

# Cool New Kid Handbook



**Fuller Middle School  
Framingham, Massachusetts**

*Subject Area*  
Language Arts

*Area of Service*  
Educational

*Grade Level:*  
Middle School, Grade 7

*Author of Project*  
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## In Brief

To meet the needs of Fuller Middle School’s student population, a group of seventh graders created a kid-friendly student handbook to accompany the school’s traditional handbook. In the student-generated book, seventh graders personalized the usual rules and regulations with original illustrations and student quotes. Additional features ranged from helpful hints such as which water fountains provide the coldest water, to interviews with teachers and newly entered students.

## Learner Outcomes

Students learn to:

- Identify a need and employ problem solving skills to address it;
- Compose questions and conduct interviews;
- Work cooperatively capitalizing on each student’s talents; and
- Organize diverse types of information into a logically sequenced document for a specific audience.

<b>MASSACHUSETTS CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK CONNECTIONS</b>	
	This unit is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Listed are the subject areas and the learning strands addressed:
	<b>English/Language Arts</b>
	Language strand: 1, 2, 5
	Composition strand: 20, 21, 22, 23

## OVERVIEW

### The Need

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The traditional student handbook of Fuller Middle School did not fully meet the needs of the school's student population. Missing from the list of rules, regulations, and school procedures was the student perspective on adjusting to a new school.

### A CSL Response

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7th grade students were fascinated by the many community service learning projects being conducted at Fuller Middle School. After discussing the definition of "community," the class decided to focus on the school as its community. They felt that incoming students needed a kid-friendly handbook, written in easy-to-understand language, to supplement the traditional student manual. They used the traditional manual as a resource to ensure the accuracy of essential information. Then, students designed a carousel brainstorming exercise (see "Lesson Plan for Choosing Topics") to determine which additional topics they would offer in the student-generated version.

Based on their multiple intelligence strengths, students self-selected their roles as writers, typists, artists, interviewers, organizers and layout designers, and investigators. The last position was prized, as it involved a special building pass approved by the principal to investigate lavatories, water fountains and the cafeteria. Students took their responsibilities seriously. In addition, they demonstrated commitment to the project by sharing and helping each other when necessary to achieve the common goal of a kid-friendly handbook.

### Service Component

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The student-generated handbook addresses new student concerns such as which bathrooms to use, what's cool and what's not, and how to fit in at Fuller Middle School. The students presented their book, *Fuller: Our Point of View (The Cool New Kid Handbook)*, to the principal and guidance counselors. The guidance department now distributes the handbooks to all incoming students.

### Celebration

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At a formal reception, the administration presented each student with a copy of the published handbook and a certificate of commendation in recognition of his/her participation in the project.

## OUTCOMES

## Academic Gains

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The tasks involved in developing the *Cool New Kid Handbook* addressed several learning standards while providing students with the opportunity to employ individual talents and strengths (i.e., the multiple intelligence approach). In deciding on the book's contents, students listened to the ideas of others, contributed their own ideas, and together compiled their final list. They peer-edited the contributions for content and form. They composed their entries with the audience in mind, which was not only the "new kid," but also the faculty members who might be reading it with their students.

## Societal Gains

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Fuller Middle School's core values, "Respect, Responsibility, Results," provided the context for the work done by and for the school community. In the process of reflecting on their expectations as new students at Fuller Middle School, seventh graders became sensitized to the adjustments of underclassmen. Rather than harassing younger students, upperclassmen, through the process of rewriting the student handbook, came to see themselves as mentors.

## Community Partners

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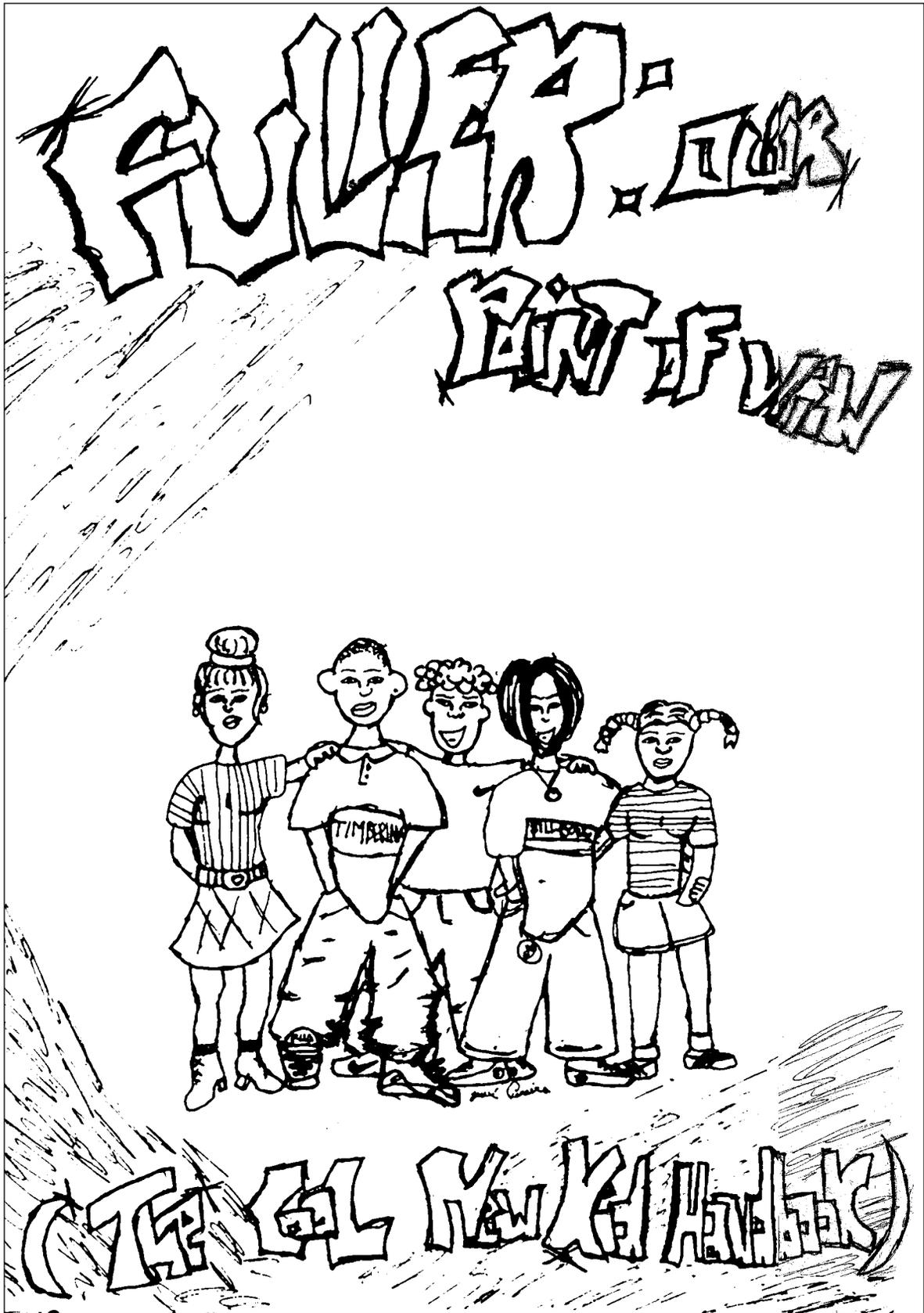
This project could not have been accomplished without the support and cooperation of the Fuller Middle School community. The principal issued student-investigators special passes; the guidance department and attendance secretary supplied an up-to-date list of new students; the library staff provided a place for writers to interview new students; students who are bilingual served as translators at these interviews; teachers and staff members granted interviews; and the technology department offered helpful suggestions and guidance.



## TIES TO THE MASSACHUSETTS CURRICULUM FRAMEWORKS

LEARNING STANDARDS/ OUTCOMES	ACTIVITY	ASSESSMENT
<b>English/Language Arts</b>		
<b>LANGUAGE</b>		
<b>Standard 1:</b> Students will use agreed-upon rules for informal and formal discussions in small and large groups.	In groups reflecting the school's diversity, students discussed their lists of possible topics, making additions and deletions, and then compiled their lists to create a group list. See Lesson Plan for Choosing Topics.	Rubric for group work and completion of task.
<b>Standard 5:</b> Students will identify, describe, and apply knowledge of the structure of the English conventions for sentence structure, usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.	Students discussed as a class and in groups what a letter of introduction should contain. Then, after a mini-lesson on friendly letter writing, each student wrote a letter of introduction to the "New Kid" who would be reading the handbook. See Lesson Plan for Writing a Letter of Introduction.	All final drafts ("biography of a work") were submitted for a composition grade. Assessment also included the teacher-created Specific Skills Proofreading Guide (see Addendum) and McDougal, Littell & Company's General Evaluation rubric.
<b>COMPOSITION</b>		
<b>Standard 21:</b> Students will demonstrate improvement in organization, content, paragraph development, level of detail, style, tone, and word choice in their compositions after revising them.	Students who investigated various locales in the school submitted their notes to the writers. They assisted the writers in organizing and developing drafts, which they then peer-edited and revised. Typists completed the final drafts, making additional corrections as needed.	Students and teacher peer-edited for content and form, as well as for standard English conventions in written expression.





## LESSON PLAN Writing Letters of Introduction

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### Objective

Students will each write a general letter of introduction to a new student.

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### Learning Standards

#### English/ Language Arts

Language strand: 3

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### Materials

Previously written letters  
Teacher-created Specific Skills check list  
General Evaluation rubric

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### Activities

#### Part I

Peer-edit letters of introduction.

As a class, students discuss and post the elements that a letter of introduction to a new student should contain. After a lesson on friendly letter writing, each student writes a friendly letter to a new student, using the agreed-upon information and any appropriate personal information the writer feels the new student should know. Students peer-edit the letters using two writing evaluation sheets. Finally, they revise and proofread for content, structure and grammar.

#### Part II

Write final letters on the computer.

Students write their final drafts on the computer. Each student uses the two evaluation sheets as well as the tools on the computer.

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### Assessment

Teacher-created Specific Skills proofreading checklist  
McDougal, Littell & Company's General Evaluation rubric

## TIMELINE

### January

CSL teacher training sessions. Introduce CSL philosophy to class and select project.

### February

Determine topics to be included in student-generated handbook.

### February-March

Write letters of introduction; conduct research and interviews; create original artwork.

### April

Organize information; type text and scan artwork; create table of contents; proof final copy; begin layout of handbook.

### May

Complete layout; publish (copy) handbook.

Formally present handbook to principal and guidance department.

Student authors receive certificates of participation and an official copy of the handbook.

## LESSON PLAN Developing Interview Questions

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### Objective

Students will develop approximately ten questions suitable to the person to be interviewed, i.e. student, teacher, or any other member of Fuller Middle School.

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### Learning Standards

#### English/ Language Arts

Composition Strand

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### Materials

previously prepared interview questions  
pens and markers  
newsprint and masking tape  
rubric for assessment

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### Activities

#### Part I

**Choose the ten best questions individual members of your group generated and use these as final interview questions.**

Each student reads previously prepared interview questions to her/his original small group.

The group then discusses, approves, rejects, and/or adds new questions.

A recorder writes the final list on newsprint, and the group posts it at the front of the room.

#### Part II

**Create a final list of interview questions.**

As a class, the students choose two recorders: one to cross out redundant, unnecessary, or unpopular topics, and one to record the final list.

The class completes a final list of interview questions.

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### Assessment

Rubric for Group Work and Completion of Task (same rubric as Lesson Plan 1)

## Assessment

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Students reflected on various aspects of this project in their journals. The teacher responded to each entry, establishing a short-term dialogue. Rubrics were used to assess the development of the book's content, its appropriateness to the audience, its structure and form, its grammar and mechanics, and its graphic presentation (e.g., illustrations).

Student reflections allowed the teacher to gauge the success of individual lessons and the extent to which students worked cooperatively. Students reflected during in-class discussions and in journal entries submitted once every six-day rotation. Students were asked to reflect upon the method of determining content, the topics selected, and the reason for supporting the creation of a new handbook (since the traditional book was already in place).

### CONNECTING TO MCAS: OPEN RESPONSE RESPONSE



#### Compare / Contrast

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List the similarities and differences between the traditional *Fuller Middle School Student Handbook* and *Fuller: Our Point of View (The Cool Kid Handbook)* on a Venn diagram. Then take a stand as to which one is more effective in providing information to a new student. Using the information in your Venn diagram, write a compare/contrast essay to support your stand.

## Challenges

The computer lab schedule is filled.

New students are scattered in different grades and sections.

New students speak various foreign languages.

Because they must catch buses immediately after school, handbook writers must interview teachers and new students during class time.

Handbook writers need permission to “roam” the building to investigate specific locales.

A user-friendly handbook requires original student artwork.

## Solutions

With the scheduled teacher’s permission, allow individual students or groups of two or three access to the computer lab.

Obtain the class schedule for each new student from the guidance department.

Use student translators when possible in conducting new student interviews. (Interviewers work in pairs—a native English speaker with a bilingual student.)

Students make appointments at the convenience of teachers.

Students conduct interviews in the library during each grade’s lunch; students give teachers advanced notice that interviews will be conducted in the library during a specific period.

A principal-approved, teacher-issued-and-signed pass gives investigators the license to roam.

Enlist the help of teachers in the technology education department in scanning artwork.

## Extending the Vision

A school community changes constantly, whether by the entrance of an incoming class, the registration of a new student at mid-year or the hiring of new staff. The atmosphere also changes with modifications in the physical plant, the acquisition of new equipment or the adoption of new regulations. With this in mind, a language arts class revises and updates the *Cool New Kid Handbook* yearly. A copy of the handbook is readily available in the library, and the book’s introduction invites suggestions and contributions from the larger Fuller community.

## IN CONCLUSION

By providing a kid-friendly student handbook, the 7th grade students met a need of the school’s student population. In the process, they began to view their school as a community and to see themselves as important contributors to that community. The *Cool New Kid Handbook* is a product in which the students and teacher can all take pride. For the teacher, however, this accomplishment is far outweighed by the students’ increased confidence and growing sense of civic responsibility.