wasn't like I hadn't seen any of them for a long time.

Finally, we reached school. It felt so strange being in physical school again. It felt nice to see my friends again.

Also, now that we have to wear masks in school, there's been a 'mask fashion' trend going along. Here are some of the different types of masks people are wearing:



Some of the safety freaks are really scared of the covidiot. They always try to stay as far away from them as possible, while the covidiot always try to irritate them by yawning near them.

When I came to my class, I realized how little of my class I really knew. I had only seen many of these people during online classes, and they looked so different in real life!

“Hey, what’s your name?” I asked a short, nerdy looking kid wearing glasses, looking into his phone and playing some video games.

“I’m Neel.” he answered, still staring into his phone.

“No, I mean your real name.”

“Oh, Dark Carnage.”

I was shocked! This little nerd was the class cyberbully? For others it was the complete opposite. Many girls had put baby pictures as profile pics because they looked cute or something, or just filtered them to the point where you had no idea who

was who. The only ones I recognized were the people who changed their profile pictures every few days.

All the teachers also looked different since they had all put pictures of when they were in their 20s.

After that, school started. After some time, the school bell rang. Was school already over? Nope, it was just our breakfast break. I was so unused to the bells. The next few hours of school were more like days. Everybody's eyes (including the teacher's) kept glancing at the clock to see when it would finally be lunchtime. Finally, the bell rang. Plus, even though we just had breakfast, I was starting to get really hungry. I missed getting up every two minutes to go to the kitchen and grab a snack.

When lunch came, it was a huge relief. I was starving! We ate food as a class for the first time in almost a year too, which felt nice (the food was still bad though).

"School felt much longer than usual." I said.

"Yeah, and it was really boring too, we didn't even learn anything," Krish agreed, "And I couldn't just mute the teacher's audio and watch Khan Academy."

"Oh. I thought you and your parents would be happy that school is reopening."

"What? No way. My mom wanted to use Covid to finish up my 12th grade math and science so I would get ahead of everybody."

"Oh. What about you Sid?"

"I wished they could give us computers. I started getting more fidgety. My hands kept tapping the desk and felt restless without all the exercise they got while chatting and playing video games and my eyes started hurting without a screen in front of them."

"It was more about the food for me," said Virat\_Kohli6 - uh, I mean Vik, looking longingly in the distance as he patted his



stomach, “I miss getting up every 5 minutes to pop some junk food in my mouth.”

The rest of school felt soooo long. But finally, the school bell rang and I was free again.

Real school will take some time getting used too.

After this, it took a couple weeks, but we’ve started getting used to physical school now. Online school had a nice run where we got to be completely lazy for half a year. It was a good run, but all good things come to an end. Hopefully it’ll happen again in the future someday when someone invents virtual reality or something and we can all visit school from our homes.

## **School Election: The Dark World of Middle School Politics**

Even though offline school just started, 8th grade is coming to a close, and I guess I should be celebrating the fact that I've made it this far, but no! I've decided it's time to get really serious now (no, not about studies, about more important stuff.)

I've decided to prepare for my student president campaign. Elections won't be held until 9th grade, but I need a headstart. I've decided to prepare a list of stuff I need to do:

The most important thing, of course, is to design a good campaign slogan. It acts as a rallying cry for your voters and can be chanted during your rallies. I made a list of some potential ones:

1. Down with HCS
2. Liberty, Justice and Longer Lunch Times
3. Technology is the future. Drop the ban on phones.

Also, a lot of stuff people would be expecting me to do was unrealistic, and if I said what I was actually going to accomplish in my presidency: absolutely nothing, no one would vote for me. So another tip is to make unrealistic promises you're never going to achieve. I mean, do you actually expect teachers to decrease homework, increase lunchtime and allow phones in school just because some kid said that in his presidential speech?

After that, I put random quotes from famous people in my speech. I chose some quotes from arguably the most influential turtle of the 21st century: Master Oogway and everybody's favorite green guy, Master Yoda.

“If you only do what you can do,  
you will never be more than you are now.”

~ Master Oogway

“Many mistakes, one makes in his life.  
Not voting for Ishan, don't let one be.”

~ Master Yoda

Cool! All I needed now was to talk about what makes me qualified for being president and introduce a logical plan for what I was going to do... Just kidding, no one really cares.

## High School's starting??

Now I would have the whole summer break to chill and write my speech. Woah... it was already time for summer break. Wow, was middle school already over? Had I already made it through? It had been a crazy few years. I almost got eaten by a bear, moved to a new country halfway across the world and made it through online school.

I was (as always) super excited for summer break - this would be my first *actual, not online summer in India*- but at the same time I was feeling kind of sad. I had made so many friends and had so many experiences. But anyways, I have plenty of time to look back on the past when I'm a boring old adult.

Right now, there are more important things to think about: high school.

High school is a whole new thing. It's like middle school, but cranked up to 11. I'm pretty excited for it!

I know it'll be tough, but hopefully my book prepared you at least a little for middle school. Before saying goodbye, my sister's complaining that she needs one chapter dedicated to her, so I'll let her have the last one.

## **How to actually do well in middle school**

Hi, I'm Sanika, Ishan's sister (who's just about to start 6th grade) and I'm sorry to tell you, but the hundred pages you just read were a huge waste of time. I never thought I'd hear the day where *my brother* thought he could give someone advice about how to be popular, but now it turns out he's written a whole book about it.

I have a few different - and much better - suggestions for how to actually do well in middle school. Firstly, don't follow any of my brother's advice. He is probably the farthest away from popular as it gets. You have to be ~effortlessly cool~. So maybe don't watch Disney shows and read wiki how articles on "How to survive middle school!!!!!!". They won't get you anywhere. Maybe if my brother would have been smart enough to take any advice from me, this whole situation would have been different, but at least I have this chapter to tell you.

Am I scared for tomorrow? OBVIOUSLY I'M TERRIFIED. But rule #1 of middle school is -don't show your true emotions. You're probably really nervous if you're going to a brand new school, but it's also really good because you get a completely fresh start, so no one's going to remember the time you accidentally stapled your forehead back in 2nd grade (don't ask).

Things may be harder for me because I'm always going to be seen as Ishan's sister, and he's kind of known as the skinny kid who plays video games all the time, so it won't be easy. My brother's honestly so old fashioned when it comes to advice (what else would you expect when he got it out of watching

Full House). Popularity is all about being cool *online* which is where 90% of your interactions happen. So I got Instagram and started posting cool stories of myself and pictures of coffee (my parent's cups obviously, I'm not allowed to have it, but anything for Instagram). Also, don't ghost people to play video games (but also delay your responses just enough so that people know you're interested in talking to them, but also not desperate).

Next, you'll need to develop some taste. Don't have your favorite band as imagine dragons (like a certain *someone*). Listen to Reputation or anything else by Taylor Swift and other cool songs that are trendy, but not too trendy (gotta be a trendsetter). Read romance books from Tiktok or watch TV shows above your age level.

I have to admit, my brother is going to come in handy. His book actually helped me quite a bit (mostly in deciding what not to do). I've also used my brother to start talking to the kids in his grade so now I know some *actually* cool people who are older than me.

Anyways, my brother's starting high school soon and I've decided to take pity on him, because there is absolutely no way he's going to make it through high school acting like *that*. Hopefully, things turn out well for him.

And as for you, you're probably going to start or are going through middle school and in that case, good luck. Just remember who to give credit to when you become the coolest kid in school;)



Ishan will have to face the biggest challenge of his life: middle school. Suddenly, from arts and crafts week and eating mac and cheese with juice boxes at lunch, he's thrust into an environment with 6 foot giants they call 8th graders, and a whole new world that watching TV could never have prepared him for. And suddenly, when things start going well, it's time to pack his bags and move from California to a whole new country - India. Through navigating the crazy chaotic world of middle school politics, a brand new culture, and online school, Ishan takes you along on an adventure and prepares you for *what they didn't tell you about middle school*.

#### About the Author

Ishan Khire was born in Pune, India and moved to California. There, at age 10, he wrote "Life through the Eyes of a Ten Year Old" which has been read by thousands worldwide. He then moved to Hyderabad where he currently lives. Ishan is part of the Indian national debate squad and is really passionate about using economics to make the world a better place. While he isn't currently working on another book, he loves writing on his blog [ishankhire.blogspot.com](http://ishankhire.blogspot.com). He's also an avid chess player and a Swiftie. He'd love to hear any feedback or thoughts on the book! You can email him at [ishankhire@gmail.com](mailto:ishankhire@gmail.com).



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