

Hi! Thank you so much for supporting the Now I Know YouTube Kickstarter. And apologies that it's taken me so long to get the rewards out the door – it was a much bigger undertaking than I thought it would be. As promised, here's the first chapter of the book I'll never finish. I really like these 700 or so words, but unfortunately, I don't a plot, just some basic ideas. The title of the book, in my head at least, is "Confessions of an Eighth Grade Candy Dealer." – Dan

The Box

Packard Middle School has three wings -- North, South, and Henshaw. Yeah, the names are weird, I know. It used to just be North and South. The school was originally made for just seventh and eighth graders because sixth grade was part of elementary school, but that changed when I was in kindergarten. They had to add another whole wing to the building to accommodate all the extra kids, and they didn't want to call it the West Wing because that's where the President works. So they named it after someone named Henshaw. I'm not sure who he is. Never really cared to find out.

Between the North and South wings are what we call the Hub -- I don't think that's its real name, but we call it that anyway. The Hub is where you'll find the cafeteria, the school library, the all-purpose room (it's the gym when we have gym, the assembly room when we have the school play or band concerts, and really whatever else you need it to be), and most importantly, the school store. But we'll get to that later. Because we have to talk about the Box first.

The Box's official name isn't the Box, that's for sure. Teachers really hate it when you call it the Box. It's in the MAA -- that stands for "Music and Arts Annex." The MAA is attached to the North Wing where us eighth graders have all of our classes. It houses band room, the chorus room, a wood and metal shop which aren't used anymore, and some art classrooms are down there. They were built like fifty years ago when parents demanded that schools have classes in music and art and all that other stuff.

There's also a rarely-used hallway which you really don't want to go down. Down that hall there are what used to be three smaller practice rooms for the band and orchestra, or maybe they were big supply closets for the woodworking classes, or, oh, I don't know. The rooms are still there, that's the important part. They're big enough for a chair, a big big desk like grown-ups use, and that's just about it. The walls are white, the chairs are white, and the desks are white. They have a tiny window near the top of their twelve-foot high ceilings and, importantly, no doors.

Those rooms? They're the Box.

The Box is used for in-school suspensions. You really don't want one of those.

Middle schoolers are put into "teams" -- basically, a group of students who have the same teachers throughout the day, but are spread across five different homerooms. My team, "Team 8-B" (the other is 8-A, showing how creative middle school teachers are) has a demerit system. Do something bad but minor and you get a demerit. Small stuff, like forget your homework, get caught in the hallways without a hall pass, or throwing food at lunch. (Okay, that last one may earn you two demerits.) Our Language Arts teacher, Mr. Mosnite makes us grade our

classmates' homework in class, and you have to use a red pen to make things X if they're wrong. No red pen, you get a demerit. No one really likes him.

Your first demerit per market period is a warning. The teachers keep bad records so really, you can usually get two or three and it's still a warning, but officially, you get one freebie. The second one gets you a lunch detention, where you have to eat your lunch in a classroom with a teacher instead of with your friends in the lunchroom. If the teachers like you, the third one is also a lunch detention, but again, the official rules are different -- the third demerit is an after school detention. Those are scary because you have to tell your mom and dad about those because they have to pick you up (and because you have to get your parent to sign a detention slip or the schools gives them a phone call). You know how many demerits you need to get sent to the Box?

No one knows. The Box isn't for kids who get demerits. It's for kids who do something REALLY bad.

I'm writing this from the Box.

And I'm going to set the record straight.