





MEET THE



Chris

**Age:** 13

**Proudest Moment:** got all As on his last report card

**Looking Forward to:** a trip to Alaska

**Favorite Food:** peach cobbler

**Best Quality:** stands up for others

# CHARACTERS



PHIL

**Age:** 13

**Biggest Problem:** being bullied by his older stepbrother

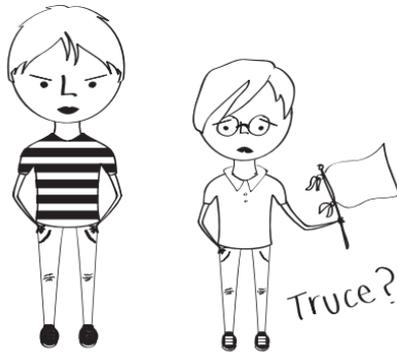
**Wants to Become:** a race car driver

**Favorite Food:** beef jerky

**Best Quality:** knows he could be nicer

# 1 THE CODE

It was a school fight like all the others. A big kid picked on a small kid. The small kid got his butt kicked. Other kids made a ring to watch and cheer.



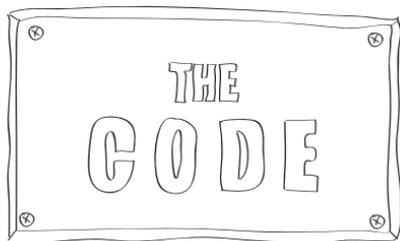
The big kid was Phil Hartz. Phil was strong. The small kid was Sam Colton. Sam was a wimp. Phil liked to pick on wimps.



Phil used to pick on Chris Marks. That was why Chris did not try to stop the fight. He just stood there and watched. Just like all the kids in his seventh grade class. There were yells and shouts. It was not a fair fight. Phil did what he wanted. Sam fell to the ground. Phil kicked him in the ribs just for fun.

That was when Mr. Jones ran onto the field. He was the principal. He hated fights. He said all kids could get along. Chris was not so sure. By the time Mr. Jones got there, the fight was over.

“Who started this?” Mr. Jones was mad. Phil shrugged. “It just happened.”



shh... all kids must follow

That was a lie. Chris knew it. No one said a word. The kids had a Code. No one ever talked. Chris did not like the Code. He did not like it one bit. But he did not want to be picked on by Phil. No one did. It was too bad that Sam got beat up. But Chris did not think it could be stopped.



“Come on, kids. Someone saw. Talk. Please.” Mr. Jones looked from kid to kid. Then he called the names of the best students. “Mary Lopez. Alan Parker. Chris

Marks. Sylvie Pollock. Tai Browne. Come with me!”

Chris gasped. Mr. Jones wanted to talk to him? He wanted to know how the fight began.

They all went to Mr. Jones’s office. The principal closed the door.

“It’s safe,” he told the kids.

No one said a word. If any of them told, all the kids would know someone broke the Code. This is why Chris did not talk.

“Oh, come on,” Mr. Jones said. “You guys can stop this. All you have to do is say who started the fight. Phil, right? Don’t want to say it? Write it down. I’ll leave the room. Just write the name on a file card.”



I can't write it down. That still breaks

THE  
CODE



Mr. Jones found file cards. He put them on his desk. He found pens too. Then he left. The kids were alone.

Tai shook her head. "I'm out."

"Me too," Alan said. "You know why."

"Me too," Mary agreed.

Chris felt Sylvie's eyes on him. He turned to her. She put one finger to her lips. He knew what she wanted to say. *The Code*. Break it and a kid could get hurt.

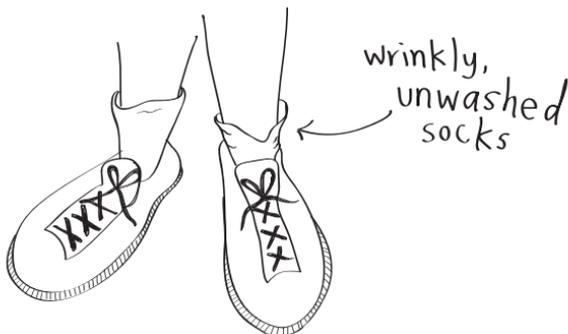


When Mr. Jones came back, he looked at the file cards. They were blank. He got mad.



“You kids! You know Phil started it. I need your help to show it.”

Chris looked down at his feet. He felt his face get red. But he did not say a word.



Mr. Jones shook his head. Then he pointed to the door. “Get to class. Go.”

Chris went. Phil was right there in the hall. So was Phil’s friend Rodrigo. He could tell no one talked to Mr. Jones. He grinned. Chris hated the grin on Phil’s face. He hated it so much.

## 2

# CHEATER!

Chris went back to class. All the kids were still buzzing about the fight. Sam was there. Sam's face lit up when Chris looked at him. The little guy came over to talk. "What did you say to Jones?"

Chris shook his head. "Not a thing."

"Didn't Jones ask who started it?"

"Sure. But I didn't say. It isn't that I didn't want to. But ... you know."

Sam nodded sadly. "Yeah. I know."

"That's it. If I were you, I would stay out of Phil's way. He belongs in a zoo."

A huge voice boomed out behind Chris.



“I heard that!”

Chris turned. There was Phil. His chest was all puffed out. He had an evil look on his face. Chris’s lunch turned over four times in his belly. Ugh. Now he was on Phil’s *I’m-gonna-mess-you-up* list for sure. Why could he not keep his mouth shut?



“Relax, dude,” Phil told him. “Call me what you want. Just keep your mouth shut.”

The teacher, Ms. Santos, came in. “Pop quiz! Map of America. You are so lucky.”

The whole class moaned. Ms. Santos was

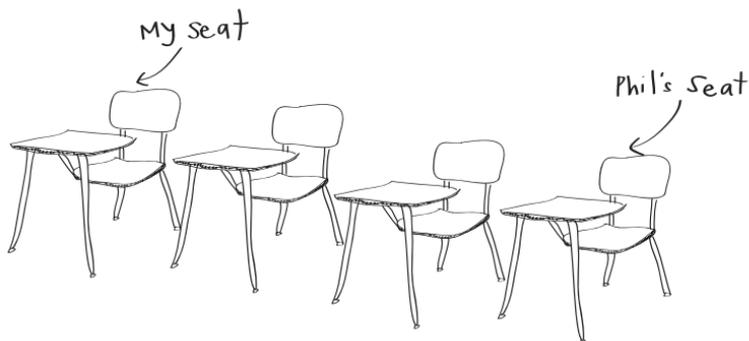
big on pop quizzes. Then she could tell if the kids did their homework. Chris knew the whole map, no sweat. His family did car trips every June. He had been to forty-five of the fifty states. He even knew the big cities. When Ms. Santos gave out the quiz, Chris did the whole thing in less than a minute. There were no goofs. He looked over at Sylvie. She had it down cold too.



*i've always wanted to visit here*

Then he looked at Phil. Phil sat three

seats to the left in the same row. Phil was staring to his own left.



Chris figured he was looking out the window. But no. Phil was staring at his bud Rodrigo. Rodrigo was doing the quiz. But he was also touching his cheek with his right hand. One finger. Two fingers. Three fingers. Then one finger a—

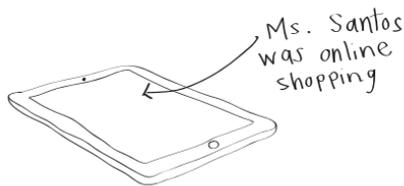
Oh no.

It was like lights snapping on in Chris's mind. Rodrigo and Phil. They were cheats!

Chris checked out Ms. Santos. Was she



watching? Nope. She was on her iPad. She didn't see a thing. When she did look up, Phil and Rodrigo cooled it.



“Okay! Time’s up. Pass your quizzes to me,” Ms. Santos told the class.

All the kids passed their quizzes to the front of the room. Ms. Santos took them. Sometimes she would grade them right away. Sometimes she took them home. Either way, she had no idea that two kids cheated. Chris knew, though. And it made him feel as bad as the fight had. Maybe worse. He wanted to tell. But he couldn't.

The Code. *The Code.*



# the CODE

Yeah, I rule the school.  
And nobody rules me.  
Nobody snitches.



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